

Individual and group elements in the individuation process

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Abstract

The author describes the phenomena related to the proliferation of new ideas and theories in psychoanalysis. Conservation and innovation, loyalty and rupture have characterized the development of psychoanalysis from Freud to the new currents of thought, after the Second World War. From Freud's concept of archeology of the mind to thoughts and theories more in keeping with social changes. The atmosphere of enthusiasm and self-idealization, but also of disenchantment and naivete, understood as the inner birth

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My colleagues who preceded me spoke about the development of the individuation process. Autism and the intermediate phases represented by diversified stages of symbiotic states were treated. The concepts originally elaborated by Mahler were touched on, and successive elaborations by other authors that contributed to widening their meaning were also mentioned. Most of the observations were a result of reflection on the clinical situation of the effects of psychotherapy on psychosis.

My paper on the other hand, considered the possibility of taking the concepts of autism-symbiosis-individuation out of their usual context (theory of development) and apply an interpretative paradigm in order to comprehend or gain insight into various phenomena that we all have to face sooner or later in rooms that are adjacent to those in which we carry out our clinical work. The phenomena I am referring to, are the multitude of new ideas and theories that have vitally sprung up over the past years; some of these redefine the very foundations of the classical theories we are used to. The specific field I am talking about is psychoanalysis, founded by S. Freud more than a century ago.

Conservation and innovation, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, loyalty and fractures have always characterized the development of psychoanalysis; lacerations in the theoretical corpus of psychoanalysis have led to schisms and formations of new schools with different theories; even Freud during his life-time was at the centre of vivacious discussions among his pupils, and he continually modified his theories during the course of his life.

We could agree with S.A. Mitchell (1995) when he says that *<<psychoanalysts, are principally called upon to face the atemporal and universal dimension of the human experience that lies beneath the surface, rather than the superficial waves of cultural change and the latest scientific and social trends. For psychoanalysts it is important to believe there has only been one revolution, the Freudian one, and that all other research and studies have gradually contributed to the works of the founder. Many*

analysts identify themselves as direct descendants of Freud and are bound by this close affinity, partaking of his genius and authority. They believe they are digging in the mind in the exact spot indicated by Freud, but with better instruments and on a vaster scale, perhaps even deeper, but always within the area of Freud's concepts>>.

In a letter to Fliess dated 21st December, 1899, Freud compares himself to Schliemann, the archaeologist who was unearthing the ancient city of Troy at that time, and it is exactly in this tradition that the greater part of psychoanalysis identifies itself.

I believe that the belonging to a magisterial corpus-Freud-psychoanalysis, fully satisfies a valid and reciprocally enriching symbiotic need of its members, it gives validity and substance to the group and to the idea that sustains it; the members feel protected from hate and guilt; the belief to be the direct descendants from Freud, the feeling of strength deriving from participating to the great project of the discovery of Troy, and having control over the group, all go to provide coherence and stability. Alongside this assumption and in perfect harmony with it, a demand for innovation and change has arisen, mainly from the necessity to adapt the psychoanalysis to different social and political situations, or to different philosophical and cultural trends, not to mention the cropping up of mutated and new pathologies or pathologies that were not cured in the past.

Consequently, not only the theories but also the aims of the psychoanalysis have undergone transformation. Sandler (1997) writes: *<<Since the Second World War, psychoanalysis has witnessed the development of an incredible variety of new theoretical orientations. Groups of analysts have given rise to Ego-psychology, Self-psychology, object-relation theories, the Kleinian school and others. New formulas appear that differentiate from the initial aims of psychoanalysis. For instance, the elaboration of depression, the increased cohesion of the Self, the achievement of a major autonomy of the Ego, and the development of a capacity to 'worry about' the object, etc.>>.* A perceptible gap has emerged between these new aims and those of the archaeological excavations and the positivistic rationalism of Freud-Schliemann, and the discovery of the walls of Troy.

New, social, philosophical and pathological conditions impose a transformation of psychoanalytical theories, consequently, psychoanalysts have created new thoughts-theories-models to face this new reality and to satisfy their own needs for independence, detachment, separateness, and individuation.

The loyalty-fracture phases do not develop in a sequential or historical order, there is no perceptible linearity to their cropping up, but rather they are phases that permeate each other, they are different moments, intersecting and overlapping.

Symbiosis-individuation phases within a group can be seen as basic moments of functioning or ways through which a process of development comes about. This process unwinds (I am aware that this term is not the most suitable), sometimes gradually or at other times with sudden intensity. This depends not only on how much a member of the group or sub-group is capable of thinking and enforcing a new idea

but also how much effort is required to accept a new idea. Enthusiasm, self-idealization, or underrating everything that came about previously, are the sentiments most frequently expressed in this process.

A group that produces new ideas and encourages individuation has an impassioned spirit; it is defined as having a sentiment of enthusiasm.(Greenson,1984) The prevailing atmosphere can be eccentric and expansive. The members of such a group feel very righteous. There's a feeling of exuberance and richness. The enthusiasm is bounteous. There's a desire to share the richness with others. The others must be converted to the enthusiasm otherwise it could diminish.

The strength and intensity that keep this atmosphere alive depend on two connecting factors. The first factor is related to how similar the new idea is from the previous ones. The more innovative it is and the more the precedent idea is reneged, then all the more stronger the emotional and affective aspects will be.

The second factor in perfect balance with the first, is the type of affective response the upholders of the previously constituted idea give. The more the threat is experienced as disturbing and destructive, the more the response will be preposterous and tending to negation thus fomenting the state of enthusiasm of the sacrilegious.

In a group of psychoanalysts the issues connected to the emerging of these basic states and the ensuing fantasies are numerous. Above all, it is important to bear in mind persecution is an element ubiquitously diffused in the group, whether it is accentuated or not, it is always recognizable.

I would like to consider two other issues, the most important being, how can we comprehend what steps the analysts must take in order to cure the members within their own group. The second issue which is closely related to the first regards the analyst's mental attitude in his or her clinical work.

Regarding the possibility that a group of analysts can cure the single members or the group as a whole, I can only say such a task is practically impossible to realize. Whilst on the other hand, if we consider how the analyst prepares his/her mental attitude to face clinical work, and without going as far as Bion's notion of <<*lack of memory and desire*>> which requires adherence to a strong and radical idea, I believe disenchantment is an extremely useful aspect to adopt, because it is accompanied by a sense of lightness and disbelief in any faith or creed, and a certain forgetfulness and ingenuousness. By ingenuousness I don't mean naivety or foolishness, but I am referring to the etymological meaning from the Latin ingenuous that literally means 'inborn', to describe a mental state that valorizes the situation expressed in that precise moment with that person.

References

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