Forms of institutions. Creative and Destructive Processes

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Abstract

This essay examines different aspects of the life of institutions. Through an analysis working on an anthropological and psychoanalytical level, contrasting yet coexisting aspects are brought to light. Beginning from an analysis of the recent film *The Lobster*, which describes an anguishing form of institutional Dystopia which favours conformist and destructive individual and group experiences, a comparison with those institutional forms that, on the contrary, take the shape of supportive and creative relationships is proposed. This work presents reflections on the relationships between specific emotional contexts in the psychiatric institutions, the ritual constructive and destructive behavioural aspects that we find in different cultures and in the psychodynamic dimensions of the group.

Key words: institutions, creativity, destructiveness, anthropology, psychoanalysis, transitional area, liminality

1. The Disquiet of Institutions

A careful reflection on the processes that involve the relationship between institutions, groups and individuals cannot help but maintain a "poly-ocular" point of view. A point of view that refers to the most diverse epistemological instruments: anthropological, sociological and biological. This way it is possible to continually refocus on an object that escapes narrow and unidirectional interpretative grids. Any analysis of institutions alternatively reveals both creative and destructive processes. Institutional forms represent multiple "lifestyles" that adhere both to the human dimension in their relationships with the social and to the more disquieting and problematic states which, relying on an extreme need for security, give substance to the worst nightmares of a totalitarianism that dissolves the sense of individual or group freedom.

One example refers to the possible manifestation of the formulations that destroy the individual's integral sense of life in relating to the institution as representative of a culture of power that acts as a "regulator" despite being outside of negotiated rules.

Here I would reference the recent film *The Lobster* by director Yorgos Lanthimos, which describes living conditions that take place in a dystopian future that, in certain aspects, can be likened to a form of relationship that seems like the expression of a constant "state of exception" (Agamben 1995), while in other aspects, seems to adhere to a type of social and/or mental control well known from the Orwellian imaginary of *1984*. An intrinsic and substantial relationship between the individual and the group is, in fact, represented to the extent that it outlines the close connection between the power imposed by the institution and the principle that it constitutes an ineffable and unquestionable biological basis in some ways comparable to that of "bare life."

The film shows a society in which there is an obligation to be in a conjugal or

monogamous relationship. Whoever does not meet these requirements is forced to spend 40 days in a kind of resort filled with persons of both sexes. At the end of this period anyone who has not found a partner, whether male or female, is to be transformed into their predetermined animal of choice. The protagonist of the story chooses, if this were to become the case, to become a lobster. The story is complex and dramatic; the participants of the squalid and forced search for a partner are willing to do anything to escape the possibility of losing their human form.

The principle that inspires the formation of relationships deals with the possibility of finding another person based on the imitative sharing of defective states. One young man who lays his eyes on a young woman with a nosebleed pretends to suffer from the same condition, punching himself in the nose to cause it to bleed. The institution/resort is the bearer of falsified values based on the lowest common denominator and conformist imitation that generate a mechanical and non-affective, anonymous and impersonal sexuality. The protagonist believes he has found his soul mate in a frigid and cruel woman who puts him through a terrible trial by killing his brother who is in turn transformed into a dog. Following this experience, the protagonist flees the resort and joins a community of rebels who have in turn imposed a law of remaining single. The rules of this rebel group at the margins of a forest, in its own way strongly institutionalized, are themselves totalitarian and ferocious as well. No type of affective relations is permitted and the transgression of these rules is cruelly punished. The protagonist at this point falls in love with a young woman and she with him. Their love is discovered by the tyrannical leader of the group who then, under the excuse of a corrective laser eye surgery operation has the girl blinded. The protagonist manages to escape once again, this time from the rebel tyrant as well as from the dominant social model, but then, in order to share the woman's condition, blinds himself—a blinding that has little to do with Oedipus and more to do with a imitative symbiotic/syncretic relationship that seems like the only possible, however futile, attempt to find a way to escape the folly of a totalitarian institution that in its opposing representatives (the dominant group and the rebels) expresses the sense of a psychotic freezing of sentiments. This has less to do with the tension at the dimension of death as a fact that is part of existence than it does with the institutionalization of deathly rules in life. The institution in this dimension becomes a sort of zombie institution trapped in a non-lived present that blocks the sense of the future in a form of dystopia, impeding the resolution of the past and the return of the inevitably precarious conditions and anxiety of the incompleteness of life.

Here, the central point rests on the fact that, if it is true that certain devastating historical experiences, or certain contemporary manifestations of "institutional fundamentalism" based on ideologies or religious forms interpreted and put into force in extreme and falsified ways, seem to give value to the idea that the essence of the institution consists of a certain concept of the "state" or "power." In other words, the institution is always, or prevalently, an expression of a "state of exception" (Agamben 1995). It is also true that many other examples of "good" institutions leave us more optimistic in the consideration of a more balanced and creative relationship between individuals/groups/institutions. This notwithstanding, whoever reads a

history book or a newspaper today can notice the amount of wars, conflicts, and cruelties that have infested existence and continue to do so. The sense is that in a complete account, cohesive sentiments and social solidarity generally prevail over more destructive and noxious aspects. One consideration on the anthropologic and psychoanalytic level of the institution can help us better understand these complex and contradictory phenomena.

The society described in the film *The Lobster* allows us to imagine an extreme situation of development of an institutional power that does not permit an escape route for individual choice except as a flight towards death and exclusion. The individual, even one who attempts to oppose an instance of syncretic sociality in the sense of an unchanging negativity is trapped in the closed system of a group governed by base assumptions (dependence, fight/flight, pairing) (Bion 1961) that are in themselves in a static and rigid relationship rather than a dynamic, shared one. The base assumptions and primary emotions that they express do not allow any movement or fluidity in that scenario; they are simultaneously present but cannot be confronted, a state that does not permit the passionate aspects of social life to enter into dialogue with one another. On the contrary, they are expelled only to re-enter into play in the form of a prevalent anxious paranoia that permeates every form of possible intimacy.

What I have tried to bring to light is the fact that over the course of history, particularly in the modern period, this paradoxical and radical reality expressed in the film somehow finds significant dimensions of realization on a macro-social level in the recurrent and extreme episodes of extermination and genocide, and on a -micro social level in the escape attempts in those institutions that in many cases correspond to the adherence of institutional/sect forms. In contemporary daily life, this sentiment is articulated in a strong, often shared sense of conceiving institutions as restrictive bonds for the expression of the individual in his persona, in his creativity, and in his relationship with the group to which he belongs. This comes about in the psychological-psychiatric contexts, in the fundamental institutions of socio-political organization and in the ritual practices that belong to this reality.

2. Psychoanalysis and Institutions

I have proposed beginning with these considerations that lead to a problematic relationship between the individual and social institutions in that these aspects are an important part of the perception and reality of institutional life that cannot be ignored. Experience, however, permits us to consider the necessity as well as the possibility of conceiving institutions as expressions of the processes that culture, in its broader sense and in its socio-political declinations, brings about. Institutions represent ways in which creative construction is articulated that forms the feeling of group solidarity, enriching individual experience in such a way that social culture is lived and perceived as a necessary support to existence, otherwise exposed to an excessive sense of precariousness.

In the reflections and discussions proposed by authors who work in anthropological or psychoanalytical fields, institutions are presented as extremely complex systems. The considerations that come from psychoanalytic experiences on the institutional

level tend to highlight the emotive structures underlying a collectively shared institutional field that is "made by the coming together as a complex mass of life experiences, emotions, thoughts, images, dreams, sexual and destructive forces" (Correale 1991, P. 53). There is a need to think of the institution in its general characteristics and thus to look to broad theories, such as that of the complex multi-layering that refers not only to psychoanalytic models but to systemic theories that put forth a plethora of explanations which allow us to compare experiences and diverse factors related to life in psychiatric institutions. By complex layering, we mean "a globalizing macro-group configuration in a mix of the virtual and the real, which is presented as a space-time portion behind which identity, force, relationship, and a multisensory observation point are identified and where phenomena related to the physical, biological, and psychological manifest" (Margherita 2012, p. 48). Or rather, the institution is conceived of as a given structure that precedes the individual and inserts him into a more general order of symbols, placing itself in a position of otherness with respect to the individual yet determining his subjectification processes (Kaes 1988). This is an idea that we also find again in some ways in Bion, who maintains that the institution is "the body which governs the society; in the field of thought to which the pre-existent or pre-conception willingness corresponds" (Bion 1970, p.88). But the levels of institutional functioning are very dynamic; if it is possible in fact to identify a style of syncretic socialness in an institution as Bleger describes, at the same time this constitutes a place in which relational contexts are built: "In all the groups, the group identity has two levels. The first is that of the identity gained by work done in common and which leads to instituting certain rules of interaction and behavior that the group takes on; this identity is brought about through stabilizing the tendency toward interaction and integration of the individuals and persons. However, in all these groups another, and at times unique, identity exists, (or the only one that can be obtained in a group); this has to do with a very particular identity which is called syncretic-group identity and which relies not on integrations, interaction or evolved rules but on a socialization in which such limits do not exist; each of them that, from a naturalistic view, are seen as subjects, individuals or persons not possessing an identity as such, their identity is in their belonging to the group" (Belger 1971 p. 72). Institutions also adhere to those that we could define as forms of masking that correspond to those "foreclosed" aspects of psychic experience that must be placed outside of the subject in institutional structures to represent the denial of the narcissistic pact that Kaes defines as "...the generic intermediate formation that is in every bond—referring to a couple, a family, a group or an institution—turns to a destiny of repression, of denial and of disavowal, or which maintains in the non-representing or the imperceptible, everything that would put in question the formation of such a tie and the investments of which it is object. One can therefore consider the denial pact as one of the aspects of the Renouncement contract, of the realization of the community and of the narcissistic contract" (p. 47-48).

In this sense, the perception of self, both in that which concerns the adequate functioning of symbolic thought and in that related to aspects that cannot be "treated"

in the passage from the intrapsychic field to the intersubjective one in its social institutional counterparts, is positioned both inside and outside oneself, that is to say, in institutions (Kaes 1988). In this way, we can principally describe the alienating aspects of the institution yet without exhausting the meaning of the function of the institutions. If, on the one hand, the rapport between individual, group, and cultural institution can be conceived of as a set of rules externally limiting the life of the subject, on the other, it expresses a process of strict correlation and of construction that does not come down to a, however necessary, function of identity but shows itself in a process woven from multiple coexisting and simultaneously present factors. In these terms, from a "historic" point of view, "the institution is characterized by specific elements that slowly come together creating an identity that can be compared to a 'personality' of the institution. The elements that make up such a characterizing structure are: affectivity, history, language and memory" (Corwale 1991 p. 40).

A central point seems to be the relationship between institutions and organization or institution and task. When organizational aspects, even ones that are necessary or too restricted to pre-assigned tasks, prevail over freer experiential assets one risks the ossifying of the creative aspects of the institution. Rather, the institution can represent a place where a process of the recognition of the individual is favored, welcoming the vital needs of the subject (Tagliacozzo 1995). The institution, from this point of view, permits the individuals who are part of it to experience not only a sense of belonging but also the transformation process that includes the individual, group, and cultural dynamic in the broader sense. The institution represents a shared thought that connects the affective emotional aspect to the more rational ones and brings a sort of recovery from the basic anxiety tied to the social dimension through a constructive creative experience that enriches the position of the individual in the world (Boccara, Riefolo, Neri 2014). If we re-evaluate these constructive creative aspects of the institutions we can consider that "the organizations are contemporaneously a specific type of institution; decisional subjects; systems that elaborate complex information; systems that define roles and competences; obligations and settings for the decisions; sources of routine and cultural generators. In all cases, these seem to perform tasks that the individual alone could not carry out due to his limited resources and to the uncertainty that permeates the social fabric. The nature of institutions is rooted in the recognition of the limits of the subject: for that which these more or less evoke, on the phantasmatic level, a positive entity that helps, protect and sustain the individual on the road towards an aim" (Patalano 2014 p. 249).

3. Anthropology of Institutions

This last formulation leads us to investigate a closer relationship between the considerations that relate to the psychoanalysis of institutions and the function that the anthropological sciences have contributed to institutions in their various forms. Anthropological studies are designed to expand understanding of the relationship between politics, power, and daily practices of social relations within specific cultural contexts. The latter are considered in their actual processes (Abeles, 2001). Anthropologists now favor the ethnographic approach based on observing the ways

in which institutions, customs, and the local rules included in them are transformed into cultural contact. Mary Douglas has proposed her reflections on this in *How Institutions Think*. In this view, the cultural process is conceived of as a way of thinking that is embodied in institutions through a certain style of thought and corresponds to a way of life that directly binds individuals to specific institutional cultures. The institution, in its various forms (family, play, ceremony) tracks the direction or directions of the individual's life and contributes significantly to giving meaning to their existence, providing especially, as much as possible, answers to implicit questions about the meaning of behaviors that are put in correlation with the "cultural cosmologies" on which they rely, attaining the benefit of becoming conventions: "We believe, namely, that when well-entrenched institutions are put into question, they can base their claims of legitimacy on corresponding to the nature of the universe. A convention is institutionalized when, even when the first answer can be formulated in terms of convenience, the final answer to the question 'why do you do it that way?' makes reference to the position of the planets in heaven or the way in which plants, animals or humans naturally behave" (Douglas 1986, p. 83). Institutions, and the conventions that they express, have the power of life and death over the individual and give them identity. In this process, which has strong functional characteristics, however, the individual, even if not having his or her own position outside the institution, does not have a passive role. In fact, the formation of a sense of identity, while going unnoticed in that it is a result of an implicit process, is a construction that is based on the coherence of the system of the elements that compose it, and that come together in the relationship of 'similarity' which, as an "intrinsic quality to the object continues to reappear because within each particular culture certain sets of things are so institutionalized and taken for granted that the identity of their elements has taken on the authority of being self-evident" (Douglas 1986, p. 98).

Mary Douglas leads us to reflect on the relationship between individual, institution, and identity in anthropological terms. In my opinion, in her conception, which still reflects a functionalist vision, the individual is not a 'passive' subject who undergoes the cultural model to which they belong almost impoverishing their own sense of self, but has an active role in the construction of identity as an institutional factor. However, once certain "lifestyles" or strong "cultures of belonging" are present, the individual seems to move mainly within the values that are functional to those specific cultures. The creative component inherent in the relationship between individual, group, and institution does not appear more clearly in this way. This is a dimension that is, however, much emphasized in the research on the cultures of Oceania by anthropologist Adriano Favole who, while not underestimating the conflicting aspects of colonization and subsequent postcolonial processes, urges us not to consider the native cultures as passive in their encounter / conflictual relationship with Western culture. The dynamic anthropology of Balandier, but above all the research of Lanternari on religious movements, had already extensively investigated the dynamic relationship in the acculturation process. Lanternari attributes a strong transformative push to the forms of religious syncretism, which

constitute modes of creative contamination on a cultural level, which was determined by the active reactions of African or extra-European cultures in general that interpreted aspects borrowed from monotheistic religions such as Christianity, as well as Islam, in a vision of a messianic liberation from the West (Lanternari 1960). Favole, however, goes into greater detail, by way of extensive ethnographic field experience, in his analysis of the creative elements that the cultures and individuals who belong to them bring into the field to transform and to create new institutional arrangements in intercultural relationships. In this respect, he argues that "the tropics are not necessarily sad" and quite appropriately describes how local institutions, which are based on the traditionally acquired prestige of the chiefs, go with certain forms of democracy from French colonialism, and that the same thing happens in the interaction or relationship of contiguity between the economic dimension of exchange and the dimension related to the function of money in terms of the prevailing culture of the West and, of course, the globalized world. In fact, "despite the increasing interdependence that characterizes the globalized world, local cultures maintain their autonomy and historical continuity, or better, the ability to organize in a specific way the market flows, technologies, and ideas, coming from elsewhere" (Favole, 2010, p. 21). In the culture of Foutune, an island in Oceania, the exchange of yams and ritual formulas, present in every moment of the construction of different institutional forms, are the product of an intense creative process "that arises with particular force in the encounters, in the relationships, in the situations of coexistence and living together, and sometimes even in the impact, between cultures and different societies" (Favole, 2010, p. 36) Favole adopts a formulation from the local leader Tjibaou that refers to a "sprouting word" in his constructive and non-nihilistic fight against forms of imposed colonial power, referring to the idea that identity is "before us," as a process of transformation, always incomplete and imperfect (Lombardozzi 2015), "purifying it from the reifying incrustations, from the risk of ethnic closure, from the realm of the anti-creative concepts. These reversals or semantic refills, which we have already seen at work in relation to terms like 'tribe,' 'tradition' and in the very ethnonym 'Kanak,' are very important in the perspective of creativity. 'Identity in front of us' is also the result of a thought which stresses improvisation and choice" (Favole 2010, p. 179). If there is a conflict, it regards opposing a way of considering identity as a defined and rigid entity rather than the process of a continuous interweaving of cultural, biological, individual, and group factors that disintegrate and continuously recreate new institutional arrangements. In this sense, the metaphor/articulation concept seems more appropriate for examining the complexity of historical and cultural dimensions. In this context, "the articulation allows us to think of societies as composites; no longer 'bodies' who live and die when their vital organs are affected, but 'political coalitions,' 'cyborgs,' or 'discourses' that can be disassembled and reassembled into new forms, even from exogenous materials" (Favole 2010, p. 97).

Favole's argument is compelling in many ways even if the problem of what happens when institutions do not present themselves as creative,' but instead become instruments that favor a conformity imposed by the prevalence of implicit and

explicit power dynamics should certainly be explored in greater depth. In this regard, it is important to refer to a very complex vision of institutions that contains interpretative models that include both psychological and social dimensions, which can help for a more complete analysis of the alternation between creative and destructive phenomena in institutional processes.

4. Group-Institution Transformations

I offer, to this end, a brief clinical example. A group in a vocational training school produces dynamics that may be of interest to the theme of the group/institution relationship. I will address this theme by identifying some general points rather than more precise details, limiting myself to underlining elements that pertain primarily to the analysis of the destructive and creative aspects of institutions. The group, mostly female, had earlier expressed a strong tendency toward generative creativity, dreaming and imagining female figures with strong contrasting aspects, characterized by very long, flowing hairstyles that harked back to the idea of the pre-Raphaelite woman immersed in an aquatic or lakeside world. A woman who inspired a strong generative force, represented in almost fairy-tale form, somewhere between a witch and a fairy (Lombardozzi 2015). The hair became a way of representing the traces of identity that put group and individual experiences in direct correlation. The work, however, produced unprocessed remnants of "beta elements" that took form as concrete images in some dreams/nightmares, again concerned with hair, in which, this time, animals similar to crustaceans were entwined, creating an atmosphere of restlessness and anxiety.

Based on this background, during one session, a member of the group dreamt of arriving in the consulting room in a situation where people from the institution where the group is held appear in the background. In the dream, she accompanies a very upset young woman who is behaving like a possessed obsessive. There are also children and she is worried that they might be frightened. In the dream, a figure who looks like a priest, possibly representing the analyst, reassures her that everything is calm and there is no danger to the children. The institution, which the priest represents, is somehow conceived of with "churchly" aspects that on the one hand are reassuring but on the other temporarily blur and re-dimension the more disturbing aspects, yet without causing them to evolve into a form of freer or group thought. These aspects relate to the creative drive of the pre-Raphaelite women's group who bring to the table their power to generate very powerful, and also very disturbing, symbolic content that remains deposited in the group waiting to be processed. A few sessions later, the same person recounted another dream in which there is a figure of a child whose games occupy the group space and appears as if coming out of a Trojan horse. In this case as well, the institution is very present in the background. There is also a reference to the presence of a crustacean, perhaps a lobster. In another later session, another central theme of the group concerned a television series that takes place in an isolated town where the dead return and live alongside the living, creating a situation of confusion and upsetting the order of social relations. The shellfish, shrimp, or lobster, whatever they are, return, but are no longer entangled in the hair,

instead visible and manageable, prepared as something that can be cooked and digested.

These sequences help us think about the way in which group processes interact with the specific institutional context that characterizes them.

The group in this particular experience seems to represent a mediator between the individual and the institution. It is also a site, a complex field, where the various forms of institutional settings are articulated. After the group expressed the creative drive of its female generativity, there is the risk that the institution is experienced, through the function expressed by the priest-analyst dream, as a reassuring entity that re-dimensions them by exorcising the creative as well as the disturbing elements in an assumption of dependency that seems to have some kind of skewed definition towards taking on a "bureaucratic" type of role. The priest seems to be a leader-guide who is the guarantor of the training school as a church. From another point of view, the dynamics of the "psychoanalytic group" activate an articulation of the basic assumptions that circulate in a multifaceted field, allowing the alternation of their correlation and the coexistence of mental and emotional states of the group to dialogue. It is then possible to bring out the function of the group with the part of the institution that "thinks emotionally" and allows keeping even those persecutory aspects that express a form of primordial function in the field, as with a crustacean, at the level of a "simple" organism containing them. There is, indeed, a passage, through the intrusion of a "Trojan horse" type function—in a fight-flight assumption, of beta/group/institutional elements that are removed or paraded by the jumble of thoughts about hair at least to be viewed as objects, animals representing forms distant from the human, with which the group can work psychically, in an attempt not to remain blocked or frozen in the basic assumptions that colonize the group one by one by not talking to one other, as happens in the extreme situation of the film *The Lobster*. In this exchange between elements borrowed from the institution, deep intrapsychic experiences, the aspiration to see themselves as a "working group," extra-analytical contexts of external reality (anthropological in the broadest sense), the group is configured in its cohesive function though in a complex field. It forms in becoming that which we might call a gamma-generative self-object, an articulation between the function of the group as the self objiect (Neri 1995/2004), and the gamma function (Corrao 1981), which is also a creative function of the group. The establishment of this function for the group is a process of facilitation and processing to contain, and thereby transform, the field in its complexity, in which there is also space for the wounds of time, loss, and mourning, and factors that are evoked in the return of the dead and express strong fears of possible disintegration. The leader, who represents a high institutional position, offers an associative structure, different from the "ecclesiastical" condition of the institution, with which to reactivate the temporal and cultural memory of the group. It suggests the idea that the dead can also be the bearers of the memories of all the groups that have passed through that same space, as if to represent a function similar to that of the ancestors in some African societies, which the organization recalls, or something similar to the *lares*, protectors of the home, in classical Rome. This introduces diachronic insights as to the synchrony of

the group field trying to foster a sense of continuity of experience in the "construction" of a sufficiently stable function of what I have called the generative self-object gamma, which enables the dynamic alternation of basic assumptions in order to evolve and transform destructive and creative aspects. The elaborated beta elements can be mobilized in this way and not deposited in a stalled condition.

5. Institutions, Transitional Areas, and Liminality

Another example, this time from literature, can perhaps give us some ideas about these concepts. The charming book *The Wolf Totem* by Chinese writer Jiang Rong (2004) recounts the experience of a young Chinese man who goes to Inner Mongolia for on the job training during the Cultural Revolution. He finds himself involved in the life, traditions, and customs of the local nomadic population. In particular, he is fascinated by the relationship between the humans and a wolf representing a totem. It is an ambivalent relationship but also one of strong respect and admiration; the wolves attack livestock (sheep, cows, and horses), the raising of which is the basis for the group's sustenance; however, their strong predatory characteristic is not sufficient cause for them to be considered an evil enemy. For the men in Mongolian culture, the wolf group is the behavioral model on which the warrior style of the nomads is structured. Further, the wolf, because it is a predator that when hunting seeks the weak and attacks only a limited number of other animal species, is an important balancing factor in the local ecological system. The wolf pack, from the men's standpoint, demonstrates itself as a risk factor in the short term, but at the same time, as an element of survival in the medium and long term. They are a kind of totem that mediates the sacred and its institutional rituals. In psycho-cultural terms, referring to the model of basic assumptions adapted to a wider social scale rather than to a small group for analytic function, the conditions of dependency between wolf and man, such as fight or flight, reciprocal hunting, mating practices, and the protection of a shared future environment, enter into a form of dynamic correlation in which the destructive violence and generative creativity of a natural culture that unifies the men and wolves, coexist. The cruel intervention of the military force of the Chinese Cultural Institution, which masquerades itself as "revolution" and is oriented towards a "destructive" policy toward the wolves, puts the stability and survival of the cultural as well as natural environment at risk.

What emerges from all the different contexts taken into account is the impossibility of reducing the analysis of the institution and the relationship between creative/destructive patterns to generalized explanations. If the very condition of sovereign power in as much as it is a declination of a *state of exception* for the *homo sacer* is a comprehensive formulation of certain historical conditions of the violence of power reduced to *bare life*, I do not consider it useful if it is to represent an ontological statute extended to more complex forms of power, which instead are divided into differentiated cultural practices. Institutions can be carriers of conformist or devitalizing instances or they can be containers of forms that welcome aspects of falsification, transforming uncomfortable elements of a "culture" into shared defects in "cultural intimacy" in such a way as to present them as motives for identity pride

(Hetzfeld 2000). This is not to say, however, that the creative functions that also make social institutions carriers of openness and transformation should be delegitimized. The destructive Mystic mentioned by Bion (1970) that brings new ideas to the group, deconstructing the canonical basis of coexistence, is also the bearer of creative elements that are necessary for the group's active survival and the culture that contains it. When the Mystic or Holy man, or the group that sees itself in an exclusively destructive mode cloaked in a false creativity, is defined in a strict, nihilist identity, then that is the moment in which the risk which this movement leaves behind itself appears as a kind of "ontological desert" that is the outcome of every form of totalitarianism.

In conclusion, in some respects the above examples describe the dramatic results of a hardening of institutions when they are prevalently defined as static "structures." If, however, we focus on the transitional processes and the "flow" of social experience, the scenario becomes more dynamic. In fact, the expansion of the liminal area in the anthropological sense of ritual (Turner 1982) always seems possible. It is comparable to the transitional area that guarantees the creative growth of the individual (Winnicott 1971), and encourages the oscillation and articulation between the tendency toward rigidity of social institutions and the inevitable and strong push toward creativity of cultural forms. Turner, in fact, in his analysis of the ritual process, references the studies of Van Gennep (1909) on rites of passage, identifying three significant moments: *separation, margining* (or *Limen "threshold"*) and *aggregation*. The subject of the ritual, at the same time individual and collective, separates from a sufficiently structured "previous" life situation to go through a more fluid moment to then regroup in a condition of relative stability. The liminality concerns the fluidity of the situation that is the transition phase in the rite where the individual and the group deconstruct themselves in order to rebuild their sense of belonging to the world and the cultural institutions that represent it in new and transformed forms (Turner 1966).

The words of Victor Turner allow us to finish with a conclusion, albeit provisional and partial: "I am, rather, of the opinion that the essence of liminality, liminality *par excellence* consists of the breaking down of the culture into the constituent factors and in the free or 'playful' recomposition of the same in each and any possible configuration, however bizarre. All this emerges clearly from the study of liminal stages of the most important rituals in different epochs and cultures. When implicit rules start to appear that limit the possible combinations of factors within certain schemes, designs or conventional configurations, what we are witnessing, in my opinion, is the intrusion by the legislative social structure into that which potentially and in principle is an area of free and experimental culture, an area where not only can new elements be introduced but also new combinatory rules, more rapidly than they can in the language" (Turner 1982, p. 61-62).

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