

Comment to: *Interview with Corrado Pontalti in conversation with Fabio Vanni*

Rita Cavalieri*

It was a great pleasure to read the exchange between Dr Pontalti and Dr Vanni. Their conversation was guided by their loving intelligence, by the lightness of wisdom, by the simplicity of the scholar. I left with greater clarity on the topics discussed, new stimuli for reflection, and the urge to review our interventions in the light of the existing data, data characterised by loneliness. I started working as a child neuropsychiatrist in the field a long time ago, when the NPI became part of the social services. At that time, when speaking of a patient one spoke of a ‘case’ or a ‘difficult case’ with reference to his clinical features. From an etymological point of view, the word ‘case’ derives from the Latin *casus* and the verb *cadere* ‘to fall’, and there are various definitions: i) unforeseen event, fortuitous circumstance (1313, Angiolieri); ii) mysterious and remote cause of human events (1505, Bembo); iii) fact that happens under medical control (1565, Varchi). It seems to me that these definitions could easily be applied to our patients: ‘unforeseen’ may emphasise the painful lack of prevention plans; ‘mysterious cause’ reminds us or suggests that there are many factors involved in determining illness, not only organic ones; ‘under medical control’ occurs most often only when everything has already manifested itself. ‘Difficult’ was a term used for those cases in which there always seemed to be a missing piece in order to achieve a satisfactory psychophysical condition. “Difficult” is defined by Savonarola as that which requires effort to be understood; by G. Cavalcanti “that which cannot be done without effort or skill”. And the effort was to try as skilfully as possible to create collaborations with colleagues in order to build up knowledge of the patient together. It was not always easy. Then over time the case was no longer described as difficult but as complex. And the patient became a client. I think the transition was significant because instead

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of indicating difficulty as a salient element, we moved towards a specification. The word 'complex' is an adjective, therefore a specification that requires that we know it in all its parts. We then move on to emphasise that a case as it appears to us is the result of the presence of various aspects acting and interacting with each other. The etymology of the word 'complex' is also very interesting. It derives from Latin, from the participle of *complecti*, 'to embrace'. So the defining action of the word 'complex' is not separation, fragmentation into several separate parts, but embracing. Dante defines embrace as "to understand, to contain". Hence embracing to allow reciprocal knowledge, the reception of each other's message: a close proximity that does not alter each other's limits but allows the creation of a thought as the third element of the relationship of a response as a synthesis of what is reciprocally transmitted. Now we also speak of complexity. We move from the adjective 'complex' to the noun 'complexity'. There is therefore a complexity in which the subject is immersed in his being. From the individual to the plural, to the social. The individual increasingly seen as inseparable from the society in which he or she is immersed. Thus, knowledge of the individual is knowledge of the many personal and non-personal facets that make up an ever-changing, ever-evolving whole. Surely '*famiglia*' is itself a complex and difficult unit: it requires understanding, effort and skill. The term '*famiglia*' is etymologically defined as 'a group of people who constitute the retinue or court of a person; servants of the house'. How well this definition prompts us to think about the various roles that are assumed within the term. Reading the interview, I felt weighted down by a heavy cloud of loneliness. The parents are alone, the children are alone. The grandparents, too, are alone. Revolutions create great emptiness: one is caught up in the action of revolt. The concrete, impetuous, fiery manifestation becomes the realisation of the revolution. It starts with a social, group event with a common need for concrete change, and its achievement concludes the action. Instead, I believe there should be a revolution within each person: the intimate understanding of the goals, viewing them in the light of one's own being. At times one ends up supporting an event because that was required by the revolt, and revolutionary theories are applied without criticism, without reflection, without personalisation. The adult viewing the child is no longer capable of distinguishing the individual with whom he can try to relate in a unique and living way. The difficulty presented by dialogue is that it requires curiosity, willingness, loving tension; this has been met by parents and children who are disarmed, uncertain, afraid. Thus, one gets lost. The new view of the developmental age, the revolutionary view of the couple, of the family, with the desire to get out of asphyxiating cages, taking on board unreflecting, uncritical indications, gave rise to loneliness. There was not something to share but something to do. The real need for change materialised on a practical level and not on the level of a loving relationship.

I think '68 was partially the start of loneliness. Today we no longer have time: perhaps we no longer have time for all things. Doing instead of being. I cannot help but conclude by recalling that the ancient Greeks believed that the 'how' and not the 'when' was the only element to be taken into consideration.

Conflict of interests: the author declares no potential conflict of interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: not required.

Received for publication: 17 June 2022.

Accepted for publication: 30 June 2022.

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Ricerca Psicoanalitica 2022; XXXIII:674

doi:10.4081/rp.2022.674

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