BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL SELF AND SOCIAL SELF
The vicissitudes of identification and identity as a clinical parameter for
the group analytic process

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- Group and groupality are the encounter space between Individual Self and Social Self. Groupanalysis as you well know, considers the group as a special field or setting, where one can enact, unveil, make aware, experience and transform the unconscious or preconscious conflictuality of relatedness.

- The process of identity and identification are the axis when their vicissitudes converge. These can be usefully employed as a parameter of our every day clinical practice.

The group “groupality” and the processes of identification and identity.
1. The Freudian thought:
- Freud (1929) was the first to outline the psychodynamic link of the identification processes within the group.

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He suggested that new kind of libidinal investment that takes places between members of the mass. The libidinal pulsions are inhibited in their final aims and transformed in to identifications. Two kinds of identifications link the group formation: the shared oral regression and the identification with the leader, that result in the common projection of the ideal Ego within the group.

- In spite of these intuitions, Freud shares with some sociologists of his time the pessimistic conception of the group conceiving the libido as been fundamentally antisocial and egoistic and that human nature being by tendency unable to establish good interpersonal relationship since it is driven towards the Ego and the search of pleasure rather than the “other”. So human nature can be only socialized under strong pressure.

- From the very beginning the psychoanalytical thought proposes a dichotomy between the individual and the group, between psychoanalysis and sociology.

- This dichotomy continues to inspire many psychoanalyst that work with groups. This dichotomy wich is one of the main themes in the Freudian thought constitutes a unresolved epistemological problem as Freud himself reveals in some on his reflexions: (see Napolitani, 1987) “the oldest psychology is the group psychology”. “Every single individual is a result of many groups and thanks to the identification is subject to multiple links, and he has built his own ideal Ego on the basis of different models”. “Every single individual is therefore sharing many collective souls (Freud, 1921)

2. THE RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

In psychoanalysis the process of development from the intrapsychic, monadic, mecanistic and pulsionale model was a gradual and difficult one.

From the primitive monade the kleinian cosmology conceived the objects relationship in the beginning as something within the intrapsychic (internal object). ( For example Projective identification, was considered we can say, as a sort of space probe. Only some years later it was Ogden (1991) who gave to projective identification the meaning of “relational bridge”).
The development of the English school of object-relationship continued, with Guntrip, Fairban and especially Winnicott who overcame the “subject” as a unique, pointed out the necessity of the other (the mother) and an intermediary space for the relationships. Bowlby (Attachment theory) established the notion of security base from which to explore new dimensions of relationships.

- From another perspective Kohut described the “satellite systems” of the self objects, that brought the “self psychology”. From this theory three main research perspectives came out:
  1. Kohut and his followers (The self-object matrix)
  2. Stolorow, Atwood and Brandchaft (1987), crossing this satellite system, propose “intersubjective psychoanalysis”

  1. A third group is made up of many important contributions that worked on different perspectives: Stern D. (1985) The interpersonal word of the infant; Lichtenberg J. (1985) on the motivational system of the self, towards a theory of the psychoanalytic technique; Shane N and coll. (1977) look for integration between the self psychology, the attachment theory, and the evolutive systemic theory.

- Others that have conceived important aspects for the relational psychoanalysis are:
  Pichon Riviere (1970) in Argentina who proposed the psychoanalysis of link; and the group of the “cultural models”, in the USA: Sullivan, Fromm, Horney.

For a more detailed study of this subject see Mitchell S.A. (1988) who probably without knowing Foulkes speaks of the concept of “relational Matrix” (J. Ondarza Linares, 2003, signals specific bibliographic references).

RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYSIS
FROM EGO TO SELF AND IDENTITY

The gradual transformation of relational psychoanalysis was evidenced for a consequential transformation more or less recognized of some components of the structural theory. Let us
consider the gradual transformation of the concept of EGO (anchored to positivism in which EGO was synonymous of, consciousness, and Identity) to Self concept. This appears clear through an “excursus” of the psychoanalysis thought over this 60 years (from Winicott seminal contributions (1945), Hartman (1950), Jacobson (1954), Malher (1968) and mostly Kohut founder of Self Psychology (1971) and his followers, Khan (1974), Greenberg and Mitchell (1983), Duruz (1985).

- Regarding the Italian Authors discussing and questioning about the problem of the Self as a psychical instance:
  - 1. Despite the controversies whether the self is only a representation or a psychical instance (and or as a continuum in dialectical existential transformation) the SELF appeared clearly more connected to relatedness that EGO.
  - 2. As such, the self is linked to the identity between the body structures and the evolving mind.
  - 3. The Self is continuously permeated between the pulsionale need of been related between Individual Self and Social Self.

FROM THE “MONADIC MIND” TO THE SOCIAL MIND

Groupanalysis and the processes of Identification and identity

In short we can say that groupanalysis, founded by S. H. Foulkes, is essentially the passage from the monadic individualistic mind to the social mind of the group in constant feed.back. This passage is an epistemological spiral that goes through the theory, the methodology and the technique of groupanalysis.

The fundamental nodes are:

1. The relatedness (as named by Foulkes) or social instinct as a basic starting point.

2. The Network theory: each individual is a part (nodal point) of a psycho-social network hierarchically set-up. The network is the total system of people who it keeps linked and
belonging to themselves in a common and reciprocal interaction. Mental processes are based on the bipolar relationship Individual-Group.

3. The Matrix construct: “is the shared common background determining, eventually, the meaning and importance of all events” (Foulkes 1964). Nevertheless, the epistemological value of the Matrix is sometimes difficult to conceptualize and circumscribe. Through Foulkesian works, it evolves from a methodological reference circumscribed initially to the therapeutical group, to comprise the global context or the contents of the transpersonal communication”.

There is a constant dialectic between Fundation Matrix and Dynamic Matrix.

The foundation Matrix (Foulkes, 1957) “sustains a pre-existing stable community between the members of a group (all are human beings, all have the characteristic of the species the same anatomy and psychology and (perhaps) also the traces of ancient experiences […] they share a mental foundation matrix”…

The foundation Matrix is the union bridge (biological, structural, cultural) with the Network in an evolutionary perspective and a new meaning of the Self identity. Since its origin the foundation Matrix (or primordial Matrix) contains the seeds of the Social Unconscious, sown and germinated in the individual Self in his social perspective, this sets up and promotes a common protection and defence system founded on a tacit and basic unconscious pact based on reciprocal identifications, common ideals and shared renounces. The word Dynamic Matrix (initially applied to therapeutically evolutinal perspectives of the analytic-group) refers to the transformation perspectives of the foundation matrix a new common sense and meaning of the individual differences: “shared change”.

4. The communication processes are at the centre of the groupanalytic process (which constitutes a “fundamental” epistemological change from the mecanistic, pulsional model of psychoanalysis to groupanalysis).

5. The methodological and technical aspects of the groupanalytic model, that came out are that: the interpretation is a “translation process”, the groupanalytical experience is a “self training in action”. The therapist’s task must be “matrix oriented” promoting within the group itself a Matrix: a common shared context of communication, identity and significance.
6. It seems to me important just to mention the contributions of the recent discoveries of neurobiology that could be considered as an organic basis of some foulkesian group analytic postulates “The brain is structured as a social network”. “The concept of Social Synapsis as a neurological base” (this gives us the a point to reflect about the construct of the Social Self) (See J. Ondarza Linares, 2009, “Group analysis and neuroscience”).

**COMUNICATION LEVELS AND IDENTITY**

S. F. pointed out that the Communication process within the analytic group arises in five different levels hierarchically and dynamically disposed (see attached scheme). From 20 years I have been outlining the theoretical, methodological and technical importance of this scheme (Ondarza Linares, J. 2001, 2004).

**Levels of Communication of the Analytic Group (S.H.Foulkes, 1968)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foulkes connects these levels of communication to the spheres of development of identity and relationships of E. Erikson (1965)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels 4-5 whit Autocosmo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 whit Microsphere</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levels 1-2 whit Macrosphere</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transference level tr. Level (=transference in specific sense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Body level</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Primordial level (Jung’s collective unconscious)</td>
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When
Foulkes focuses on the Communication process at the centre of the groupanalytic process he makes an important epistemological change of the perspective and significance of the therapeutic process itself. This is no longer and not only considered as an insight, or and individual awareness or a sublimatory experience of forces and drives that move in a horizontal mecanicistic causality, but the therapeutic process is: to search and look for a new matrix of identity and meaning.

- By now I would like to focus on just one aspect dynamically connected with these levels: their importance for the identification and identity processes that appears and developed in the group. Erikson H. (1965) is one of psychoanalysts that dealt with the identity problems of the child. His concept of the bipolarity of identity is widely known: identity is being oneself (sameness) and being significant to others.

- Foulkes matches his 5 levels of communication to Erikson’s epigenetic process which signals the evolutionary stages of the child's identity: Autocosmo-microcosmo-macrocosmo: from the individual self to the social self, Kaes R. (1985 ) paraphrasing the evolutive phases, that happen in the group process recalls the group as a freudian “perverse-polimorph child” I would rather call the therapeutic child group “ as an “eriksonian child” (Ondarza Linares 1999).

- The Identity concept is necessarily connected to the epistemological transformation of the Self concept. From positivist idealist construct in the past, Identity, is contemporarily conceived as a process or the continuum functioning of relationship between Individual and Social Self. We focused on this essential process as a methodological and clinical frame of our clinical use of groupanalytic process.

THE THEORY OF CLINICS IN THE GROUP ANALYTIC PROCESS

Some models of “group as a whole” conceives the analytical working through of the group process, regarding mostly some common and recurrent configurations of the group as a whole (see the “Assumption Basic” groups –Bion 1972- “of the common tension of group” –Ezriel, 1974) from these derivate their therapeutical transformations. Reflecting about it; it
is possible to discover an implicit dichotomy between individual and the group in this theoretical and methodological premises, based mostly on the Kleinian metapsychology. Instead Foulkes and his followers base their methodological and clinical vision of the group analytic process on his own theoretic premises.

Some of these theoretical bases were mentioned above.

- Now I would like to focus primarily on the theory of our clinical group analytic practice, concentrating on the identification and identity process that occurs in the group.

My conviction was born in nearly 40 years in a feedback between theory and every day clinical practice within the group analytic circle. In which way is possible to construct a theory of our clinics practice, using the vicissitudes of the identity process as a marker? In which way could this perspective be useful? We can propose some methodologic and clinical steps.

1. The communication process is always at the centre of group analytic process. The group is a communication field. This process evolves mostly in a evolutive and hierarchical levels as signalled by Foulkes.

This process of communication, travels conjointly with the processes of identity and identifications that arises constantly in the group. “Semilogically” we can always look for and search for the level in which the group are predominantly communicating. These appear as group as whole, subgrouping, or particular interactive configurations of all the members or some of them… (synchronic and diachronic communication).

Is the translation process of the Self training in communication evolving significantly or on the contrary is it blocked by individual or group resistances and constraints?

2. The therapist’s task and actitude is matrix centred (that is equivalent of the neutrality and abstinence of the psychoanalytic situation). The therapist instead to guide the group tries to “work through” the group blocks of communication, to increase the promotion of the creative matrix of communication and identification.

3. The promotion of an intermediate space of identity, means to cross the frontiers of identity established by the group as a whole and each individual according to the experience that shaped their own self or false self. The group as a whole and every member,
learns that the frontiers are both a need of “individuation separation” and also a point of contact, of encounter and shared mutual identification.

4. All these clinical issues can converge using the translation process (from symptom to its relational significance) to promote a Self training in action (common-action, communication –De Maré 1973) which is essentially a “self development throught subjective interaction” (Brown D.1994).

5. Of course this journey is not easy because the individual and group psychopathologies are reenacted in the group within their own characteristics, that request in extreme situations more activity of the therapist (for ex. Changing the group setting or structure). The ideal is to maintain the double alliance with the therapist and the group, to use it opportunely when veiled or blocking instances of the identity occur.

6. My description could appear heuristic or too schematic.. but I invite all the group analysts to be aware of this “semiology of the clinic”, oriented by the vicissitudes of the identity process and invite you also to share your clinical findings contributing in this way to better configure a theory of our every day groupanalytic clinic practice.

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