
Emotionally marked link and meaning¹

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ABSTRACT. – With the fading use of the economic-dynamic model, psychoanalysis failed to respond with a profound reformulation of the general theory and it preferred to promote psycho-evolutionary, psychodynamic and clinical generalizations to theory, renouncing a procedural theory which, in justifying clinical practice and the method, would promote psychoanalysis's research and development. Against the trend and in view of such a necessary general theory, the Author introduces the concept of emotionally marked link to indicate a fixed, stable and persistent bond in time between a somatic-value-based element and a symbolic-representative element which, by virtue of emotional markings, limits, directs or prescribes the possible actions of the subject. A crucial feature of the emotionally marked link is its continuous attractive activity, which according to a fixed and marked framework tends to model the elements of the flow of experienced life, which logically, analogically or metaphorically allow it to be traced back to the framework. Emotional marking triggers an anticipation of emotion and initiates the approach response, moving away or caution in any motivational field, placing itself as the elementary mechanism for the formation of motivations, and therefore, intentions. The concept of emotionally marked link also makes it possible to clarify the problem of meaning, by indicating the meaning bound to emotion, the only “meaning” that can be considered causative from the point of view of actual processes. The conjecture behind the definition of the concept of emotionally marked link is that which psychoanalysis has always understood as the “unconscious” and must and can be translated into the continuous, systematic, and generalized action of the hierarchical network of emotionally marked links. This network silently guides behaviour not through unfathomable mentalist intentions, but through the simple exercise of (relatively or radically) binding rules, which construct meanings, intentions and motives, according to a grammar and syntax, that instruct meanings and contexts driven by marked emotionally marked links rather than by causative intervention of a mental content or projection of an image exhumed from a distant, unverifiable past.

Key words: General theory, emotions, emotionally marked link, attractor, meaning.

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¹ The Author would like to point out that he believes there is no “adequate” translation from the Italian word “vincolo” (or “vinculo” in Spanish) and has therefore opted to translate this concept as “emotionally marked link” in English, as the word “link” alone is somewhat confusing.

In order to assess the current state of the art of so-called “relational” psychoanalysis, we must go back to forgotten circumstances that happened almost half a century ago. It was still a time when most analysts neglected the sinister creaking of theoretical construction and were deaf to the calls of scientific philosophers; they cultivated the quiet certainty that psychoanalysis had the status of a normal science. The Veil of Maya abruptly dissolved, discovering the unexpected and unforeseen reality: in order to function according to its energy processes, the Freudian adamantine “apparatus” foresaw a brain that was different from that of *Homo Sapiens*, which neuroscience was steadily revealing, day by day, always more intently and accurately. It was an upset. Emptiness. Then mourning. It took time to absorb the blow. It took even more time to resign itself to the need for a radical theoretical reformulation, which would enable a rich and profound heritage to be safeguarded. To those who, in those difficult circumstances, chose to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules of the analysis of the “observed object” and face the open sea of an unknown point of view, which placed at the centre of the theoretical and clinical investigation the relationship/action between two “observed and observant interacting subjects”, the glass of the contemporary psychoanalytic landscape, in Italy and beyond, may have appeared, if not completely empty, at least half empty.

At the time, the replacement of the formal object and of that point of view was not simple or obvious. To the difficulty and novelty of the problem and to the shock at the enormity of the work that was to come, there were added side obstacles that were not easily predictable. It was only slowly and painfully, for example, that we could realize that being brought up in the conceptual network of classical theory and using its constructive logic, “metapsychological thinking” continued automatically and on its own to model reconsideration attempts in accordance with its patterns and models. It is now easy to understand that it was the very idea of “psychic apparatus” that was the stumbling block, which projected improbable paths and illusory scenarios. Theories are a beautiful thing, but they are also strange animals with a life of their own and strange habits. We think that we think them up, but it is also true that theories ... think us up! There was an even subtler obstacle that was not at all easy to overcome. The Freudian model - (apart from the timid and in many ways compromised and confusing “object relationship”) - lacked a theoretical space in which to place the action/relationship between observed and observant subjects. Freud was unfamiliar with the concept of “subject” which, therefore, was completely absent from the toolbox. This radical aporia hindered turning to an organismic point of view, which was capable of justifying from the bottom the bio-physio-psychological unity of the subject, which was still thought to have to be guaranteed in psychological terms and, therefore, *from the top*, delegating to the psychological, and therefore to one side, a function that logically has to be attributed to the totality. There were

also, of course, more immediate and concrete difficulties. It was not easy to venture perilously and with contempt for diplomacy into unexplored virgin territory, driven by enthusiasm for the endeavour's nobility, but oppressed by the anguish of being able to respond to the sufferings of patients with the only resource being a falsified theory. Once in a while, some lifelines surfaced. Gill's essay on transference analysis took form in 1982 (Gill, 1982) and in 1984 his essay on psychoanalytic psychotherapy came to light, which courageously reviewed an array of metapsychological work in the previous 30 years (Gill, 1984). They were greeted with enthusiasm by those who timidly began to think in terms of interaction. Much later came his last book (Gill, 1994), which was almost like a will, although it did not dictate a precise theoretical design, it drew a line indicating a direction. Meanwhile, Greenberg and Mitchell's essay (1983) on object relations came to light. They, as is known, saw the history of psychoanalysis as a slow, tortuous attempt to overcome the pulsional model in order to achieve a relational model. A basic point of view, but in many ways encouraging. According to this interpretation, in the formulations of object relations theorists, a direct drive to broaden (and overcome) the hiatus between the pulsional and relational models is clearly visible, up until the end of the century until the decisive affirmation of the second of these models.

Tough and exciting times! Not very rewarding. Then suddenly, everything changed. It was only a decade or so later. They say it happened like for the Father of the Church Athanasius of Alexandria, who waking up in the morning and looking around, found himself in disbelief that suddenly the whole world had become Aryan heresy, and in short, the whole world seemed to become unpredictably "relational". "That's great!" You may think. It was, in fact, but not as good as it appeared on the surface. The tidal wave, impetuous and overwhelming, arrived thanks to the "arrival of our troops" with their American inter-subjectivism flags which, like everything that comes from there, is great, strong, rich, powerful, intrusive, bulky and large enough to occupy all the space in bookstores, magazines and the minds of experts. On the wave of those gusting winds, thinking "relationally" became less inconvenient and risky. In the face of the gaze and the indignation of the strict guardians of the doctrine, you continued to feel like an insignificant pariah, but at least for now, a polished pariah. It even became easier to find publishing spaces. Not everything that shone and sparkled was gold, however. Perhaps it seemed like the retaliation of poorly dressed peasants at the disdain of their lords, the first call of the longed-for revolution. It was this in part. Only in part though! Today, with the distance that time allows, it can be said that the new theoretical relational and intersubjective tendencies have done as Odysseus did when he blinded Polyphemus, he found himself a prisoner of the boulder, which obstructed the exit of the cave. The hero found the solution. Come morning, with his companions he tied himself to the underside of the Cyclop's sheep

and, protected by the wool of the animals, escaped the giant and returned to his ship. Even modern psychoanalysis was a prisoner of the naturalist cavern, unarmed with any instrument other than clinical-technical theory, and it abandoned the cave, using Polyphemus' sheep. Having blinded the eye of the pulsion towards naturalist theory, it clung to a number of concepts capable of conveying intersubjective perspectives. "Polyphemus' sheep" were transference, countertransference, projective identification, unconscious intent, unconscious fantasy, and enactment. In this way, analysts, like Odysseus, clung to the sheep of the Cyclops to escape the cavern in which Freud had been held captive. Odysseus, however, fooled the Cyclops, left the sheep and ran to the ship; contrastingly, inter-subjectivists found it convenient to hold onto the wool and did not leave the... sheep, who, as is their custom, return every evening to the sheep pen, bringing back the fugitives to the naturalist cave, which they naively believe to have escaped! These are the traps of theories! Traps in which the inertial tendency of psychoanalysis easily falls into by bypassing theoretical problems rather than grabbing them by the horns. After all there is repetitive inertia in the history of psychoanalysis².

1. The theory that does not exist

Ever since the times of the 'metapsychology crisis', which are long gone - a crisis which, in fact, was death - it was not so difficult to realize that the metapsychological sorceress, built on the principle of constancy, on the concept of psychic energy and on the rudimentary neurons of the end of the 19th century, proved to be obsolete, that it had the merit of initiating scientific clinical psychology, but could not support and promote its development. This awareness, which was certainly painful and difficult for those who had the destiny and development of psychoanalysis at heart, imposed a pressing, inevitable *hic Rhodus, hic salta* ["Here is Rhodes, jump here!"]: one had to bravely dip one's hand in a deep, radical reformulation of the formal theory, leaving to history the glorious energy-drive model. This necessity, which seemed logical and obvious, was never accepted by most of the psychoanalytic world, and indeed the very idea of general theory has gradually been eclipsed over the last three decades, in parallel with the silent, stealthy and

² Unfortunately, throughout the history of psychoanalysis, because of the centralized organization of the psychoanalytic movement, which since the Freudian "fellowship of the ring" has stood, with almost theological methods, in the defensive face of orthodoxy, theoretical problems have always found solutions in ostracisms, secessions or school differentiations, promoting, instead of effectively overcoming, assessments of merit and of content, organizational fragmentation and identification characterizations that have crystallized problems rather than solved them.

undeclared apophasis of drive theory. Not only has there not been a trace of a more solid and acceptable general theory, but there has never been a hint of the concern of setting up the construction site where it can be built. It is this embarrassing and, in many ways, short-sighted renunciation that makes the glass more than half empty.

Classical theory, in its energy-drive system, had a network of concepts (cathexis, anti-cathexis, fixation, condensation, displacement, removal, regression, isolation...) which were sufficiently neutral, hidden and far from the colourful, but singular and unrepeatably lived experience. They made it possible to look at and conjecture the processes, to explain and account for experience relatively independently of content³. On the other hand, as has already been mentioned, there was no modern concept of subject that was capable of varying the processes within a single framework and of safeguarding the organizational unit. This aporia, which had forced Freud to reintroduce the concept of Ego (originally expelled) and later, to draw the three Ego-Id-Superego macrostructures, rests on a more essential and underlying fracture. The original procedural theory ("metapsychology") was born in the womb of positivism (and indeed physicalism), at the very moment when the crisis of classical mechanics began to take shape, but because of its very object, it was a candidate to build itself as a science of subjectivity, it showed in its epistemological DNA, alongside the positivist and mechanic matrix imposed by history, the instances that pushed in the direction of overcoming the constructive and reductive naturalist form. These were expressed essentially in the perceived need to take due account of history, culture, the flow of events, and the role of subjective variables in the construction of meanings and, therefore, motivations and actions. This complex articulation, which was largely unexplained and inexplicable in that cultural context, can also be interpreted in the profound storyline of the numerous "crises" that characterized Freud, who was still living and later, the history of the emerging discipline (Freud/Jung, Ferenczi, Rank, Anna Freud/M. Klein, the story of American culturalism...) until the explosion manifested, between the late 1960s and 70s of the 20th century, as an unexpected result of Rapaport's courageous formalization attempt. Psychoanalysis did not know how to respond to the sudden disappearance of formal theory, courageously trying its hand in formulating a new general theory capable of merging the object instances of the original physicalist foundations with the subjective ones of the antithetical "psychological" needs via a new articulation of the relationship between biology and culture and between physiology and history⁴. In

³ With the exception of the link with sexuality, which was to ensure quantitative references.

⁴ It was not by chance that the Rapaport school contrasted Rubinstein's "neo-metapsychology" (1965, 1967, 1976) and Gill's (1976) and Klein's (1976) "psychology".

the name of a misunderstood fidelity to its founder⁵ it found no alternative to the fearful abandonment of the field of general theory except in the self-conservative clinging to the supposed safety of the method and the reassuring concreteness of the session, promoting to general theory the psycho-evolutionary, psychodynamic and clinical generalizations in a horizon fragmented by school divergences. The psychodynamic theorizations, following the “death of metapsychology,” due to the inevitable obsolescence of drive theory and, therefore, the explanatory energy framework of Freudian theory, had to leave to their fate the procedural concepts, which constituted their backbone and foundation, and found themselves:

1. no longer possessing concepts that were hierarchically quite low and neutral enough compared to the phenomenology of experiences;
2. maintaining however the clinical backbone of the traditional theory, by continuing to rely on concepts such as identification, projection, psychic reality, transference, and unconscious fantasy but which owed their procedural value to their dependence on energy-drive concepts;
3. finding itself prioritizing content, often exchanging it for processes, as is the case in a transparent way with abnormal concepts such as projective identification (Scano, 2016) or with the essentialist use of defense mechanisms and, more generally, with not even such a hidden entitative use of the unconscious.

The result of these inertial processes, which are at the very least not very courageous, is that today psychoanalysis risks being a clinical practice without a theory that justifies it and promotes and guides research and development. The psychoanalytic world relies, unfortunately, on a theoretical nebula inherited from a noble past, but that is composite, fragmented and disorganic, in that it is difficult to distinguish between beliefs justified by habit, more or less plausible generalizations and assumptions that are simply unjustified. The unconscious, transference, resistance and defense, pro-

⁵ Falsifying a theory is neither defeat nor failure, but merely acknowledging its erroneous assumptions (psychic energy), of its failure to account for new data that became available – one only has to think of the difference, which had already become apparent in the 1960s, between the “analytical child” and the “real” one! - or of the exhaustion of its heuristic potential. A theory is a net for catching “fish-truths” (Popper), but especially in the early and formative stages of a scientific discipline, it easily reaches a point where it can only catch by-products of itself. It is time to hand it over to history and to work to produce a new one, one that explains the old data while agreeing with new. From this point of view, the “death” of a theory is as important and creative as its construction. Theories are not dogmas. They do not assert “truth.” They are instruments for conjecturally understanding something that is not known and not immediately knowable. Unlike theologues, they are based on ignorance, not truth, and, in the process of understanding, they are born to die. The glorious end of a good theory is to die giving birth to a new, more powerful theory. Freudian theory has been forbidden from having this glorious end.

moted to general theory by decree and popular will (Wallerstein, 1988, 1990) have roots, trunk and branches in the now unproductive flesh and blood of the noble Freudian sorceress who, unfortunately, has been resting in a tomb for 40 years.

2. The concept of emotionally marked link

There is no lack of data or knowledge to formulate neutral procedural concepts without compromising them with metapsychology. In a relatively recent book (Scano, 2015), that summarized the 20 years of research of the Theoretical-Clinical Laboratory that I conducted until 2013, I analysed the state of the art of theory after the collapse of metapsychology and explored a conceptual territory in which a general theory can be constructed. This text is not intended to propose a packaged theory, but it tried to explain unconscious intent without resorting to traditional dynamic-economic explanatory models, by avoiding and overcoming, above all, the slippery concepts of “unconscious fantasy” and “psychic reality”. The analysis of these concepts, which are the foundation for both the concept of transference and the faded, but certainly not abandoned, concept of defense, can easily highlight, on the one hand, their substantial dependence on economic-dynamic substratum, and, on the other, their not so hidden, reliance on problematic psychological mentalism. Such a reference and such a dependence seem to make the presumption of the proclaimed autonomy of clinical theory highly doubtful and voluntarist and rather suggest the need and urgency for a reformulation of general theory, which would overcome both the obstacle of neuro-physiological reductionism and the no less dangerous psychological mentalism, which unconscious fantasy necessarily seems to implicate. In this work, on the basis not only of epistemological perspectives that are very different from the naturalistic point of view, but above all on the basis of the acquisitions of nature and the role of emotions, enormously enriched and laid out in recent decades, I explored the territory of a possible new theory, that would need new and flexible concepts to be used as “bricks”, far from experienced life and independent of content, in the reconstruction of the genesis of every subjective self-organization, that is rooted both in the physical nature of the organism and in the indispensable cultural, interactive and relational scene from which it emerges and in which every “Ego” develops. In that context, not only was it an opportunity, but a need and urgency to “... describe the notion of emotionally marked link and describe the various levels of links, formulating controllable predictions about the processes which underlie their formation, maintenance and change”, (Scano, 2015, p. 295). I have since devoted myself to this and the related problem of meaning in an attempt to define, conceptualize and specify the concept of emotionally marked link.

The term “link” translated as “vincolo” in Italian, which originates from the Latin “vinculum” (vincire = to link) denotes what binds or serves to bind something or someone. It therefore indicates a link, bond, and by extension, bonding condition or bonded condition. In its semantic horizon, two focal loci of significance can be distinguished: the first indicates the very action of binding and, therefore, the stopping, fixing, chaining, immobilizing of someone or something with some kind of impediment or connection. The second refers rather to the consequences of the bond for the something or someone that was linked and is, therefore, an impediment, a limit, a blockade, some kind of constraint. Figuratively, emotionally marked link extends to affective, moral, and social ties, which set limits, prescriptions, and expectations about the subject’s action, but also duties and rights for those linked by the bond. In a more figurative and broad sense “emotionally marked link” implies an element of constraint up to dependence or moral slavery. In law, it refers to the limits to which a person is subject to as the holder of a situation, state or possession and which are reflected in a subjective right of another person or even the simple limitation of the right to property. In town planning and architecture, it concerns provisions, which regulate and restrict the freedom of action with regard to interventions on property of historical and artistic or landscape interest. In mechanics, it denotes any limitation to the freedom of movement of a body; common examples are: the plane on which a body rests which blocks its downward fall, a non-extendable wire that prevents a body from moving away from its suspension point, the cylindrical hinges around which a door is forced to rotate, thereby securing its axis of rotation. Each emotionally marked link exerts on the restrained body a force, called a support reaction, which impedes its displacement and is directed in the opposite direction to that in which it is prevented from moving.

The concept of “emotionally marked link” is completely foreign to the traditional psychoanalytic dictionary, although the term, in its linguistic variants (vincolo, lien/liaison, bindung, vincolo), has always been widely used in its current meaning. However, it has not been operationally defined and conceptualized except by authors who acted and act predominantly within group, family and couple contexts and, therefore, from the emotionally marked link intended as a bond between two interacting entities. In this sense, it was Pichon-Rivière who introduced it as early as the 1950s with a large following: “*The analytic investigation of that internal world led me to broaden the concept of “object relationship,” formulating the notion of vinculo, which I define as a complex structure, which includes a subject, an object, their mutual interrelationship, with processes of communication and learning.*”⁶ Then, because of the connections that the emotionally marked link understood in

⁶ Pichon-Rivière E. (1985), *Il processo grupale*, Lauretana, Loreto, p. 25.

this way necessarily weaves into debated topics within the wider psychoanalytic horizon, such as the object relationship, analytical relationship, transference, counter-transference, interaction, intersubjectivity, the concept has taken up no small space in the literature.⁷ In this attempt at formalization, however, the concept of emotionally marked link is viewed in a very different way and on a more abstract and basic level, which finds, if anything, a distant formal affiliation with the concepts of fixation and false connection of the oldest psychoanalysis and with the Rapaportian one of structure, especially in the micro-structure sense.

Starting from an initial description or generic definition, the term “emotionally marked link” can be used to indicate a fixed, stable, persistent connection over time between a somatic-value-based element and a symbolic-representative element. Such a link, once established and fixed, by virtue of the emotional marking and therefore of a conscious or unconscious motivational “meaning”, limits and directs the range of possible actions of the subject but may also prescribe or inhibit a specific action of the subject. In order to clarify this generic definition and to envision a more precise description, we must analyse the two elements that bind in the emotionally marked link more accurately, correctly indicating and defining the two elements “somatic-value-based” and “symbolic-representative” that establish themselves firmly in the bond described.

1. “*Somatic-value-based element*” stands for an essentially bodily event that, because of its positive or negative hedonic value, acts as a qualifying marking capable, therefore, of moving a motivation and eliciting an action or inhibiting it. These are essentially sensations in the pleasure-pain dyad and primary emotions, from which, with development, we will specify secondary ones up to feelings. Such events with substantial body resonance play an essential role in the organismic regulation and the process of attributing meaning. As neuro-scientific research has shown in recent decades, emotion is, in fact, the driving force behind the process of attributing meaning and, indeed, the process by which the brain computes and determines the value of a stimulus (Le Doux, 2002). Using the qualitative and tonal keyboard of primary emotions and the pleasure-pain range, the brain deciphers from the body, the meaning of a pattern of brain activity, which overlaps during development and in the specification of secondary emotions and feelings, with the cultural and social paths of emotion, until it regulates the totality of the body’s mind in the complex network of scenes, situations and stories. Thanks to this hedonic-value-based marking, what happens in the body works as news for the brain, which will classify situations as danger-

⁷ On this use and debate see Fischetti R., *Il concetto di vincolo nella psicoanalisi operativa*, (2013), in Cavicchioli G., (edited by), *Io-Tu-Noi*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.

ous, alluring, or neutral. The brain has evolved, by studying and building the world through its own modifications, and from this point of view, emotions and feelings are an essential part of cognition, operating as a basic system of regulation. In this view, together with pleasure/pain, the “primary” emotions (anger, fear, sadness, joy, surprise, disgust) and subsequently secondary emotions or emotions derived from these (anxiety, shame, jealousy, envy, sympathy, dislike, trust, mistrust, remorse, guilt, resignation, offense, disappointment, contempt...) and feelings are the parameters by which the body ascribes meaning. Establishing how this meaning forms, describing its basic and typical configurations, and explaining how the rules that govern the constrained selection of inputs and responses are built should be the fundamental task of a clinical theory.

2. *Symbol/representation*. It is less simple to describe the second element involved in the nexus, indicated a little hurriedly as symbolic-representative, which is supposed to be firmly bound to the somatic-value-based element. Perhaps the most immediate, albeit generic, way to describe this is to use the simple term “remembrance,” understood not in the current sense, but in the narrowest and most precise event of experience that left a conscious or unconscious memory and can be reactivated by an “external” or “internal” stimulus. The reviving stimulus can be perceptual, (an object, its graphical photographic or imaginary image, an odour, a colour, a word, a phrase that is heard or read, the timbre or the tone of a voice...). It can also be symbolic, (the perceived symbol of something, which was previously experienced), dreamlike (and thus a dream, the memory or the retelling of a dream), thought or imagined. It can be as simple and straightforward as in all previous cases or complex and articulated as a scene, a situation, an environment, a task, a duty, an order, an expectation or a prediction. It may be something that is happening here and now, something that will happen, something that may happen, something that will certainly happen, something that I fear may happen. In any case it is an event which intervenes in the flow of experiences and which, directly or indirectly, has or can find an antecedent (real, analogical or metaphoric) in the emotionally marked experienced history.

Each of these events, which intervene in the flow of experiences, can have, and generally have their own value-based quality, positive or negative, in a variable scale that is not generalizable in absolute terms: a pin prick is painful in itself, and it will be painful for everyone, but we will all have a different threshold and scale of assessment of that pain. After all positive patterns must be given more relativity than painful and negative patterns. The taste of a fruit or food or hot and cold are more likely to have subjective aspects in the level and value of pleasantness or unpleasantness. Beyond the value-based quality in itself, however, each event is part of a story, in which previous experiences contribute to determining the value-based quality that we will attribute.

To frame the meaning of the emotionally marked link, you need to take a historical-evolutionary perspective to consider a relatively fixed basic tonal keyboard, that is however susceptible to significant individual differences – think of the differences between two babies that have a steep or gradual glucose curve – and a sequence of events that may or may not happen. In this sequence, however, we will also have to consider another essential element which will need to be discussed at length later. Every human organism, every new-born of the Homo species, is born and can only survive in a relational context, whereby the sequence of events always takes place in an intersubjective context and also the calibration of the keyboard and, therefore, the attribution of value will take place in an intersubjective and cultural context.

Within the framework of such a delimited space, the notion of emotionally marked link can be described more precisely. The emotion system, moment by moment, based on the scanning of objects, events and relational configurations and based on feedback from the action patterns (inbound and outbound), ascribes meaning, based on its coded encyclopaedia, both to incoming perceptual patterns and the results of the action, the outgoing ones. This processing in evaluation-prediction sequences, due to a marked bodily significance, can only be described reductively as unconscious. In fact, it constitutes, our organismic and procedural mechanism for guiding the construction of the world and of the me in the world and the matrix from which actual intentions emerge both those that are knowingly spoken or speakable, and those that are unspoken or unspeakable, that silently innervate behaviour and actions.

Emotional marking triggers an anticipation of emotion, - (or maybe an *as-if emotion*, but that has to be verified experimentally), - and in this way initiates either the approachment response, the moving away from or practicing caution in any motivational field, making itself the elementary mechanism for the formation of motivations and, therefore, intentions. Such a system extends the usability of the biological mechanisms of emotion, from the original scope of survival to the human, cultural, social, and relational environment. The crucial point in the structure of the concept of an emotionally marked link is that the experience of emotions, pain and pleasure leads to the construction of somatically marked early emotion-action frameworks, which have un verbalized, non-verbalizable scene-narrative structures and tend to fixate as silent attractors. This is, therefore, more precisely what we mean by “emotionally marked link”: a fixed anticipatory pattern of emotion-action, which by virtue of emotional marking, limits the range of possible actions and indeed, often prescribes a response or inhibits it. Such patterns have a profound effect on the sentiment of the me and tend to shape, through the force of emotional prediction, ranges of limited possibility in the organization of the experience and the subject’s intentional, relational and behavioural competence. In this sense, what we are accustomed to thinking as Subject X’s personality profile, as her

character structure or as her internal organization, could be considered the result and the fruit of a complex and multifaceted hierarchical network of emotionally marked links and different link networks. From this point of view, for example, defense could be understood as one aspect of the functioning of this general regulatory mechanism, which operates largely regardless of awareness, ultimately consisting of progressive structuring, based on experience (real, fantasized or transferred), of specific perception-emotion-prediction-action frameworks in relation to subjects, objects, situations and relational configurations. An emotionally marked link, ultimately, is precisely a stable pattern between perception, emotion, and action.

In a general and wider sense, the concept of an emotionally marked link may indicate any marking of a positive or negative pattern in view of the role of the marked connection in initiating an approach, departure or caution response. However, not all markings are strictly binding, especially not in the case of positive hedonic markings. The question is, therefore, whether it would not be more appropriate to reserve the term to indicate, even in the more general context described, not just a negative or positive hedonic assessment, but a much stronger connection between a stimulus (external and/or internal), an emotional marking and a prescription or prohibition of action to form a firmly or relatively fixed and sometimes even cohesive repetitive pattern. From this point of view, the constant scanning of objects, events and relational configurations, and the marking of feedback from action patterns, could account for X's overall landscape of actions, her preferences, attitudes and habits in the range of her choices, the situations she experiences as pleasant and those she sees as unpleasant and possibly to avoid. More strictly speaking, X's links would actually be real prohibited senses or one-way senses that are also characterized by a higher or lower level of co-action, that limit action beyond the varied range of her preferences, in which she maintains relative freedom of choice or control.

3. The emotionally marked link as an attractor

The concept of an emotionally marked link is not, in itself and for itself, a descriptive concept, in the sense that it does not refer exclusively and necessarily to phenomenologically appreciable links that can be easily identified in the explicit, implicit or deducible narrative of a subject. Of course, even in the initial self-presentation of a patient candidate, it may be possible to identify and isolate one or more emotionally marked links, which are imposed on observation because of their phenomenic value. An immediately obvious emotionally marked link may, for example, be a well-defined symptom that occurs in one or more classes of situations in a repetitive and automatic manner. In one case, which was studied systematically for more than three years,

the emotionally marked link was an outbreak of unbridled anger that appeared in four types of situations that could be identified, analysed and described. In most cases, similar emotionally marked links can be found in many symptomatic behaviours, repetitive idiosyncratic behaviours (of which the patient may or may not be aware), assertive behaviours (sometimes fully aware, sometimes less), *personal theory of mind* or be related the *theory of other minds*, as in the case of symptomatic pictures characterized by explicitly avoidant behaviours or widespread inhibitions. These more superficial emotionally marked links, which have a more obvious descriptive value, are actually to be considered the emerging tip of a chain of underlying emotionally marked links and, as such, are also a door and Ariadne thread that analysis could use to identify deeper layers of that network.

However, it must be clearly stated that, despite this sometimes-tangible phenomenonic observability, there are no links such as “things” in the “head” of the analysand in the same way as there are no removals, projections or transference. “Emotionally marked link” (like removal or transfer, even if it is often forgotten!) is a concept and it “stays”, therefore, in the observer’s theory, not in the observer’s “head”. Like any concept, it can have phenomenonic referents, but its task is not to describe a phenomenon, but to account for and explain the effects and results of processes that are not directly observable, which take place, so to speak, in the belly of the subject.

Once established that emotionally marked link does not refer to a phenomenon in itself but is a concept belonging to the observer’s arsenal and that a superficial link is to be considered as the emerging tip of a hierarchical and underlying network of links, you need to consider how this linked organization translates into experience and behaviour. One might think that the organized network of emotionally marked links functions, in fact, like a satellite navigation system, which, based on the information contained in its database, tells you in every instance whether you have to go straight, right or left, or which exit you have to take at a roundabout. The database of the satellite navigation system is fully explicit, written in digital language in the memory of the device and can be changed as the territory changes, for example, when a one-way street is introduced, or a new road is opened. The network of emotionally marked links of the analysand, on the other hand, does not have a known database nor, in its deep layers, is it knowable and can be changed by simply directly modifying information (for example, via an interpretation as we are traditionally used to thinking). Its database is the result of the flow of events and experiences that, as they happened over time, established the links between perception, emotional assessment, action and/or inhibition, waiting, approach and escape. The superficial part of the database is that of the directly observable emotionally marked links and those that are susceptible to being described, but which are, as has been said, the emerging tip of the network, determined by the lower strata of emotionally marked links that are much

more difficult to identify and describe. In general, however, the single emotionally marked link and the network of emotionally marked links work automatically and mostly unconsciously for the observing Ego so that a subject may choose to “go right” without even realizing that his/her “mental navigator” has forced him/her to go right (the alternative, in fact, can simply not be perceived, or simply “does not exist”!); or he/she can only realize afterwards - and this is usually what happens in therapy - that in situation x he/she went “right” and maybe in all situations x can’t not go “right” and, in this case, he/she will probably give any justifying explanation for this.

In the case referred to above, the linked behaviour was easily observable and the subject simply considered it a negative and unpleasant aspect of his/her character, faced with much more general problems affecting self-esteem, relational and affective areas, and a suspected underlying depression. The overall result of this linked network was “life at a minimum,” persistent dissatisfaction, and a subjective and objective self-realization that was completely inadequate in terms of possibilities. These more general symptoms were certainly not related to a single emotionally marked link, but rather seemed to be the result of the overall system of its networks of emotionally marked links, which constituted a kind of global characteristic (both relating to behaviour and character), resulting not from individual directions imposed by its “navigator”, but rather, it was to be seen as the overall result of many turns, at many levels and at many different junctions.

The kind of theories we’re used to leads us to think of these complex problems - (but also any action of a subject, which appears unreasonable, not egosyntonic, or simply strange) - as the result of an “unconscious intention” explained in terms of classical theory, the object relationship, or generally in the terms of a pervasive “unconscious”, which directs choices in a way that is not aware but intentionally sought. These theories sway dangerously between reductionism and mentalism. The conjecture behind the definition of the concept of emotionally marked link is that which psychoanalysis has always understood as the “unconscious” and must and can be translated into the continuous, systematic, and generalized action of the hierarchical network of emotionally marked links. This network silently guides behaviour not through unfathomable mentalist intentions, but through the simple exercise of linking rules, which construct meanings, intentions and motives, according to a grammar and syntax based on emotional regulation (Scano, 2015, p.262-269) and the exercising of linking rules (relatively or radically), that construct meanings and contexts rather than by causative intervention of a mental content or the projection of an image exhumed from a distant, unverifiable past. In this context, an intriguing question is whether the analysis of superficial emotionally marked links (in search of the underlying networks) can also serve as a fossil-guide to illuminate the processes that then determine the true deeper and underground “symptoms” of the analysand.

A emotionally marked link is ultimately learning strongly marked by an emotional experience, which limits the range of possible actions or can prescribe action in a direct or even forced manner. That is, it is a learning within the subject's relationship with his/her environment based on the responses that the emotional syntax of the environment (in the essentially maternal and parental childhood) has on the basic emotional keyboard (primary emotions) and later on the subject's derived emotions. This learning draws the intersubjective space of the subject and the range of his/her possible actions with regard to the environment. It is not, of course, a single learning, but rather strongly marked groups of iconic/representative/ideational elements, which necessarily structure themselves hierarchically in the sense that the lowest emotionally marked links, by narrowing the range of choices or prescribing a choice, determine, with the limitation of possible actions, the higher ones. This means that any superficial link could or should be understood and explained as determined by the network of lower links, in the sense that it becomes, in a way, a "consequence of". It is likely that the really low emotionally marked links are completely inaccessible to both the subject and the therapist. The accessible ones are those that have somehow entered into the narratives of the subject in *the then* or *now*.

This hierarchical structure of the networks of emotionally marked links can explain in a vertical sense - from bottom to top, from general to detail, from then to now - the behaviour of a subject, but an additional essential feature of the emotionally marked link can also explain it in a lateral sense, so to speak.

The most general feature of the emotionally marked link is in fact its function as *an attractor*. Put as simply as possible, a emotionally marked link is ultimately a stable pattern between ideational-representative content, an emotion, and an action. As a stable emotionally marked link, it is fixed, but this fixedness is to be read in terms of a continuous attractive activity, which tends to model the elements of the flow of the experience according to a fixed and marked pattern, which in some way let themselves be traced back to the pattern or understood in the pattern. If a smiling and happy child approaches a medium-sized black dog, and perhaps this dog sees or hears another dog approaching behind the child, and suddenly barks menacingly, this can trigger a strong fear reaction in the child, which, we assume, marks the "black dog" image. The black dog/fear link can then spread to non-black and large dogs and then to all dogs also to the lady's poodle next door and maybe to cats that still have four legs, a mouth and teeth. In this sense the emotionally marked link is stable, but it floats or flows on a liquid surface or in a fluid territory.

This attractive attitude is exercised in the simplest and most immediate way on the perceptual/representational side via a process of simple transfer from a perception A to a perception B by logic (for example by a similarity in some relevant element), by analogy (for example, for an equivalence in ways of functioning, such as a photocell and a switch that are "similar" because both

light up a lamp) or by metaphor (a metaphORIZER for a distressing metaphORIZATION A, can in turn be metaphORIZED for another metaphORIZER B, which can thus become a metaphORIZER of A). A child who had an angry and heavily punitive father could establish a link between an emotional experience of paralyzing fear/terror and the image of the father. Such an image could have perceptual aspects such as being tall and large, having thick eyebrows, a baritone voice, large hands... the “paralyzing fear/terror” marking (and, therefore, the expectation of) could be logically transferred to a non-father individual who was tall and large, had thick eyebrows, large hands etc. However, this could be transferred by analogy to a teacher or any “authority figure”, which somehow “is above” and metaphorically to any element capable of metaphORIZING, because for example it is experienced as “above” or “big” (like a big animal or perhaps a ... lorry!), and it may induce a “paralyzing fear/terror”!

However, the marked connection of the emotionally marked link can also be transferred in another two ways. First, the link between emotion/anticipation/action could be transferred as an “everything”, as a sort of pre-packaged module like a hammer or a screwdriver that is always ready and suitable for use. The subject, for example, may have experienced an advantage of the emotional disorder/anger/explosion of rage connection and uses it in different situations that are not necessarily related from an ideative content point of view, for example, in a discussion during a philosophy class, in a football diatribe at the bar, in a political fight over dinner with friends. In this case, the emotionally marked link would work just like an exportable format in a variety of contexts. The marking could be predominantly exercised this time by the emotional assessment of the output action (and not the input stimulus), for example, by experiencing the rage outburst as a solving element of the growing experience of emotional pressure or as a sort of evacuation, which restores a peaceful “normality”. In this case the emotionally marked link would be more specifically the effect of the marking of the result.

A further way of exercising the function of attractor is that the emotionally marked link can also obtain it from the marked emotional experience. In one case I supervised, the subject described the emotional-bodily element of the emotionally marked link as anguish, closure, despair, frequently experienced in the house in which he lived as a child. It is not a discrete emotion, but a global emotional configuration, as it were, amoeboid, that could “encompass” emotional experiences that were also quite differentiated and otherwise motivated. A particularly heightened anxiety about a feared event could lead to an experience in some respects resembling closure, anguish, and impotence caused by not knowing how to overcome the problem, trigger an experience similar to despair, and, therefore, the emotionally marked link and action.

A further element on which the attractive function of the emotionally marked link rests is a more general feature of the mind. We try to comprehend and master the unknown by starting from what we know: with regard

to an object, an image, a new problem we tend to trace it back to what we already know and experience. It is a general feature of the mind and, indeed, also of science.

It is not at present possible to determine whether the fluidity resulting from the attractive function described in this way is sufficient to explain the construction of the networks simply because of the three different modes of attraction corresponding to the three types of transfer mechanisms referred to as logical, analogical or metaphoric routes. It may be possible to also think that the three types of transfers characterize different classes of links, or that different types of emotionally marked links have to be hypothesized on the basis of different criteria, but that they can each use the three different transfer mechanisms.

These conjectures on the emotionally marked link are intended to explain the behaviours that psychoanalysis traditionally includes in the class “unconscious intent.” Alongside this unconscious one, however, and in a more evident manner, there is a conscious and realistic intention. A subject can, beyond his or her linked behaviours, safely shop, go to school if he or she is a teacher, prepare lessons, plan a trip or day off, rationally follow the route to get to a friend’s house or to the delicatessen where he/she buys ham. These choices would appear to be governed, therefore, by different rules and freer rules than those governing linked behaviour. Here, too, there are repetitive patterns, which we refer to as “habits”. Habits may also be more or less appropriate, but generally, due to their possible dysfunction, the use of the adjective “unrealistic” seems exaggerated. Perhaps, however, we are being driven too far to widen the gap between the two areas of intention, and it is probably more appropriate to think of a continuum, where the net difference is between the two end points while the intermediate points are more reasonably to be understood as characterized by a mixture of adequacy/inadequacy and realism/unrealism depending on the relative distance from the two ends.

Indeed, the two areas of behaviour do not seem to be as irretrievably opposed as the opposition between the primary and secondary processes would seem to demand, but in that case, too, they were mostly mixtures or compromises between the two types of process. In fact, all our intentions and actions are driven by “*how tos*.” The ‘*how tos*’ of our most realistic and reasonable actions are taught by explicit or explainable knowledge, convictions and theories, based on experience, skills and, sometimes, even scientific theories or knowledge. Those that regulate the broadest part of our subjective and intersubjective behaviour instead rely on “*how tos*” built on the assessment of our successes and failures and experiences of well-being, fear, pain and anguish, often implicit or even inexplicable. The modulation of action in the two territories, and therefore also of realistic intention, seems, however, to be dependent on the same control system and therefore on the emotional system. There are good reasons to believe that even realistic and planning behav-

our is governed by the same system of rules that governs the emotionally marked links responsible for unaware intent. Establishing how the two domains connect is essential, but at the moment it is complicated and premature. But perhaps we can generally assume:

1. that realistic and appropriate planning action is freer from emotionally marked links in the strict sense, the more it is unlinked to connections and relationships with people, the more directly targeted to instrumental targets and objectives, and the more closely related it is to the mechanisms of unconscious intent, the more related it is to the relationship;
2. that the possible cannibalization of realistic behaviour and planning by unrealistic behaviour is mainly and more directly due to derived emotions (modesty, shame, jealousy, envy, guilt, etc.) rather than to primary emotions;
3. that at a conscious level motivational strength is expressed, limiting the range of choice, via assertions and beliefs relating to (in terms borrowed from cognitivism) what we can refer to as *the theory of one's own mind and of another's mind*;
4. that successes, failures, setbacks, and limitations that inhibit action are an important channel for the regulation of positive or negative self-esteem.

4. Emotionally marked link and Meaning

The concept of emotionally marked link would not have been conceivable until the extraordinary acceleration of data and knowledge about the emotional system in recent decades and without the illuminating summaries of Le Doux (1996, 2002) and Damasio (1994, 1999, 2010)⁸. Its explanatory strength

⁸ This research tends to credit three assertions as a contrast to traditional concepts: 1) emotions are essentially bodily events; 2) they function as mostly unconscious processes of evaluation and attribution of meaning; 3) they are closely related to cognitive and motivational processes. The concept of emotionally marked link is directly based on this innovative concept of emotional regulation, which, however, is located in an overall landscape, which since the 1980s, has been progressively enriched, thanks to molecular biology and the development of cognitive neuroscience, especially in the field of memory and learning, to the point of allowing a much more flexible and verifiable view of unconscious processes than rigid metapsychological schematism. In this context it is at least necessary to recall Kandel's precise contributions to memory (procedural, declarative, associative), which also seem to be able to allow a balanced view of the relationship between nature first and nature second thanks to the changes that learning causes in gene expression (Kandel, 1999, 2001, 2007). In the field of learning, on the other hand, the distinction between "delayed conditioning" and "trace conditioning", which can transform implicit conditioning into explicit memory, and acquisition, known since the 1970s, of the ability of the conditional stimulus to "predict" the appearance of the significant unconditional stimulus, is of particular significance for the concept of emotionally marked link (Rescorla, 1988).

rests essentially on the organismic regulation of the emotional system, which the sum of these studies has described and justified. That is why it is not, perhaps, entirely out of place to point out that in the Freudian conceptual universe emotions - but Freud called them "affections" - represent, apart from anguish, the less understood, understandable and unexplored area of experience. This is a shortcoming - an innocent one given the lack of knowledge available at the time - but recognized and denounced by Rapaport (1953) in unsuspected times, which also played a no less important role in the construction of the economic and dynamic system itself. Freud, in fact, especially in the first three decades of his theoretical parable, "*con-fused*" affection with energy and conceived affect as a pure discharge process, which also made problematic the justification of "unconscious affect", for which clinical experience seemed to impose the necessity for, nevertheless.

The concept of emotionally marked link allows us to fulfil, by broadening it to all the emotional system and intent in general, the logical operation carried out by Freud in 1925 with the revision of the theory of anguish (Freud, 1925), which was finally recognized, through the notion of "signal", as a causative role in the activation of defense, where previously it was considered to be a simple effect and consequence of repression. In a broader perspective and free from the limits of the economic-dynamic model, the emotional system, via the construction of networks of emotionally marked links, can be seen to activate not only the defense, but the intention and action of the subject in general. Introduced and defined in order to solve the problem of "unconscious intent" in a way that is free from mental impairment, the concept seems to be able, thanks to the attractive function described above, to present itself as a flexible instrument capable of illuminating and explaining in a unified way also the traditional territories of defense, transference and resistance. This simplified power of explanation competes with the emotionally marked link, not only because of its role as an attractor, but also because it allows logical and consequential clarification of the problem of meaning. It allows the construction of meaning to be placed in a procedural horizon and to describe it in operational terms as a trigger that activates motivation, intent and action even in those contexts that psychoanalysis has always expressed in terms of conflict, defense, transference, and countertransference.

The issue of meaning, which we now have to deal with briefly, is in fact confused and confusing. Both in literature and in the concrete flow of a therapeutic interaction "meaning" stands for very heterogeneous things: the meaning of a symptom, of a behaviour, of a dream, of a memory, of a story, of an event, of a reflection, of a reconstruction, of a reprimand, of an experience, of an interaction, of an accident, of a failure, of a Freudian slip, of action, of a choice, of a lapse or even of a period of one's life. In this heterogeneous population it is easy to identify the constant presence of a lowest common denominator: in all these cases the meaning is understood, on the

one hand, as an explanatory motive and, on the other, as something that is there, that must be discovered and can be communicated.

It is not a sin to ask oneself or ask someone, about a dream, a symptom or a narrative: “what does it mean?”. We’re used to doing this not only in a therapeutic interaction, but also in everyday life when we try to explain to ourselves an unexpected, abnormal or surprising action of a subject. It is a habit which, from a general and superficial point of view, could also be considered useful and justified, but which, in the technical and strictly theoretical field, lends itself to perpetuating not only a confusing notion of meaning, but also, in an underlying surreptitious way, an uncomfortable legacy that comes inertially and directly from Freudian naturalistic objectualism. In fact, in the current general concept, the idea of meaning expressed in the clearest way by the archaeological model of work “by means of slowly chipping away at” continues to have a significant weight. The archaeologist at work at a site, (especially the type of archaeologist, referred to by Freud), uses the “chipping” technique to “discover” the artifacts that “are there”: walls, basements, columns, ruins, fragments of vessels, of statues and paintings and, perhaps, Priam’s treasure or the gold of the Atreides. In the hillsides of Hissarlik, of Tell-el-Amarna or Cholula there is nothing to suggest that, under the pebbles, shrubs or sand, the memories of Troy are hidden, or the city of Amenofis or of the immense pyramid of the Toltecs, just like in the tell of the symptom, there is nothing to suggest what has been repressed, but artifacts and repressed objects “stand there” waiting to be discovered. The meaning is preserved and enclosed in the matrix, which preserves and hides it. The archaeologist finds fragments and ruins that he/she will question, classify, connect, compose, and recompose as Freud will do with the thoughts of dreams and vestiges of the repressed that really lie there, defined and determined. The archaeologist and Freud must both study what to look for and where to look, distinguish a hill from a tell, know the type of artifacts, know how to recover fragments, how to dig, clean and recompose them to their pre-existing form, but the fundamental point in the Freudian view of “meaning” is that meaning exists and persists, unchanged and immutable and, therefore, can be understood. The emphasis does not fall on meaning, but on the rules of identification, understanding and translation. This concept defines the ground in which both the *Deutung*, the interpretation, and the *Bedeutung*, the meaning, germinate. In this perspective, the “unconscious meaning” is to be understood and is understood as the causative meaning of action, behaviour and symptom, which, although apparently illogical, unrealistic and irrational, regain intelligibility and rationality when connected to their unconscious motives. This concept of meaning is based not only on the overall view of the structure of the psychic apparatus and its topical, dynamic and economic functioning, but also on the naturalist and objectualism assumption, which presupposes, a world out

there “as is” regardless of the observer and the interaction between the observer and the observed.

The short space of this article does not allow for a precise epistemological analysis of the world of the meaning, the limits of this naturalist pre-assumption, and the complex issue of the relationship between the then and the now⁹. It should therefore be stressed that the fact that a narrative can show a finalistic and reasonable meaning of the action does not mean that it has been explained. It is reasonable and likely that the neck of the giraffe has grown enormously long to reach the leaves that are out of reach for almost all competitors, but that doesn't mean that its very long neck can be explained by the intention to win the battle for grazing over zebras and antelopes, nor, of course, that it can be referred to as an unconscious fantasy of the giraffe's mind, that motivated millennia of stretching exercises to lengthen its neck! What is true of the giraffe, though perhaps less conspicuously, is also true for John who, unwittingly falling off his bicycle, smashed his knee within a few days of his wedding, inducing, (in Joseph and his therapist), the belief that he has, unknowingly but intentionally, chosen to avoid the upcoming marriage.

Regardless of the likelihood of the conviction (of John and the therapist), by which this and similar emerging meanings can be formulated, it should be clear that a meaning also reasonably inferred by a narrative cannot be considered to be explanatory and causative of action. The concept of emotionally marked link allows for clarity on what is meant by “causative meaning” and allows for a precise line to be drawn in the issue of meaning between a *process plan* and a *narrative plan*.

The process plan is the effectively causative plan in which the value-based marked action is placed in, which by activating the constrained emotionally marked link, determines the meaning of the stimulus, perception or situation and prescribes, directs or precludes action, intention and choice. This meaning bound by activated emotion, is the only “meaning” that can be considered causative on a strictly theoretical level from the point of view of

⁹ Classical theory was based on the assumption of “psychic continuity”, which, when faced with the observational evidence of discontinuity of consciousness, became the true litmus test justifying the existence of unconscious psychic processes. On this assumption the psychic apparatus was built, whose first and general principle of operation was that any excitement passing through the apparatus in both progressive and regressive directions would leave an indelible and, therefore, at least in theory, recoverable trace. Logically, this approach also implies a fixed and determined conception of meaning, because the meaning of any element of life will be recorded as an indelible trace and must be established and defined on the basis of psychic continuity. Today, things have changed a lot, and we cannot expect to look for and find a “then” preserved, unchanged and immutable in some corner of the mind or brain. The “then” is not in a hidden shrine, but in the “now”, in the consequences it has determined and which act in the “now”. The “then” exists concretely in the constraints that it generated and that determine the “now”.

the actual processes, which should correspond to the analysis of the individual patient by the formulation of concrete (always conjectural) hypotheses relating to the actual emotionally marked links of that particular patient. The plan of narratives, in which certain meanings emerge, which reveal themselves and, generally, are built in interaction, responds to much less controllable rules of inference, which preclude any possibility of attributing to narrational meanings a certain causative nature, even when they were fully aware for the subject. Again, in fact, the causal meaning lies in the hierarchical network of underlying emotionally marked links, which procedurally determine the conscious tip of the iceberg.

The habit of considering meaning, even causative, as emerging from a narrative, (of a dream, event, failure, or period of one's life) hides another trap into which it is easy to automatically fall. The trap is to believe that the problem of meaning is essentially a linguistic problem, as in colloquial conversation we are referring to the meaning of a word, a phrase, a fantasy or a desire, by implying that the construction and intersubjective exchange of meanings is an area governed by language.

The concept of a bond, on the other hand, leads us to believe that meaning is built and exchanged in much more complex ground that is deeply rooted in the body, it grows and is challenged in interactions, it is linked to language. It is not linguistic in itself and has to do with the Ego, but essentially pursues the "me". In order to be able to talk about it and describe it in a more concrete way, it can actually be treated as a language, as a primordial bodily language, which, in its elementary traits, is known by every non-speaking infant as, presumably, it was known by our ancestors before the advent of language. Looking more closely, it can be seen that such language diverges at an essential point from all languages spoken by humans, in which the relationship between significance and meaning is completely extrinsic, arbitrary, and instrumental; in this language, on the other hand, the relationship between significance and meaning is not extrinsic or arbitrary, but determined by the body and, indeed, more precisely, by the changes in the body state, which we refer to as emotions. The connection, for example, between the meaning "pain" or "disgust", as a response to a painful or disgusting stimulus, is not arbitrary, but established by the body's biological rules, which shape a precise body response as a state of the body experienced in the past and anticipated by the recurrence of the stimulus. The link between signifier and significance in this emotional language is, therefore, essentially biological, and rests on the automatic attribution of an elementary bodily significance consisting of primary emotions, which according to rules set by evolution are the primary values of pleasure, pain, fear, anger and disgust. Meaning therefore goes beyond the language field, because its modulation and construction does not take place in discourse and is not, therefore, subject to language's own rules of construction; it is not delimited and constructed by language rules, but mod-

elled by a different set of rules, upon which, rather, the linguistic meaning is attached. This set of rules does not combine sounds or images in relation to a referent, symbolically represented by a language sign, but combines emotions and feelings with events and adjusts the combination of emotions and feelings with events, predictions and evaluations with the attribution of a weight and a marking to even relational patterns, which have self-organized throughout the history of every subject's interaction and configure themselves as emotionally marked links.

The system of emotions therefore stands as a kind of generative grammar, which allows identifying, building and exchanging – with itself and with others – of these kinds of meanings, teaching semantics and elementary pragmatics. A cry or a smile from a little child causes the activation of meaning in the mother, acting as a trigger for finalized actions. This grammar is also progressively specified in a syntax, which regulates and governs the correctness of actions and inter-individual exchanges in the same way that grammatical and syntactic rules regulate the correctness of sentences.

This basic, subjective, and intersubjective regulation system was built during evolution, developing from the oldest regulation systems, which in amphibians, reptiles, birds governed and govern intra-specific exchanges, as in mating and breeding procedures, and extra-specific as in predation and defense against predation. Especially in mammals and primates in particular, however, this grammar has increasingly developed and specified its syntax in the context of the regulation of interactions between conspecifics, as can also be seen from an occasional observation of a baboon clan in an African park. Even in the baboon clan, it is possible to observe most of the composite geography of scenes and typical situations that characterize human relations and which, with their configuration, also seem to determine the course and outcome of psychotherapy.

One could explain this unpredictable continuity if we assume that the grammar of emotions has specified its syntax in a sort of basic bio-sociology, reflecting the emotionally marked links and the possibilities of encounters/clashes between individuals of each species. This syntax began to be organized already in the clan of the primates, then in that of the hominids, gradually determining the figures, scenes, and obligatory passages of each existing together of every human group. This elementary bio-sociology pre-orders typical situations and repetitive and recursive modules, marking out the elementary scenarios of the narrative of interactions. In fact, it consists of all the essential occurrences of approach, proximity, contact, encounter, confrontation and distancing in relation to gender, age, roles and figures, which being together as a human group necessarily implies, specifying what is right or not right, correct or incorrect, for each individual in the clan, by virtue of gender, age, role and situation. These anthropological categories could be considered the essential scenarios of the narratives of every experience

together, which our ancestors: mammals, primates and hominids necessarily began to relay, even before *homo* learned to express using language.

The syntax, which governs the construction of the phrases of this emotional language, was built, in fact, from the elementary grammar of emotions, with the specification of rules, which govern the declination of emotional language in the context of the relationship between the individual and the other members of the species close to him/her. These rules coordinate the emotional and bodily significance of the subject with the corresponding emotional dynamics of other subjects in the context and exercise of relational scenes and scenarios, determined by the elementary structure of human sociality, preformed by the social biology of the species, but formatted in the overall culture, where the specific interactions of that subject take place. While the two systems of rules overlap, they act differently: the first system – let's say grammar – is body-marked and self-centred and determines links in the anticipation of meaning in terms of the weight and value of a stimulus or relational pattern, determined by direct and simple body marking; the second, however – let's call it syntax – takes form from comparing the weight and value attributed by one subject with that attributed by other subjects, with whom it is in contact and in which, therefore, the attribution of the body meaning must fit into accepted scenarios and scenes, in order to prevent that the phrase, that we build – the action we propose – be considered wrong by the other and punished with negative weight and value, which could contradict the simple direct emotional marking. One could say that, in the first system of rules, these are narratives, in which the subject, predicate and the complements concern the organism exclusively (on the basis of the primary emotions), while in the second, the organism's action is part of stories, in which the other is always present as the subject (active or passive), or as a complement in contexts governed essentially by derived emotions. The two systems, which are deeply overlapped, form the cornerstone of the me (*self-regulation*) in the regulation of the us (*interpersonal-regulation*).

5. Conclusion

Due to a more than a hundred-year-old habit, the psychoanalytic world fails to use the term unconscious as a simple adjective to designate to the conscious or unconscious quality of a psychological process or a given of experience. It does not resist the temptation (and shortcut) to use it instead as a noun, which inexorably refers to a preformed and structured entity. In doing so, it forgets, moreover, that Freud prohibited himself from using it as a noun (1915) without being able to obey this rule. By developing the concept of emotionally marked link and redefining the problem of meaning, we can try to build a tool that allows us to replace an “essential” concept of unconscious,

a strictly procedural vision that can express in terms of links, link connections and construction of meanings, intentions and actions that psychoanalysis has always understood in terms of conflict, defense, transference, countertransference. Russel (1921) noted a long time ago in his illuminating essay on the mind that, rather than saying “*I think*”, one should say: “*it is thought in me*”. Even with regard to the term unconscious one could come to think of it not as a noun, certainly as an adjective, but above all as a verb, an unheard of and impossible verb: to *unconsciate*, reflective and active, but impersonal as to rain or to snow. On the basis of what Russel says, should we not be able to say: “*it unconsciates in us*”?

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