

## Reply to comments received

*Luigi D'Elia\**

Nothing can make the writer of a scientific contribution feel more fulfilled than receiving constructive and intelligent comments and criticism. This is the virtuous path to be followed by any construct or any idea in all respectable scientific-professional spheres: an exchange, a confrontation, rebuttals, mutual inspiration for new ideas. And this can only happen – and very rarely does – within scientific and professional communities where the course is steadfastly directed towards the common goals of progress and humanitarian interests and where the dynamics of power and competition are mitigated.

If, then, it were ever possible to define what ‘professional happiness’ is, well, the above considerations provide the coordinates that would define it.

Made happy, therefore, by what is happening here, I cannot help but express my most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to Fabio Vanni, who invited me to send my contribution, to the four fellow commentators who read it, Enrico Vincenti, Carmine Parrella, Maurizio Mistrali and Antonio Milici, to the reviewers of the journal and to the entire community they represent. Gratitude which immediately extends to the contents expressed by the four fellow commentators in their writings.

Antonio Milici displays remarkable acumen in pointing out a possible fruitful further branch of research following on from my notes on the technosphere (see the final table of my paper) regarding the as yet unexplored consequences of life on the web, a veritable migration of human beings through virtualisation and decorporisation of experiences, foreshadowing further migrations already announced by the advent of the metaverse and the conjunction of this technology with developments in artificial intelligence. This further leap of existential niche construction (from an evolutionary perspective) is not by chance one of the topics I am addressing in a new, as yet unpublished, research project of mine.

As for Milici's doubts on the sustainability of psychotherapeutic training

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in light of new social configurations, I agree with him completely, but perhaps we should also move towards new and more transdisciplinary professional figures.

Maurizio Mistrali's remarks not only flatter me, but also confirm that the excessive realism (but can realism ever be too excessive, I wonder), which is a hallmark of my seemingly pessimistic analysis, has been correctly grasped as prospective (not prophetic! For goodness sake). If I were unable to imagine a better future than our present, I believe I would not take time to imagine scenarios for future colleagues. As I have also tried to say in my writing, variations in theories and settings always arise from unexpected evolutionary thrusts in our history, or from techno-scientific leaps which at times correspond to leaps in consciousness. I believe it is likely that we are all on the eve of such a leap.

Carmine Parrella's contribution arouses in me a particularly sensitive response, especially when he states: 'It has always seemed to me a contradiction and, more profoundly, a sort of deontological and 'ethical betrayal' to commit myself to returning a healthy individual to a sick society'. How can one disagree... But also in his putting himself directly into the picture in his description of his clinical vignette (the young boy who, after strenuous therapeutic journeys, goes back to his team and deals with the gruff coach), which ends with the question: 'whose responsibility is it to build a 'place of social psychotherapy'?'

The answer to this question appears a few paragraphs later: 'therapeutic paths must take on a marked territorial character and dialogue with the affective and identity matrix of places and 'people'. Beautiful! It is at this point that the mission of socially-inspired psychotherapy merges with the mission of community psychology, trying to invent new ways (again, very low-tech, but with very high anthropological competence) of providing care that go beyond both missions.

There is a strong temptation to tell ourselves: this is where my task ends, others will take over from here on. But we know very well that, although it is understandable and legitimate to stop when faced with exorbitant tasks, limiting our omnipotence and our *furor curandi*, those 'others' do not exist and will not take over. I believe that the fantasy of picking up the phone and meddling in the lives of some of our patients is in no way an invasion of the field (of the social worker's work, for instance) or a degradation of the setting, but corresponds to the civic and intellectual commitment of the professional. I would go so far as to say that the greater the psychotherapist's feeling of exercising an intellectual function, the greater the possibility of picking up that phone.

Finally, I come to Enrico Vincenti's more than substantial commentary, which is actually a long article in itself and which I have read and reread many times, given the breadth of the topics covered. I do not profess hereby

to reply point by point (the result would be another 10-page article and the space I am allowed is much less), so I will try to raise the points that seemed most relevant to me, reserving the right to go into greater detail on another occasion, perhaps in person.

It seems to me that, apart from the many different and certainly enriching cultural references (I did not know Minolli and his very interesting and transversal positions before today, and I find myself agreeing with most of his analyses), Vincenti observes or glimpses in my writing – I apologise for the perhaps excessive synthesis – the ease of giving into the temptations of polarisations, the use of abstract attributions of blame to society as such, a use of categories which imply an ideal development of the personality.

I believe, however, that there is a small but significant misunderstanding, or perhaps a small divergence, from which arise misinterpretations and probably different, but not necessarily conflicting, conclusions.

If I understand correctly, but I am not sure, Vincenti argues in favour of the ever-present possibility of the self-conscious subject of a ‘return to oneself’ and to one’s own roots so as to attest, thanks to the new quality of Presence, the possibility of emancipation from the alienating factors produced from time to time by the cultural systems in progress. I too believe this and have always hoped this, but unlike my colleague and, perhaps, also his theoretical references, I observe and register in the individual-culture relationship an unprecedented qualitative discontinuity which makes this path of return to the self much more arduous and by no means taken for granted.

What I observe in the acceleration and bulimia of economic processes, underpinned by equally rapid technological dislocations of human culture, is a radical change in the idea of subjectivity, freedom, and self-realisation of the contemporary subject and a kind of alienation of a different nature: more ineffable, more ‘introjective’, more radical than what Marx described in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To use a scientific metaphor borrowed from evolutionary biology, the sapiens species’ talent for continually ‘constructing ecological niches’, at the basis of its original phylogenetic evolutionary fortune, but also at the basis of the invention of culture, understood here as the ‘construction of existential or ontological niches’, has led humanity today to a fatal crossroads where what is at stake is the very survival of our species. The sapiens are the only species capable of self-extinction due to their new and overwhelming constructions of existential niches which see that species as increasingly disconnected from the climatic crises they produce and increasingly migrating into parallel and alienating realities: first the anthroposphere of the web, tomorrow the anthroposphere of the metaverse and artificial or organic intelligences.

The exercise of any free will and self-assertion therefore necessarily passes through new criteria of awareness and self-consciousness, and the opposition resilience/resistance that I pose at the dawn of a new clinical-social vision

is clearly intended to be a descriptive and deliberately radicalised metaphor for a completely new historical-cultural condition in which being present is fundamental, but perhaps, from my point of view, not yet sufficient to express the needs for re-subjectivisation which the contemporary human type requires. In short, think (as a further explanatory metaphor) of a doctor at the bedside of a terminally ill patient to whom it would be necessary to apply an extremely different and counter-intuitive treatment in an attempt to reverse the conditions that are leading his patient to the abyss.

Presence and a welcoming reception are fundamental and invaluable principles, but perhaps still too reminiscent of the analyst's neutrality (or presumed neutrality). My call for 'resistance', however evocative of recent historical glories, is entirely impersonal and is not meant to be an invitation to rebel against someone or something abstract, to a non-existent counterpart, but an invitation to realise how close we are to the brink of the abyss and how urgent it is to reverse the current trend.

A final note: when I refer to de-evolutionary processes, I am not referring to the concept of phylogenetic evolution, *i.e.*, the idea of a given and taken for granted development which is valid for all, but to ontogenetic evolution, so I am simply referring to the developmental age and to the (obviously serious) incidents that prevent children from growing up.

I realise that I have only skimmed with a bird's eye view over the important themes well expressed by my colleagues, and I hope to be able to compensate for this lack of in-depth analysis with further studies and research or, better still, with personal meetings throughout Italy, wherever possible.

Thank you again for this unmissable opportunity for discussion.

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