

Dissolution of boundaries and identity crisis in adolescence in the Network time: a dual /group approach

Maurizio Gentile

Abstract

The author, after having identified the psycho-socio-structural modifications consequent to the pervasiveness of the virtual, proposes a reading of the adolescent identity construction starting from the risks coming from the dissolution of the typical boundaries of the digital age. Starting from some dual and group clinical situations, the need for a review of the psychotherapeutic setting to reach "hyperconnected" and potentially "borderless" adolescents is underlined. Taking into account the "limit" - lived and experienced at a deep level - in all its psychodynamic significance becomes one of the fundamental clinical values to contrast adolescent identity crises in the digital age.

Key words: adolescence, boundary, virtual, limit, group

*“I think there is something to be said
for differentiating knowledge from wisdom.
Then I would say that whatever knowledge
each of us must be augmented by wisdom.
However intelligent, the chance of survival is decreased
if the character cannot rely on beingwise. (...)
There are no labels attached to most
options; there is no substitute for the growth of wisdom.
Wisdom or oblivion - take your choice. From this warfare
There is no release” (W. R. Bion, 1979).*

In 1977 Giorgio De Maria – a writer, pianist and dramatist - published "The twenty days of Turin. A report from the end of the century", a "visionary", dark, unsettling novel. The publication, as often happens for "out of date" artists, is totally ignored. It will take about 40 years for his "rediscovery" thanks to the Australian journalist Ramon Glazov who - struck by the reading of the text - will work to have it published by the famous publishing house Norton and C. of New York.

The novel, in summary, tells of a journalist who wants to shed light ("report") on very strange events that occurred in Turin ten years earlier: people suffer from an epidemic of insomnia. In the air you can breathe an acrid smell of vinegar and metallic screams coming from the gardens or from the street corners spread in the night. People begin to find victims massacred in front of well-known monuments of the city. A feeling of mystery and dark fear spreads through the city. The narrative atmosphere is getting darker and darker. The writer, within this gloomy atmosphere, imagines the existence

of a "Library", a place where citizens can bring a writing in which they describe themselves with brutal sincerity and where they can go to read biographies and wishes left by others. *"It is no wonder - as the writer says - that an institution like the Library had found space to proliferate. It presented itself as a good work, born specifically to induce men to open up to each other. The creators were little more than boys: well-groomed and well-dressed young men, with no trace of fluff on their always rosy and smiling faces. They seemed created to instill trust"* (p. 36).

The "creators" thus presented themselves: *"we are looking for true, authentic documents, which reflect the real soul of the people, which, in short, can truly be considered popular subjects ... Is it possible that you have never written a diary, an autobiography, a confession of some problem that disturbs you? Well, why don't you bring it to us? You will certainly find someone who will read you and who will be interested in your problems...we will make sure to put him in communion with you and you will become friends, you will feel more free. What we do is important, considering that today it has become so difficult to communicate"* (p. 37). The interesting thing for us is that *"the typical visitor"* of the Library *"was a shy individual, eager to deepen his solitude to the maximum and to make it weigh on others as much as possible"*.

"The prospect of being read floated far away, like a fascinating mirage. (...) I will give myself to you, you will give yourself to me: on this very human basis the future exchange would take place (...) The Library could seem like salvation for a man like that (...) everything could have access to the Library (...) The casuistry was infinite; it had the variety and at the same time the misery of things that cannot find harmony with Creation, but that also exist and there must be someone who observes them" (page 40). From a "good" enterprise - as it was in the original idea of its creators - the Library, little by little, became *"a muddy subsoil, a drain basin where everyone could spill what they wanted, all the pulp they kept inside (...) Those over-the-air dialogues only served to provide the illusion of a relationship with the outside world: a miserable loophole fueled by a cynical and centralized power, interested in keeping people in their perpetual isolation state"*(page 52).

The mystery of the insomnia epidemic, therefore, seems to be linked to the obsessive attendance of the "Library" and the development of a network of mutual paranoid "control": *"Here then gradually form a network of mutual, mischievous, inconclusive espionage... you could no longer leave the house, get on a tram, enter a local audience, without feeling the grinning gaze of someone who wanted you to believe that they know every intimate secret about you so that they can suck it"*(page 54).

We can take this "visionary" novel by G. De Maria as an anticipatory metaphor of what - in the current society of transparency and the Web - we are experiencing in terms of loss of the Self and the consistency of the Other as different - from - me (*"I will give myself to you, you will give yourself to me"*). The "Library" as an ante-litteram social network whose drift can favor the growth of the "shitstorm" and the loss of the identity "borders".

The rapid technological transformations and the "virtual" invasion, in fact, have determined - as S. Tisseron (2014) reminds us - a true anthropological revolution that involves all the fields of our being: the relationship with ourselves, with others, with reality, with space, with the experience of time and knowledge, with truth.

We are in the presence of a "fourth revolution" (after the Copernican, Darwinian and Freudian ones) that made us discover that we are interconnected information agents wrapped in the global environment of the infosphere (L. Floridi, 2020).

The society of "transparency" and "digital" has determined socio-structural changes whose practical consequences are visible to everyone:

- a further embrittlement of the already precarious family structures that are struggling to contain and manage the difficulties inherent in the adolescent process;
- a general modification of the relationship with reality (increasingly blurred in the boundary of virtuality) and with the "truth" (to be articulated and / or differentiated from the lie in the era of "fake news");
- a consistent increase in the "group mentality" (W. Bion, 1961) which interpose to the realization of individual needs and thinking not facilitating the positive Individual - Group synergy (F. Guignard, 2010);
- an almost total disappearance of Freudian "latency period", which calls into question our conceptions of Oedipus and the destinies of sexual organization in adolescence;
- a modification of our psychic functioning under the pressure of the "virtual speed" which affects the forms of thought utilization. The virtual, in fact, encourages knowledge and performances but underestimates the emotional literacy and the learning of uncertainty so important in the construction of the apparatus for thinking;
- a dissolution of collective superegoic instances with a clear rejection of the limit and the dimension of death in the human (M. Berger, 2010);
- a progressive "expulsion of the Other" (Han, B. C., 2017) which, by promoting the proliferation of the Equal, impoverishes the sense of community and generates new forms of self-destructive suffering especially in adolescence.

The "network", in fact, is increasingly being experienced as a "comfort zone", an illusory place where to live without risks or conflicts, entering into virtual contact only with those who think like us. Cyberspace, as is evident, nullifying the "distances" introduces a confusion between public and private, between interiority and exteriority, damaging the development of intimacy and respect.

Indeed, as Byung-Chul Han (2015) reminds us, "respect presupposes a detached gaze, <a pathos of distance>. Today, this look gives way to a vision without distance, which is typical of the show. The Latin verb <spectare>, from which the term spectacle derives, indicates a pointing to the voyeuristic gaze, which lacks the detached respect, respect (<respectare>). A society without respect, without pathos of distance, leads to a society of sensationalism "(page 11).

But such a well-constructed society, as Byung - Chul Han reminds us, spreading a violent and often anonymous shitstorm, risks becoming a society without mutual respect whose models are destined to be increasingly lacking of inner values and characterized above all by external qualities .

A society - the digital one - with no more "soul" but characterized by the "swarm" which is composed of isolated individuals unable to develop "Noità" (Weness: the deep sense of us).

"<Socius> gives way to <solus>; not the multitude, but rather the "solitude" distinguishes today's social form, overwhelmed by the general disintegration of the common and collective. Solidarity disappears: privatization extends to the soul" (Byung - Chul Han, 2015, p. 27).

And the <new teenagers>? How does the construction of adolescent identity arise, in a context in which relationships are so virtual, so liquid, so contradictory?

If Identity springs from the sense of continuity and coherence between the different representations of own Self over time and on the basis of relational resonances within that Self, cyberspace tends to dissolve the boundaries of identity.

"Liquid" boundaries, which start towards a process of Self's multiplication with strong risks of fragmentation (Marzi, A., 2013).

Borders that appear increasingly blurred such as the ones between adolescents and adults that seem to idealize them and reflect themselves in them. On the other hand, even for us analysts listening, it is difficult not to feel certain resonances inside us when we come into contact with situations that present themselves as "pastiche" (mess) of Identità.

As D. Meltzer (1978) reminds us, the adolescent lives simultaneously multiple worlds: the community of the Child in the family, the one of the adult world and the adolescents' community - peer group...

To these worlds today we must add the "virtual" world with its opportunities and its risks. There is no doubt that this world has an enormous seductive fascination for adolescents because it puts them in contact with the infinite and with the extreme navigation of the libertarian imagination.

The network, in fact, is a source of illusory security and immediate satisfaction of needs: just a click to "know" or "have" what you want.

The Web is proposed to adolescents as an "Other" (Grand - Autre) that always and continuously guarantees its "presence", its total availability.

It is a real "illusory promise" of totalizing fullness where the "void" does not exist, without limits and without faults. But the true danger of the fascination of Internet lurks precisely in the dissolution of "limit" and borders.

It cannot be forgotten, in fact, that

"acceptance of the limit is essential for survival. Little Oedipus grows up when he begins to accept the superiority of his father and gets rid of the infantile microdelirium in which, by opposing him, he did not take his limits into account. The limit introduces generational and sexual differences. You cannot be male and female together. Sex is a limit. It is through the limits that an identity is established. We are in a here and now that places us moment by moment in a certain place and not elsewhere. Everything is because it is not all other things.

The absence of limits prevents any identification, definition, recognition
"(Pellizzari, G., 2020, p. 41).

The "limit", in fact, entailing a renunciation and implying a "work of the mind" allows the adolescent to separate the internal and external world, Self and Other, Legal and illegal.

In a word, the "limit" allows us to get an identity in ourselves and recognize ourselves as the mortal subject of our desire. Using Jorge Luis Borges' beautiful words

*"There is a line of Verlaine that will not come back to my mind,
there is a street nearby which is forbidden to my step,
there is a mirror that has seen me for the last time,
there is a door that I closed until the end of the world,
among the books (I see them all) from my library
there is someone I will never open again.
I will be fifty years old this summer;
death, incessant, consumes me "
(J. L. Borges, Limits, 1967).*

The real dramatic failure of the adolescent experience is observed when the adolescent enters the tunnel of isolation, expecting more and more from technology and less from others (Turkle, S., 2019) with the illusion of creating an "identity that does not suffer" operating a real "suicide from reality".

This is the case of Amalia, 14 years old.

Amalia is a beautiful 14-year-old girl. She attends the first year of high school. Parents ask me for a psychological consultation because they are worried about her behavior that define "*strange, oppositional and tending to isolation*".

They also say that their daughter "*at school does not agree with her schoolmates and - to use her words - she feels disintegrated by the group*". They add that the girl does not talk much with others, she feels she is always the object of criticism and is unable to bond with anyone. Moreover, they say that Amalia at home spends long hours confined to her room with her smartphone in her hand.

In this regard, parents report what their daughter told them when they tried to urge her to leave the room to do homework or engage in other activities:

"I can be connected for five hours, but for me it's like five minutes! With my smartphone I do many things: post photos or videos on Instagram, I surf on the web looking for things that can "amaze" me ... I play games... I've also met some boys with whom I also chat at night".

Her parents also express their serious concern over the fact that their daughter "finds it difficult to wake up in the morning and refuses to leave her bed", so much so that she often does not make it on time to go to school.

Immediately afterwards, in a distressed tone, they say: "*Our daughter, more and more, is closing in on herself and sometimes she has even shredded her arms!*"

When I meet Amalia for a first interview, I am struck by her slowness in walking, her darkened face and her general resigned and sad tone. All this is in evident contrast to the excessive "make-up" of her face and eyes and to the patently "provocative" and "grown-up" clothing.

As soon as she sat down, I smiled at her and observed that she changed expression, showing a deep desire to talk about herself and a clear need to be "recognized".

She begins by telling himself like this:

"I have few friends ... maybe really none! In class I don't agree with my classmates because I don't feel well received ... They keep me far away and I know they often say bad things about me! In fact, I don't like going to school ... I feel excluded ... Not even with my professors I feel good ... I know my problems, I've always known them: I have difficulties with my memory and even insomnia. Only when I'm alone I feel free because I can chat with the friends I met on Instagram ... One is in Verona and another one in Roma. Until late at night we are on the net ... For this reason I have difficulty falling asleep ... I know them well .. I know everything about them! "

And I, pointing to a smile: "*Everything, except the smell they give off!*" She smiles ...

Continuing the conversation, she tells me - by darkening - that there is a secret she wants to reveal: one of these guys, via the internet, asked her to be seen naked through the screen and she agreed. Indeed they used "instagram live ", a technique that allows you to enter "directly" in the video that the other is making ..

Now she is very confused and does not know how to behave. Then she adds:

"The truth is that my true friends are the ones I meet in chats, the others don't exist for me "

Amalia is one of the many "lost" adolescents that we encounter in our work and who feel like they are flooded with the fluidity / viscosity of their borders. Lazy borders that are often perceived by them as deformed, bulky.

Such fragile adolescents who, fearing to meet their suffering in the other's gaze, move away from it, avoiding contact for fear of a rejection that would thunder like a boomerang in the hermitage of their fragile Self. Fragile enough to make them resort to acting (shredding their arms!) perhaps in the illusion of cushioning the pain of their mind through the one inflicted on their body. Or perhaps in an attempt to challenge the adults' omnipotence or their own, as if to say: "Do you have the courage to look inside me with all the pain I have?"

Adolescents who live in solitude - and not only inside the 'claustrum' of the four walls that border them, but in the inner isolation from the world. A mental segregation

supported by the illusion of having even intimate friendships with strangers met online. As Byung - Chul Han effectively reminds us

"through digital communication means we try to get closer to the Other as much as possible, to cancel the distance to achieve closeness. So we no longer enjoy the Other; rather, we make It disappear. Proximity is a negativity as long as distance is associated with it. On the contrary, currently, there is a total dissolution of the distance which, however, does not produce closeness but rather eliminates it "(2019, p. 32).

Therefore, a network that often deludes, disappoints, traps ...

However, today's teenagers are the first real generation that was born with the smartphone in hand, grown "always connected" and immersed in the "social networks" since the beginning of their lives. They live naturally in virtuality and do not experience it as "hostile".

In this regard, it is worth remembering that at the end of a statistical-comparative study that lasted several years, Jean Twenge (2018) - Psychologist of San Diego University - identified the psychosocial features of the so-called "I generation", that is, of girls and boys born at the beginning of 2000. The result is a real "Identikit" of today's teenagers, digital natives, children of a socio-cultural context that has taken on the "virtual" dimension and "online" life.

The essential characteristics of this "I generation" can be summarized as follows:

- immaturity which determines a prolongation of the childhood condition well beyond the typical age of adolescence;
- hyper connection - that is, the choice of using the smartphone as a dominant tool in everyday life - which changes the quality of the organization of one's relationship life;
- incorporality - that is the dizzying decline of the social relations in the bodily encounter vis a vis;
- indefiniteness in the way of understanding sexuality and sentimental relationships that generates a sense of uncertainty and precariousness (No future generation ...);
- instability with consequent exponential increase of affective-emotional difficulties, isolation and disengagement (the new "silent epidemic" of which M. Spitzer speaks, 2018);
- inclusiveness with a tendency to accept differences more easily, egalitarianism, etc.

Starting from these data, from these evidences, we must ask ourselves to understand more deeply the adolescent psychic world of today, surely modified in its internal and phantasmatic functioning. Criteria and interpretative models, used until recently, are often inadequate to activate an "empathic and syntonic" understanding in the clinical

encounter, as well as the setting management must also be reworked to "try to take" the adolescent there where he proposes himself.

In light of what has been observed, it is necessary to underline how difficult it is for the "virtual" adolescent to construct a confinement between Self and the Other, between the internal world and the external world, between fantasmatic imaginary and reality, between illusion and delusion.

As if his ability to identify himself projectively was entrusted to the liquid crystals of his cellphone; as if therefore also its borders lost solidity, became liquid.

A real subversion of the original meaning of the term "border", from Latin "confinis", the neighbor, whose root "finis" means both "exit" and "limit" (Marcolongo, A., 2019). The dissolution of the "borders", therefore, as an inability to have limits, doors to open to welcome and let the "others" enter.

Is this "generational mutation" actually changing our children's brains / mind by putting us in contact with "Digitally modified adolescents"? (Scognamiglio, R.M.-Russo, S.M., 2018). Probably yes, if we take note, with Sherry Turkle (2019) that

“our new devices offer space to the birth of a new state of the Self, an Itself divided between the screen and the physical reality, generated by the wiring made possible by technology. Teenagers tell me they sleep with their cell phones; and that even if they do not have them on themselves, for example at school where they are confined to a cabinet, they know when they are vibrating. Technology is part of them to the point that it has become a kind of phantom limb” (page 23).

It is as if the cell phone, therefore, made body with their bodies and their minds. All this, of course, also modifies the setting of our dual and group sessions with respect to the presence of cell phones that now seem to be an integral part of the patients' narrations as it emerges in the short extrapolation of a group session presented below.

This is an analytical group conducted with seven teenagers who show difficulties in the construction of their identities, in various ways.

At the beginning of the session, the group turns its gaze towards new landscapes, those of the first falling in love that one would like to cross with a curious and enthusiastic spirit ... however, the expanse that is delineated is too vast and fraught to pass beyond it in a serene way. Thus one is taken a little by fear and dragged by the ambivalence of one's own experiences. At times they also try to stand back like Peppe who fantasizes about leaving his girlfriend and at the same time reflects on the gift to offer her. The confusion lingers and, to defend themselves, all that remains is to let themselves go to thunderous laughter. There are other emotions, however, that laughter holds tight to its sinister chains. Fortunately the group wants to free itself. It is not necessary to force the locks: the group possesses in itself numerous keys (of reading) to signify the events. Mauro's gesture reassembles the group and so we return to the reflection on personal relationships.

<Rosaria: *Alda, is there something wrong?*

Alda: The other day I had my birthday party and it went well, but not with my parents ... I have separated parents. My mother said I had to have a party with relatives, but I do not attend any of them and therefore as relatives there would have been only my parents. But my father told me that if my mother had been there, he wouldn't have come and so I had the party only with my friends. They didn't even come for the cake at midnight. And my mother didn't even wish me for my birthday>.

The boys are saddened. They ask Alda questions to better understand the situation. Alda explains that she has always lived with her father and almost never sees her mother who has remarried to a violent man whom she hates. She says that a year ago, just after the umpteenth quarrel with his stepfather, Alda thought of jumping off a bridge.

<Alda: until the other day I went to my mother to study, but he turned on the TV and I couldn't study. Then, since he had to eat, he took all my books off the table and told me "take off!"

Rosaria: but doesn't your mother defend you?

Alda: she can't do it.

Peppe: I could not live like this ...>

The group tries to deal with painful questions: the experience of not feeling important for parental figures pervades the atmosphere. We tune in to the profound sadness narrated by Alda and this allows the activation of an initial capacity for emotional self-regulation. Alda brings very intense private elements into the group: the inconsistency of emotional relationships leads to a sense of desperation that one could also "throw from a bridge". But for us who are in this group, the bridge cannot be a vehicle of death but of associative vitality.

The boys suggest Alda to record his stepfather's behavior with her mobile phone so that she has the evidence to report him. Everyone starts checking how much memory is available in their cell phones. The handsets in the hands, the boys extract the SIM from their inside and each one communicates to the others all the possible capacity.

The image of the boys looking at their own "internal memory" was of great impact. What they had before their eyes was not just a technological and mechanical card. They were wondering how much they had in their internal memory to contain pain. And if memory should sometimes prove insufficient, we know that there are ways to expand it. An "extension" that can be given by the group container.

In the group, therefore, mobile phones have gradually become the vehicle to express the "difficulty in connections". In another session, in the same group, the smartphone is used to facilitate the exchange among members:

<Carla (with her cell phone in her hands): if I had the connection here, at least I'd try something ...

T: beyond the internet connection, we can try to create these connections among the things passing through our mind.

Mauro writes on the display he feels worried about a homework he has done in class and circulates the smartphone along the circle to allow everyone to read.

The group discusses about mathematics. Peppe asks for explanations about logarithms and algebraic functions... It is not clear for him how to find the value of x.

The boys all together try to explain to him the method to solve the function. At one point Peppe writes an example of equation to find the value of x all together.

There is a certain collective participation. Everyone approaches with the chairs towards the center of the circle. We ask ourselves about the best method to find the result.

<T: it seems to me that the group is moving to find the value of x .. it is looking for something. Through the Mathematical function we are wondering about the function of our group.

Peppe (with his cell phone in his hands): this is the first time I have the connection here.

Carla: yes, I have it too!>

There is no doubt, as we have already said, that to attract our adolescents so much, the Internet network responds to their deep needs. The "seduction" exercised by the network probably refers to key moments in the life of each of us in which the dynamics of separation and the construction of identity is implemented through new and intense modalities.

This profound level of seduction can evoke, by metaphorical analogy, the bath of sensory and emotional arousal excitement in which the newborn is immersed since birth and which he must learn to control. But it can also call to mind the transitional space (Winnicott, D., 1971) that the child explores in his early years of life or the archaic forms of narcissism characterized by excessive idealization of self or other. In adolescence, in particular, the "network" can support the fear of having to confront in a direct / brutal way with the Other's concrete reality.

The network, therefore, attracts and seduces because it responds to the deep needs of being in the pursuit of pleasure and / or of Identity. And this is all the more true if we consider adolescents who feel they have lost their space-time references in relation to the body that changes and the emotional-cognitive upheaval typical of their brain functioning (Blakemore, SJ, 2018; Molina, 2019).

How does this affect our clinical work with adolescents?

As group-dual psychoanalysts, which contribution can we offer to counter the identity "risks" of hyper-connected adolescents in a context that increasingly sees a basic "group mentality" that is struggling to become "group culture" (Bion, WR, 1961) capable of promoting the experience of "having a mind"?

In hindsight, the imperatives of hypermodernity (producing-competing-consuming) and of the transparency and the virtual society (annulment of distance - incorporeity - dissolution of limit) clearly conflict with the very foundation of dual-group

psychoanalytic clinical work: understanding / thinking, fantasizing / dreaming, playing / creating, sharing in presence / transforming.

Attention to the internal world, the construction of the sense of being in relation to the Other, the historical verticality of the subject's affective-relational foundation, all of this is strongly "attacked" by the horizontal superficiality of a world in which disposable objects reign and in which the individual is dispersed in the networks that cross him, without being really explored.

It is as if the adolescent defensively felt the need to mute his anxieties, deafening himself through the liquidity of the boundaries between the Self and the Other. The Other that the adolescent does not see and from whom he hides in order not to be seen/looked at in the depths of his own suffering. Perhaps also the suffering of not being able to have a comparison with his/her parental figures able to narrate themselves with respect to their own adolescence. Parents whose roles are often confused and disorienting for their children: they too do not miss the chance to watch their mobile phones. More often than not, liquid crystals are also a refuge for them to escape from everyday life.

They are parents whose often unresolved adolescences are solicited by the painful projections of their children with whom they come into conflict, rather than offering them a side of reflection. Therefore, parents who are also in difficulty and whose "absence" makes it more difficult for their children to confront their stories to build their own.

These new socio-family structures, strongly influenced by the virtual era, are actually contributing to the progressive "disappearance" of the "regulatory" function of Oedipus (Fréjaville, 2002; Berger, 2010), with significant consequences on adolescents' identity building: undifferentiation and uncertainty in the definition of one's sexual gender, impoverishment of the imaginative dimension, difficulty in creating stable and meaningful "bonds", Eros' agony and de-eroticization of emotional bonds.

Indeed, "the invasion of the virtual" has changed the psychic functioning of adolescents (and not only!) and it cannot fail to have epistemological and technical consequences on our daily clinical work. As "practical analysts" we compare with new difficulties emerging from the new socio-interactive scenery that involves us on the counter-transferential level and on the technical-professional level.

On the countertransferential level, because often our ability to empathize with the problems brought into session by "I generation adolescents" is conditioned by our training models far from "virtuality".

On the technical-professional level, because, as we have seen, the setting of care management cannot but become more flexible and "broader-inclusive".

A necessary "flexibility" that allows us to rediscover the profound meaning that the setting assumes above all in the psychotherapy treatment of adolescents. As G. Pellizzari effectively reminds us, in fact,

"the setting cannot be conceived as a rigid invariant structure and at the same time it must have a structure, a shape, a limit that highlights the relational process of the analysis. The setting is a living form capable of changing while the story changes, the story which takes shape in it and thanks to it. The setting is a metaphor for the subject, which is identified through its history, a history which, in turn, takes shape through the subject's identification. It is clearly seen especially in adolescents, when the setting is not a prerequisite for the analysis, but a result of the analysis. The establishment of the setting coincides with the establishment of the ability to think, with taking shape of the internal world, of personal history as an adventure: the person as a living form" (Pellizzari, G., 2020, pages 42-43).

That's why we cannot disagree with Bion's precious suggestion when he reminds us that

"In the practice of psychoanalysis it is difficult to stick to the rules. To begin with, I don't know what the rules of psychoanalysis are. There are so many people who will say: "Don't you know the theories of psychoanalysis?" And I could answer: "No, I don't know them, although I have read them several times. Currently I feel I have time to read only the best psychoanalytic theories, only the truly best ones ... if only I knew which they are". I would try to limit myself, however, only to those ones. The practice of true psychoanalysis is a very hard work indeed. It is not the kind of thing one should choose if one wants a pleasant, easy, comfortable life. People talk and read easily about theories; psychoanalytic practice is another matter" (Bion, 1981, 262)

The challenge that awaits us, as adults and professionals, is to listen to these "virtually modified new adolescents" with a free spirit, without pre-judgments, and to offer them spaces for reflection that can be configured as a place to discover a "different" interactive mode with respect to the only one ("digital") they have known and experienced since the beginning of their existence.

It is a matter of creating the conditions for a "good encounter" between the adolescent's mind and the adult's mind capable of offering itself as a transformative container (♀) able to welcome the anxieties and desires to discover the "infinity" of the world that teenagers are bearers of.

This means helping teenagers of the digital age to compare with the "limit", inside and outside of themselves. A "limit" that derives from the recognition of otherness, from the clear discovery-integration of the difference of the sexes and their "complementarity", from the comparison with the "loss" evoking death as a specific human condition.

This is, we believe, the primary task that adults must take on in their relationship with teenagers today. A task strongly anchored to the ability to set "limits" and to "contain". A task aimed, on the one hand, to experience the feeling of protection that which offers the levee with respect to the spread of an omnipotent Self and, on the other hand, to encourage the growth of an autonomous and integrated Self. As P. Jeammet effectively reminds us:

“Setting limits and deferring satisfaction actually means allowing the adolescent to mature his desire and protect his narcissism. He may believe, for example in the field of sexual relations, that it is the limits and prohibitions imposed by adults that prevent his satisfaction, while in reality, he is simply not yet emotionally ready. Vice versa, the lack of limits constitutes a real invitation to move on to the act, forcing the adolescent both to become aware, in a brutal and perhaps humiliating way, of his own limits and inhibitions, and to throw himself early and counter-phobically into an adventure for which he is not ready yet - and which risks precipitating him into a parody of adult behaviors, fiction and simulacrum, making him compare with a feeling of falsehood, inner emptiness and dramatic misunderstanding, by the people around him, of his profound reality” (Jeammet, P., 2009, pages 202-2013).

It is clear that, in the era of the digital and the "swarm", to re-propose the question of the "limit" and its humanizing - identifying value, means confronting with the powerful fascination of the web (which promises immediate and unlimited enjoyment) and with adolescents' deep need to find an "embankment" to their omnipotent fantasies and the dissipative risks of their Self.

We believe that this requires a "different" willingness to listen and a renewed adult capacity to remain "inside" the relationship even when the situation becomes heavy and maintaining the position of "thinking deeply about thoughts" becomes difficult and painful. It is only under these conditions, however, that we can offer teenagers a "safe point of reference" that allows them to learn from experience and promotes mental growth.

As the poet John Donne wrote:

*“Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to aery thinness beat.
If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th' other do.
And though it in the centre sit,
Yet, when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.*

*Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just
And makes me end where I begun"*

(A valediction: forbidding mourning by J. Donne, 1633)

It is quite clear that the real "risks of virtual" - those that can lead to real psychopathologies or deviant behavior - arise in a family and social context of relational fragility, loss of own boundaries and widespread and substantial existential unhappiness.

These factors determine an emptying of mental contents, confusional states and a dismemberment of the original early identifications. These are adolescents whose internal wounds are always open and painful enough to cause them to defensively drown themselves in the sea of the web and the "new addictions" without borders to receive illusory relief.

As if, in the infinity of the net, these teenagers were looking for an object/ phantom (maternal, paternal?) Unable to "contain" because without "borders" or because excessively present in an invasive-fusional way.

In order to be able to re-hook the "hyper-connected", the so-called "Igen" (JM Twenge, 2018), it is necessary that adults (parents, educators, psy) rediscover the ancient ability to "weave networks", as evoked by myth of Arachne, to maintain a "contact" that facilitates the creation of bonds in the here - and - now of the real meeting of minds. Complex ability, which must be exercised with dialogic discretion while remaining - as Bion says - within the thing, learning from the "network" that fascinates so much, without demonizing or rejecting it.

Dual-group psychotherapeutic work with adolescents can take on this function of "careful accompaniment" towards the discovery of one's own limits but also of the profound need of the Other and to get out of the solitude in which the virtual elimination of distance is gradually chasing them away.

Through group analytical experience, in particular, the adolescent can gradually bring out his true self by processing the pressure coming from the "group mentality" and from "vogue" (Bion, W., 2007) which tends towards the homologation and mortification of the expressive freedom of emotions.

Once again, it is a matter of fostering desire and ability to narrate oneself through the body, words, writing, the gesture to rediscover the profound meaning of one's own being - in - relation in the creation of oneself. A creative process that engages us in a "solidarity network" which necessarily requires the presence of others, of the Group.

*"A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.
And you O my soul where you stand,*

*Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.
(A Noiseless Patient Spider
By Walt Whitman)*

Bibliography

- AA.VV. (2019), *Le ragazze sono cambiate. Le nuove adolescenti nel mondo reale e virtuale*. Milano, F. Angeli;
- AA.VV. (2014), *L'adolescente e il suo psicoanalista*. Roma, Astrolabio;
- Askofare', S., Sauret, M. J. (2002), *Clinique de la violence recherche psychanalytique, in Cliniques Méditerranées*, n. 66, pp.241-260;
- Bauman, Z. (2014), *La vita tra reale e virtuale*, Milano, Egea.
- Berger, M. (2010), Oedipe civilisateur menacé, *Filigrane: écoutes psychothérapeutiques*, vol. 19, n. 1;
- Bion, W.R. (1961), *Experiences in Groups*, London, Tavistock.
- Bion, W.R. (1970), *Attention and Interpretation. A scientific Approach to Insight in Psycho-Analysis and Groups*, London, Tavistock Publications.
- Bion, W.R.. (1974), *Il cambiamento catastrofico; La griglia; Caesura; Seminari brasiliani*. A cura di Francesco Corrao, Torino, Loescher, 1981.
- Bion, W.R., (1979), *The Dawn of Oblivion*, Clunie Press, Perthshire.
- Bion W.R. (2005), *The Tavistock Seminars*, London, H. Karnac Books.
- Blakemore, S. J. (2016), *Inventing ourselves. The secret life of the adolescent brain*, Transworld Publishers Ltd.
- Bodei, R. (2016), *Limite*. Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Bollas, C. (1993), *Perché Edipo?* Roma, Borla.
- Brady, M. (2019), *Coinvolgimenti analitici con gli adolescenti*. Rome, Astrolabio.
- Civitaresse, G., Ferro, A. (2020), *Vitalità e gioco in Psicoanalisi*, Milan, Cortina.
- De maria, G. (2017), *Le venti giornate di Torino. Inchiesta di fine secolo*. Turin, Frassinelli.
- Demetrio, D. (2011), *Perché amiamo scrivere. Filosofia e miti di una passione*. Milan, Cortina.
- Diana, M.A. Gentile, C.M. (2012), Il passaggio dal “rumore” alla comunicazione in un gruppo di preadolescenti, in *Psicoanalisi di gruppo con bambini e adolescenti*, a cura di A. Lombardozzi, Roma Edizioni Borla.
- Donne, J. (1633), *Liriche sacre e profane*, trad. it. Milano, Mondadori, 1983.
- Ferri, P. (2011), *Nativi digitali*. Milan, Bruno Mondadori.
- Flora, C. (2018), Gli smartphone stanno distruggendo il cervello degli adolescenti? in *Le Scienze*, Aprile.
- Floridi, L. (2020), *Pensare l'infosfera*. Milan, Cortina.

- Frejaville, A. (2002), Oedipe, ses complexes et notre époque. *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse*, 1 (vol.66).
- Gardner, H., Davis, K. (2013), *The App Generation*, New York, Baror International.
- Gentile, C.M. (2011), Adolescenza, bullismo, stalking, in *Koinòs*, Rome, Borla, n.1.
- Gentile, C.M. (2017), Equità in educazione e dispersione scolastica, nella rivista *Poliedro*. Palermo, ottobre.
- Giorgetti fumel, M. (2013), *Giovani in rete*. Milano, RED.
- Grimal, P. (1988), *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*. Paris, PUF.
- Gui, M. (2014), *A dieta di Media*. Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Guignard, F. (2010), Réflexions d'une psychanalyste sur l'enfant dans la société occidentale d'aujourd'hui. *Filigrane*, 19 (1).
- Han, B.C. (2014), *La società della trasparenza*. Bologna, Nottetempo.
- Han, B.C. (2015), *Nello sciame. Visioni del digitale*. Bologna, Nottetempo.
- Han, B.C. (2017), *L'espulsione dell'Altro*. Bologna, Nottetempo.
- Han, B.C. (2019), *Eros in agonia*. Bologna, Nottetempo.
- Jeammet, P. (2009), *Adulti senza riserva*. Milan, Cortina.
- Ybana, M. L. et al. (2006), Examining characteristics and associated distress related to internet Harassment: finding from the second youth Internet safety Survey, in *Pediatrics*, 118 (4).
- Kowalskj, R. M. et al. (2008), *Cyberbullying: bullying in the digital age*, Blackwell Publishing.
- Lancini, M. (2015), *Adolescenti navigati. Come sostenere la crescita dei nativi digitali*. Trento, Erikson.
- Lastra, S. A., Saladin, G., Weintraub E. (2015), La construction de la subjectivité adolescente dans l'ère digitale. *Controverses dans la Psychanalyse d'enfants et d'adolescents*, n.17.
- Lemola, S. et alii (2015), Adolescents' electronic Media use at night, sleep disturbance, and depressive symptoms in the smartphone Age, in *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 44, n. 2.
- Lombardozi, A. (2012) (a cura), *Psicoanalisi di Gruppo con bambini e adolescenti*. Roma, Borla.
- Marcolongo, A. (2019), *Alla fonte delle parole*. Milano, Mondadori.
- Marzi, A. (2013) (a cura), *Psicoanalisi, Identità e Internet*. Milano, F. Angeli.
- Molina V. (2019), *Il cervello adolescente. La costruzione dell'Identità*. Milano, RBA Italia.
- Pellizzari, G. (2020), *Opus Incertum*. Milano, Mimesis.
- Preist-lagache, F., Mazoyer, A. V. - Roques, M. (2014), Enjeux psychiques du virtuel à l'adolescence. *Bulletin de Psychologie*, tome 67(6)/534.
- Prenski, M., 2001, Digital natives, digital immigrants, in "On the Horizon", 9, n°5-6.
- Prenski, M., 2012, *From digital natives to digital wisdom: hopeful essays for 21st Century Learning*. Thousand Oaks, California.

- Rinaudo, J. L. (2009), Archéologie d'une approche freudienne des technologies de l'information et de la communication. *Cliopsy*, n. 2.
- Riva, G. (2014), *Nativi Digitali. Crescere e apprendere nel mondo dei nuovi media*. Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Roncaglia, G. (2018), L'età della frammentazione. Bari, Laterza.
- Salerno, M. C. (2015), (Monu)Menti in costruzione in una psicoterapia di Gruppo con adolescenti. Palermo, IIPG.
- Scognamiglio, R. M. Russo, S.M. (2018), *Adolescenti digitalmente modificati (ADM)*. Milano, Mimesis.
- Sisto, D. (2020), *Ricordati di me. La rivoluzione digitale tra memoria e oblio*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri.
- Spitzer, M. (2018), *Connessi e isolati*. Milano, Corbaccio.
- Spitzer, M. (2019), *Emergenza smartphone. I pericoli per la salute, la crescita e la società*. Milano, Corbaccio.
- Tisseron, S. (2014), Prova a prendermi. La mediazione dei mondi digitali nella terapia degli adolescenti, nel vol. di AA.VV., *L'adolescente e il suo psicoanalista*. op. cit.
- Tisseron, S. (2013), 3-6-9-12. *Apprivoiser les écrans et grandir*, Toulouse, Editions Eres.
- Tonioni, F. (2011), *Quando internet diventa una droga*. Torino, Einaudi;
- Turkle S. (2019), *Insieme ma soli*. Turin, Einaudi;
- Twenge, J. M. (2017), *Igen. Why Today's Super connected Kids are Growing Up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood- and what that means for the rest of us*, Atria Book, Simon e Schuster Inc.
- Vandebosch, H., (2008), Cyber bullying among youngsters, Paper presented at the ICA Conference, San Francisco.
- Vlachopoulou, X. Houssier, F. (2013), Les destins du virtuel à l'adolescence, *Recherches en psychanalyse*, Université Paris 7 Denis Diderot, 16(2).
- Volpi, B. (2014), *Gli adolescenti e la rete*. Roma, Carocci.
- Whitman, W. (1861), *Leaves of Grass*, Norton and C.
- Ziccardi, G. (2016), *L'odio online. Violenza verbale e ossessioni in rete*. Milan, Cortina.

Notes

1.Thanks to Salerno, M. C., a group psychotherapist (IIPG) who supplied me with her text about the session.

Maurizio Gentile is a Psychotherapist, Training Analyst at Italian Institut of Psychoanalysis, IIPG in Palermo.

Email: firstmauriziogentile@gmail.com