

EDITORIAL

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Important challenges for our psychoanalytic theorisation and the consequences on our clinical work must be addressed nowadays. The clinical practice of couple and family psychoanalysis is very much in need in our contemporary world, many couples seek out psychoanalytic intervention to help them with their conflicts, and many child and adolescent psychoanalysts need psychoanalytic assistance for the family of their patients to contribute to their improvement.

The subject to which most psychoanalysts are fundamentally dedicated is the individual, the internal world, internal objects, conflicts, processes of subjectivation, and the unconscious psychic reality which is its most outstanding constitutive hypothesis. How this knowledge was constituted and the technical modality it acquired gives us the possibility to approach the individual intrapsychic reality by isolating it from other factors. These factors have to do with the intersubjective and trans-subjective spaces with their effects on our internal worlds. Our existence is the effect of this unconscious psychic reality in which other subjects participate, assisting us in the formation of intrapsychic structures, just as we participate in the constitution of the psychic reality of others. The concept of intersubjectivity is imported from other related fields of knowledge: philosophy, linguistics, and French psychoanalysis. This raises a question that we cannot fail to consider. As Freud states in “On narcissism: an introduction” (1914c), we are links in a chain of subjects that precede and succeed us. We are singular subjects that inhabit the plurality of a life full of links: links by which we are constituted. At the same time we are constituents of others through the effect of linkage, of unconscious alliances, and by doing with others. Object relations and identifications are the results of participating in them. We are always participating in intersubjective links between complex organisations. We could define each of us as a sophisticated text, as a kind of hypertext, made up of a network of other texts, of links with multiple roots that can facilitate our lives, provide us with multiple possibilities of creativity and solidarity, or chain us to all kinds of suffering, destruction, or even death.

Participating in links, being part of them, demands psychic work. We invest others with our narcissistic and object libido, and at the same time we are recognised by these others as the subject of these links.

Unconscious alliances of different orders operate from the initial moments of human becoming. This relational fabric links each human subject to the whole, to the group to which he or she belongs, defining different contractual structuring levels, be they of a family order (filiation, parental, generational, transgenerational), or other alliances that link us to the social context in which we participate (the fraternal, the father as a symbolic representation, the control of destructive impulses), each acting as guarantors of the common

psychic space that we inhabit. This trans-subjective framework affects the individual psychic framework as it exerts a structuring or de-structuring effect on the intrapsychic formations of the individual unconscious: the superego, ideals, and ego functions rest on these unconscious alliances that underpin these cultural and societal guarantors.

The psychic reality of intersubjective links is of importance if we are to intervene therapeutically. It forces us to consider the consistency of the space between subjects—this common, shared psychic reality—and not only the effect of this intersubjective space on the internal world of each subject. Subjects are unconsciously constituted in intersubjectivity, and each of us is part of the intersubjectivity that is interwoven with others. We observe that the consistency and contemporary forms of the intersubjective bond are in mutation. The cultural and societal guarantors no longer fulfil their functions of framing and providing contextual markers. They have ceased to play their role. In cases where ruptures and catastrophic transformations have occurred, threats to the whole are inevitable, and the suffering of those who inhabit human relations is inevitable. In the contemporary world and our clinical work, these can be easily traced.

This issue of *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* immerses us in the clinical field. Ortal Kirson-Trilling's ideas show us the defenceless states and suffering present when love cannot be experienced in a couple linked by mutual vulnerability, a predicament that requires specific therapeutic tools. This shared denial of mutual dependence needs to be addressed, as well as the countertransference effects on the analyst. The pandemic brought the difficulty that some treatments had to be interrupted, since not all analysts and patients were willing to continue distance treatment. Distance treatment has been a novelty for most of us. Judith Pickering's article applies Bion's work to couple therapy, locating negative epistemology as an intrinsic aspect of therapeutic methodology with specific relevance to how members of a couple can address linkage work. Early relational trauma and war trauma are also addressed in her article. Both articles provide interesting clinical understanding.

Negative therapeutic reactions in couple treatment are explored in the article by James Poulton and Sefi Hassin. This couple-based form of the negative therapeutic reaction is conceptualised, and we are shown how the authors suggest we address it through the example of Danny and Shelly. Paradoxical motivations and uses of projective identifications are illustrated, and the countertransference induced in the mind of the analyst explored. The importance of the analyst's internal setting and the affective intensity of the negative therapeutic reaction bringing analytic work to its limits is also addressed.

Sexual aversion disorder in couple work is examined from a theoretical and technical perspective by Norma Caruso. She uses the language of object relations and reformulations of the oedipal complex to examine her understanding of Richard and Robin's case. She shows us that nowadays sexual problems in couples are commonly treated with behavioural approaches

rather than psychoanalytic ones. The outcome of her clinical work provides us with evidence that these difficulties are within the domain of psychoanalysts' clinical expertise, and shows us how. Caruso's work adds to the literature on sexual desire disorders in couples and the complexity of sexual functioning. Countertransference in this case also functioned as a compass to guide clinical work of the unconscious communication between the partners.

The next contribution by Anastasia Tsamparli introduces us to clinical work with aggressive couples and the possibility of being helped by psychoanalytic psychotherapy despite high levels of acting out. The author conceptualises the importance of the co-creation of an intersubjective psychic space for the couple as a therapeutic goal, and the deconstruction of an existing destructive link between the partners to inhabit a different psychic space for dependence. The readers will be able to understand the author's proposal through the case illustration of Elias and Iris.

To close the section of original contributions, Robert Monzo brings in one of the main themes of clinical work with couples: the therapist's countertransference, closely connected with the couple's shared unconscious phantasy. He informs us of the splitting and projective mechanisms that need to be processed to understand the unconscious dynamics present in the couple and the mind of the analyst: a major point in the work of interpretation. The author poses several vignettes to provide us with examples for our clinical work.

Damian McCann opens our thinking to new cultures in his book review of marriage and families in modern China, which provides a set of case studies allowing the reader to explore the nature of intimate relationships and family dynamics in a different sociocultural background. Joanne Brown reviews a book that covers changes in our contemporary world traced in the new organisation of same-sex couples and other identities, challenging the heteronormative assumptions of classical psychoanalytic theories. Both books address the importance of culture, a challenge for psychoanalysis in need of hypotheses to incorporate into its theoretical approaches and practices about the body of the social, which makes up the trans-subjective and models the subjective constitution in a sociohistorical context. Both reviews highlight that each singular subject is subjectively constituted in a world of multiple linking networks. Robert Monzo adds his review of a book describing universal themes and dilemmas facing couples, interesting for all practitioners to keep in mind.

Arts reviews are always a section of great interest. Marian O'Connor, Ella Bahaire, and Catriona Wrottesley renew interest and touch heartstrings with their reviews of subjects addressing the emotional world linked to early motherhood, the experience of couple therapy with all its painful aspects, and the universal themes of love, loss, and betrayal in couples.

The profound changes that have taken place in recent decades have generated a context in which we observe new ways of bonding socially with others. Transformations in the way in which social ties are established give rise to group formations where exclusion and marginality coexist with manifestations of an important individualism. These transformations have the effect

of producing new subjectivities, new linking styles, which provoke new ailments and symptom formations or disorders, prompting us to consider new modalities of intervention. Subjectivity can be thought of as a structure in permanent change, an open system, as developed by Janine Puget (2015). The terms subjectivity and subjectification are recent to our discipline: Silvia Bleichmar (2006) examined the incidence of socio-economic and political factors that produce states of helplessness and violence that endanger the narcissistic contract. Marcelo Viñar (2015) stressed that psychoanalysts cannot turn their backs on this civilisational mutation and its effects on the constitution of the internal world, on the significant changes that historical and social modes have on the production of the psychic subject. These changes affect the forms of work, of love, of sexuality, of how to have children, of family and couple configurations, and the kinds of suffering that accompany the new millennium. Various debates are taking place in psychoanalytic forums on how Oedipus remains valid in the new forms of subjectivity. Green (2003) announced the death of Oedipus “on the pretext that our contemporary societies no longer maintain the traditional role of the father” (p. 53) in its symbolic dimension. Understanding the complex processes of transformation of groupings and ways of linking between humans that make up the society in which we live provide challenges for our psychoanalytic theorisation and its implications for clinical work.

References

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