FOCUS: PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP: ITALIAN DEVELOPMENTS

# The dynamic recursive hologram for a topos of the relational in psychoanalysis

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> *Neither is it divisible, because it is equal in all its parts,*
> *nor is there in any part greater in being that could prevent its contiguity,*
> *nor any part less, but it is all full of being.*
> *Parmenides, Fragments*

ABSTRACT. – This paper puts forward the idea of an extraterritoriality of the Unconscious, or ectopia, meaning that the Unconscious is not entirely contained within the boundaries of individual space.

Moreover, the interactive dynamic between the Unconscious of the analytic field and that of the individual field is described providing a framework related to interpsychic and transpsychic space-time. This space-time identifies both the synchronic and diachronic dimension of the contents and defences (qualities) present in the field. The subject's ectopic space-time thus extends to form a common space-time shared with other subjects. This is the co-constructed aspect invoked by relational theories in psychoanalysis, in fact, as Webster states, integrated unity is the result of different units relating to each other in a new way.

This shows in complex systems that do not present a simple, indivisible, elementary *original unity,* but a homogeneous nature when viewed from the perspective of the whole and a paradoxical, multiple and diversified unit when viewed from its parts.

It is the necessary mind-body unity of relational systemics invoked by Gregory Bateson on which the new epistemology is based.

The 'Freudian topos' of each subject is not only projected onto the group, but also assimilated into the topos of other subjects and contributes to building a shared/common space-time.

The character of the Unconscious is thus ectopic, heterotopic, heterogeneous and polytopic; it shows not only in the intrapsychic but also in the other psychic space-times of the field.

*In this way the classical metapsychology of the individual apparatus is superseded as insufficient either to define the display of the qualities of the Unconscious or to identify its interactive nature.*

*Key words*: Analytic field; emergence; hyperdense nodes; hyper-expanded nodes; non-linearity; hologram.

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In this paper, I espouse post-Bionian psychoanalytical field theory, noting, where possible, points of convergence with intersubjective and relationship theories.

A theoretical analysis seeks to explain the real nature of the problematic interweavings of the analytic relationship in a more advanced way, while identifying new perspectives for exploration.

Relational systemics tackles the question in terms of the reciprocity of communication which rests on the organisation of Trevarthen's *primary intersubjectivity* (1993) and which Benjamin calls *Rhythmic third* (2019) so that the mother's responses to the child are expressed in amplified form, therefore, not a copy of common experience but a re-representation of it which happily results in mutual recognition.

In Beniamin's model the intrapsychic and interpsychic are held together.

Mitchell (2002) also conceives of the mind as Self-other configurations, both intrapsychic and relational, but this author does not yet go as far as conceiving of the analytic field as a co-constructed emergence and with its own fractal and dynamic organization.

Psychoanalysis, according to Bion's famous expression, expands the phenomenal field that it explores, making an ever closer incursion to the limits of thinkability. For this reason, Bion always relied on increasingly refined explanatory metaphors; from the drive model to the inter and intrapersonal model of object relations and finally to the interactional model of non-linear systemic models and the analytic field. In addition, metaphors that have always been used, such as that of psychic space, ought to be revisited. This renewal allows psychoanalysis to converse with close or co-involved disciplines: from neuroscience to cognitive science, and to experimental devices for validating clinical hypotheses.

The concept of psychic space is a metaphor, an abstraction for understanding everything that can fall outside the limits of experience. This is true of any model applied to the study of processes that take place in the consulting room; it is therefore transversal to the various 'dialects' with which we encode our hypotheses. This concept is also and especially significant in a systemic and therefore relational conception of the mind because the unit of information, as an element of dynamic communication, uses devices to represent itself such as recursive rings that naturally refer back to it.

Psychic space, due to its being a dynamic model, is in reality, space-time - a 'virtual configuration' (Civitarese) where information and noise circulate and where organisation, invariance and openness emerge. In fact, it not only extends synchronously but is constantly evolving and, thus, may be defined in the diachronic dimension. This diachrony creates a profile which is more similar to a spiral that expands with unpredictable outcomes than to a static configuration as defined by the first or second Freudian topos.

The mind's space-time is a rearrangement of the traces of memory that

incessantly reproposes new emergencies in the temporal horizon. It is therefore the space-time of memory that is identified as the 'dynamic structure' of the mind. There is no inversion in the direction of time, therefore, but only a recursion conditioned by the present context on the memory trace bound to past experience. Neuroscientists, such as Edelman, confirm this: they believe that current response configurations act on the traces of memory understood as a theoretical model of all the mind's functions (Edelman, 1992).

## Global functioning

*What you inherited from your fathers,*
*win it back,*
*if you really want to own it*
*Wolfgang Goethe*

Proto-constructivist aspects were already present in Freudian theories; in fact, in 1899 the father of psychoanalysis wrote that 'childhood memories *do not emerge* but are *made,* and a series of reasons which have not the slightest intention of keeping faith with historical truth help to influence their formation' (Freud 1899a).

All thought functioning is comparable to that of rearrangement or posteriority; in this, one of the processes of the oneiric state of wakefulness is active, *i.e.*, deterministic circularity (Conrotto 2009), an essential framework, and not a simple retrospective phantom *(Zuruckphantasieren)* as a Jungian interpretation would have it (Laplanche Pontalis, 1967).

From a relational perspective psychic space-time is not limited to representing the intrapsychic dimension but describes the entire field of interactions. It has neither an inside nor an outside but may be delimited only with a new abstraction, that is, with the specification of a setting that crops it, reduces it and simplifies it.

It could be expanded and therefore understood to incorporate further psychic space-time in the relational mind of both parties of the analysis, even going so far as to include the psychoanalytical institutions that operate as conceptual containers, and which, in turn, are parts of even larger systems, and so on. The *setting* is also a simplifying device, therefore, employed in an anti-complex resizing, which is unavoidable if we are to avoid an expansion to infinity which allows for no symbolisation, a substantial opening onto the primary symmetrisation process (Matte Blanco).

It is deployed, *i.e.*, deliberately constructed and maintained in action by the analyst's mind, in order to favour the exchange of reverie which allow one to dream the dreams not dreamed or interrupted dreams, and to set up, after symbolic coding, the apparatus for thinking (Ogden, 2005).

In this way, the concept of the analytic third, which seemed marginalized by relational psychoanalysis, can be rehabilitated. The apex of the *trialogal* is the setting itself; it uses the dividing principle with a specifically evolutionary function, even if its functioning remains in the balance, and at risk of being lost due to the powerful symmetrizing forces present in any analytic and non-analytic relationship. It is easier to lose sight of the setting expressed as an internal device rather than in its formal dimension which is constantly at risk of fetishization (Civitarese, 2011).

This involves the original and very fitting metaphor of the cognitive-emotional immersion of analysis in field theory: that of virtual reality. His proposal is interesting, because it deals with interactivity and the analytic field as a global entity, an entity that shows its own modes of operation that are irreducible to those of its components. It is the narrative of the relationship that immerses the protagonists of the analysis room in a consciousness of fiction that keeps the participants anchored to the evolution of the manifest text, without affecting the deeper levels of unconscious scenarios but re-interpreting them tangentially with unsaturated interpretations. All of this is unexpectedly similar to a virtual reality situation.

As Chantraine reminds us, every technological innovation provides us with a splendid metaphor for interpreting text discourse, as perhaps few other opportunities would do (Chantraine, 1999). Virtual reality is therefore a metaphor that captures the dynamism of the psychic field and informs us of the 'as if' nature of participation in the consulting room, due to the pervasive presence of transference.

## Holograms

> Combine what agrees and what disagrees,
> what is in harmony and what is in disagreement.
> Heraclitus
> Drawing Hands, Maurits Cornelis Escher, 1948

I would argue that the analytic field is organized as a hologram which is a space-time metaphor taken from virtual reality. A hologram or fractal indicates a principle of self-similarity that the co-constructed bipersonal-analytic system possesses. A feature present in a part of the system or hyperdense node is re-presented in the whole or hyper-expanded node. The general organisers of the field present at all diachronic levels, as in projective identification but also in more evolved processes such as condensation, displacement, transference, *etc*., and in intra and intersystemic communication, testify to an invariance that recurs at different levels of scale.

What we find, for example, in the institutional group, the context of the subject, such as splitting, projection, condensation and more or less primitive

defenses, reappears at the level of the subject as an individual intrasystemic reality. And *vice versa*, what is proposed in the individual reappears in the group. The phenomena that characterize the intimate nature of the field, as we have seen, are organized as a *fractal* or a hologram, that is, they are invariant by self-replication of unconscious phenomena.

Let us consider, for example, the splitting processes that take place in an institutional group; if these are not processed through the transformations of a working group, they recursively and diachronically recur on one or more designated subjects present in the same group, establishing similar forms of protection and organization of information.

This phenomenon may be identified only through a complex reading of the analytic field. Clinical understanding is subsequently required to isolate the single phenomena that oscillate between the whole and the parts.

Therefore, complexity informs us that what is proposed on the intrapsychic level is repeated on the interpsychic level and *vice versa*, beyond the specific characteristics of each level. As in fractal organizations, considering a 'part' potentially capable of resembling the 'whole' in scale, offers a more perspectival view of mental disorder and therapeutic action. In disengaging from the pathological fixity of the part, cascade-like, we can act on the whole.

This is a constructivist perspective, even if complex logic goes beyond the assumption of the unknowability of the real, leaving the problem of the relationship between knowledge and reality on hold, and listing it as an undecidable problem beyond any correspondentist theory or contrary to any radical constructivist claim.

Pribram argues that memory is organized as a hologram (Pribram, 1983), *i.e.*, as a computation and not as a data warehouse; this brings us back to the question of posteriority, all perceptual, mnestic, and cognitive organization and their extremely close interrelationships have a hologramatic and recursive nature. It follows that posteriority is an absolutely general feature of the mind, a way of elaborating the organization of the entire mental field, in its individual and group dimensions.

Furthermore, the validation of knowledge is legitimized by the comparison between elements within the system itself; it is self-referential and its nodes are the expression of its heuristic validity. Knowledge, therefore, remains historically determined and unfinished, '*but at the same time this means that it can be pursued*' (italics in the text) (Morin, 2011a).

This approach to knowledge has existed since we gave up the belief that, in nature, there is an absolute truth, rather there are only partial truths, through which knowledge evolves. Complexity is identified by the presence of 'uncertainty, regression of deterministic knowledge, insufficiency of logic. But complexity is also recognized through its positive traits: the common fabric in which the one and the multiple, the universal and the singular, order, disorder and organization bind together' (Morin, 2011b).

Within the analytic field, the two polarities of the complex are defined thus: 'The empirical pole is disorder, danger, tangles, inter-retro-actions in phenomena. The logical pole is retroactive causality, inevitable contradictions within logical systems, the complexity of identity' (Morin, 2011c).

The great challenge that complexity poses to psychoanalysis concerns the connection between the intrapsychic event and group phenomena. All this leads us to wonder, for example, how a local phenomenon can be recognized as symptomatic and characteristic of a global group phenomenon. Or whether autonomy and independence are antinomic in a system that contemplates the opposites.

Surprisingly, the psychoanalysis of the first Freudian theory emerges, thanks to paradoxical logic, from the rubble of positivism and informs our current way of understanding knowledge.

Classical theory and post-modern reorganisation are thus the opposites that make up the continuum of what is complex and cannot be excessively reduced for reasons of simplification.


## Virtual as real

Research will have to find ways to identify the hyperdense nodes, which give life to the global and the particular; they are not simply symptoms but include other functions of the mind such as defenses, complexes, affects, conflicts, memories.

There is no *epistème* in the Aristotelian sense; we will never reach the essence of the Ultimate Reality, O, but we will reach only interpretations of interpretations, some more useful for representing reality, others less so.

I believe that the recursive dynamic hologram is a more inclusive metaphor than that of the psychic space of Freudian topos.

As Boncinelli reminds us 'there is no rational activity that does not contain an affective component and there is no affective component that does not contain cognitive and even logical elements' (Boncinelli, 2010); studying the recursive dynamic hologram of the field means considering this congruence and this mutual identity.

It is essential that during analysis information nodes be sought through the sensitivity of the analyst's unconscious, informed by an indication of the holographic nature of the field. Applying the hologram to field analysis thus makes it possible to trigger transient turbulence phenomena which are manifestations of the creative non-linearity of the patient-analyst system.

Psychic health and its creativity are identified then with a wider repertoire of choices that cultivate the patient's ability to have new experiences (Albasi, 2009), unlike disease, which is identified with an excessive and relative fixity of the dynamic system that becomes linear and impoverished. Kubie also

believes that 'the measure of health is flexibility, being free to learn from experience, being free to change following changes in internal and external circumstances (...). The essence of disease is the freezing of behaviour in unchangeable and insatiable models' (Kubie, 1975).

This freezing is, however, to be considered akin to homeostasis, which in a dynamic system is a tension towards equilibrium, an unstable equilibrium.

Therefore, the analytic process requires the maintenance of systemic homeoresis which amplifies fluctuations.

A brief clinical example may help us understand how this is real and what therapeutic changes can be generated with the hologram concept.

> We often wondered if what you were saying was absolutely crazy
> or unreasonably true ...
> (Anonymous)

Anna is a 50-year-old patient who has been in analysis for three years; one of her problems is of feeling inept, incapable of educating her children and be a good teacher.

This is evident in transference by a feeling of inferiority, which, under the supervision of an archaic super-ego, needs to be underlined and expiated. Anne does not want her qualities noted, which would result in feeling guilty for being thought of and thinking of herself as quite likeable. The presence of a cold and non-empathic mother justifies this situation in transference and creates a difficult precedent to process.

Transference and extra-transference interpretations are no use - Anna sees them as sadistic blows that leave her exhausted. Shortly after, Anna cries during a phone call in which she seeks yet more reassurance for her own scruples. 'I'm inept, all I do is ask for help, I'm worthless, I feel totally fragile and useless... I'm a fragile flower.'

The intervisional discussion shows that the group members experience feelings of unworthiness and insecurity; the patient's feeling has become contextual and unconsciously solicited in the institutional-group. Moreover, the group believes that its own position, covertly and unconsciously judgemental, through my analytic posture leads to an exacerbation of the patient's super-egoic episodes.

I understand, therefore, how Anna's thoughts are in turn recursively reinforced by the experiences of the institutional-field that condense the information into a knot that contains defenses, scripts confirmed by daily experience, unanswered questions for reassurance, self-condemnation, resistances, projective identifications and counter-identifications, but also experiences of awareness. This is how I intervene, with the group and subject hologram process in mind.

Later, during a session, thanks to what emerged from the group, I

comment on my previous interpretation of an excessively saturated dream. 'I think you feel yourself to be fragile, unworthy and insecure also because of the pressure you felt from my interpretation; in reality, you want me to know that you are like a flower. A fragile but beautiful and elegant flower has many qualities and can give life to fruit'.

This promotes a non-linear movement that shifts the analytic field system to another level. Anna cries and thanks me; pointing out to her what she can give, I focussed on an aspect that she could not observe in herself, being part of a resistance.

The intervention is an interpretation in the here and now; the flower is not Anna but it is *also* Anna and at the same time it is the institutional-field. The metaphor of the flower reveals the 'fractal' organization, the hologram on which the patient's hyperdense node is built.

My experience, subsequently reported to the group, involves an analyst-patient recursion towards the group which unblocks group-intervision by introducing non-linearity and creativity.

Turbulence asserts itself shattering the unmovable certainties of resistance, the patterns are questioned, cognitive-emotional scripts lose stability, the global institutional-field system shows cracks and is redefined according to new equilibrium.

According to the fixed point theorem, all transformations are expected to leave at least one point unchanged within a given space, which, in our case, is represented by the set of rules of the setting. This fixed point must be a single one so that the dynamic system may be free to evolve (Florita, 2011; Kauffman, 1993; De Robertis, 2005).

Thus, a non-linear leap is made, which, to continue to be generative requires the permanent maintenance of the pluriadic system 'under dissipative pressure', with the aim of fostering complexification (Siegel, 2001).

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