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The braiding of link

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If "rupture" is often a difficult situation to live through, its elaboration depends to a large extent on the issues at stake in the relationship and the bonds or ties that are severed. From this point of view, "rupture" seems to be a kind of "natural analyser" of bonding and the braiding of the components that constitute it. Drawing on diverse clinical situations involving difficult ruptures, I will try to identify three of these components organised as forms of "contracts" which are partly conscious but also to a large extent unconscious. The diverse clinical situations referred to will draw particular attention to the primacy of one or the other of the contracts which represent the way the bond is organised and how it is regulated.

These three contracts are:

- the "narcissistic contract" which represents the basis of the relationship and condenses its narcissistic value; it is characterised by a certain number of traits that define its narcissistic "style";
- the "libidinal contract" which regulates the libidinal transactions between the diverse subjects involved in the bond and the forms and limits of its transactions; it is characterised by specific instinctual interests and a style of "conversation between bodies" in sexuality;
- and finally the "symbolic contract" which condenses and determines the "right conditions" thanks to which the narcissistic contract and the libidinal contract are regulated and can be elaborated at the moment of separation or, conversely, on account of which this elaboration fails.

The three contracts are always present in every relationship, but their quantity and organising value in the bond are variable; it is their articulation that gives its particular "colour" to the bond established, and thus, at the same time, to the separation and its effects.

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¹ Translated by Andrew Weller

RUPTURE AS AN ANALYSER OF BONDING EPF (TURIN 2014)

The theme of rupture is far-reaching: ruptures themselves have multiple forms and can concern all the fields in which human beings are involved, whether in the social field – homeless people dropping-out, exile and revolutions are forms of rupture, but there are also invisible ruptures –, or in the domain of ideas – L. Althusser spoke of an "epistemological break", thus of an epistemological or paradigmatic rupture –, or in the domain of human relations, and, in particular, those that are based on love in one form or another.

But though the manifest forms of rupture are diverse, one can only speak of rupture "for a subject"; the rupture is only such as it is because it affects, regardless of its field and its causes, singular subjects and the relations between singular subjects. And the way in which the rupture is experienced or decided and put into effect also depends on the meaning that this or that incident or circumstance acquires.

At any rate, it is from this point of view that I have decided to reflect on our theme, thus resolutely as a clinician of **bonding** and relationships. My reflections and argument will be based on the following proposition: rupture is an *analyser* of the nature and constituents of **bonding**. Often invisible aspects of the bonds linking or uniting subjects are revealed through and in the experience of rupture.

To explore this hypothesis, I will begin with a clinical situation.

A clinical history

Myriam had asked me for an urgent appointment following the break-up of a relationship; she had been referred to me by a young woman colleague who was a friend of hers.

I met a beautiful and elegant woman in her fifties, who very swiftly collapsed into tears as soon as she tried to explain to me what was happening to her. Since breaking up with her friend, she had lost her courage, spent her time crying, and even her work, which she was normally very interested in, left her feeling relatively indifferent at the moment. She had already been married twice and had initiated the first two separations which she had coped with very well. But this time she thought that this man would be the right one and their relationship had been going well for two years. That had met each other while she was on a

professional assignment in a far-off country, and during the first year they only saw each other periodically owing to her being away a lot. As things were going very well between them, she had decided a year ago to come and live in Lyon, where she was born and where her family were currently living, in order to live together with him. They had bought a house together and everything had been going well until the last few months when violent conflicts had appeared between them, particularly in connection with her youngest son who was living with them. Her friend had begun showing signs of jealousy and was very critical of the relationship she had with her son, and the conflict had got constantly worse until one day, in the middle of the night, her friend suddenly left the house they owned together. Even though they had seen each other since several times, she could not get over it: "Something's broken," she said.

Myriam was referring, then, to an "internal" rupture affecting her relationship with her friend.

The two years of regular clinical sessions that followed made it possible to clarify, in part, what had happened within her; in any case, they were enough to help her emerge of the depressive slump into which this form of rupture had plunged her.

The two divorces in her love-life that preceded her relationship with her current friend, had become inevitable for her when she realised that both these men, who were not without qualities and charm, were unable to fulfil their paternal function.

She had met the first after leaving the family home at the age of 18, because she could no longer tolerate living in close proximity with her father, who was a highly intelligent and eminent scientist, but behaved in private like a sort of domestic tyrant and was unliveable with on a daily basis. With this man whom she had met during her medical studies, she went on many mountain <u>races</u> Escalation and shared several passions. But as soon as they had a son, their relationship deteriorated rapidly. This man invested very little in his "job as a father" and also turned out to be a mediocre doctor, without much professional ambition, whereas she herself was enjoying a very successful career in international bodies responsible for population health.

Myriam had married her second husband without being passionately in love, and mainly so as not to have to bring up her children alone. He turned out to be just as disappointing as the first when it came to providing the children with the educational support she expected from him, and when, for professional reasons, she had to go away for a long period of time anyway, she finally decided to leave him.

It was only later, when she had more or less given up the idea of getting married again or of forming a lasting relationship, that she met her current companion. It was quite quickly a case of "love at first sight" for a brilliant, ambitious, and funny man who, like her, was Jewish, and whose family, like hers, had experienced the horrors of genocide. Though she had doubted that it would ever be possible for her to fall in love again, she had lived a cloudless idyll for almost two years that was probably even marked by a form of passionate love.

As, in all three cases, the relationship had broken up over the question of the relation of her men and lovers to the paternal position, I thought it was worth exploring this question with her in greater depth.

The first rupture had occurred with her father when she left the family home at the age of 18. It was a genuine rupture in the sense that, for many years thereafter, she had no further contact with her father and only maintained communication with her mother.

I suggested to her that there might be a connection between her conflict with and separation from her father and the subsequent difficulties she had with men. She accepted this link, and taking this as the starting-point for our analytic work a certain logic in her history began to emerge.

Through her relationships with men, she was also trying to repair the bad relationship she had had as a girl with her father, and it was when she was faced, each time, with the failure of this project which was "superimposed", as it were, on the love affair itself, that the relationship broke up. It was as if the bond of love with men was established in and through the superimposition of her current relationship with a man, and the "transference" onto this relationship of her former relationship with her father, the prototype of the first relations with men. The rupture with men – the point at which things "broke inside her" – was provoked by the rupture within her of the superimposition of these two relationships, by their dissociation.

Her despair, when her last relationship broke up, was linked to the fact that this man, who was from the same country and of the same religious confession as her, and whose family had experienced a history of community break-up that was similar to her own – and, I let me add, who also had a complex relationship with his own father – seemed like a sort of "double" of herself. A double, a similar other, with whom she had thought she could share the same project and establish a sort of "narcissistic contract" of reparation. She was no doubt also more "torn apart" by the present rupture to the extent that the woman in her was also still very much in love with the man that he was.

Primary construction of the bond of love

Diverse levels of the bond of love seem to be involved in this clinical sequence which I am going to use as a central clinical theme for my considerations. They contribute to creating the first bond, which results from the superimposition of the diverse factors involved in the formation of the relationship, but also to all the factors that participate in its stabilisation.

In the choice of a love partner, when it is really a "choice", different elements and levels of investment are involved.

There are of course the parameters specific to the love-object, its bodily and relational qualities and particularities, thus its own alterity. But these are only invested in conformity with internal ideational complexes constructed partly on impressions of childhood, of adolescence, and of the young adult's life.

This ideational complex produces an internal "object-presentation" that is mingled with, and more or less superimposed on, the actual perception of the object. This superimposition produces an "effect of illusion" at the heart of the state of love. Illusion, here, is in no way meant pejoratively or to deny the "reality" of love: it is the term that designates the superimposition of an invested (loved) internal representation and the perception of a more or less ideal object. It is this background of illusion that is destroyed in the case of rupture.

If the superimposition is very good, it produces the first effect of "love at first sight": the awaited object is "encountered", as if there were no gap between the internal "ideal" representation and the real object. The greater the gap between the representation and the perception is, the less intense the state of love, at least at the beginning of the relationship, will be.

Against this background the relationship will develop gradually, become more complex, and, in a certain way, will also "put to the test" the solidity of the background: diverse "contracts" that are more or less conscious and deliberate will be established to stabilise the primary bond. It is these "contracts" that will structure the bond and that will be torn apart when ruptures occur.

The libidinal contract

I would call the first of these contracts "libidinal" in the sense that it is woven with sexual attractions and a mode of object-relating based on a mode of organisation of drive life and of the libido which fixes both the reciprocal postures and the levels of reciprocity of these postures and modes of investment. The libidinal relation to the object is organised by an unconscious fantasy activity which itself configures the rules of the increase of libidinal tension and the type of "language of the sexual" wished for between the partners. It is thus a form of contract that is established between the lovers, a contract that is largely unconscious, even if certain aspects can be in broad daylight, a contract that consists of expectations, prohibitions, of more or less obligatory "passages", of a sexual dialogue and "conversation". It is a contract made up of libidinal transactions that must be respected in order to maintain the attraction, and whose transgressions are also partly regulated.

I have very little information about the mode of the "libidinal contract" concluded between Myriam and her current friend; she never spoke to me about her sexuality except to tell me "that it worked very well between them" and that it was satisfying, in contrast with what it had become with her two husbands. I do not think that it was at this level that the relationship broke down.

But in the course of certain analyses, it is not unusual to observe that, as the libidinal economy of one of the partners changes, the "libidinal contract" is undermined and that the sexual life of the couple becomes unsatisfying to the point of causing a breakdown of the relationship. The opposite is fortunately not uncommon either and, with the lifting of certain repressions and the reconquest of certain sexual freedoms, the sexual life of the couple and their "libidinal contract" is enriched and diversified.

The basic narcissistic contract

This first contract is linked to a second contract for which I will take up the term "narcissistic contract", forged by P. Aulagnier, though in a different sense to the way she uses it. It is linked to the libidinal contract insofar as sexual life, in the broad sense of the drive engagements in the relationship, contributes to the subject's narcissistic economy, but it is not superimposed entirely on the "libidinal contract" insofar as the regulation of an individual's narcissistic economy, his or her level of self-esteem and self-respect, for example, does not depend only on the use of his or her sexuality, even understood in the broad sense.

The narcissistic contract also concerns the self-image that the partner reflects by what he is himself, as if at a certain level of the relationship the other was also a "mirror" of oneself. Aesthetic criteria thus play a role in the narcissistic contract, along with diverse other components ranging from the social stature of the partner to his relationship with the truth, including his self-assurance or sense of

ease in social relations and many other components intervening in the narcissistic economy of the subject.

The alchemy of the narcissistic economy of the relationship is very complex and also depends in part on the specific difficulties of the subject, the partner realising "for the subject", and on certain conditions, what the subject himself cannot realise, or in relation to which he is in difficulty.

But what I consider to be the decisive level for the subject is that aspect of the "narcissistic contract" which depends on what the partner reflects, less by what he is himself than by the conscious messages that he addresses to the subject. Of course, here again, this level is linked up with the libidinal contract and the relationship as a whole will be affected by the mode of drive engagement and of the object-relation that organises the latter. It is difficult, for example, to imagine a form of sexuality established on anal sadistic bases which would not leave traces in the other sectors of the relationship, and a certain degree of "sadism" or a certain degree of depreciation is likely to be present in the partner who is dominant at a given moment. This does not preclude, of course, a form of reciprocity or of vengeance from establishing itself which inverses, in the ordinary context of relations that are not directly sexual, the postures of sexuality. Everything depends, then, on the types of contracts and on how the question of reciprocity is regulated within the couple.

Invested human relationships, but no doubt also any interpersonal relationship marked by basic empathy, always comprise a level at which the other is also "a same", another oneself. It is the basis on which social relationships are established; it is the basis on which society establishes itself; indeed, it is the basis of elementary social psychology.

The narcissistic contract is sometimes established on the basis of an experience of sharing a "common skin", where each partner has the other "under his skin" to the point that a large part of the relationship is devoted to diverse manoeuvres aimed at finding a space of differentiation, even though this is often impossible. The impasse in which certain couples find themselves, one that family therapists have often drawn attention to and translated by the paradoxical alternative, "separating kills us, living together is deadly", can be recognised here. Separation, the rupture of the bond is then experienced as a form of tearing off of the skin as D. Anzieu has shown so clearly, one partner leaving with the common skin, while the other feels he or she has been skinned alive. What has been described by Anzieu concerning the experience of having a common skin can also pertain to any part of the body or the Ego, as several authors have pointed out.

I can recall one of my patients who was incapable of having sexual relations, and whose analysis showed that in her fantasies she and her mother had had a "common womb and genital organs" since her earliest childhood. The analysis had made it possible to link this fantasy — an "operative" fantasy which functioned as an internal reality — with a traumatic experience linked to her mother's repeated pregnancies and to the way in which the latter disinvested the precedent child with each new pregnancy. The fantasy of sharing a "common womb and genital organs" seemed to be an attempt to "preserve" the bond with her mother in the face of the menace of disinvestment, and thus to avoid a psychic breakdown. The elaboration of this traumatic infantile situation gradually made it possible, so to speak, to "unstick" their respective "wombs and genital organs" and helped her to envisage a "libidinal contract" with a man — which nonetheless retained perceptual and "geographical traces" of her father.

In the transactions between Myriam and her companion this problem unfolded at two levels.

The first concerned the question of knowing *who* was separating, who *was leaving* the other. The one who left took with him the protective "skin" that covered the one who triumphed. But the other one, now exposed, multiplied manoeuvres and seductions aimed at reconstructing the relationship so that he or she could then be the first to leave, leaving the other in distress. One can well imagine the stormy character that the relationship took on, the "passionate" hesitation waltz that then unfolded.

The other level, which was already less directly stormy and allowed for the intervention of a legal third party, concerned their "common property": the house. Each of them claimed the right to keep it, neither of them being able to envisage abandoning it to the other. The question of knowing who could or was going to pay the other his own share then took centre stage. This also was the source of a raging battle, but social laws provided a means of mediation in a conflict that was otherwise insoluble.

When love-relations break up, it is not uncommon for an object to incarnate particularly the central object of the passionate relationship, functioning as the symbolic equivalent of the common skin, of the common narcissistic object.

A narcissistic contract always involves the construction of a common object, of a common zone, of a "common language", which stand in for the "skin object" of the common skin. It is from this common part that it is difficult to separate in a situation of rupture, that it is difficult to detach oneself, and this is why one of the central figures of rupture is tearing or wrenching apart (*arrachement*).

In the case of couples, children embody the "common object" that has welded the narcissistic contract of the couple in love, and are thus often at the centre of the passionate conflicts of separation.

In the regulation of the "narcissistic contract", there is another aspect which I have often observed to be decisive; it concerns the quality of exchange and communication. In the narcissistic contract there is a "clause" which concerns supporting the other partner when he or she is in difficulty. The quality of listening, being receptive to the difficult states of the other person, narcissistic solidarity with him or her, are also an integral part of this clause of narcissistic support for the other, of the reciprocity that it implies.

But this contract is sometimes perverted so that it loses its character of reciprocity and only works "in one direction": one partner has to support the other without the contrary being true, or rather one of them may be instrumentalised to become the narcissistic complement that is indispensable to the other. Here we can recognise relationships which tend to reproduce the primary forms of "narcissistic contracts", those uniting the parent and child.

Any rupture in such a mode of bonding appears to be a catastrophe for the partner who had hitherto found in the other his or her indispensable complement, in whom a part of him or herself had been deposited vicariously, and with which the other is now threatening to leave.

Separation is thus always experienced as a threat of a rupture of identity; it is then always lived in a state of passion which points, beyond what is at stake strictly at the level of love, to what is at stake "narcissistically" in the bond.

The symbolic contract

The third cement of the bond of love that is apt to produce an experience of rupture is organised around what I have proposed to call the "symbolic" contract: it is this contract which, in a certain way, gives the bond its "framework", gives it its meaning.

A relationship is established within a social "framework" which defines the expectations, rights, and duties of the partners of the relationship; this social framework produces a form of contract that is unwritten, except in the fabric of the daily life of the relationship. For example, between children and parents the "symbolic contract" implies a certain type of behaviour from the parents which defines the archetype of what a "Mother" or a "Father" is in the educational relationship with their children. Even it is difficult to clarify all its aspects, we

all know more or less intuitively when a father or a mother does not behave as such and fails to keep the symbolic contract of parenting. It is thus not a question here of a father's or mother's "particular style" but of what underlies this position. It is clear, for example, that everything that pertains to incest refers to a rupture of the "symbolic contract" of parenting, but beyond incest proper, any form of instinctual or narcissistic "debauchery" on the part of the parents breaches or undermines the contract. But the "symbolic contract" presents less manifest and spectacular aspects; it operates quietly, in an almost silent manner or one that is only marked by its effects. An example taken from the famous story by J.M. Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, will help us understand this type of silent structure.

Peter Pan, a pre-adolescent child, lives in "Never Never Land", the land of children disappointed by the world of adults, the land of children who have experienced a rupture of the "symbolic contract" uniting them with their parents. In this world there is only one adult who embodies and "represents" someone who does not respect the parental symbolic contract, and who has clearly himself been hurt by life, for he bears the emblematic mark of it in his "hook" hand **d'emprise [of mastery?: but what is the meaning exactly?].** He is egoistic, nasty, potentially murderous, the only one who counts in his eyes, and thus embodies the "narcissistic" parent.

From time to time, at nightfall, Peter Pan returns to visit the world that he has left and to observe the other children, those who are still living with their mothers and fathers in the quietness and security of family life. This is how he makes the acquaintance of Wendy, a nice little girl, "prim and proper", good and reasonable, but helpful – she repairs the shadow, the narcissistic double of Peter Pan, evoking right away the question of the wounded self-image that children who are in "Never Never Land" have suffered, and which is awakened when they emerge from their posture of total refusal. Peter Pan invites Wendy and her brother, John to come to the land of the "lost children". Wendy, who is still good and confident in the world of adults, who is still linked to them by a solid "symbolic contract", refuses his offer. Peter Pan leaves again, somewhat repaired by this encounter but promises himself he will return. End of the first scene.

In the second scene, the parents of Wendy and Joey have returned home and it's time to put the children to bed. John has to take his potion before going to bed, a sort of cod liver oil which opens up the question of one of the great paradoxes of education: transcending primary sensoriality in the name of a higher good. The potion is "good for the health" but tastes bad. Joey is reticent: it is difficult for him to grasp the paradox of what is bad but "good"; he refuses, and doesn't want to know anything about it.

To avoid a situation of confrontation and impasse, Wendy suggests that her father should "set an example", one of the situations making it possible to put to work the aporia of the saying, "Do as I say and not as I do". Her father must also regularly drink a potion for his health that clearly tastes unpleasant. He tries to get out of the situation by declaring that he would gladly do so, only his bottle of potion has disappeared. Wendy goes to look for it and brings it to him saying that she had found it behind the bathroom cupboard, which begins to create an element of confusion: how on earth did it end up in this astonishing place?! Cornered, and with a certain theatricality and a certain solemnity – that which might be fitting when the father is in the symbolic function of the "Father" – Wendy's father prepares the spoon of potion and is about to put it into his mouth. And the scene suddenly changes, he gets hold of the dog that is passing by and shoves the spoon into its mouth, laughing. Shocked, all Wendy can say is, "Oh Dad!"

The scene is apparently innocuous, there is no incest here, no manifest violence, no spectacular trauma which might move the population when related in the newspapers; it is even almost ordinary. But during his next visit, Peter renews his invitation to Wendy and John to come with him to the "Never Never Land", and this time they follow him.

Of course, it is a fictionalised story, life is undoubtedly more complex, but it seems to me to be a good example of a silent rupture of the "symbolic contract" of the bond between Wendy and her father. One may imagine, moreover, that it is not the first time that such an incident had occurred in the relationship between Wendy and her father, but that this time the incident had occurred "once too many times", rocking the relationship and provoking a form of disappointment that results in losing hope in it. Peter Pan's role as a "tempter" should no doubt not be overlooked either: it represents a possible response to disappointment, an extreme and radical response, an alternative to submission. It represents rebellion carried out in the name of the symbolic contract itself, in its most intransigent and infantile form. But children are often like that; they are infantile and experience in "all or nothing" terms the impact of the breaches of the conditions of symbolisation.

Our example concerns the parent-child relationship, where the ruptures of the symbolic contract can most easily be highlighted and separated from the forms of narcissistic contracts.

In relations between adults, within the bond of love, things are often more mixed up and narcissistic and symbolic contracts assume an entangled form.

For Myriam, for whom the narcissistic issues at stake in the **breakdown of her relationship (OK?)** were no doubt decisive in **the way she experienced the internal rupture of the bond, [OK?]** the symbolic breach is present each time in her observation of a non paternal attitude in the different men from whom she separated. Narcissistic issues are here closely bound up with symbolic issues. What she told me about the attitude of her current friend towards her son – behaviour that was the source of many conflicts that erupted between them just before they broke up, show that that he was incapable of behaving in an adult and parental way towards Myriam's son. He was jealous, was constantly in rivalry with the adolescent, never stopped belittling and criticising him, etc, while placing himself "at the same level" as the adolescent, in an exclusively narcissistic relationship of rivalry with him. This attitude repeated her father's attitude towards her when she was an adolescent; it therefore did not "repair" her own adolescence, but attacked the symbolic contract that should unite a substitute father with an adolescent.

The danger that was thus posed to an aspect of the symbolic contract of their bond was compounded in the period leading up to the rupture of the internal bond by another danger. As I have said, Myriam is a beautiful woman, she is often courted by the men she meets and is quick to charm on account of her manifest qualities. But she has always rejected advances, and without much effort, has remained entirely focused on her relationship with her friend. In the final period leading up to the separation, her friend, on the other hand, had begun to spend quite a lot of time with one of his female colleagues at work. A bit too much for Myriam's liking, with the result that she began to question his fidelity. On several occasions, when they had planned to have lunch together, he had cancelled the appointment at the last moment to stay and work – and have lunch – with this colleague. A certain number of professional questions that they had been in the habit of speaking about together were now also "transferred" to the relationship with this colleague. Without being excessively jealous, Myriam found it very difficult to tolerate the presence of this other woman behind the scenes of her friend's professional activity; the question of his fidelity was involved and with it another aspect of the symbolic contract.

The symbolic contract defines a type of relationship of "symbolic belonging". Beyond the "social contract" established by laws, it defines and is defined by a sense of belonging which manifests itself when one says "my" wife or "my" husband, "my" child, but also "my" country or "my" company. It is important not to confuse, as in relations marked by mastery, belonging and the sense of ownership. Belonging is defined by a "symbolic contract" which is based on the respect of a certain number of characteristics.

The groups or entities to which we "belong" also belong to us; the relationship of belonging is reciprocal. Belonging defines rights concerning the entity to which we feel we belong; it defines a sort of "right to have one's say" about it; and it also defines the obligations of our belonging.

It is based on inter-recognition: "my wife" is only my wife if I am "her husband", and I am only "her husband" if I respect certain rules within the couple. A child can be "disinherited" symbolically by his or her father: "You are no longer my son" signifies that I no longer recognise you as such, and this is true even if, in practice, the actual inheritance, which is governed by social laws, is not really concerned by this form of symbolic banishment. In some cultures a woman can be "repudiated" as such, not only in social law but also in the internal symbolic inscription itself.

These rules can vary depending on the couples, the families, and the social groups, but there are always rules that define belonging. When one of these rules is transgressed, one of the fundamental rules of the bond of belonging, a breach of the symbolic contract occurs. For example, in certain couples fidelity is one of the clauses of the contract, and infidelity is a *casus belli* which results in its "rupture" or termination. In other couples, which are organised differently, infidelity is not totally unacceptable in itself, but the fact that it is manifest and made public will be. Everything depends on what constitutes the basis of the sense of belonging for a particular subject, and thus on what will undermine his or her singular sense of belonging.

By way of conclusion

I can scarcely go any further within the limits of this paper; what I have already said will suffice, I hope, to show the complexity of what can be involved in the situations of ruptures, "real" ruptures coupled with an "internal sense" of rupture.

The three types of "contracts of bonding", which in reality are closely interwoven, but which I have tried to differentiate in an attempt to clarify the issues at stake make it possible to configurate different aspects of the situations of rupture which affect our relations with the other. The three types of contract appear to be the components of any relationship: they are always present but, of course, in variable quantities depending on the subjects, the types of **bonding** and the nature of the "frame" which contains and gives them their meaning.

The way in which rupture and its effects are experienced depends on the type of contract – libidinal, narcissistic, or symbolic – that is broken by the situation

that provokes it, but also on the way in which the three contracts are interwoven, on their particular combination. Thus there can be situations of rupture without an actual rupture: nothing happens in reality, but something changes in the subjective sense of the bond with the other, something "breaks" without there being any manifest, "official" effects.