

# **SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ECONOMY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ECONOMY OF THE GROUP IN A METAPHYSICOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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*Abstract.*

*The classical psychoanalytical metapsychology sees the group formation and its "derivatives" (language, culture, etc.) fundamentally as a work of investment or transformation of individual intrapsychic energy.*

*Group analysis (mostly foulkesian and postfoulkesian) emphasizes the necessity to postulate a group metapsychology as its own.*

*To put this in the most extreme position could seem to stress the dichotomy between the individual and the group.*

*Instead the epistemological node is coming through the conflict itself. In which way could this be accomplished (from the theoretical, methodological and clinical perspectives)?*

*Considerations are offered about the bipolarity, "configurationality" and levels of the economic conflict between the individual and the group.*

*The group analytic clinical context and its level of communication (relatedness, sense, significance, identity) offer an heuristic perspective.*

## *I. – The freudian metapsychology and the group.*

It is a well known fact, but is a fundamental point for our discussion purposes, that Freud, denying the existence of a primitive social or gregarious drive, excluded the group as a true object of his metapsychology (1915, 1921). The psychoanalytical epistemology is built around an intrapsychical monad: the individual.

Many post-freudian group psychoanalytical approaches have not changed such metapsychological status.

1. The first approaches prevailing in North America practice, tried to adapt the group therapeutic use to the theoretical and methodological premises of psychoanalysis.

2. The development and the vicissitudes of the classic individual psychoanalytical model, evolving to the Relational Model in Psychoanalysis, allowed *group psychoanalysts* to apply to the "group object" the new concepts that slowly emerge, in a sort of natural assimilation and evolution, without modifying the essence. As when Columbus, "discovering" the New World, considered it a prolonging and expansion of the Old World, on the basis and projection and even of a pre-existing ideology, that somehow conditioned the name and even the applied nomenclature. One is reminded of the name *Indians*, given to the "discovered" inhabitants.

3. More specific attempts to know the group as an object by itself, have been undertaken above all by some group analysts, involved in a daily clinical group practice. That felt the need for a better theoretical definition of the group and of the processes that the group specifically requires. So, many theoretical aspects were focused, as well as insightful methodological and technical-clinical considerations arose, but, basically remaining within the theoretical construction of the classical Freudian metapsychology. (Among these, see the interesting and creative contributions of Pichon Riviere (1970), of Bleger (1967) and other noted exponents of the Argentine school, of R. Kaes (1999) and the French school, and the seminal contribution of Bion (1961), who, as we know, later abandoned group practice).

As noted in that time, Trigant Burrow created a clear exception, with his revolutionary *phylumanalysis* with the rejection from Freud of the American psychoanalyst, and his exclusion from the Psychoanalytic Society, although Burrow was the founder and the president of the North American Psychoanalytic Society.

## II - *The Metapsychology of the group in Foulkes and in post-foulkesianism.*

S.H. Foulkes had, from the beginnings of his clinical group practice (it is known that he practised until his death, that took place in the group circle), a revolutionary and innovative approach, the reason for which he is considered the founder of groupanalysis. Nevertheless, Foulkes himself never proposed a specific group metapsychology, (although, in all his work, he repeats concepts that can be used as a foundation of it). The nature of the human being is profoundly social, the individual is an abstraction and is constantly permeated by the social, and is, in all aspects of his being, the knot of a hierarchical network, and his life constantly proposes itself in a common matrix of meaning and communication (see De Mare P., 1971, Ondarza Linares J. 1999, 2001). We have mentioned only a few fundamental points, that show us how groupanalysis considers the group in a position polarly opposite to that of the Freudian metapsychology.

Dalal (1998), who defines himself as being post-foulkesian, makes an accurate assessment of the thinking of Foulkes and of his interaction with the radical thinking of Norbert Elias (1965), who had over the founder of groupanalysis a recognised influence (Elias was one of the founders of the G.A.S.), and notes the contraposition, and the apparent incoherence (see, for this purpose, also Pines M., 2002) between that which is called *orthodox* Foulkes and *radical* Foulkes, counterposition that, according to Dalal, derived from the double fatherhood of Foulkes' thinking: Freud the psychoanalyst and the sociologist Elias.

In his book, Dalal undertakes an examination of the thinking of Elias (1978), effectively pointing out to us groupanalysts, that we have not had the opportunity to study it thoroughly. Dalal underlines the fact that he, like Freud, looks to discover the origins of human existence, and

reveals the dimension of his work, that moves between philosophy, politics and psychology. Yet "Freud and Elias have the individual coming from opposite directions: Freud begins from biology to the individual, to the social, his theory becomes more complex because the social returns and again goes into the individual. On the contrary, Elias starts from the social, in which the individual and the structure of the internal and external experience are brought out". (ibid. it. ed., page 4).

Dalal, perhaps because of the concept itself of Elias' ideology, seems unwilling to propose a new "metapsychology", he proposes, instead, an eventual post-foulkesian groupanalytic paradigm, "in which his philosophical and metaphysical foundations find the right placement".

### III - *Between the individual and the group: dichotomy or bipolarity*

The "two" metapsychological constructions, carried to their extreme consequences, appear as two poles, each one excluding the other: either the individual or the group. This polarisation brings us to a dichotomy, erected on the two opposite poles: each pole is constructed and becomes more and more solid, because of the sedimentation of each one of the couples, opposite and conflicting, in which is revealed the conflict of man, living through the group. We can see these couples of opposites configured at different levels, from the epistemological - ontological one, to the level of the vicissitudes of daily life.

If one considers that metaphysics is a theoretical construction that ends by containing itself, such a polarisation risks to involve the metapsychology itself, distorting it. A large part of the divergence and diatribes in the field of post-freudian psychoanalysis, and many group-analysts are not immune from them, are caused by this polarisation, at the theoretic, methodological and clinical level.

On the other side, however, a large part of group-analysts, foulkesian or not, recognise in the metapsychological proposals made by Foulkes essential aspects that allow them to go beyond diverse dichotomies, that are instead contained in the individual metapsychology. However, in the feedback between practice and theory, fundamental foulkesian concepts such as network, matrix, the primacy of the communication process, etc., are frequently bypassed or hybridised.

On the basis of these considerations, we propose the following reflections, that we believe are useful to point out:

1. The construction itself of a groupanalytic metapsychology must begin not from an "*aut aut*" between the individual and the group, but taking as a basis the Constant and conflicting relationship between the individual and the group. That is useful to admit and point out the existence of a Constant bipolarity between the individual and the group.
2. Nevertheless, as clear as the former premise may seem, it would be naïve to rule the countless

difficulties that groupanalysis will overcome, in order to construct a metapsychological building, like that proposed by Freud, apparently coherent and elegant, (even with modifications, vicissitudes and rethinking) in his metapsychological psychoanalysis.

More on, and within the schematic limitations of this introduction, I believe that it is useful to identify a few of the important points, on which to reflect for an eventual construction of a groupanalytic metapsychology (see, for this purpose, also Pines M. 1998).

*Some of the conflictual knots for group analytic metapsychology.*

Individual intrapsychic or social instinct?

The theory of instincts is the centre of the classic freudian metapsychology, from which the topical, dynamic, economic and structural principles are derived.

It must be the same, for any metapsychology that is built on the concept of "social instinct", whichever way one prefers to call this force, defined or to be defined, that unites the individuals, constantly permeating their structure and their vital processes.

And nevertheless, it is possible to point out as a first task, a perplexity, ambivalence or uncertainty in the defining, to name, to label the theme of the drive, as if it were the keyword of the holy, untouchable or almost untouchable text. Have psychoanalysts ventured out to explore this uncertainty, perhaps going beyond groupanalysts?

We should remember the definition that Freud gave in 1915 ("Instincts and their vicissitudes"), "instincts seem to us as a limited concept between the psyche and the somatic, as the psychic representatives of stimuli that take their origins from the inside of the body and arrive to the psyche, as a measure of the operations that are requested from the psychic sphere because of its connection with the physical sphere". Many groupanalysts would not object if, in Freud's definition, we were to substitute "from the inside of the body" with the phrase "from the psychic field of the individual-group conflict", but it would appear to be a careless and superficial reshuffling.

We do not know what Freud would have said about Mitchell (1988), who, in his appreciated synthesis of the relational model in psychoanalysis, that brought him to postulate about the concept of the relational matrix, said: "As we are an animal reality, our animal nature having been smoothed out over the course of thousands of years from evolution with the purpose of survival being inborn in our bodies and pushes to manifest itself. If, however, one starts with the premise that the fundamental push of the mind is made from the conflict, and that the deep meaning is not supplied, a priori, from the body's request, but is moulded from the levels of inevitable conflictual interaction, then the sphere of sexuality is understood in a completely

different way. The intense physiological component and the phenomenology of sexuality as a potential brought out from the inside of highly conflictual contexts renders the body and sexual experience the excellent means for self experiences in interactions with others". (Mitchell S. A., 1988, page 12).

This means, for example, considering that the Oedipus conflict is not an individual intrapsychic problem, but it is a conflict "of and "in" the family network.

### *Groupanalysis and the Theory of drives.*

What concept of drives is used to work through in group analysis?

This is a topic that calls for a careful examination through the evolution and historical vicissitudes of the thinking on group therapy and its contextualisation. This may be useful as a defence of our conviction, that the concept of social drives, either gregariousness or relatedness, whichever way we choose "to call it, is in itself a concept that provokes conflict and bipolarity. Obviously, such an assessment (that we are working on in another paper) cannot be presented here.

Foulkes (1957, page 234), although he never spoke specifically about gregarious drives, and even less proposed a specific substitute for the classic Freudian theory on drives, uses the term "relatedness" to define it clearly, as shown here:

"We cannot doubt that enormously strong forces operate immediately in favour of mutual attraction and mutual reaction between members of any group". (Foulkes S.H., 1957, page 236).

"Relatedness seen as taking place within a basic, all-embracing group matrix, is the corner stone of any working theory".

Nevertheless, as Dalal (1988) points out, the Foulkesian position is not systematically and coherently expressed (in particular, we would like to add, when it has to do with the opportunity to present a "new groupanalytic theory on drives"). And here, it springs forth once again the contrast, and even the apparent incoherence, between that which Dalal calls the conservative Foulkes and the radical Foulkes.

(In my personal opinion, without underestimating pertinent observations made by Dalal, who moves in the English Foulkesian context, I tend to consider this contrast also as a configuration and expression of the bipolarity and conflict of the concept itself. We must also consider that Foulkes, as therapist, moved in another system, less "aseptic" than that of the sociologist Elias). Therapy is different from ideology.

Regarding Elias' thoughts on the subject, they reveal that while the Freudian plan hinges on the conflict of drives, that of Elias is centred on *interdependence*. Power is a primary and perpetual

cause of interdependence: "that which is able to be thought, said and known is not only a function of the intellect, but also of the relationships of power between persons and groups of persons". (Dalal F., 1998, page 126). (Let us remember that the *word power* in English means, on one side, *strength*, but also *authority, domination rule*. In Italian, the word *potere*, used as a noun, is the ability that comes from domination - authority and force as verb, on the contrary, invokes the possibility of doing.) It is this, which gives us an idea of the concept of figuration (one of the pillars of the Eliasian theory), the second being the theory of symbols, a further consequence of interdependence: the structure itself of the mind, the entity that thinks thoughts and feels feelings, is not just something with which one is born, it is not universal, but it is contingent, and in part determined by themes that exist in the socialpolitical dimension". (Dalal F., it. tr. page 127). In the post-foulkesian view, Dalal insists on the lack of the notion of "power" in the foulkesian theorising of the "communication field", one of the pillars of the group analytic theory, emphasizing that "power patterns the communicational field and determines to some extent the sort of things that can take place in the differing regions that it generates". (Dalal F., 2001, page 548).

- The theoretic crux of the concept of drives, strength or relatedness, of groupanalysis is of extreme importance and needs to be examined thoroughly, on many levels and perspectives, with methodological and technical-clinical repercussions.

An important starting point is to consider it airways in its bipolarity and configurative perspective, in the conflictual context of both individual and groups. The concept of conflict itself cannot continue to be used in the linearity and apparent simplicity of the classic theory of drives. The idea source, object and aim of the drive, acquires different configurations in this conflictual, configurational, and bipolar context of the "communication field".

- To move the theory of drives and relatedness from the homeostatic principle of constancy, or beyond the pleasure principle, toward the axis carrying the identity and meaning, it is not only an heuristic prospective, but focalises the event of man in the eternal dilemma of being himself and being significant for others: the two poles of the Erikson identity (1951).

Always keeping in mind the relatedness field or "communication field" of Foulkes (Loewald, 1980, speaks of the "primitive relational field", and Schlapobersky of the "semantic field") as a context for the revision of the first and second topics: *conscious - unconscious* individual, *conscious - unconscious* social or collective, that permeates and crosses the structuralization of the second topics: *Id - Ego - Super-Ego*, as a passage toward a possible "third" topic (Relatedness, Green 1990, that in the radical post-foulkesian prospective is the only one that exists). This permits the revisiting (also in a post-modern or deconstruzionistic prospect) of the dynamic and structural principles of the old metapsychology. And this while not giving in to the seduction of any easy syncretism, but as a need that allows for the better organisation of our

knowledge, integrating them with the Constant contributions of modern science: from neurobiology "social" evolutive, the theory of communication, etc.

If we were to take, for example, the problem of the economy of its bipolarity and conflictuality in the field of relationships and communication, we would see that the so-called "relational goods" acquire different values, according to the levels of investment and the possibility of being, circulating symbolic or relational goods, or on the contrary, reified things accumulated in one's backpack of the primary narcissism, or sedimented in the coffers of the collective self, also reified.

In this vision one can perceive the economic vicissitudes between an archaic and narcissistic Ego ideal, fusional, syncretistic, that if aggregated with others that are similar, may rise up a groupness which is also reified, that we could name "Antigroup" (Nitsun M., 1994, Ondarza Linares J., 1999c). This contrasts of an Ideal of the Ego, with a polarity and a capacity of investments, open toward symbolic and social values.

#### *The intermediate space and communication between the individual self and the social self.*

Our daily practice as group analysts moves into a conflicting space between the individual and the social self. Foulkes taught us to live this conflictuality as group conductors, in primis, and not reduce the vitality of this space, that is a transformative space. This leads, somehow, to the foulkesian construct of the Dynamic matrix (Ondarza Linares J., 1999b, 2001). The specific nature of the groupanalyst is to be matrix oriented.

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