

## **Multiplicity of groups, individuality of the person**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aimed to analyse, through the contributions of authors from different disciplines, how duality, and plurality and internal (and often unconscious) multiplicity seem to be the structural elements of individuality. The individual's mind seems to be organized around configurations of multiple and discontinuous states of the Self with varying degrees of awareness. The ability to integrate individual multiplicities and discontinuities is based on the fundamental function of the mind to objectify/subjectify itself and others. This function is deficient or non-existent in severe forms of mental distress and this seems to derive, according to the author, from a lack of experience to stably exist as a subject in the mind of another. That is what happens in strict pathogenic interdependencies, where the emergence of an "I" capable of objectifying/integrate a "Me" and the subjectify/recognize the Other is prevented. Through the presentation of a short piece of a session, the author presents some thoughts about how the group Multifamily Psychoanalysis can play a vicarious function in the capacity to objectify/subjectify, through the establishment of a "Mente Ampliada" - by definition plural and multiple – which can provide the experience of think and being thought by another. The possibility of mutual recognition within an external "multitudinous" environment composed of several "I/Subjects" generates a strong discontinuity with respect to what is experienced in the inner world as an invasion of objects or parts of objects, not representable and not thinkable.

**Keywords:** Objectifying/subjectifying, integration of mental states, pathogenic interdependencies, Mente Ampliada

“Everyone is one, singular, irreducible. And, yet, he is at the same time double, plural, diverse and heterogeneous” E. Morin

Each of us organizes his/her own subjective identity through continuous processes of inclusion/exclusion, confrontation/denial, integration/separation of the dual dimensions of our being. Human duality and multiplicity seem to be the distinctive structural elements of the individuality, a varied microcosm in which to meet and intersect complementary and antagonists aspects. I am a woman, not a man, but how much of that "I am not" organizes and enriches the "I am"? We actually perceive continuously inside us, in a more or less conscious fashion, the presence of physiological, psychological and cultural elements, that characterize the opposite sex.

Meanwhile, in the succession of multiple ages, we bring something in every phase that was present in the previous: childhood and adolescence do not disappear in adulthood, but occur repeatedly every time we watch ourselves playing with the

enthusiasm of a child or falling in love as a dreamy teenager.... and besides, there are inner and deep multiplicity starting with the obvious body/mind duality until getting to the plurality of private dimensions (intimate and secret), opposed to the public and external ones that characterize our individuality. Paradoxically, the identity seems to be based on the non- identity.

In addition to these internal duality, plurality and psychic unconscious multiplicity, we live (and sometimes suffer) countless affective discontinuity in the alternation of the different states of mind; mood shifting and uncontrolled tantrums appear to us as temporary modifications of identity. Different emotions not only change the faces, but the voices and behaviors affect the profound representations of ourselves. The mind seems to be organized around individual configurations of multiple and discontinuous self-states, with varying degrees of awareness, which allow a subject to "feel one, in the many" (Bromberg).

The ability to integrate and unify the natural individual multiplicity and discontinuity rests on a fundamental function of the human mind which is the ability to objectify, starting from the objectification of itself; the apparent duality of I/Me expresses the subject's ability to see themselves as discontinuous object (Me) without ceasing to be the subject (I). This attitude allows the person to reflect on the different mental states within a single experience of identity, maintaining a sense of consistency, integrity and personal continuity. Quoting Morin: "... the crucial point is that every human subject can be considered at the same time as subject and object, and can also objectify another individual while recognizing him/her as a subject. Unfortunately he is also able to stop seeing the subjectivity of others and consider them only as objects. From that moment, the person becomes "non-human" because he stops recognizing their humanity or, on the contrary, they can only blindly love or hate" (end of quotation). Basing on these considerations, I believe that considering the other "only as an object" comes from the failure of experiencing oneself as a stable presence in the mind of the other as subject.

To be thought as other than the self, with feelings, emotions and thoughts of their own. That is what happens in the most rigid expressions of pathogen interdependence in which it is impeded the emergence of a Self, capable of objectifying/integrate the Me and at the same time subjectify/recognize the Other. Over time, networks of mutual fusional and objectifying constraints are structured (as opposite to evolutionary relationships that subjectify, instead). These limits dramatically emerge and reveal themselves through the individual mental illness; how many "Not me" appear on the scene of a Multifamily Group through the repetition of an acting-out, the actualization of deliria, the narration of a life in which from generation to generation the trauma of denial of subjectivity will be repeated? "The others within us" play a role... (In Italian "recitare a soggetto" – literarily "to act a subject" is an expression that indicates someone who do not to show himself, but represents another's will and thoughts).

## **What happens in the groups** (Transcript from video-recording )

Valeria, Roberto, Elena: the impossibility of being a child and the difficulties to recognize as a parent.

Roberto and his parents attended the multifamily group since the inclusion in the Therapeutic Community, which occurred after a long hospitalization in the Psychiatric Clinic following an acute episode of delirium; until the time of the reported meeting, Roberto had intervened frequently with appropriate comments with respect to the experiences of other participants, working as a "leading thinker" and in other community settings, but never bringing his own experiences and personal emotions. Valeria, his mother, often uses the group to complain about something but do not enjoy the opportunity to reflect on his suffering. Helena, mother of another patient resumes in this meeting her contact with the group after a long absence occurred as a result of heavy attacks brought to the therapeutic work, an expression of her difficulty in supporting the initial differentiation of the child.

Valeria: ... I know I'm sick ...

Ceppi: how long he began to feel bad ?

Valeria: .... I do not know... it's a long time... now I can tell.... at some point I started to feel bad...

Roberto: But you said I was wrong .... I ...

Ceppi: What do you remember about that period?

Roberto: I remember the excitement I felt, I do not remember what happened ..... I have always lived in their control, I later identified control with my mom .... she has always thought instead of me, as if I were not capable of thinking, the one thing that led me to not knowing my feelings, my emotions .... not knowing how to feel, not knowing that I was feeling something and .... being scared when feeling something! She never told me: "What do you think?" ... what a beautiful thing ... "what do you think" ...

Ceppi: could you help us to understand better?

Roberto: I am her life! ... The bond between a mother and a child is a wonderful thing, but when this lasts for too long .... becomes too attached ... just a spark is enough to break it and if it happens ... if thinking is not used well thought everything crumbles! ... too attached to me, still had not removed the umbilical cord, when a person is formed... 14 , 15 years ... she was still too attached to me...

Ceppi: You're describing a form of attachment ...

Roberto: Morbid! A mental morbid attachment! For example, I was starting to go out at night but I didn't enjoyed it because I thought that she was anxious ...

Valeria: .... but what do you care if I am anxious ?

Roberto: ... that's just what I mean for morbid mental attachment!

Valeria: ... then you could have come back before earlier so we could have both been happy ...

Robert: ... you were the happy one! ... Then I started to feel bad ... analysing this thing scares me. I'll tell a piece of the story otherwise we can not understand .... together ...

Roberto tells the source of his discomfort, connected to the split-up of the parents who become non-existent for him and the transfer of parental functions on a couple of friends, with regards to whom he felt like a child who could really grow up.

Roberto: I could reason with them, they made me think ...

Ceppi : ... and they did not think in your stead ...

Roberto: That's right!

Ceppi : ... and you felt your emotions ...

Roberto: right! They shared emotions, for what was possible ... they saw that when I was a kid ... when their relationship fell apart, I found myself without parents ... it was a terrible separation .... I decided to leave towards Spain, and after a week the real problems started... I started to hear voices, deliria....

Riccardo tells the content of the "trans-generetional" deliria in which he was the son of his grandfather while his parents and himself took different forms, populating his mind with a confused multitude of "characters" from time to time menacing, powerful, ever-changing ....

Roberto: There's one thing that scares me a lot .... when I no longer had my new parents, who also represented my identity and having to go back to my parents earlier ... sick ... I do not know ... but there is a link that scares me, it's like ... to go back to that initial, true core, I had to be sick otherwise I could not get back into it ... another thing that scares me is that when I heard the voices, the emotions were very much .... rivers of emotions ... which I no longer felt when I was healed .. so to speak ... when I was in delirium voices were telling me stories, fairy tales ... like before you go to sleep ....

Roberto tells the contents of the voices to which he believed like a child believe in fairy tales ...

After a long pause he says :

Roberto: I wanted to say one thing about my mom ... SHE ALWAYS talked in my place!

After being very absorbed throughout the Roberto's story, Elena speaks, really moved.

Elena: I imagine the pain Roberto still feels when he recalls of himself and his fears .... when I found myself in front of my son who heard voices I found that I had to deal with a huge weight .... maybe each of us has his own time ... now I can understand ... I think my son was telling us how bad he felt for something he could not tell ... it was a path of his, made to understand us .... how we were not there, not just as parents, how we had not be there as children ... all the baggage of pain that these children lead...

Ceppi: do I understand you correctly? You say that still earlier to be absent as parents, one can be absent as a child ... then this baggage of pain might belong to you as a child...

Elena: Yes, they are just two parallel paths ... we can not ask our children to do the work for us. For our ... Identity ... which we are bound to do .... this is the worst pain, having no one to hold onto ... we first ... I first have to do it, separating the two identities ... this is what causes me the most pain ...

The emergence of an "I" who can tell and give meaning to a delirium (Roberto) or the expression of awareness of the profound connection between the denial as a daughter, and the difficulty to recognize the mother (Elena) may occur because they are supported by a dedicated and particular integrative function of the Multifamily Group: where the individuality of the subject is non-existent or too fragile, the plurality of the group may temporarily perform a vicarious function? As the establishment of a *Mente Ampliada*, by definition plural and multiple, it can provide the experience of being thought and thinking another, if this experience was not present in the original family context?

Right from the "rules of setting", i.e. to speak for themselves and not for others, actively listen to each other without overlap or interrupt, the multifamily group is proposed as a framework for psychological refuge with respect both to the processes of unconscious projection of intolerable content and to movements of implicit relational disconfirmation of the other; thus creating an external and concrete space where the possibility of existing and co-existing of a plurality of voices is tested (initially on an emotional level and only later at the mental level); each of these voices finds room and listening even when it is expressed in the language of delirium or acting-out. Adherence to setting rules (... and the difficulty to be maintained, that we so frequently check, expresses the powerful mechanisms put in question!) is the first step, concrete and visible, towards the possibility of mutual recognition within a multitudinous context composed of many Subjects/I .... Children , Mothers, Fathers. This generates a strong discontinuity with respect to what was experienced for a long time in the secret and inner world as an invasion of a multitude of indistinct objects or parts of objects, that could not be represented or thinkable. The perception of this discontinuity is made tolerable by

the containing function performed by multiple processes of mutual mirroring occurring within the group, because the members of a family that is organized on network of pathological interdependencies (that in the course of life have prevented the opportunity to observe and reflect on what is happening inside each of them and between them), can begin to observe and reflect, from a distance of emotional security, on what happens among other participants.

The Group is transformed into a stage on which the different representations provide the opportunity and the incentive to start a metaphorical mirroring through which one can recognize in the other what is still unrecognizable in himself. Attending to the representation of a family history, reproduced in an individual story, although initially confused and fragmented, allows each viewer to intervene in the story itself, through questions, comments, observations. And it gradually permits, the emergence of a secret plot hidden behind a chain of events that are only apparently disconnected and meaningless. The story becomes narrative and in that narration everyone can find something that belongs to himself and about which it becomes possible to think. The ability to objectify oneself seems to pass through the ability to objectify the perceived reality of the other, similar but different.

Returning to the transcription of the video, it is worthwhile noting that Elena's recognition of her emotional state through the observation of emotionally intense interaction (representation - in the here and now - of ancient pathogen interdependencies) has made it possible to activate a process of thought "with many voices" in which until then inexpressible contents can be contacted and translated into words. The group is functioning as a "mente ampliada" in which individual contributions are welcomed, compared and discussed to form a coherent and original thought. The mind of the group processes and integrates what the individual mind brings as a fragment of thought, triggering a spiral of creative associations in which everyone is allowed to carry their own subjective truth. This seems to be a powerful emotional experience for a subject who never turned on the ability to treat himself or others as beings motivated by mental states. Building on the experience of attributing meanings to each fragment of thought within a mutual co-constructing process, which is creative and always negotiated by a multiple but integrated thinking, everyone can begin to attach meaning to his behavior, connecting it to painful and traumatic experiences and from here begin to reintegrate dissociated mental states or integrate split-off parts of themselves.

Experiencing the ability to recognize the plurality and tolerate the discontinuity in the minds of the group, is the base from which everyone can begin to recognize their internal multiplicity, discontinuous and irregular and at the same time conceive the continuity of their own separate "I", intact, functioning. "I'm interested in that each is able to discover that the diversity of perspectives can enrich the mind and that this diversity can coexist in a group or even in a single mind, that is, in the inner world of each of us" J.G. Badaracco.

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