FOCUS 1: PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Creativity in psychotherapy as a 'co-reflexive dialogue between acting subjects': a clinical and theoretical proposal

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ABSTRACT. – This contribution, in part discussed by the authors at the 'Andare Avanti' study day organized in January 2023, seeks to outline the role played by co-reflective dialogue between patient and therapist, in the emergence of Subjectivity and the sense of agency in psychotherapy. Starting from the analysis of concepts that have become classics in the Psychoanalysis of Relationships, such as those of 'creativity' and 'delegation', a theoretical revisiting of them is proposed aimed at recovering the implicit, corporeal and intersubjective bases of the therapeutic process. In an attempt to describe the complex links between the self-reflective and pre-reflective, individual and relational dimensions of the sense of agency in psychotherapy, the analysis of a clinical vignette is proposed.

Key words: subject; relationship; intersubjectivity; sense of agency; psychotherapy.

Emily Dickinson writes, 'So from the mould/Scarlet and Gold/ Many a Bulb will rise /Hidden away, cunningly,/From sagacious eyes./ So from Cocoon/Many a Worm/Leap so Highland gay,/Peasants like me -/Peasants like Thee/Gaze perplexedly!' (1859).

In these verses, there emerges, with great force, the sense of amazement, of innocent unpreparedness which permeates a person's attempt to explain what makes them feel alive, what allows them to move actively in the world. This fascinating mystery has been more prosaically translated into academic classrooms as the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers, 1995). As human beings, not only do we 'know' that we are alive, but we are able to 'feel' that we are alive and we act like living beings. However, we are unable to explain how this happens. In their professional studies, even psychothera-pists probably ask themselves the same, complicated, questions about subjec-

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tivity: how does it happen that patients leap out of their cocoon in a Dickinsonian manner and become more active, more creative, as agents of their change, like Subjects more 'present' to themselves?

In 'Being and Becoming', Michele Minolli (2015) attempts to give a systematic answer to these questions by taking a meta-theoretical perspective, *i.e.*, free from dichotomies between nature and culture, the internal and the external, genetics and environment, consciousness and unconscious, *etc*.

Psychoanalytic process, according to Minolli, essentially follows the process of existence. In fact, the author indicates many temporal criteria, not surprisingly called *moments* by him*:* at moment zero, the Subject *does not exist* because powerfully configured and traversed by genetics and the environment.

> 'The idea of a pre-existing subject that interacts with its configured being does not hold up' (Minolli, 2015, p. 113).

As Coin (2020, p. 501) writes, 'Minolli thus undermines the concept of the *active subject* on which he had focused so much in the past. The Ego-Subject moves within the lines of force inscribed in its configuration: it brings into being what it is, like any organism that acts according to its nature. The *active* component is necessarily conditioned […]'.

In other words, at the origin of the process of subjectivation as individuals, we would be active only as genetics and the environment prescribe, our existence being subjected in some way to the powerful pressures of our own structures, independent of us. Subsequently, the moment of Consciousness would intervene: a feeling of existing which, according to Minolli, does not coincides with historical identity which pertains to the feeling of 'being the centre' (2015, p. 14) of oneself, and which-leads us towards the other in a kind of 'reinforcement linked to the need to be confirmed in one's existence' (*ibidem,* p. 115). The final moment is represented by Creativity. On the ontogenetic level, it appears from 15/18 months, when the child begins to express the function of Consciousness of consciousness. Even in the analytical process this moment can be defined as *creative*, because, just as happens when humans begin to experience self-reflexivity in life, in therapy at this level we go beyond ourselves, and go on to:

> 'pursue an active acceptance of one's historical configuration, to take into account 'conscience' and, starting from oneself, to go beyond this to take control of one's life' (*ibidem,* p. 115)

In a nutshell, according to this approach which intentionally overturns (Coin, *ibidem*) the previous Epistemology of Presence (Minolli, 2009), the (creative) conquest of the self-reflective sense of agency could be portrayed as a predominantly individualistic process. This process actively welcomes

the historical predeterminations of the Subject, as they were originally given. In fact, with the emergence of Consciousness of consciousness the delegation of one's identity configuration to others has overcome. Individuals take themselves as a basis of their own meanings, rising to a new quality of being, active, in no way subjected to the slavery of delegation (understood as: The way I live is contingent on being recognized by the other).

However, cognitive science, neuroscience, and the philosophy of mind also propose alternative points of view regarding the processes of the emergence of subjectivity, and the role played in these processes by interpersonal relationships, bodily experience, biological mechanisms, physical phenomena, *etc*.). According to these perspectives, the equation between a sense of agency and a self-reflective capacity is not enough to bridge the enormous complexity of what Metzinger (2004) defined as the subjectivity of subjective experience. The first-person point of view of subjectivity contains in its deepest folds – in the apparently obvious and 'predictable' dimensions of phenomenal experience – constantly changing bodily textures, implicit and pre-reflective dimensions without which any attempt at reflexivity would be impossible. At the same time, all these aspects unfold in the space and time of complex and dynamic relationships between internal worlds and external worlds. Georg Northoff, for example, has recently reviewed some empirical evidence in favor of the hypothesis according to which the genesis of self-consciousness is not exclusive either to the cerebral, or to the mundane brain (Northoff, 2021). For the German neuroscientist, the Self develops at the crossroads between the brain and the world and is a multifaceted process, in which the Self and the other than the Self (world, brain, body) enter into dynamic resonance, in the framework of a relational temporality that he defined as 'neuro-ecological'.

Also, if we observed from this same point of view the reflective processes of creativity in psychotherapy to orient ourselves in clinical phenomena, we could not do without a compass: the one provided by the epistemological perspective of 'complexity'. We should therefore be wary of the 'human' temptation to hypostatize reflective subjectivity into a purely individual or purely relational process. In fact, there would always be the risk of absolutizing now in one direction, now in the other, self-reflective Consciousness rather than Primary Consciousness, the being oneself rather than being in relation to the other, the being active rather than passive, emotion in place of cognition, mind instead of body.

In attempting to change perspective, the new challenge is to consider the non-reflective Subject as an integral part of a broader creative process of Subjectivation in psychotherapy: the moment of Consciousness and that of Consciousness must be revised as being representative of two different modalities, on a qualitative level, of a single spectrum/continuum of the Subject's agentivity.

In fact, at the Consciousness level (or rather, the Primary Consciousness level), the Subject is also nuclearly (Damasio, 1999) and pre-reflexively an agent, that is, he perceives himself, in an ineffable way, as being as alive as the author of his own subjective experience. The first experience/memory of oneself is the bodily one and, as Edelman and Tononi (2000) indicate, at this level the Subject exists in a remembered present dimension. The experience of Self as Subject is that of an immediate experience of corporeity, traversed by emotions, affections, perceptions, enclosed in a contingent experience (in which the immediacy of the corporeal here and now is associated with the memory of the there and then) and as such differentiated from the external world. According to philosophy of mind we are on the *ipseity* level (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008): I pre-reflectively know that I exist in a first person perspective in which I am the vantage point of the world taken as mine (it belongs to me, I own it), as intended (I act on my world), and as embodied (my world is a world seen, heard, touched, smelt, a world felt emotionally, living also because effected by my body[1]).

Naturally, even at the Consciousness of Consciousness level, Subjects are the agents of their experience. But this agency, even if it is more 'evolved', is not at all separate from that existing at the level of Primary Consciousness. It is true that reflexivity accentuates first-person experience and transforms it. However, this transformation cannot ignore nor completely free itself from the pre-symbolic, implicit, corporeal, emotional, interactive articulation of pre-reflective Consciousness (Husserl, 1950). This type of creative agency recalls to the ability of Subjects to transcend themselves without transmuting into an awareness separate from what is predetermined, a kind of pure Consciousness. At this level the Subject is active, but on a different complexity level. The level we are referring to, in this case, is that of symbolic agency, which allows Subjects to put together, unify, synthesize their own unconscious potential and their own conscious meanings into a more complex organization of meaning, pausing in the open spaces and perspectives of the dialectic of opposites (Tricoli, 2018). To put it in Jung's words, we refer to that function of self-reflexivity which comes true in the 'unification of 'conscious' content and 'unconscious' content' (1916, cited in Cozzaglio, 2017, p. 51) and which projects us, as agents, towards the not yet known dimensions of our becoming.

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[1] In this regard, Gallagher, Zahavi (2008) and Ginot (2015) also think about the embodied dimension of Subjectivity through the concept of 'enactivity'. The feeling of possessing a subjective experience as an experience 'felt' in terms of the possibilities/potentialities of action provided by the body with respect to the world and, equally, signaled by the world through the body. Adopting a more experiential language it could be translated into these terms: 'This world belongs to me because I can touch it, feel it, eat it, smell it, grab it, throw it, *etc*.'

In other words, symbolic agency refers to the extraordinary ability of human beings to observe their own experience through a constant and seamless movement between multiple levels of contact with themselves. One of these is the third-person point of view of self-reflexivity, the other is the first-person point of view of the unconscious. Individuals become Subjects when they seek within themselves self-reflective contact with their unconscious emotional issues, inevitably stimulated by their relationships with the other. It is the continuous movement of separation and synthesis between the first and third-person points of view, of continuous oscillation between self and other, between conscious and unconscious, which makes the passage between primary consciousness and consciousness of consciousness the transition towards symbolic agency. Symbolic agency is, in fact, a second-person point of view of Self, a complex perspective of one's experience that connects the Self, and the other than Self, in a continuously becoming and constantly evolving process.

In the economy of relational reflections on subjectivity, underlining the importance of the symbolic function of Presence to oneself, cannot and must not lead us to give in to the lure of environmentalist relational psychoanalysis. Somehow, the creativity of psychoanalytic change truly makes Subjects active protagonists in the courageous process of environmental liberation; a change in which they face the ghosts of 'solitude' and 'emptiness' (Minolli, 2015, p. 204), and take on board the discomfort that comes with starting from themselves to take back control of their lives with a renewed sense of agency.

On the other hand, we should also ask ourselves: with respect to whom does the creative Subject (*i.e.*, agent of change) face 'emptiness' and 'solitude'? As a famous poet said, 'emptiness is fullness' (Montale, 1971). In other words, the ghosts of solitude and emptiness perhaps become capable of creating new meanings also because they are to a certain extent 'relative to', that is, in a dialectical relationship to, or with someone or something within a dialogue conducted by the Subjects with themselves (with the unknown and already known parts, the fantasized and the repugnant parts, the thinkable and unthinkable parts). And, perhaps it is precisely for this reason that the psychoanalytic listening context may be facilitative (dialectical).

In our opinion, the ability of psychoanalysis to promote a renewed sense of agency always involves Subjects, allowing them to overcome the suffering of their individualism in the constant swinging back and forth of the relationship. Nowadays, maintaining a differentiating perspective would sound a bit like giving an answer to the question 'Which came first, the egg (of the Subject) or the chicken (of the Relationship)?' Subject and Relationship are in fact the two observable terms of a unitary process. This, for example, is the significance of the empirical data on the therapeutic factors which attribute change in psychotherapy to the work of a-specific factors, which go beyond the individuality of the technical/theoretical options,

and which concern the relationship between patient and therapist. Furthermore, the in-depth study of the intersubjective and intercorporeal dimensions of self-reflexivity represents the cutting edge of the scientific debate on Subjectivity, *etc*. For example, according to neurobiological research and 'Infant Research', the ego is primarily a bodily self (Ammaniti and Gallese, 2014) and its representational and symbolic world is rooted in the primordial and immediate connection between one's own body and that of others, that is, intercorporeality.

> 'One could add, siding with Merleau-Ponty, 'Without reciprocity there is no alter Ego' […]. Perhaps it is not possible to conceive oneself as a Self, without anchoring this awareness in a previous phase in which sharing prevails' (*ibidem*, p. 33)

Therefore, it is also in the experience of intersubjective contact with the Other that a Subject is born. We can reflect on ourselves, and therefore evolve and reorganize ourselves, also to the extent that we are active bodies, that is, alive in the context of the agency of other bodies that seek each other (and which therefore, in their seeking us, sometimes attempt to be reflective with us). This, obviously, does not alter the fact that we are self-reflective and pre-reflective actors in a specific way, in as much as we are separated from the other's body, and it is precisely because we can influence a system of mutual regulation with the other that we perceive ourselves as individual agents.

> 'According to Sander […], the origins of human identity are founded in the transformation of the influence exerted by the child's behavior on the interactive system into a subjective sense of agency. […] The sense of agency is built start-ing from the experiences of recognition of the child's acting behavior by the environment, during repeated experiences of efficacy.' (*ibidem*, p. 173)

In fact, if it is true, on the one hand, that the first steps in the process of subjectivation are largely conditioned by the constraints imposed by biolo-gy and the environment, it seems equally reasonable to think that children, given their genetic structure, are capable of constraining the environment. Therefore, a child can develop as a Subject only through the resources pro-vided by the environment (internal and external); at the same time, the nature of the biological resources of the child and of the environment allow the child to be an *agent* who influences the external world, equipped with the ability to modify it to favor the evolution of their own individual poten-tial. The mother-child system is a complex system, in fact, precisely because the brains of the child and the mother are, to use Northoff's very fitting expression again (2021), 'neuro-ecological' systems. The suggestive hypotheses of Vittorio Gallese (Ammaniti and Gallese, 2014) also move in this direction. According to Gallese, the experimental data collected on the

neurophysiology of mirror neurons would suggest the existence, from birth, of basic cognitive-affective-motor processes consistent with an implicit sense of 'like -me-ness' (Meltzoff, 2007). In other words, such neural processes would play a sort of embodied simulation of the other in the mind/brain of the observer. Thanks to this process, of an implicit and pre-symbolic nature, each individual could recognize an intrapersonal similarity between the mental states experienced within themselves when actions are performed, or certain emotions or sensations are experienced, and the mental states experienced within themselves when those same actions, emotions or sensations are recognized in others. Furthermore, mirror neurons seem capable of establishing a basic difference between me and not me. In fact, their bioelectric activity is different depending on whether the observer performs an action, or observes it in another. Overall, these findings would seem to provide an even more solid empirical basis for the theories proposed by the research tradition of 'Infant Research', which, as we know, underlines the role played by the processes of emotional attunement and dyadic regulation between child and caregiver in determining the development of Subjectivity in its distinctive qualities of consistency, coherence, agency, resilience (Beebe and Lachmann, 2001; Tronick, 2006). In reality, research on mirror neurons, and more generally affective and social neuroscience, while admitting the great importance of maternal repair functions at moments of breakdown of the bond with the child, believe it is erroneous to attribute an exclusive role to the caregiving environment in the ontogeny of subjectivity[2]. The Subject, and its agency, seem to emerge according to neuroscience at the crossroads between self-regulation and interactive regulation. In a very interesting observational study, carried out on twin fetuses (Castiello *et al.*, 2010), it was demonstrated that already at the fourteenth week of gestation the movements of the upper limbs showed different kinematic profiles depending on their target (one's own body rather than that of the twin). Furthermore, it was also observed that between the fourteenth and eighteenth weeks of gestation the percentage of self-directed movements decreased while that of other-directed movements increased. Therefore, well before birth (even before the birth of a Subject) the human motor system seems to show rudimentary abilities to modulate self-organization depending on the possibilities provided by the external environment. All this suggests that the genesis of Agentive Subjectivity can be placed in a dynamic process between self and eco-organization; a process in which the Subject self-organizes also as a function of dyadic regulation in search of a

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2   Michele Minolli already in 2009 criticized the 'exaggerated emphasis' of external data by 'Infant Research', correctly adding in this regard: 'the system must be thought of as capable of self-organisation'.

new functional balance, in an unpredictable and seamless process in which more complex dyadic systems favor an increasingly complex self-organization of the Subject and *vice versa*[3].

Following this line of reasoning, the self-reflexive agency of Consciousness of consciousness is creative precisely because it comes true in a second-person perspective on the world. The creativity through which we perceive ourselves as subjects in flux perhaps occurs, as Cozzaglio (2017, p. 45) rightly notes, by virtue of thinking together which is also feeling together, that is, through thinking individually while simultaneously recognizing ourselves in the other, a reflective function in co-reflection with the other. From this perspective, once again, the sense of self-reflexive agency perhaps acquires greater theoretical and clinical depth; in fact, as already noted by some (Tricoli, 2018; 2020), broadening the field of self-reflexive agency to intersubjectivity leads back to the cognitive-affective potential of the Subject to create a unitary vision of the Self in the dualistic tension between the Self and the Other. And this, in turn, restores to clinical practice the importance of the intersubjective relationship at the service of a shared symbolic function. It promotes meanings beyond itself, meanings not yet known, and in the process of becoming, and this occurs via two subjects engaged in a bond of the co-observation of their own and others' subjectivity.

Let's try to clarify this point with a very short clinical vignette. A patient, engaged in long-term therapy for relational dependence problems, becomes angry with the therapist because in one session the latter proposes a higher fee, and then goes on to ask, concerned 'Are you sure you can manage the change?' ignoring the patient's reassurances. The two parties seemed to be on different tracks: from the patient's point of view, the therapist was overly concerned, quickly becoming intrusive to the point of seeming like a mother who 'jumps to conclusions about her child's finances.' From the therapist's point of view, the patient was angry because he evidently felt that something was unacceptable in the emotional climate of the session. But these positions, potentially legitimate, remained more or less deliberately concealed behind an aggressive-passive silence, so much so that the patient wanted to leave without explanation (apart from protesting: 'How intrusive!') or, take refuge in a prolonged, deafening silence, leaving the therapist feeling annoyance. At the end of the session, the therapist suffered feelings of guilt; he wondered if his seemingly empathetic evaluation of the patient's economic means to con-

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[3]   Referring to the relationship between temporality and the genesis of Subjectivity, Norhoff seems to affirm a similar thing when he writes: 'Empirical data show that temporal change and temporal continuity are perfectly compatible with each other and that what constitutes our Self is exactly the level of their balance. Identity and difference can therefore be reformulated as temporal continuity and change, where the two terms are mutually inclusive rather than exclusive (2021, p. 128).

tinue therapy revealed a hidden, implicit, infantilizing attitude in the proposal and subsequent denial of a shift, an evolution in the setting. Just as when a parent first encourages autonomy and then withdraws it, casting a veil of suffocating discouragement over their children. Curiously, in the following days, the therapist was tormented by an internal battle in which, on the one hand, he imagined himself accepting the patient's withdrawal from therapy without much hesitation; on the other hand, he attempted to have more faith in himself and in his patient. In the following session, the patient came to the session angry, but also dismayed with the therapist, announcing in a solemn though sincere tone: 'I would have liked to have given up therapy but I don't want to. I feel good here, but, above all, I realize that you were right. I'm right to be angry with you for your intrusiveness as you weren't at all clear. But I also understand that I'm angry with you and then I deprive myself of the time and space to explain. I do this in all my relationships, and when anyone approaches me I put up a wall.' The therapist feels sorry but not at fault, and this time chooses to give the patient plenty of speaking time. He is aware of the how much confidence he is trying to give the patient, but is also afraid of what this confidence entails: 'Will my patient make it in life?'

In this vignette, the patient's and therapist's attempt to give new meaning to their experience is evident, and it resulted in a session marked by the patient's powerful affirmation of self-reflexivity. If we hypothesize that the patient realizes, independently and starting from herself, that his anger, at least in part, arose from his desire to reassure the therapist/parent concerned about his autonomy, as much as from the desire to free himself from this antithetical mechanism with respect to a genuine, deep, processing of emotions, we would necessarily come to the following theoretical-clinical conclusion: in this last session the patient becomes a self-reflective agent because he takes upon himself the pain of being seen as a child, rather than delegating to the therapist (You are the one who sees me as a child! It's your fault!), as well as taking on the effort of communicating his pain to the therapist. But what would happen if we took an alternative view and started from a different hypothesis which would extend the therapeutic field outside the session? A hypothesis in which the explanation of the self-reflective assumption made in the last session by the patient represented only the tip of the iceberg? We could assert that self-reflexive agency occurs within a deeper context, a context in which patient and therapist in their separateness, co-reflect on the scenario of their 'dialectical' relationship. Both reflected on their dancing together, around the issue; an unspoken issue permeated with strong emotional overtones (*i.e.*, anger and guilt) of dependency. The therapist reflected on his fear of claiming his professional space realizing that he had expressed and then denied it – perhaps hoping for confirmation that he was a sort of indispensable master, perhaps wishing to represent the parent who is more attentive to the Other than the patient's own parent. But the patient also reflected on his own

dependency. In the days following, he focused on what he felt about the episode, focusing on the fact that he was angry with the therapist because unable to accept the latter's own desire for closeness, without fearing that he might be swallowed up. He understood that he was angry with the therapist because the latter was the one who could not separate himself from him, and was afraid to show his attempt at personal affirmation. The patient was able to take charge of this awareness on returning to the therapist (who in turn had carried out an internal redefinition of his relationship with the patient) because the therapist himself, on returning to the session, had altered his own position, having undergone some self-reflection himself. The patient's return to his original configuration occurred because he, by himself and then with the therapist, reflected on their deep relationship, making it the pivot of an active and self-reflective creativity.

In this perspective, self-reflexive agency must be revisited more thoroughly within the context of the complexity of the Self/Other-than-Self bond, and consequently in a unitary intersubjective process[4]. Retrieving the image of the servant/master dialectic expressed by Hegel in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit' (1807), the Ego becomes Subject when it denies a absolutistic representation of itself, and, at the same time, recovers in itself what is not, and has projected onto the object (Minolli, 2000; Minolli and Tricoli, 2004). In this perspective, the return to one's own configuration is an intersubjective process which assumes that the basis of the recovery of a separate subjectivity is the connection with the object.

> 'At the end of its tiring wandering around the object in search of an improbable interior and an elusive essence, consciousness realizes that it had done nothing but search for itself, because the real is like consciousness and consciousness is the real (*ibidem,* p.161)'.

The case discussed above takes on a new, clinically richer meaning in this perspective. Patients become present to themselves when, in a self-reflective and creative act, they deny the need for external confirmation of their historical identity (themselves as servants) and re-appropriate a new way of seeing themselves, rigidly projected onto the therapist (the other as master). But therapists also become more present to themselves when they reject the need to be confirmed as a 'master' and reclaim their desire, projected onto the patient, to put themselves in the background as 'servants' without seeing this as a threat to their therapeutic affirmation.

Therefore, in our vision of psychotherapy, self-reflexive agency takes on

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[4]   By unity one must not naively mean a fusional union of Self/Other; unity refers to the complexity of a self-eco-organised system, where 'tension towards' and 'separation from' are elements of a continuum.

maximum importance when patient and therapist, through an intense connection, transcend their own historical configuration through co-reflection on their bond.[5] It is precisely thus that an apparently banal element of reality introduced in the relationship, such as the fee, becomes a symbolic third through which both the patient and the therapist re-signify their identity configuration, first affirmed and then denied, in an implicit and de-signified relational dialectic (De Robertis, 2000). To put it more simply, we could say that both patient and therapist, in the space between sessions, proposed to withdraw the projection onto the other of unconscious beliefs and fears associated with their own desires for dependence. In a complex epistemological perspective we need not ask why this took place (who caused what), but how. When the two members of this analytic relationship observed their own Self from the perspective (unconsciously denied) of separation from the Other, they undoubtedly impressed a more complex reorganization of their bond. That is not to say that the relationship alone constructed the change. In fact, if we focus on the 'how', it is not the bond alone that effects the transformation, nor is it the members constituting the bond that propose the transformation. Mutual commitment to overcoming an isolated perspective is the answer to how change is implemented. It is the mutual commitment of patient and analyst, dynamically oscillating between a first-person point of view and a third-person point of view of self, to achieve a second-person point of view of self, which transforms two inseparable poles of the same process: the analytical relationship and the Subjects in the relationship.

In our view, this picture of self-reflexive agency is less likely to be subject to a theorization which has ethical and moral implications, and which lends itself to voluntaristic interpretations of the therapeutic process. There is no doubt that the painful impasses that Subjects come up against in their becoming arises from the difficulty of 'abandoning the original position of son' (Coin, 2022, p. 131). However, we must clarify what we mean by 'position'. In fact, if we apodictically wanted to understand by the term 'position' a category of the Subject alone, then we would do well to speak of Individual, and not of Subject (whose etymology – *subiectus* – has clear relational implications), concluding that it is the Individual alone who is responsible for passive compliance or transformative rebellion against a historical position. Given these premises, the obvious corollary would be that 'suffering does not arise from the relationship' (*ibidem*) and, consequently, we should consider that, in a broad sense, relational trauma 'does not exist' nor does any change in the therapeutic relationship, since it is the individual alone that pre-exists all and

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[5]   'The gaze, always initially confused and not detailed, with which the analyst looks at the patient, is transformed through reverie into a gaze on himself, which then returns with more clarity to the patient, and so on in a continuous process of broadening of awareness of both.' (Tricoli, 2009).

decides if, how, and when to change. Obviously, this vision places responsibility squarely on the patients' shoulders, because it would make their own individual will to change the absolute (and exclusive) worth of therapy; as if to say 'patients do not change position because they are unable to find within themselves the courage to self-reflect.'

However, if we view the agent Subject as more focused on the relational side, we can account for the transformative potential inherent in the corporeal, implicit, intersubjective and relational dimensions. The Subjects' historical position may be seen in terms of complex units, 'relational matrices', that is, how the set of conscious and unconscious fantasies, desires, fears about themselves and the other, that Subjects use in the relationship both to maintain historical coherence and to seek a transformation. This translates both into the possibility of affirming oneself, and into the affirmation of the 'other than oneself' in the real emotional relationship with the Other.

In the clinical case cited, the patient was able to reflect actively and autonomously on himself because his therapist was able, through his (real and authentic) attention to the implicit emotional dimensions of self in his relationship with the patient, to create a therapeutic climate of authentic reciprocity. A climate in which, to put it once again in Hegelian terms, he was able to relegate himself to the background of the therapeutic relationship, thus leaving 'speaking space' for the patient. This position, which recovers aspects of the first Minollian theory and embraces recent neuroscientific acquisitions, distances itself completely from the myth of the 'all good' therapist, the equivalent of the emotionally corrective mother for the patient. Put simply, the therapist was able to 'wrong-foot' the patient. Avoiding unconscious attempts at idealization, and keeping in mind the patient relationship, allowed him to explore his deepest fears (fears that were evidently active in both parties but which had different content) relating to dependence and reciprocity[6]. All this could not have taken place without deep emotional contact between patient and therapist, and mutual commitment to the task; mutual but separate, and at the same time set within an inseparable dualistic framework.

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    6   Recently, Bonalume *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that the more experienced relationally oriented therapists (who in the cited study belonged to SIPRe) seemed, unlike the less experienced ones, to think about the therapeutic process and the relationship with the patient, feeling less threatened by their role or negative experiences present in the 'here and now' bond with the patient. In other words, the clinical experience of relational therapists manages to make them better equipped to think in a complex way about the analytic relationship, helping them to maintain a more fluid balance between self-regulation and interactive regulation.

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