
The intrapsychic conflict and the historical evolution of its psychotherapeutic approach in psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT. – The concept of ‘intrapsychic conflict’ is probably one of the theoretical constructs on which psychoanalysis has mostly focused its attention, from its birth to the present day, both as regards formation/training and modification over time of its theoretical structure as a whole, as well as from the point of view of the construction and the progressive refinement of its psychotherapeutic technique. In this article the Author presents the main stages of this long and articulated path and concludes by describing how the concept of ‘intrapsychic conflict’ might now be considered outdated in one of the main contemporary psychoanalytic approaches, that of Relational Psychoanalysis.

Key words: Intrapsychic conflict; relational conflict; drive model; relational psychoanalysis; attachment theory.

Introduction

There is no precise ‘date of birth’ of psychoanalysis: its initial phase may probably be placed in the five-year period 1890-1895, since - as Brenner (1955, p. 11) states - in 1895 the evolution of this discipline appears ‘already well underway’. Historians, on the other hand, clearly agree on both the name of its founder, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and the fundamental innovative feature which from the very beginning differentiated this discipline from others of that time, namely the scientific systematisation of a concept that was in fact already known and mentioned in those years but still poorly defined and described, namely the concept of the ‘unconscious’.

From the outset, the main ‘cornerstones’ of the conceptualisation of the unconscious in this new discipline have essentially been the following: i) the ‘psyche’ is not identified with consciousness; ii) the primary psychic reality is not ‘the conscious’ but ‘the unconscious’, since the conscious with

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respect to the unconscious is actually like ‘the tip of the iceberg’ (*i.e.* only the derivative and superficial manifestation of the unconscious); iii) in the aetiology (*i.e.* in the ‘study of the causes’) of psychic illnesses, an absolutely fundamental role is always to be sought in the ‘conflict between unconscious psychic forces’ (and thus not necessarily, or at any rate not only, in the presence of organic disorders).

The structure of the psyche (*‘prima topica’*)

In the early years of the scientific systematisation of this new discipline, Freud developed an initial ‘model of the psyche’ (now known as the ‘*prima topica*’) which viewed the psychic apparatus as divided into three specific ‘zones’, respectively named - on the basis of the fundamental characteristic Freud believed each zone contained - the ‘conscious’, the ‘preconscious’ and the ‘unconscious’: i) the *conscious*: the seat of all that is immediately accessible and usable in the mental functioning of each person; ii) the *preconscious*: the seat of psychic contents which, although they are or may appear to be momentarily unconscious, can in reality become conscious through a not particularly excessive effort of attention; iii) the *unconscious*: the seat of permanently unconscious psychic contents, which are maintained as such by the force of a mental mechanism called ‘repression’, which can only be overcome by means of special techniques specifically designed for this purpose by psychoanalysis. For this reason, the content of this ‘place of the human mind’ was defined by Freud as ‘the repressed’.

Repression in the *‘prima topica’*

In this phase of the evolution of Freudian theory, repression is therefore a mechanism of psychic functioning (or, to be exact, one of the various ‘defence mechanisms’ that will later be described individually both by Freud himself and by various other psychoanalysts, in particular by his daughter Anna) whose essential aim is to remove from consciousness those desires, thoughts or memories considered unacceptable and unbearable by the subject, and whose active presence in his conscious mind would cause him displeasure, pain and suffering.

Already in the years of the *‘prima topica’*, that is, practically from the dawn of psychoanalysis until 1923, Freud also added to his vision of the human psyche as divided into the three ‘zones’ a ‘dynamic’ vision, according to which these three ‘areas’ are not simply ‘inert containers’ of the conscious, preconscious and unconscious material, but are in constant interaction with each other: That is, they are not only ‘areas’ of the mind, but also

constitute its fundamental ‘functioning systems’ because, in fact, they activate significant dynamics whenever they come into conflict with each other.

In particular, according to this early view expressed by Freud, repression is essentially a process that takes place on the border between the unconscious and preconscious systems: ‘*its essence consists simply in expelling and keeping something away from consciousness*’ (1915b, p. 37). Its purpose is therefore to protect the balance and psychological well-being of each individual, and it may be considered, in Freud’s view, a universal modality of the human psyche, whose effects are easily evident even in the everyday life of so-called ‘normal’ people, especially in behaviours such as *lapsus* and so-called *missed actions* (Freud, 1904).

The intrapsychic conflict according to Sigmund Freud in the years of the ‘*prima topica*’

According to Laplanche and Pontalis, ‘*In the framework of the first metapsychological theory, the conflict can be traced schematically, from a topical point of view, to the opposition between the Inc and Prec systems, separated by censorship; this opposition also corresponds to the duality of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, in which the latter seeks to ensure its superiority over the former. One can say that the two conflicting forces are then, according to Freud, sexuality and a repression instance which includes the ethical and aesthetic aspirations of the personality; the repression is likely to be motivated by specific characteristics of sexual representations that would make them reconcilable with the ‘Ego’ and generate displeasure for the latter*’ (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967).

In other words, according to Freud the intrapsychic conflict is right from the start a *conflict between drives* (and it always will be, even if it takes on different specific connotations over the decades). In the years of the *prima topica*, in particular, it is a conflict between the sexual drives and a group of drives opposed to them, which respond to the individual’s need for survival and the gratification of other biological needs other than sexuality, and which Freud subsequently defined, in alternating phases, *Self-preservation drives* or even *Ego drives*.

Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the intrapsychic conflict according to Sigmund Freud in the years of the *prima topica*.

The ‘Oedipus complex’

This theoretical construct, which Freud drew directly from his clinical practice, and which certainly represents one of Freud’s best-known innovations, takes its name from the mythological king of Thebes, the protagonist

of a tragedy by Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex*), who had the unconscious and unfortunate fate of killing his biological father (Laius) and then sexually uniting with his mother (Jocasta).

In the individual's psychic life there is in fact an experience, according to Freud universally widespread, which develops in the period approximately between three and five years of age and which consists, essentially, in a libidinal attachment to the parent of the opposite sex, accompanied by an ambivalent attitude (*i.e.* of 'hate' and 'love' fused together) towards the parent of the same sex.

'Overcoming the Oedipus complex' is, according to Freud, absolutely fundamental for the subsequent psychological evolution of the subject, for his equilibrium as well as for the eventual establishment, if it does not happen in an adequate way, of significant forms of psychopathology (above all of a neurotic type). Freud himself, after all, identified in the Oedipal complex *'the nucleus of neurosis'* (Freud, 1915-17, 1932).

Psychoanalysis according to Sigmund Freud

In his work, *Due voci di enciclopedia: 'Psicoanalisi' e 'Teoria della Libido'* (1922), Sigmund Freud gives his own view of the scientific discipline he founded. Both definitions were published in 1923, pages 377-383 and 296-298 respectively in the *Handwörterbuch der Sexualwissenschaft*



Figure 1. The intrapsychic conflict according to Sigmund Freud in the years of the *'prima topica'*.

(*Dictionary of Sexology*) printed in Bonn by the Berlin publisher Walter de Gruyter and edited by Max Marcuse.

According to Sigmund Freud, '*psychoanalysis is the name: i) of a procedure for the investigation of psychic processes that would otherwise be impossible to access; ii) of a therapeutic method (based on that investigation) for the treatment of neurotic disorders; iii) of a body of psychological knowledge acquired in this way that gradually accumulates and converges into a new scientific discipline*' (Freud, 1922a).

Psychoanalytic therapy in the years of the '*prima topica*'

In the years of the '*prima topica*', for Freud the main task of psychoanalytic therapy is to 'allow to emerge in consciousness the repressed psychic conflict' (*i.e.* removed from consciousness because it is unpleasant or painful).

The main techniques introduced by Freud ever since the early years of the '*prima topica*' to help the patient to overcome the resistance that prevents the repressed from accessing the consciousness, are in particular the following: i) hypnosis; ii) interpretation of dreams; iii) free associations.

The structure of the psyche ('*seconda topica*')

More or less at the same time in which he coined the above definition of psychoanalysis, Freud operated an extremely significant modification of his 'model of the functioning mind' introduced in his '*prima topica*'. In his book, *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1922b), he proposed a new scheme to describe the mental apparatus which, without abandoning the distinction between 'conscious', 'preconscious' and 'unconscious' which lay at the basis of his previous conceptualisation, integrated and modified it by systematising it into a single 'functional whole' made up of three 'systems' (also defined 'instances', 'dimensions', 'entities', 'poles', *etc.*).

According to the model proposed by Freud in '*seconda topica*', the psyche is a complex unit made up of three dimensions (with different functions) in relation to each other: i) *Id*: drive pole of the personality; ii) *Superego*: moral consciousness; iii) *Ego*: organised and conscious part of the personality, which has to come to terms with the demands of the *Id*, the *Superego* and the outside world.

With the introduction of his '*seconda topica*', moreover, Freud completes an early revision (already in progress for some years and highlighted above all in his 1920 volume *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) of his overall 'drive theory'.

Repression in the '*seconda topica*'

Repression = the ego distances from consciousness: i) traumatic childhood events (source of suffering and anguish); ii) any drive that conflicts: with the outside world; or with internalized social norms (Superego).

In addition: i) the conflict inherent in repression may produce psychoneurotic symptoms; ii) psychic disorders presuppose repression.

Intrapsychic conflict in neurosis and psychosis after the introduction of the '*seconda topica*'

According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1967, p. 93), '*In the course of Freud's work, the problem of the ultimate foundation of conflict met with various solutions. It should be noted first of all that conflict can be explained at two relatively distinct levels: at the topical level, as a conflict between systems or instances, and at the economic-dynamic level, as a conflict between drives*'. In this respect, the two authors specify: '*the seconda topica provides a more diversified model which is closer to these concrete modes: conflicts between instances, conflicts within an instance, for example between the paternal and maternal poles of identification, which can be found in the Superego*' (idem, p. 94).

As we can see, therefore, the intrapsychic conflict and its approach in psychoanalysis after the introduction of the '*seconda topica*' becomes very complex: Freud deals with this theme in various works, proposing at first (in his volume *The Ego and the Id*) a simpler conflict between each of these instances and each of the other two, as well as between the internal contents of each instance, but then also considering the possibility that each of the three psychic instances theorised by the '*seconda topica*' could in a certain sense 'form an alliance' with one of the other two in order to gain the upper hand over the third.

In order to bring into a simpler framework the psychic theoretical and methodological approach to the problem of intrapsychic conflict within the Freudian psychoanalytic model, Brenner (1976) proposes the following conclusion:

'We can say, very generally, that there are three kinds of conflicts. In the first, we have a conflict between one or more instinctual derivatives and the more mature, organised and coherent part of the psyche: in these cases the Superego, if it is already formed, is on the side of the more organised and coherent psychic instances. In the second type of conflict, the organised part of the personality struggles with an unconscious need for self-punishment. Finally, there are the situations in which the self-punishing tendency is allied with a masochistic desire, and both come into conflict with the more mature and organised part of the psyche. In the language of structural theory, the conflicts are between Id and Ego (+ Superego), between Ego and Superego, between Id + Superego and Ego' (Brenner, 1976).

Shortly after the publication of *The Ego and the Id*, in his essay *Neurosis and Psychosis* (1923), Freud enriched his scientific contribution to psychopathology and to the theory of conflict with what he defined as a ‘simple formula’, but which in reality opened up huge, important insights within the psychoanalytic debates of the years to come, regarding the main etiopathogenic difference between neurosis and psychosis. In fact, he states: ‘neurosis appears to be the effect of a conflict between the Ego and its Id, while psychosis appears to be the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relations between the Ego and the external world’ (Freud, 1923). In the same essay, Freud completes this statement with a further specification: ‘the translation neurosis corresponds to the conflict between the Ego and the Id, the narcissistic neurosis corresponds to the conflict between the Ego and the Superego, the psychosis to that between the Ego and the external world’ (Idem, p. 614).

Figure 2 below shows a schematized comprehensive view of the intrapsychic conflicts which Sigmund Freud pointed out over the years in his ‘*seconda topica*’.

In the same years of his transition from the *Prima* to the *seconda topica*, moreover, Freud progressively abandoned his view of the ‘two species of drives’, which he had previously divided into the groups of ‘sexual drives’ and ‘self-preserving drives’ (or ‘ego drives’), substantially preserving the former (which he also begins to define with the Greek term *Eros*) but replacing the latter with the so-called ‘aggressive drives’ (within which he also places the so-called ‘death drive’, later defined with the Greek term *Thanatos*). He

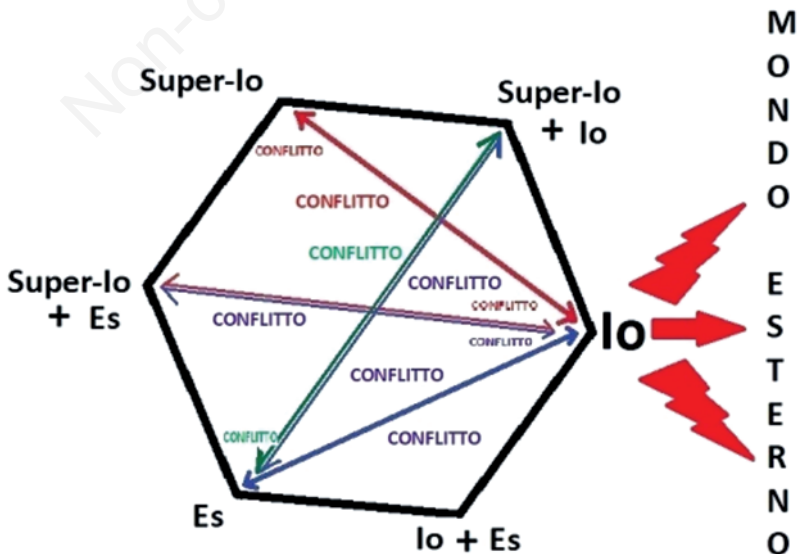


Figure 2. The intrapsychic conflict according to Sigmund Freud in the years of the ‘*seconda topica*’.

justifies the abandonment of his previous concept of 'self-preserving drives' with the consideration that 'both drives appear to act in a conservative way, in the strictest sense of this term, since they appear to aim at restoring a state disturbed by the appearance of life. The appearance of life would then be the cause of the continuation of life and at the same time of the aspiration to death; and life itself would be a struggle and a compromise between these two tendencies' (Freud, 1922b).

The concept of 'intrapsychic conflict' and its psychotherapeutic treatment in the comprehensive conceptualization of Melanie Klein and her school

Melanie Klein (Vienna, 1882 - London, 1960) was a psychoanalyst who trained first in Austria and then in London, where she became one of the most decisive and influential personalities of the world psychoanalytic movement of all time. She is widely known today in particular for her pioneering work in the field of child psychoanalysis and for her contributions to the development of object relations theory; Her comprehensive theory is characterised above all by the extremely concrete value she attributes to the three psychic instances that characterise the model of the Freudian *seconda topica* (Ego, Id and Superego), by the in-depth study of the most primitive and archaic defence mechanisms already identified by Freud (above all *splitting*, *introjection* and *projection*), and by the identification of other unconscious defence mechanisms whose origin, according to this Author, can be traced back to the first phases of human psychic development.

In particular, the 'unconscious fantasy' is the fundamental activity which, in the long physiological process of psychological and emotional growth that characterises the developmental age, creates and maintains, according to Klein, a sort of 'bridge' between the mind and the body, whose psychic and physical developmental paths are reciprocally connected and sufficiently integrated and harmonised: in individual events characterised by psychopathological experiences, this connection is instead disharmonious and altered, and in some cases, even interrupted. The extreme consequence of this new Kleinian theorisation is that also the 'conflict between the Ego and the external world' which was placed by Freud at the basis of psychosis (*Neurosis and Psychosis*, 1923) is in fact redefined by Klein as a conflict primarily *internal to the 'unconscious object world'*, and that only secondarily to this - in its most intense forms characterised by the active presence of aggressiveness and the *death instinct* - can it also assume the characteristic of *conflict with reality* underlined by Freud.

And this, in my opinion, is not at all a secondary element in the evolution

of psychoanalysis as a psychotherapeutic method; on the contrary it probably constitutes, on the operational level, the most important novelty of those first decades of its history because, differently to what was made explicit by Freud in the definition that he himself provided in 1922 (which he in fact maintained until his death), it brings psychosis into the group of pathologies that can be dealt with and treated with the psychoanalytic technique, suitably modified, of course.

At first, Klein used the psychoanalytic method in the treatment of psychosis, specifically in children, supplementing (and often replacing) the technique of free verbal associations with the technique of child play. Later, both she and her students extended the psychoanalytic method to the treatment of adult psychosis: in my opinion, this can in all probability also be seen as one of the main consequences of having traced all forms of psychopathology back to the various and diversified conflicts active within the mental apparatus, whether between the three psychic instances described by Freud in his *'second topica'*, or between split parts of the ego, between the various forms of drives of both species ('life' and 'death' drives) constantly fed by the biological substratum of each human being and, finally, by the characteristics of the *internal objects*, of their affective representations and characterisations and, *last but not least*, of their reciprocal *unconscious relations*. All this is schematically represented in Figure 3.

Thanks to Melanie Klein's contribution, therefore, the main aim of psychoanalytic psychotherapies has moved from the 'treatment of symptoms' to the 'development of personality', through the reintegration of splitting in the Self, the affective re-characterisation of internal objects and the withdrawal of projective identifications of infantile parts.

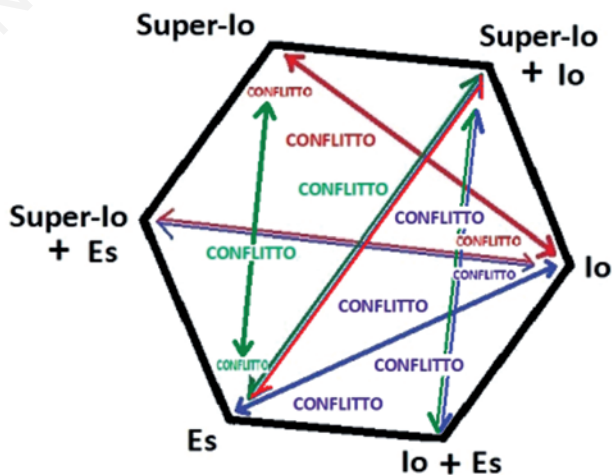


Figure 3. Schematic representation of *intrapsychic conflict* in Melanie Klein's theorisation.

Therefore psychotherapy, in Klein's psychoanalytic approach, appears to be oriented above all towards the reconstruction of the patient's 'inner world', so that it becomes increasingly populated by 'good objects' and is thus easier and more harmonious to integrate into the patient's comprehensive psychological and psychophysical balance.

The concept of 'intrapsychic conflict' and its psychotherapeutic treatment in the comprehensive conceptualisation of William Ronald Dodds Fairbairn

Like Klein, of whom he can certainly be considered a follower and continuer, even if limited to the first part of his professional and scientific activity, William R. D. Fairbairn has always underlined the need for the psychoanalyst concretely dedicated to clinical activity, to relate to each of his patients, always considering them as a flesh and blood 'person', bearer of extremely concrete experiences and needs with which the professional cannot but relate, with equal concreteness, extreme respect and requisite sensitivity.

Fairbairn accepts the model of Freud's '*prima topica*' without any particular reservation, evidently agreeing with its general aspects: in his comprehensive theoretical approach the concepts of 'conscious', 'preconscious' and 'unconscious' are in fact widely used. However, he presents a structural and functional organisation of the Unconscious that is very different from the one proposed by Freud.

According to Fairbairn, the unconscious is certainly at the basis of every person's psychic life since it is an 'inner world' containing internalised objects with which the deeper structural components of our Ego continually have intensely emotional relationships. In particular, the parts of the Ego that form the unconscious include - in addition to a significant part of the 'Central Ego' that remains as a residue of the original Ego - above all the so-called 'Libidinal Ego' and 'Antilibidinal Ego' (for the meaning of 'Libidinal Ego' and 'Antilibidinal Ego', see below) which already during early and late childhood have the task of regulating the Ego's relations with internalised objects (parents and other significant figures). Consequently, the unconscious presents only immature models of relationships which, however, will profoundly influence the object relations that every human being is programmed from birth to activate, and are established with the outside world not only in childhood, but throughout the course of his existence.

By pushing the Kleinian vision of an unconscious that is in its origins concrete, physical, practically 'material', to the extreme limit, Fairbairn in fact theorises, at this level, the equivalence between 'structure' and 'object'. It is in fact in the unconscious that the relationships the child establishes and consol-

idates with its parents during the first years of life, are internalised and kept extremely 'alive'.

In a more mature phase, these models are externalised to situations in the external social world. Thus, according to Fairbairn, the individual finds himself continually exposed to the difficult situation of being bound to immature relations with internalised objects on an unconscious level while, on the other hand, he tries to establish mature relations with objects on a conscious and rational level. The 'object relations' are, therefore, the most important feature (one might even say the 'absolute protagonists') of the unconscious as it is conceived and described by Fairbairn.

The repression according to Fairbairn

The repression, according to Fairbairn, is primarily a rejection of the 'bad' object by the original Ego: '*What is primarily removed are neither intolerable guilty drives nor excessively unpleasant memories, but intolerably bad internalised objects*' (Fairbairn, 1943).

This causes a splitting of the original Ego and the subsequent repression of the parts of the Ego that are directly related to the repressed objects, which in turn gives rise to two new intrapsychic structures called respectively by Fairbairn 'Libidinal Ego' and 'Antilibidinal Ego' (the latter was called psychic structure by Fairbairn in the first version of his theory, and given the significant term of 'internal saboteur', as it tends to prevent the subject from consolidating his libidinal impulses in stable positive relations with what Klein would define as 'good objects'). What remains of the original Ego after this split is called the 'Central Ego' by Fairbairn.

Contrary to Freud's assertion, in fact, for Fairbairn the rejection and repression by the not yet split Ego are not only directed towards the 'bad' objects, regardless of whether they are such because of their being 'rejecting' or excessively 'exciting', but also towards the subsidiary parts of the Ego that are connected to the objects by libidinal relations (and, therefore, 'good' objects).

According to Fairbairn, we can therefore define the Central Ego's attack on the subsidiary Ego with the term 'direct repression': nevertheless, this is not sufficient to repress the exciting object, and this is why Fairbairn also refers to an 'indirect repression' by the Antilibidinal Ego *versus* the Libidinal Ego.

The 'direct repression', according to Fairbairn, is therefore activated by the Central Ego *versus* both the Libidinal Ego and the Antilibidinal Ego; the latter, in turn, activates against the Libidinal Ego a further repression, which Fairbairn defines as 'indirect repression', in support of the Central Ego and *versus* the Libidinal Ego. The Antilibidinal Ego, in Fairbairn's model, collaborates therefore with the Central Ego in attacking the Libidinal Ego in a dynamic scheme which clearly shows that, while direct repression occurs against both the Libidinal Ego and the Antilibidinal Ego, indirect repression occurs instead only *versus* the Libidinal Ego.

Therefore, according to Fairbairn the excess libidinal components are subject to a much greater degree of repression than the aggressive ones and, moreover, it is evident to him that repression is originally activated already in the schizoid phase rather than in the depressive phase. One must consequently inevitably assume an early splitting of the original ego in order to justify the fact that one part of this psychic structure, obviously endowed with a charge of dynamic psychic energy, can repress another part of itself also endowed with a charge of dynamic psychic energy.

The 'object relations' as fundamental basis for individual psychic development

The foundations for an object theory were laid down by Klein, who nevertheless remained firmly anchored to the dual theory of instincts as proposed by Freud. It was from the 1940s onwards, however, that Fairbairn brought about a real 'paradigm shift', which can be summed up in his 'revolutionary' assertion that 'the final aim of the libido is the object' (Fairbairn, 1941), or as he would later say, 'the true aim of the libido is the object', or again, 'The true libidinal aim is the establishment of satisfactory relations with objects; and it is therefore the object that constitutes the true libidinal aim' (Fairbairn, 1946). Thus the aetiology of psychopathology derives substantially, according to this Author, from disturbances in object relations during all the phases of development, since, in the absence of lesions that compromise the normal functioning of the organism, environmental factors are of primary importance to the human being with respect to both the action of drives and other hypothetical innate or constitutional factors.

Fairbairn's object/relational model of the structure of the human psyche and its implications for the psychotherapeutic process

Fairbairn completely abandons Freud's original use of the concepts of Id, Ego and Superego, and thus also Klein's use of these terms; in fact, he completely rejects the model assumed by Freud's so-called '*seconda topica*'. Furthermore, he argues that the first objects to be internalised are those that Klein would call 'bad' objects, and that this occurs as a form of control of the 'libidinal frustration' generally associated with the weaning experience.

The relationship of ambivalence with the object (the mother) that arises with the advent of the late oral phase is managed by the child through complementary techniques of splitting and integration. In particular the Ego, which according to this Author is initially intact, splits the mother figure into 'good' and 'bad' object, internalising the latter in an attempt to govern it.

In order to better control the 'bad' object after having introjected it, the child, according to Fairbairn, splits it into 'exciting object' and 'rejecting

object', and uses his own aggressiveness, activated by frustration, to repress these objects. However, in this process this aggressiveness is not usually completely exhausted: therefore a further dose of aggressiveness is used by the central Ego to partly split, in a specular way, into a 'Libidinal Ego' and an 'Antilibidinal Ego'.

The difference between Freud's Id and Fairbairn's Libidinal ego lies in the fact that the latter is not an original 'reserve of drives', but a real 'psychic structure' derived from the original nucleus of the central Ego (and therefore more infantile and primitive than what the latter represents in the comprehensive psychic organisation of the adult individual). In Fairbairn's view, repression manifests itself, as has already been stated in this paper, not only towards objects (direct primary repression), but also directly *versus* these two 'subsidiary Egos', which remain linked to the objects by libidinal relationships (the Libidinal Ego with the 'exciting' object; the Antilibidinal Ego with the 'rejecting' object).

Obviously, for Fairbairn, this psychic process of repression of exciting and rejecting objects is never totally completed but must be continually confronted again. Thus the central Ego operates, by means of an aggressive drive originated by the frustrations suffered, a direct ('secondary') repression aimed both at the Libidinal Ego and to the Antilibidinal Ego: The latter, using the energy deriving from its residual aggressiveness, maintains active towards the Libidinal Ego a further form of distancing of the latter from consciousness (a process defined by Fairbairn as 'indirect' repression), which not only gives rise to the phenomena already known as 'resistance' within the psychotherapeutic process, but also actively contributes, in everyday psychic life, to the maintenance of the mechanism of repression *versus* the Libidinal Ego.

In synthesis, therefore, the 'fundamental endopsychic situation' proposed by Fairbairn posits a central Ego, residual of the original Ego but more evolved than it, which is partly conscious, partly preconscious and partly unconscious, and interacts continuously with two subsidiary Egos, both completely unconscious, called respectively 'antilibidinal Ego' and 'libidinal Ego'. The latter originates from the introjection of the pre-ambivalent 'rejected object' and from the subsequent splitting by the Ego of this introjected object into 'rejecting object' and 'exciting object' and kept unconscious by the action of direct and indirect repression.

Fairbairn (1944, 1946) called this organization of the Ego 'fundamental endopsychic structure' or 'dynamic structure'; it is based on the age-old technique of *divide et impera* as regards regulating the libido and aggressiveness (Fairbairn, 1944, 1946). After introducing it, he brought subsequent modifications to this comprehensive model of psychic organization and presented a detailed description of his final vision of the structure of the human psyche in *Synopsis of an Object-Relations Theory of Personality*, (1963), available also in Italian on pages 169-170 of his volume *Il piacere e l'oggetto: scritti 1952-1963* under the title *Sinossi della teoria delle relazioni oggettuali applicata alla personalità*.

In particular, Fairbairn states that, in his view:

'1) An Ego is present since birth.

2) The libido is a function of the Ego.

[...]

9) Two aspects of the internalized object, namely the exciting and the frustrating, are split off from the principal object nucleus and removed from the Ego.

10) Two repressed internal objects are thus constructed, the exciting (or libidinal) object and the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object.

[...]

12) Since the exciting object (libidinal) and the rejecting object (or antilibidinal) are both invested by the original Ego, they also bring with them, in the repression, the parts of the Ego with which they are invested, while the central nucleus of the Ego (central Ego) is not repressed and is the agent of repression.

13) The internal situation that follows is constituted by the original Ego split into three egoic structures: a central Ego (conscious) connected to the ideal object (Ego ideal), a repressed libidinal Ego connected to the exciting (or libidinal) object, and a repressed antilibidinal Ego connected to the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object' (pp. 169-170, Fairbairn, 1963).

This structuring of the psyche is represented graphically in Figure 4 below. The black arrows represent the dynamics of repression as described by Fairbairn in his later work.

Continuing the detailed description of his model of the psyche, based on internalized relationships that constitute its fundamental structures, in the Synopsis Fairbairn also provides clear indications on the consequent dynamics of human intrapsychic conflicts:

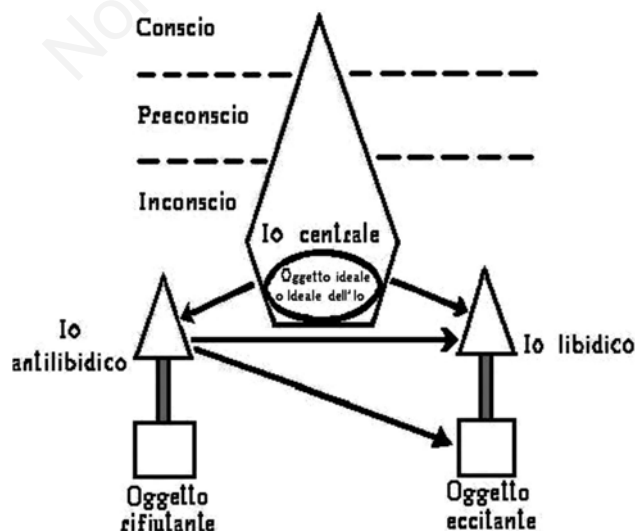


Figure 4. Fairbairn's definitive model of the structure of the human psyche (1963, in 1992).

'(15) *The antilibidinal Ego, by virtue of its connection with the rejecting (antilibidinal) object, adopts an absolutely hostile attitude toward the libidinal ego, and thereby has the effect of reinforcing the repression of the libidinal Ego by the central Ego*' (Idem, p. 170).

This dynamic is shown in red in Figure 5.

According to Fairbairn, all this is not limited to a revision of the purely theoretical aspects of Freudian and Kleinian Psychoanalysis, but also involves significant revisions of the concrete modes of psychotherapeutic intervention. This is how he describes his own thinking in this regard:

'In the light of these considerations, it seems that however much the psychoanalyst therapeutically assigns himself a neutral role, he cannot escape the need to actively intervene if he is to be therapeutically effective, and it must be acknowledged that each interpretation is actually an intervention. Therefore, in a sense, *the psychoanalytic treatment is resolved in the patient's attempt to confine his relationship with the analyst to the closed system of internal reality through transfert, and in the analyst's determination to open a breach in this closed system and to provide conditions in which, in the context of a therapeutic relationship, the patient can be induced to accept the open system of external reality.* The possibility of the analyst achieving this goal depends quite significantly on how rigidly, in each individual case, the external reality has been structured as a closed system. The evaluation of this aspect must be considered the real criterion for establishing the suitability of a case for psychoanalytic treatment. However, it would appear that, if the above considerations are well-founded, the actual relationship between patient and analyst constitutes the decisive factor in psychoanalytic treatment, as in any other form of psychotherapy,

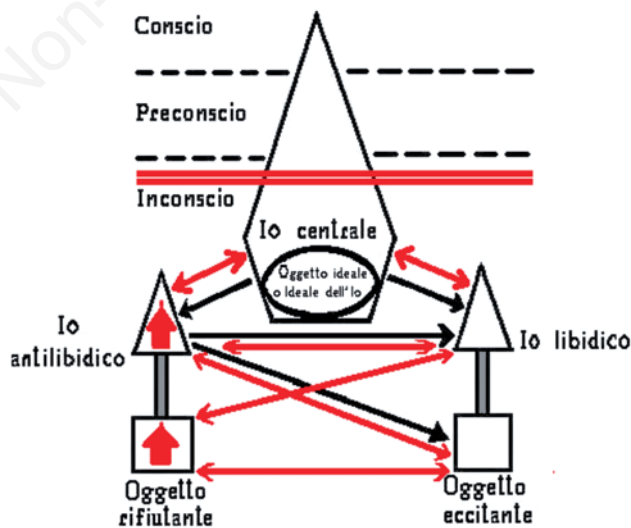


Figure 5. The intrapsychic conflict in Fairbairn's definitive model on the structure of the human psyche.

even if in the case of psychoanalytic therapy it undoubtedly acts in a peculiar way' (pp. 167-168, Fairbairn, 1958).

The progressive abandonment of the *drive model of psychoanalysis* in favour of the new *relational model*

Thanks to the theoretical and methodological contributions not only of Fairbairn, but also of many other authors who have definitively abandoned the traditional Freudian and Kleinian *drive model* in favour of the new *relational model* as the fundamental basis both for understanding the comprehensive psychic system of human beings, and for using it as the foundation of their psychotherapeutic approach to people, psychoanalysis has completed a process of revision and transformation of its original identity which actually began many years previously, not only in Europe, and subsequently spread with very specific and differentiated characteristics to almost all geographical areas of our planet.

In this regard, the renowned Italian psychanalyst, Marco Bacciagaluppi, explains:

'The relational model originated with Ferenczi. [...] Ferenczi's influence was exerted on both sides of the Atlantic, especially through two women he analysed, Melanie Klein in Britain and Clara Thompson in the United States. [...] Melanie Klein ... abandoned Ferenczi's relational paradigm and adopted an even more advanced drive model than Freud's. [...] Members of the British *Middle School*, on the other hand, are clearly in Ferenczi's tradition in terms of a loving relationship with the patient. Fairbairn (1940) speaks of 'genuine emotional contact' in therapy. Winnicott (1958) of a 'basic rapport of the Ego.' [...] Another explicit link with Ferenczi in Great Britain is represented by Ian Suttie. [...]. In the United States, Ferenczi contributed to the creation of the interpersonal-cultural school, thanks to Clara Thompson, analysed by him, and Fromm, his great admirer. [...] Without the constraints of Freudian orthodoxy, the American interpersonal-cultural school - founded later by Fromm, Sullivan, and Thompson - was free to develop Ferenczi's themes. [...] All these Authors can be defined as relational in a broad sense. [...] Other contributions in this field were given by Mitchell (1988 and 1993), Skolnick and Warshaw (1992), Aron and Sommer Anderson (1998), Bromberg (1998/2001), Donnel Stern (1997, 2010) and Hirsch (2008)' (Bacciagaluppi, 2012).

And this list of authors belonging to the so-called *relational model* in the broad sense, can no doubt continue for a very long time, for example, citing other names of international renown such as Jay R. Greenberg (author with Mitchell of the now 'classic' volume *The object relations in psychoanalytic theory*, published in Italy in 1986).

Finally, Bacciagaluppi concludes: 'one can justifiably apply the term 'psychoanalysis' to the relational model. It has in common with classical psychoanalysis the three fundamental concepts that Freud himself consid-

ered necessary to define a therapy as psychoanalytic: i) the unconscious; ii) resistance; iii) transference (Freud, 1914a) (Idem, p. 165).

In the course of the debates in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the problem of conflict in psychoanalysis, but from significantly different points of view than those characterizing the ‘relational’ current, has been dealt with extensively by various other authors who are well known in Italy (e.g. Wilfred Bion, Merton Gill, Robert Holt, George Klein, Joseph and Anne-Marie Sandler, *etc.*) and therefore should be mentioned here.

A specific exploration of their contributions on this topic is undoubtedly beyond the scope of this paper: However, I think it is useful to mention them because, although they start from different angles, many of their contributions come to express, in ways at least partly similar to those of authors from a more specifically relational field, interesting points of convergence between the theory of conflict and intersubjectivity on the one hand (for example with the thorough exploration of concepts such as those of *countertransference*, *setting* and *field*) and the subsequent contributions of the Neurosciences on the other. I will therefore try to go back to some of these topics in the concluding part of this paper.

In fact, however, in recent decades the definitive abandonment of the drive psychoanalytic model by an increasing number of important psychoanalysts, both European and American, as was pointed out for example by Massimo Fontana (2016), has had important repercussions not only on the comprehensive conception of the functioning of the human mind, and on the marked appreciation of the real relationship between patient and analyst in view of the outcome of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, but also on the role and meaning attributed to intrapsychic conflict in the aetiology of mental disorders and pathologies, whose ‘focus’ has also progressively shifted from the *intrapsychic* dimension to the *relational* one.

Indeed, this Author has noted in this regard:

‘As far as aetiology is concerned, the Freudian (and Ego Psychology) tradition carries with it a conception of psychopathology as the result of internal struggles (of intrapsychic conflicts) between drives rooted in the biological sphere, and defences of the Ego. The theories of Object Relations (Fairbairn, Winnicott) and, in other ways, the Psychology of the Self (Kohut) and the interpersonal tradition (Sullivan), instead, see in the incomplete responses to childhood needs by caregivers, or in the dysfunctionality of real relationships with others, the cause of disorders in psychological development’. (Fontana, 2016).

Meanwhile in Europe, at least in the first two or three decades after Fairbairn’s contributions, and especially thanks to the Authors of the so-called *Group of English Independents* (a group that is often defined as *Middle Group* or *Middle School*, some of whose best known exponents are Winnicott, Guntrip, Kahn and Bowlby) the fundamental cause of psychological disorders is definitely indicated in the incomplete responses to the

needs of children by the caregivers, and in the negative consequences that this entails on the ability to relate to others and to one's own life, in the United States, the *focus* on the nucleus of psychic problems gradually shifts from the dyadic - or at least circumscribed - dimension of the relationship between the child and the mother or between the child and his or her close family unit, to that of the comprehensive relationships that the individual establishes with all the other significant figures throughout the course of his or her existence.

One of the American authors most responsible for this change of perspective is undoubtedly Stephen Mitchell (1988), identified by Massimo Fontana as the first author who, on the basis of the radical *paradigm shift* which took place in Psychoanalysis in the previous decades, with the move from the *drive model* to the *relational model*, highlighted the need, in the context of understanding the etiological dynamics of psychic issues, to replace the concept of *intrapsychic conflict* with that of *relational conflict*.

Indeed, it is the concept of *relational conflict* introduced by Mitchell, as pointed out by Fontana, that allows the overcoming of the rigid and sterile opposition between *intrapsychic conflict* (on which Freudian and Kleinian *drive* psychoanalysis was focused, but also the already *objectual* one on which Fairbairn's model was based) and *relational deficit* which constituted the nucleus of the etiopathogenetic theories of the Authors of the *Middle Group*.

Yet another, no less significant innovation, in Fontana's view, helped make American relational psychoanalysis even more significant in its explanatory and applicative effectiveness in the final decades of the last century. This involved the partial replacement of the defence mechanism of *repression* with that of *dissociation* in the not only pathological, but also *normal* functioning of the human mind.

'The rediscovery of the concept of dissociation, linked to the reawakening of interest in real trauma since the mid-1980s, brought about a certain upheaval in psychoanalysis... [...] This upheaval can be reduced to its essential factors by stating that in psychoanalysis, there are currently two different ways of understanding dissociation: one resolves the problem by bringing back the Freudian approach, and identifying it as one of many defence mechanisms and, specifically, as a way in which the individual actively protects himself from traumatic memories experienced as intolerable; the other, increasingly widespread, closely follows Janet's perspective, considering dissociation as the consequence of psychological traumas that damage the integrative faculties of consciousness. Even if not actually stated in so many words by a psychoanalyst, one can report an eloquent comparison formulated by Liotti (1999) to represent the latter view: 'to consider dissociation as a defence would be analogous to considering bone fractures as defensive reactions to physical traumas' (Idem, p. 6).

Therefore, in the perspective of American relational Psychoanalysis and thanks above all to the specific innovations introduced by Bromberg (1998/2001), ‘the mind is intrinsically (and normally) structured on dissociation, insofar as it is constituted from its origin by the multiple Self/Other configurations which derive from the various significant interpersonal relationships. The mind, therefore, is intrinsically dissociated because it is inevitably part of the development of every individual constituted by multiple Selves, each one adapted to its own specific relational field and needing to be able to express itself fully in order to realise its potential, consolidate, and allow the full and authentic involvement of the person in every relationship’ (Ibidem, p. 6.).

Furthermore, I would like to draw particular attention to the fact that this recovery - operated as pointed out mainly by Bromberg - of dissociation as a fundamental defensive mechanism in response to psychic trauma, at least as much as repression, is inserted in an absolutely harmonious way both in the previous comprehensive theorisation of ‘traditional’ Freudian Psychoanalysis, and in the specific and more recent subsequent theoretical evolution which is characteristic of the Italian *relational psychoanalysis*, in a markedly original way.

Indeed, Marco Bacciagaluppi, a Milanese psychoanalyst very close to Bowlby and Fromm, states verbatim in one of his interviews (given in 1998 to Michele Minolli, one of the principal founders of the Italian Society of Relational Psychoanalysis, and published in the journal *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, owned and edited by the Association): ‘In *Attachment* (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 10-11 in the original) Bowlby reviews Freud’s conception of trauma. He basically accepts Freud’s notion that an event is traumatic when the mental apparatus is subjected to excessive amounts of stimulation. Bowlby concludes that separation and loss ‘are simply a particular example of the kind of event Freud considered traumatic’ (op. cit., p. 11). I will therefore use the traumatic separation as a paradigm of the traumatic situation.

Of the three stages of a child’s response to traumatic separation, protest is an expression of separation anxiety, despair is a manifestation of grief, and detachment is the consequence of a defence against these emotions (Bowlby, 1973, p. 27 in the original). The defence is denial, repression, and, perhaps most often, dissociation. Bowlby (op. cit., p. 29) notes that this same sequence was described by Freud in the final part of *Inhibition, Symptom and Distress* (Freud, 1926).

In the light of the above, it seems to me that I can state that the event is traumatic, while the defences tend to mitigate the consequences, although they, in turn, have negative consequences on the development of the personality’ (Minolli, 1998).

It is precisely in the comprehensive systematisation of Italian *relational*

psychoanalysis that, at least in my opinion, these contributions, from various historical sources on the *conflict* and *defences* that characterise human nature and personality, are reunited in a coherent model both on a theoretical level and in terms of its validity in the field of application and therapy.

In Italy, in particular, the *relational psychoanalytical model* in its comprehensive sense began to develop between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, giving rise to a number of Societies and Schools of Psychoanalysis which are now present in various Regions on our national territory and which, through the production of original contributions, have above all tried to build up their own specific identity in recent decades. Among these, in particular, I will now focus on the theme of interpreting *conflict* and its relationship with the technical and methodological methods adopted to deal with it in the psychotherapeutic field through the model of the so-called *relational psychoanalysis*.

The main peculiarities of this approach, compared to other approaches present within the *relational model in a broad sense*, both Italian and international, consist in my view of two further innovative elements adopted in the approach, namely the use in the psychoanalytic field of the most recent theorization concerning the so-called *complex dynamic systems*, and the particular attention paid to the *actual relationship between psychoanalyst and patient* as a ‘privileged access key’ both for understanding the latter’s relational conflicts, and for their subsequent use for psychodiagnostic and psychotherapeutic purposes.

The concept of *relational conflict* according to current *relational psychoanalysis* and its consequences on psychotherapeutic treatment modalities

We need to take into consideration at least four theoretical assumptions of the current *relational psychoanalysis*: i) the overcoming of both the concept of intrapsychic conflict and that of relational deficit, in favour of the concept of *relational conflict*; ii) the constant co-presence, in the process of structuring and dynamic functioning of the human mind, of at least two fundamental defence mechanisms, albeit acting in different degrees and often associated with other mechanisms: *repression* and *dissociation*; iii) the view of the *human personality as an inseparable part of a complex of dynamic systems*, with which it is in a constant mutually active relationship; iv) the conception of the *psychoanalytic relationship* as an expression of the relational conflicts present within the complex system ‘patient-therapist’ (or ‘patients-therapist’ in the case of a couple, or of group treatment), and therefore of its essential characteristic as the privileged object of analysis.

On the basis of these four theoretical assumptions, the explanatory

model of normal or dysfunctional functioning of the individual is based on at least the following five specific constructs: i) the 'I-subject'; ii) the 'auto-eco-organisation'; iii) 'consciousness of consciousness'; iv) 'creativity'; v) 'presence to oneself'.

All these constructs will now be taken into consideration more specifically, in accordance with the definitions in use in contemporary *relational psychoanalysis*.

As far as the first of these four constructs is concerned, Michele Minolli (2015) specified that:

- *The I-subject is one* - To affirm that the I-subject is one radically combines diversity with unity, the parts with the whole, respecting the I-subject as such and avoiding the absolutization of a part or a holistic view of the whole;
- *The I-subject has several parts in interaction with each other* - the various components or functions must be taken in their interaction. A model that only captures the aspect of unity and does not help to understand the recursive functioning of the subject between its parts and the whole is not adequate;
- *The I-subject is in relation to the external world* - It would not make much sense to deal with an I-subject that is estranged from the interactive reality in which it is necessarily embedded. And this, in particular, with respect to the influences and modes of retroactive incidence in the interactions with the external object' (Minolli, 2015).

As for the concept of 'auto-eco-organization', Minolli claims that: *'Two or more interacting systems give rise to changes that are always determined by the unit that receives the perturbations. Both the system and the environment are sources of reciprocal perturbation, and it is only from the point of view of an external observer that the change in the system is thought of as being determined by the environment or by the interior'* (Minolli, 2009). The Author then continues: 'Any consideration that leads to accentuating one or the other of these incidences is clearly dependent on the point of view adopted. If we go beyond this, that is, if we try to consider the I-subject as it presents itself to itself and to others, it is always the result of auto- and eco-organisation' (Idem, p. 53).

Furthermore, Massimo Fontana points out in this regard:

'This auto-organisation - or auto-eco-organisation', as Morin (1985) and Minolli (2009) prefer to call it, in order to underline the overcoming of the dualistic logic - is a crucial principle of that manner of theoretically framing the development in a relational perspective: thanks to it, it is possible not to slip into a surface interactionism which, instead of grasping the transactions taking place in the relational field, limits itself to dividing development factors between internal and external, as if they were independently conceivable realities' (Fontana, 2016).

Just as the principle of 'auto-eco-organisation' appears to be, therefore, absolutely fundamental in determining the conception of the I-subject as

always inextricably connected with the environment in which it is born and lives, so the concepts of ‘Consciousness of consciousness’ and ‘Creativity’, according to Minolli, appear equally linked to the original principle of ‘Presence to oneself’, which this Author considers the fundamental reference point for a real possibility, by no means taken for granted, of ‘taking one’s life into one’s own hands’.

‘We will use ‘consciousness’ to indicate the capacity of the living being to take on the external and the internal, and thus the capacity to be in relation, consciously and unconsciously, to oneself and to the world. An understanding and being in relation that implies, as Morin (1981, p. 268) stated, a cognitive action, a self/non-self-distinction and, somehow, an auto-transcendentalisation of the self with respect to the non-self. In this light ‘consciousness’ is a capacity with which any living being is endowed: from the cell to the human being. Leaving aside how it works, or cognitive consciousness, as well as the result, or phenomenal consciousness, we will concentrate exclusively on ‘consciousness’ as the capacity of every living being to make a distinction between self and non-self.

We will use ‘consciousness of consciousness’ as the specific capacity of Homo sapiens to deal with and express himself on ‘consciousness’. Only the human being has the prerogative of this qualitative leap that leads him to see ‘consciousness’ by asking himself why and what to do with it’ (Minolli, 2015).

And, finally:

‘In order to arrive at Presence to oneself, the ‘consciousness of consciousness’ faces many inevitable obstacles: from rejection to reaction, from denial to idealisation, from resignation to renunciation, from delegation to society to taking refuge in pathology. It is not necessary to dismiss a constitutional charter in order to criticise and outlaw the circumvolutions that the I-subject resorts to in order to achieve the quality of Presence to itself. One of the driving forces, perhaps the most effective, that pushes towards Presence is suffering, that is, the malaise of not being able to say that one is oneself for what one is, and therefore being able to take one’s life into one’s own hands’ (Idem, p, 233).

On the basis of this description of the process towards the acquisition of ‘Presence to oneself’ as described by Minolli in his 2015 work, as well as of its four ‘theoretical assumptions’ previously presented and illustrated, the application to the psychotherapeutic moment of the model of Relational Psychoanalysis is released - in my opinion, almost definitively - not only from the concept of *intrapsychic conflict*, but also from the concept of an *ideal model* towards which everyone should necessarily strive when they begin psychotherapy, according to the approach of today’s *relational psychoanalysis*.

Minolli concludes, in this regard (2009): ‘Every system, and therefore also every human system, follows its own path and finds its own solutions. Whatever its state is, it is certainly functional to its coherence.

There is no ideal model of how it should be. There is no time for change. There is no desirable way of being.

Analysis can only pursue a 'Presence to oneself' of the system. A Presence to oneself that allows one to feel 'well' in one's own historical and therefore current solutions, or to propose changes towards directions established by the system itself. Physics, biology and evolutionary science help us to think of change as a function of the system. It is in the service of the system that we operate. Our importance lies in being 'facilitators' of the I-subject' (Minolli, 2009).

Conclusions

The comprehensive theorisation of the school of *relational psychoanalysis*, as summarised here above all through the synthesis of Michele Minolli's contribution, would therefore seem to substantially confirm what has already been explicitly affirmed by Massimo Fontana, namely that also for *relational psychoanalysis*, as was already underlined by Mitchell in his 1988 volume, the need to completely overcome the concept of *intrapsychic conflict* (as well as of the concept of *relational deficit* that constituted the nucleus of the aetiopathogenic theories of the Authors of the *Group of British Independents*, such as Fairbairn, Winnicott and Bowlby) in favour of the concept of *relational conflict* is corroborated.

Massimo Fontana specified that this concept 'considers psychological organisation as necessarily linked to the relational field, according to a transactional model in which the ways of giving meaning to experience, and the meanings themselves, are co-constructed in interaction with the other. In this view, there is no *internal* and *external* independent of each other, but a field of interaction in the context of which desires and fears, and every other aspect of psychological life, take shape; for Mitchell, the regulation of the Self proceeds together with the regulation of the field' (Fontana, 2016).

In this regard, Salvatore Zito points out: '*In essence, what the relational revolution has as its main objective is precisely to affect the perspective through which psychoanalysis investigates the psychic subject: no longer an isolated, separate individual whose desires are intrinsically in contrast with external reality, but an intersubjective field within which the subject is born and psychologically develops*' (Zito, 2017).

In psychology, the concept of 'field' undoubtedly goes back a long way, right to the early fundamental contributions that Kurt Lewin and the authors adhering to the theory of *Form Psychology* expressed in the first half of the last century. It was used and considered with extraordinary attention by the three fundamental models of Physics that were established in the early 20th century, as well as by the previous ones, that is to say in the model of the

'gravitational field' introduced by Newton and then radically modified by Einstein (1687; 1916), the 'electromagnetic field' model of Faraday and Maxwell (1812; 1864) and, finally, in the so-called 'quantum field theory' introduced in 1926 by Schrödinger and Dirac and later developed by many other authors, among whom we need only mention Heisenberg, Pauli and Oppenheimer (c. 1926; 1950). In more recent times, it has been used several times - both directly and indirectly - also by many psychoanalytic authors: we find, for example, a very evident reference to it, albeit indirectly, in the concept of symbiosis at the basis of the theory of 'separation-individuation' formulated in the 1950s by Margaret S. Mahler. Subsequently it was also implicitly taken up by Winnicott and Bowlby (within, respectively, their specific concepts of 'mother-child dyad' and 'attachment'); moreover, it was used more and more explicitly, especially by authors of Kleinian and Bionian derivation, with particular reference not only to the interaction between the child and the mother (or, in any case, between the child and the figure of its primary caregiver) but also and above all to the interaction between the patient and his analyst (probably starting with the contribution of the Baranger couple, 1961-1962, up to those of various authors, including Italian ones, among whom we can mention for example Corrao, Chianese, Riolo, Gaburri and Ferro, 1981-1997).

Further significant reflections on this subject have also been developed over the past two decades by various Authors of psychological extraction (including, but not only, psychoanalytic authors) who have sought a possible integration between the knowledge on the fundamental role played by the *caregiver* figure in the child's primary development, and that produced by other areas of research, such as Neuroscience (Gallese, Migone, Daniel Stern, Morris Eagle, Damasio, Schore, *etc.*). What I would like to observe in this regard is above all what follows:

- i) If, on the one hand, the abandonment of the concept of 'intrapsychic conflict' in favour of that of 'relational conflict' seems definitive, at least in some sectors of *relational psychoanalysis* (and in particular in Italian *relational psychoanalysis*), how does the latter concept of 'relational conflict' relate to those of 'conflict' in general and of 'field', concepts which are still extremely present and the object of keen interest on the part of Italian and international psychoanalysis?
- ii) If the concept of 'relational conflict' has its roots in the work of European and American psychoanalysts who have definitively abandoned the drive model in favour of the relational one, as initially indicated by Ferenczi almost a hundred years ago, is it possible to find in any of these contributions useful hints to overcome the current distance, still present between the various sectors of psychoanalysis which consider it opportune, even if from different points of view, to continue to use it both as an explanatory model of the functioning of the human mind, and as a 'guideline' for its applications in psychotherapy?
- iii) What direction can current psychoanalysis, and in particular the School of *relational psychoanalysis*, take in order to produce the integrations necessary to overcome the significant gap between psychoanalysis and neuroscience on

the one hand, and psychoanalysis as a whole and relational psychoanalysis on the other?

I shall start by presenting a general outline I hope will be useful to continue the research in all these directions, although I am aware that I cannot claim to have exhaustive answers to any of these questions at the present time, in the opposite sense to how I have expressed them, in the hope of being able to encourage at least further stimuli for research in addition to what we have so far produced. With regard, therefore, to the third of these questions, it seems to me that a general push in the direction I advocate can come from, for example, the contributions of Allan Schore, who for years has indicated in Bowlby's attachment theory a potentially useful model for overcoming the gap that still exists between psychoanalysis and neuroscience. As is well known, in fact, this model presupposes four different *types of attachment*, shown in Figure 6 below, which in turn give rise to four different *styles of attachment*, each of which produces in the child the organisation of specific *Internal Working Models (I.W.M.)* which constitute the fundamental *patterns* of functioning in later life.

Whereas Bowlby's model has already been widely validated and used both by many psychoanalysts and by many neuroscientists, in the context of the progressive reciprocal integration between the two disciplines they represent, the concept of *Dissociated Internal Working Models (D.I.W.M.)* pro-

TYPES OF ATTACHMENT				
Type	A	B	C	D
Denomination	Avoidant	Secure	Ambivalent	Disorganized
Basic psychic state in the child	Insecure and anxious	Sufficiently calm, normal	Anxious and insecure	Confused, extremely insecure and anxious
Attachment originally established by the parents in their childhood (A.A.I.)	Dismissing	Sufficiently secure	Insecure and preoccupied about the attachment established in early childhood	Traumatic and unresolved
Attitude of the mother towards the child	Rejecting	Sensitive to the child's needs	Insensitive to the child's needs	Chaotic, unpredictable
Attitude of the child in the 'strange situation'	The child does not show anger towards the mother in the S.S. but avoids her when she returns	When the mother returns the child welcomes her than starts playing again calmly	Seeks the mother when she is absent, angry resistance towards her when she returns	The child enacts stereotypical behaviours, it is surprised/astonished when the mother leaves
Internal Working Models of the child (I.W.M.)	Dismissing style	Secure style	Preoccupied style	Fearful-avoidant style

Figure 6. The fundamental *types of attachment* according to Bowlby (1969-1980) and subsequent *styles of attachment* produced in the child by the relative *Internal Working Models (I.W.M.)*.

posed by Albasi in an article published in 2005 in the S.I.P.Re. Journal *‘Ricerca Psicoanalitica’* can in my opinion build further ‘bridges’ not only between attachment theory and psychoanalysis of relationships, but also between the latter and the neurosciences, or at least those which for a number of years have established a reciprocally constructive and productive appraisal with the attachment theory.

Consequently, as regards the second of the three broad questions formulated above, and precisely on the basis of the answer already given to the third question, one might respond positively by proposing, as a model of mental organisation on which the *relational conflict* that I would like to deal with now is established and must be managed, a new model that seeks to integrate Bowlby’s contribution (which provides ample indications above all regarding the ways of relating personally to others) with the final model on mental structure proposed by Fairbairn in 1963, then modified by David P. Celani in the volume *Fairbairn and the Object Relations Tradition* edited by Clarke & Scharff (2014 pp. 397-429 and further modified by me in 2015). In Figure 7 below, I present a new graphic schematization of this model of mental organization, in which the three ‘internal objects’ are represented not only by simple geometric figures, but also by photographic images that attempt to visually synthesize their respective emotional characterizations as I believe they are outlined in the works of the Scottish psychoanalyst.

Starting therefore from the modified Fairbairn model represented here,

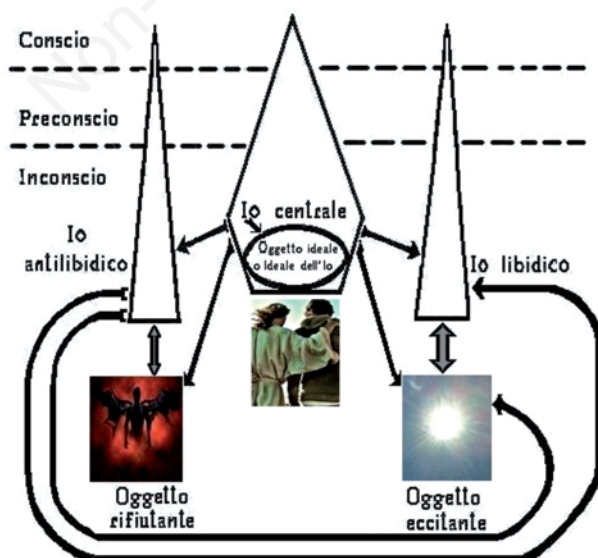


Figure 7. Fairbairn’s 1963 model as modified by Celani (2014) and Frati (2015).

in the following four figures I will try to hypothesize and consequently represent the different situations of relational conflict which in my opinion could substantially characterize each of the four fundamental *attachment styles* as outlined in Bowlby's current attachment theory, using however only, in this regard, the reciprocal relationships between the three internalized objects as defined by Fairbairn himself, and not the psychic structures that originated from them: precisely because I intend to deal with *relational conflict* and not with *intrapsychic conflict*.

In the following four figures, the red arrows represent the directions in which each of these internalised objects seeks to exert its control over the other two, or at least over one of them. Of course, these schematisations represent only hypotheses concerning absolutely theoretical models of *relational conflict*, since they never occur in reality in *pure* form but, in individual clinical situations, they are always combined with each other in the most varied forms.

i) In the theoretical model of the *secure attachment style*, represented in Figure 8, the Ideal Object (or 'Ego Ideal') usually maintains a sufficient level of control over both the 'rejecting' internal Object as well as the 'exciting' internal Object, so that the relational conflict presented by people with this style of attachment is usually quite low and generally not particularly problematic, except in particular situations of real adverse events, stress or tensions which can always occur in the course of life but most often have a transitory character. In people mainly characterized by this style of attachment, there is also a generally acceptable or good 'Presence to oneself' (Minolli, 2009).

ii) In the theoretical model of the *dismissing attachment style*, represented in Figure 9, it is instead the 'rejecting' internal Object that exercises its control and dominion over both the 'exciting' internal Object and the Ideal Object, so that

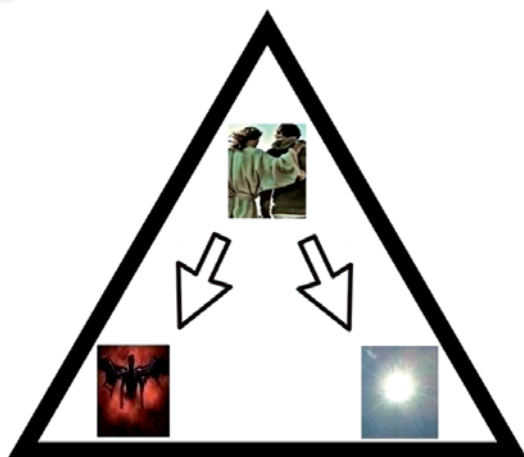


Figure 8. The theoretical model of *relational conflict* in people characterized by predominance of *secure style of attachment*.

the relational conflict presented by people with this style of attachment is usually quite high, resulting in particularly problematic behaviour, even self-harming and potentially self-destructive forms. The 'Presence to oneself' is usually insufficient, inadequate, precisely because the internal 'rejecting' Object tends to exercise a function of recurrent, and in some cases even frequent, damage or disturbance towards the Ideal Object.

iii) In the theoretical model of the *preoccupied attachment style*, represented in Figure 10, it is instead the 'exciting' internal Object that exercises control and dominance over both the 'rejecting' internal Object and the Ideal Object, so that the relational conflict presented by people with this attachment style is usually

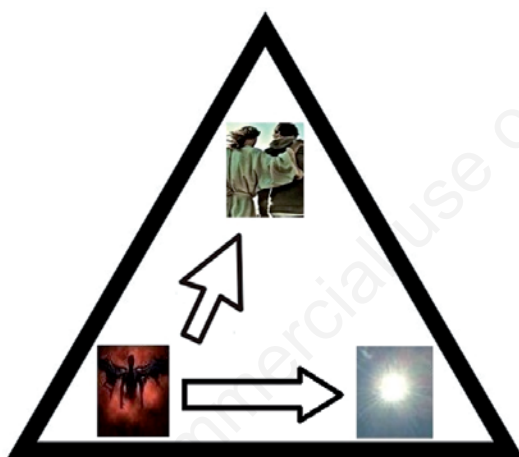


Figure 9. The theoretical model of *relational conflict* in people characterized by predominance of *dismissing attachment style*.

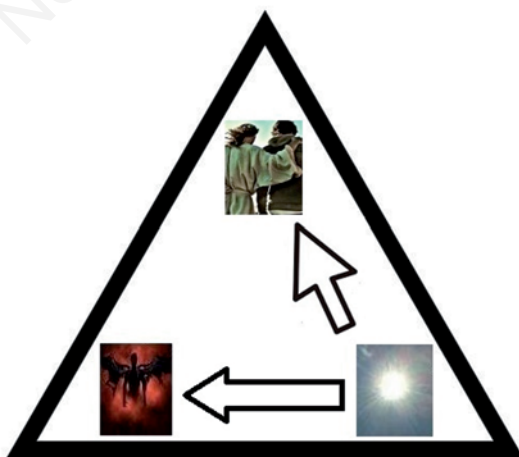


Figure 10. The theoretical model of *relational conflict* in people characterized by predominance of *preoccupied attachment style*.

quite high but not necessarily characterized by particularly problematic behaviour at the level of hetero- or self-directed destructiveness. Even the 'Presence to oneself' is usually limited, because in these cases the internal 'exciting' Object tends to exercise with considerable frequency a function of significant disturbance towards the Ideal Object.

iv) Finally, Figure 11 shows the theoretical model of the *fearful-avoidant attachment style*, in which both the exciting internal Object and the rejecting internal Object tend to exert their control and domination over the Ideal Object, so that the relational conflict presented by people with this attachment style is usually quite high and potentially characterized by particularly problematic behaviour both in terms of hetero- or self-directed destructiveness and, in an even higher form, by emotional and affective ambivalence. The 'Presence to oneself' is usually poor or at least significantly limited, because in these cases it is both the 'rejecting' and the 'exciting' internal Object that tend to exercise with high frequency a significant function of disturbance towards the Ideal Object.

The seriousness of each of these forms of relational conflict, of course, is not only determined by the type of control that one or two internal objects tend to exert over the others, but also by the quantitative level with which this control is exerted.

Therefore, after providing a substantially affirmative answer - with the help of a 'model of internal relational conflict' based on a proposed integration of the theoretical contributions of Bowlby and Fairbairn - to the second of the three questions expressed above, I will now try to provide an answer to the first question. In order to do so, I will mainly use the theoretical contributions provided by a recent psychoanalytic diagnostic tool, the OPD (2009), on the basis of the analysis made by some authors of the school of relational psychoanalysis, in particular by Maria Luisa Tricoli (2017).

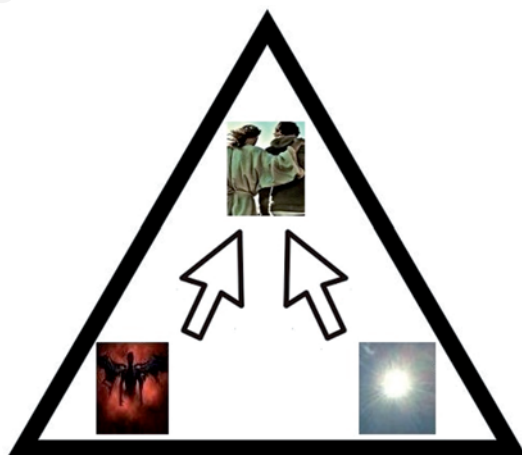


Figure 11. The theoretical model of *relational conflict* in people characterized by predominance of *fearful-avoidant style of attachment*.

In fact, the latter author points out that the OPD, 'by adhering to a conflictual, but not strictly Freudian, view of human functioning, identifies seven types of conflict, *i.e.* unresolved tensions that determine the person's experience and behaviour and that can be inferred from the clinical interview (Stanghellini 2009, pp. 215-216): dependence *vs* autonomy, submission *vs* control; caring *vs* self-sufficiency; valuing the self *vs* valuing the other; egotistic tendencies *vs* pro-social tendencies; oedipal-sexual conflicts; conflicts relating to identity which originate from contradictory representations of the Self' (Tricoli, 2017).

In this regard, the Author observes: 'Leaving aside the fact that the OPD, conforming to a precise theoretical model, focuses on the conflictual aspect that lies behind the observable manifestations, the contrasts identified, disregarding the last two items on the list, can be considered attitudes displayed by every human being, involving the area of affections, thought and behavioural manifestations as a whole' (Idem, p. 132).

In the light of all these considerations, it seems to me possible to conclude this examination of the concept of 'relational conflict' and finally provide an answer to the first of the three questions formulated above, by pointing out how, in the overall panorama of contemporary Italian and international psychoanalysis, not only does that concept still appear to be closely connected both to the idea of 'conflict' in general and to that of 'field' (in the meaning of 'relational field'), but also - and perhaps above all - that through the joint, common analysis of both these aspects, so inextricably present and interacting in the life of every person - the 'conflict' and the 'field' of a person who comes to us - it may sometimes be possible for that person, in the clinical and psychotherapeutic context, to gain a sufficiently adequate understanding of his needs, his difficulties, but also of his potentialities.

In other words, accompanying each of our patients towards the goal of a more satisfactory psychological well-being, a better ability to manage their own conflicts, a greater command over their own lives (that is, to take up the fundamental concept taught by Michele Minolli, of a better 'Presence to oneself'), must necessarily include the acquisition and recognition of a meaning and a sense within the relational field of *that* patient, of his affections and thoughts, of his behaviour, of his own past and present conflicts.

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