

Resilience, resistance or presence? Comment on ‘Towards a socially inspired psychotherapy’ by Luigi D’Elia

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Introduction

In this article, D’Elia makes a proposal relating to the need for a reinterpretation and a more precise definition of social psychotherapy that I find interesting, and so too is his view on inviting psychotherapists to adopt a position with regard to the current affairs of this historical moment in time and the changes taking place. These current events and transformations affect the manifestations of human distress and suffering.

I agree with the social analysis and the manifestations of distress, which requires careful consideration on behalf of healthcare workers, but I wonder whether the proposal and therapeutic perspective can be only that which the author puts forward. I follow his arguments with great interest, the effort to go beyond the view of the individual subject and to place the subject in a family, social and cultural context of which he/she is a part of; an ‘ethical-social’ view supported by a careful and operational ‘political conscience’. I am convinced that it is not possible to operate in our specific field as psychotherapists without the knowledge that we are part of that field or, rather, that that field belongs to us as ‘we are that field’.

I welcome the historical-political and sociological analysis, but I am also thinking about the inevitable operational repercussions and the human vision that is inferred from this proposal. Perhaps because D’Elia and I use different criteria for interpreting the identified dimensions. If D’Elia proposes moving from clinical resilience to clinical resistance, I propose going beyond the Resilience/Resistance juxtaposition in order to access a clinical Welcoming or rather, Presence.

To sum up (I will return to the subject later), I do not think that the alter-

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native is between resilience and resistance, because I believe that the concepts are on the same level, as opposing polarities and paradoxically mutually affecting in their interaction.

I suppose that resilience, in the view of the author, would be the work of adaptation to reality, a compliance, a being supine and acting according to what culture dictates. While resistance could work to defend the dignity, freedom and truth of the contemporary subject.

In my framework however, in both cases, the hypothetical therapist would run the risk of inadvertently operating for the subjugation of the patient, since it would be assumed that one's well-being depends on something or someone else, effectively delegating the issue of one's freedom to an external element.

I hypothesize that the alternative is neither position, but the knowledge that we belong to this world, us and our patient, so that being aware of it, recognizing and accepting this world represents a possibility, with inevitable consequences for everyone. I do not necessarily have to fight it nor adapt to it, I can only take note of it and, consequently, have the freedom to decide and move from what belongs to me. A vision with inevitable consequences on living one's life, one's profession, one's staying and being in the world. A vision that opens up to a re-interpretation of human suffering, not abstract, not ahistorical but embodied in the world, in culture and in the context of life. For me, placing ourselves at this level of interpretation has an inevitable consequence for the profession and an impact on clinical practice. A clinical practice of man, of the whole and unitary subject, placed at the centre of his/her world; so, a clinical practice that does not reduce the irreducible human dimension, does not break it down into its components, and does not interpret parts in relation to an ideal vision of what the world, man, and his well-being should be like.

A vision of man and suffering

Let us go into more detail regarding this issue. However, in order to do so, it is necessary to make a small digression on our vision of man. To subsequently place him concretely in his world, in the culture and society of his time; therefore, as far as we are concerned, that is the hyper-modern culture of the 21st century.

It should be emphasized that every proposal, even theoretical, is the daughter of its time and the author's world view. Thus, bringing one's own world view from the implicit to the explicit level is the first step that I think one should take in order to place it and contextualize it for both those who propose it and their interlocutors. As is easy to understand, being placed in your own world allows you to avoid fomenting misunderstandings and mis-

interpretations, both in theoretical proposals and in the clinical practice that results from these.

To explain my vision, let me start from the research, the study and the proposal that Michele Minolli (2004; 2015) put forward in his latest writings; a different way of approaching human distress and suffering, not by proposing a new theory, but by trying to line up with a meta-theoretical vision, that tends to propose certain cornerstones for research, knowledge and clinical practice. A proposal that anchors the human subject within the world, like other living beings, and that at the same time welcomes its distinctiveness and its specific singularity that makes it unique.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, Minolli (2015) proposes defining living man as the 'I-subject', who has a common dimension with the living and shares its modalities and aims, and its specificity and peculiarity as belonging to mankind.

The first characteristic has to do with the motivation of the living being, who survives, feels, thinks and builds social and intimate bonds, thus tending to preserve and actualize oneself in the manner that is one's own, derived from one's belonging to the species. Minolli (2015) believes that the modalities of the living being are relevant to its constitution, which he defines as 'configuration', meaning to come into the world through 'the interweaving of a series of genetic and environmental variables', generally received from one's parents. Genetics, the environment and culture are three elements that structure the I-Subject, determining the boundaries of its possibilities and defining its scope of action.

Minolli (2015) defines the functioning of the living being as organized on the 'dual' and at the level of 'direct consciousness' through self-eco-organizational and self-eco-regulatory movements: movements that have the purpose of maintaining an internal balance in the face of life's disturbances. This proposal considers not only the development of research and clinical practice in the field of psychoanalysis, but also research and proposals in other areas of knowledge: from biology to physics, from epistemology to the paradigm of complexity.

The second dimension of the human species, which differentiates it from other living species and defines its specificity, is the possibility of the subject to understand itself in its own way of functioning, in its relationship with the world and in its own investments.

Such a proposal seems to me to be able to go beyond the 'normal-pathological', 'functional-dysfunctional', 'single-group' dichotomy, since it is believed that every living being is also its eco, its environment and its culture, and therefore its behaviour, even the one considered to be more extreme and dysfunctional in the eyes of the observer, it turns out to be organized within meaningful relationships and therefore functional to that single I-Subject, functional since it is the result of it being organized in a certain way within a certain world.

I start from this vision of the human being and try to approach it respecting its complexity and unity, both internally and in its relationship with the ecological system of which it is a part of. I therefore try to leave the vision that directs us to deal with the psychic sphere, and I place the human subject within the world of living beings. This is necessary to approach the living being in a new way and define its suffering and discomfort. This vision leads us to understand its coming into the world as a consequence of other people's decisions, decisions that define it from the very first moment. As with any living being, its organization depends on several factors: the decision of the parents, their genetic heritage, their location in a certain region of the world and at a certain historical moment in time, the culture of the moment, *etc.* All are transmitted through the family nucleus to which they belong.

Being placed in the world of living beings leads the living being to share the typical ways of life, and to define the motivation that fuels every action: the most suitable way to maintain one's organization in function of being and feeling alive. Therefore, the human being, as a living being, is active and actively pursues his/her realization, moment by moment, in a processuality from birth to death. Every solution found is always functional, as it is the result of the internal and external conditions present at that time. Therefore, seen from the view of the living subject, every action and modality is functional to life, given the internal and external conditions, both determined and affecting. It is from the interaction with these defined conditions that every living being organizes and implements his/her own existence.

Although the human being shares these modalities with every other living being, it separates itself from them by having the possibility of a 'return to oneself' through the 'consciousness of consciousness,' a return that leads to understanding what is organized and regulated at an implicit level by bringing a qualitatively different dimension to one's own existence. While the former ways 'force' the individual to follow solutions within the possible tracks traceable from their own configuration and operating at the level of direct consciousness, the access to the second moment 'of the return to oneself', of being able to accept what consciousness implicitly leads one to do, through the 'consciousness of consciousness' brings a new quality to the I-Subject that makes it capable of not having to submit to what has configured it or to the duties that have traversed its life.

Suffering

With this in mind, the approach to suffering will also be affected. Suffering, therefore, is no longer attributed to intrapsychic needs in the conflict between biological principles and cultural needs, not even as a result of particular types of links, considered pathological, but it is a suffering connect-

ed to the unfolding of the life of the individual I-Subject and the difficulty of actively concerning oneself with one's existence and recognizing oneself for what one is, as a result of one's own history and one's own life process.

The proposal anchors the subject to its own configuration and process, respecting what it is, in order to accompany it in recognizing oneself, a prerequisite for access to a different quality through active acceptance of one's own condition.

Taking care of the subject and its suffering does not lead to dealing with the unconscious or even with the links that are deemed dysfunctional. With a conceptual revolution I believe that bonds are the ways that the subject has found to implement itself, starting from the interweaving of the multiple variables that have constituted it: the genetic heritage passed down from its parents, the cultural, environmental and social dimensions of the place of belonging received from these same parents and, as such, I hypothesize that the bonds have a function for all the contractors and participants.

To consider suffering not dependent on internal needs, but also not related to the bonds and relationships of the subject, means restoring dignity to the subject and considering internal needs and bonds as an expression of what it is with its functional ways of living (Alfieri & Vincenti, 2022).

In agreement with Minolli (2015), I define this way of operating at a 'conscious level', that is, at the implicit level of functioning, consistent with its configuration. Instead, suffering is placed on another level, it is attributed to the difficulty of the subject to accept at what level of consciousness it must actualize; the difficulty of doing something about having grasped the limit of these ways of functioning. The limit is given by the implications of its investments and interactions with others.

Thus, accompanying the person to deal with his/her bonds means accompanying him/her in dealing with the implications of the investments expressed in the bonds. This task can occur in many ways, from individual relationships to couple relationships, from families to groups, or even in institutional and social groups. One can go further by arguing that, by not dealing with the pathology but with the individual subject in its story unity and singularity, the setting does not allow or hinder the therapeutic path, it only represents a condition to deal with the suffering of that singular subject, on condition that you want to accept the subject as it is and not as we think it should be. Not a device that teaches a more appropriate or functional way of being in the world as the therapist has in mind (as the subject of his or her own world); but a device that welcomes the subject with its own way of seeing the world and supports it in commandeering and accepting it.

It should also be pointed out that this attitude is a thousand miles away from the idea that the subject should accept and adapt to its personal and social condition. It is precisely the opposite, because acceptance is not considered to mean passive acceptance, but neither is it taking a stand against or opposing.

You are not fighting your own condition, but I think you can actively welcome it. As we will see later, it is precisely the active acceptance of one's condition that allows you to deal with suffering and give substance to your life.

As mentioned above, doing so in a bi-personal, couple, family or group dimension is only the choice of the therapist, believing that accompanying the individual to deal with their own suffering, distress and crisis can be implemented in any relational situation or context in which, by interacting with the other, he/she expresses himself/herself and thus his/her own modalities. Dealing with its own bonds allows the subject to position itself on the implications of its investments and on its own specific features. Of course, not all bonds are of equal importance, historical bonds like family and affectionately enriched ones like in a couple, or the ones that are created in groups with a long history have greater subjective implications and express more deeply what the subject is.

Therefore, in agreement with what D'Elia believes, we cannot place ourselves at the level of symptoms and psychopathology, we should approach the human being in his/her entirety and unity; but also in his/her continuous interaction and reciprocal effect with the other. Of this organization, starting from the 'choice' of the parents to bring them to life, the subject will bear signs throughout its existence.

It is from this configuration that it will face its own existence, interact with the world and with others. Then we can ask ourselves how social and cultural determinants affect the subject.

The 21st-century man

How has culture had an educational influence on our constitution and how does it continually affect the becoming of the subject? This is a question that we should ask ourselves and from here we should start to explain the function of the psychotherapist and define a psychotherapy of social value.

If that is the preliminary question, it follows that next one to ask should be even more substantial: Why does man suffer? As mentioned earlier, does his suffering have to do with the conceptual level of the mutually affecting interactions, his relationship with society, and therefore at the organizational level of the human subject? Does what Freud said in *'Il disagio della civiltà'* (1929) make sense today 'Has civilized man exchanged some part of his chances of happiness for a measure of security' or is it necessary to make an additional effort and make a further leap? A leap more relevant to current knowledge about the specificity of the human being and the relationship between the individual and society. A leap that tries to grasp the contemporary manifestations of the human, and thus of the culture and social forms of organization, as a macro-manifestation of the micro-process of the subject, in a mutually

affecting relationship between the individual and the social level. Hence, if society and culture are the macro-expression of the individual process, I do not think Freud's statement can be considered relevant; it could have been relevant then with the dichotomic individual/society lenses with which 19th-century man looked at the world.

If we go beyond this dichotomy, we can say that contemporary man implements his existence on the basis of the organizational principles of his being, the result of the intertwining of genetics, the environment and culture. What Freud, with the lenses of a 20th-century scientist, considered a barter between individual instances and social needs, we can interpret as the crisis/limit of functional organizational solutions that man at that time found, crises that present a macro-expression in different forms and cultural and social organizations.

Using this interpretation, I believe, places us at a different level compared to the resilience/resistance contrast, considered antagonistic but paradoxically mutually reinforcing modalities. The first concerns acting internally on the subject, on its adaptation to a given and untouchable outside, while the second, as a counterpart to the first, is acting on the outside, on the 'external' world. The attempt is to go beyond what is considered to be a mutually functional dichotomy, to propose a vision that grasps both of these as self-organizing modalities of the individual, a precondition for the quality and consistency of the subject.

Before we talk about this, let us try to place the subject in the current world, in the 21st century. To do this I rely on one of the major authors involved in the analysis of contemporary society: Lipovetsky (2004; 2017; 2022). I got to know him first through his writings and later by listening and talking with him in a seminar organized in Milan by the School of Psychotherapy SIPRe in March 2022. I welcomed with pleasure the interpretation that leads to the society and culture of post-modernity (hypermodernity for him) where hyper defines characteristics and manifestations. I find the critical historical analysis of the cultural and social process enlightening, particularly if we are to have a vision of man today. In particular, the concept of hyperindividualism that characterizes man is of enormous importance. In one of the passages Lipovetsky states:

'Abandoned to himself, without reference points, the individual finds himself stripped of the social patterns that structured him and endowed him with inner forces that allow him to face the hardships of existence' ... It is the extreme individualism of our societies that, having undermined the resistances of 'within', pushes toward the spiral of disorders and subjective upheavals [...]' (Lipovetsky, 2004, pg. 82)

Here Lipovetsky traces the characteristics of the 21st century individual, focusing on the solution that humanity adopted after the fall of standardiza-

tion operating at the beginning of the last century. This century was characterized by huge mass demonstrations and, unfortunately, by the emergence and actualization of nationalisms, of authoritarianism based on delegation. From the words of Lipovetsky emerges a trait of man without reference points, where the tradition and values that had organized previous societies failed to be fulfilled. What fathers and grandfathers had taken on and handed down have no value, so the 'hyperindividualist' man, having only himself as a reference point, is implemented through exasperated manifestations, the search for excess (work, success, rhythms, connections, substances, styles, *etc.*) with conformist repercussions, exasperating emptiness.

While one may agree with Lipovetsky's analysis, one should ask questions about the hypothesis that, in earlier societies, 'social patterns' were able to 'structure and endow human beings with inner forces so that they could face the hardships of existence'. At the very least, the level should be set, because we are analysing what happens in the implementation of the subject within his/her culture and the reference society. Those 'inner forces' that led the individual to pursue and implement his/her own existence by leaning on and conforming to social dictates, were the result of his/her self-eco-organizing modalities, so we can say that the result is a functionally active individual, who in fact, is subjected to his/her modalities which configure and delegate his/her well-being to the values of tradition.

In any case, grasping the characteristics of today's society is of fundamental importance in order to understand certain manifestations of the suffering of man today. As Lipovetsky (2017; 2022b) pointed out, society and culture are not static but have their own evolution and transformation. Today, this change is even more noticeable because a number of phenomena have implemented its course.

Understanding the characteristics means being able to position oneself in the changing world. If societies and culture are changeable then we need to consider the process, both the social and cultural process and, more relevant to us professionals, the subject's process. I would say not only to consider them, but also to understand how the two processes intersect and articulate.

To approach this point of view, I make use of the reflections of Michele Minolli again: 'The hypothesis that we put forward [...] is that the configuration of society and culture is the macro concretization of the procedural movement of the individual. [...] Let us assume that the subject in its procedural becoming affects and determines the culture and society in the configuration of that specific moment' (Minolli, 2015, pg. 25). I therefore believe that the individual is not separable from his/her context; he/she is the child of that culture and that society, and it could not be any other way. Today, in light of the epistemology of complexity, separating and opposing them would be a sacrilege. There is no good society, just as there is no bad society. There is only the processuality of the human being that is amplified in cultural and social macro-expressions.

If that were the case, we could return to the issue of the processuality of life and have no reluctance in stating that society affects the subject. Michele dared even more by stating that society, the environment, culture and genetics, contribute to '*a group of interconnected articulated variables*', that shape the individual. Variables that are supposed to be borrowed from one's parents and family. A configuration, therefore, that the subject carries with him/her throughout existence and that leads him/her to be and exist in the world during life.

This moment in the configuration of the subject and its entry into the world and into relationships with the cultural and social values of that time, I think is in line with what Lipovetsky (2022b) believes when he states: 'The right to be oneself, in hypermodern society has become a generative value-force of a profound redefinition of the relationship of individuals with themselves, with others and with large social institutions. Since the 70s, the ideal of individual authenticity has transformed into a powerful anthropological transformer, into an operator of radical change in the way people think and exist in the collective of individuals' (Lipovetsky, 2022b).

It is comprehensible that the emergence and affirmation of these principles have had profound implications for the subject. These principles informed the subject deep inside and presented it with the possibility of looking at itself without the support of the traditional values that used to support it, to which it had delegated, in previous societies, its becoming along lines that were already laid out.

In line with Minolli (2015), I hypothesize that it is precisely the individualistic exasperation, the need to 'be authentic', with the consequent fall of delegation and anchorage to institutions, models and values of tradition that made the subject feel it exists in accordance with those values, those myths and those institutions, and ended up pushing the human being to touching his/her own fragility first hand. Although this individualistic accentuation may be the consequence of the crisis of existence dominated by adherence to traditional values and arose from man's needs and necessity to free himself from oppression and the tangle in which man finds himself in modern societies. This exasperation, which we might say is reactive, ends up removing the values and institutional references of tradition, by removing the earth from under the subject's feet.

In an interesting analysis of the malaise of our time, a few years ago, Kaës (2013) spoke of a 'forgotten subject', although he poses a question mark on whether the subject has ever been fully attuned with society, culture and institutions.

This is something to think about. If being attuned proved to be a value, it would be a problem according to a non-dichotomic view of the individual/society. We would have a static ideal of society that reproduces itself, and if it were the macro-expression of the subject's process, then we

would have a subject that reproduces itself infinitely. As Lipovetsky (2022b) states, society is not static.

The forgetfulness, therefore, could be in the lenses with which we observe the phenomena, for example of our separating the individual from his/her own culture and society. Therefore, I am inclined to think that the subject is often potentially forgotten compared to the values of tradition and deeply attuned with the social and cultural values of his/her time. At this moment in time, with a hyper-fast culture, the phenomena observed seem forgotten or contradictory, exasperated in the manifestation and therefore easier for us to take into account.

Coming back to us, if a human being is a child of his/her time and culture informs him/her, his/her processuality produces affecting interactions on the culture and society that have informed him/her.

This circularity, which is reciprocally affecting, leads to the hypothesis that the micro-processes of the subject find expression in the institutional and social formations and in the processuality of culture.

Let's see how the social and cultural process is intimately connected to the process of the subject and to the two dimensions of the processuality of life that we have just mentioned.

To do this I use a passage from Lipovetsky's work (Lipovetsky, 2019, p. 370): 'If the powerful wave of individualization, a result of the breakdown of structurally socializing modalities, brings autonomy to people, it is also accompanied by identity fragility and new psychological insecurity, because individuals are deprived of collective support and left to themselves to lead and build their own existence. Hence the increase in symbolic structuring reference needs and of community integration.'

Even within the hyperindividualist culture itself, expressions appear, which at first glance would seem antinomic and discordant. Lipovetsky refers to the emergence of exasperation needs in delegation, religious fundamentalism and we could add the growth of nationalistic tendencies. Phenomena that are not anachronistic, nor heritage of the past, but natural polarities in the process of life, which take on social and cultural expression and relevance. In other words, it is necessary to combine the two views, proposed by D'Elia, synoptic and broad, not only in the interpretation of the historical process, but also of the social micro-process within various historical moments (broad regarding the different expressions in the complementarity of polarities). Social phenomena that we can consider having been organized and represent, at a macro level, the processuality of the human being in his/her progress between delegation and individualistic exasperation.

It is no coincidence that several authors have pointed out that the fragility of the subject finds resonance in the crisis in which various social organizations are currently experiencing: the couple, the family and the

institutions themselves. It seems to me that D'Elia also agrees with this interpretation.

The theme presented is not to express a moral value, nor is it to have a pessimistic or optimistic view, but to acknowledge that in this historical period the subject expresses what it is, and these expressions find an expanded view in social organizations and institutions.

Therefore, if I can agree that social and cultural forces affect the subject and inform it in its being, I also think that the subject, with the possibility that it has to 'return to its modalities of being' and understand the implications, affects society and culture accordingly.

With this, I do not want to deny the affecting force of culture and social phenomena on the subject, on the contrary, it has been theorized as the primary force in its birth and configuration.

With equal force, however, it is necessary to give dignity to the subject and its ability to stand up to the dimensions that defined it, appropriating a sense of self and of its relationship with the world and with the needs of life going beyond the limits that the configuration defines, in order to be able to access its own consistency and creativity.

Subject subjected or inconsistency of the individual

Let's now try to approach the specificity and crisis of the 'hyper-modern' subject.

'If we make a generalization, applicable to the whole course of human history, we can assume that the human being shows all his/her fragility when tradition is lacking. The eclipse of social, cultural and religious tradition always represents moments of crisis. Repetitiveness and certainties are lost, beliefs falter, expectations remain unfulfilled, and emptiness takes over. The changes in social life and culture, that can be more or less sudden, always have a destabilizing effect and open up a subject to fragility. [...] in fact tradition is conveyed by the environment and in particular by parents. The subject is inevitably configured on tradition, more precisely the subject exists at the beginning of life as it is precipitated by tradition.' (Minolli, 2015, p. 20)

In agreement with Minolli, I hypothesize that the disappearance of traditional values, on which the subject has historically pursued its existence, with the emergence of new values expressed by hyper-modern society and the right to self-determination, has taken away from the subject the stool on which it 'comfortably' sat on, conforming through delegation. The main value of self-determination, 'an ever more culturally affirmed need', has shaped the subject and of course pushes it toward a search for its own meaning and realization, but at the same time has led the subject to not use and understand cultural, religious and social references that supported those

who preceded it. Thus, the subject found itself lacking the support of tradition, discovering itself in its fragility. In the processuality of life, sooner or later, the subject will have to deal with its own fragility and, as a result, feel how much the legs on which it stands can hold.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to dispel the myth of the goodness of man and of earlier societies. I do not think it is possible to say that in history the subject was more consistent, not because delegation or conformism prevented it. Just as today, where the culture and values of self-realization are all the rage, the same values do not make it more consistent.

Consistency is not based on the cultural values or myths of the historical period. These values inform, contribute to establishing the subject, but have no chance in making it consistent or inconsistent. Consistency is a quality of the subject, a quality emerging from the possibility that the human subject gives itself in recognizing itself in what it is, in its values, in its bonds with itself, with the other and with the world from which it is born from.

Consistency means the possibility of the subject to ‘return to itself’ through the ‘consciousness of consciousness’, a return that brings creativity and quality. A quality that leads to standing on the subject’s own feet and entering the future starting from the self, without having to undergo, or even fight, what has configured it, its own experiences and the tasks that have unfolded through its life.

Hence, the inconsistency does not depend on social or cultural values but on the possibility that the subject gives itself. Although it is possible to assume that the subject’s process in history unfolds through the oscillation of the pendulum between delegation and conformism on the one hand and exasperation in asserting one’s right to be autonomous on the other.

Today, the pendulum is turning toward the need and duty for affirmation of the right to self-determination and self-realization. Perhaps the manifestations of suffering, distress and existential malaise that we are observing today are the direct consequence and expression of the inconsistency of the subject which, when it feels the possibility of accepting, through the return to itself, its human condition, touches its own fragility first hand, being alone in a world of other solitudes. The manifestations of so-called depressive disorders, eating disorders, vigorexia, workaholism, closure, *hikikomori*, instability and crisis in couple and family relationships, denial, *etc.* are the expression of the solutions that the subject has found to face its own existential crisis, which often find and manifest themselves in sociocultural trends and phenomena.

This interpretation, although inspired by great thinkers such as Pichon-Rivier (1985), Napolitani (2006), Losso (2004), Lo Verso (2010), and especially by the maestro Kaës (2007; 2021), tries to go further by considering the interpretation of human suffering as a direct consequence of society and culture as limiting.

In particular, I do not think that the malaise is due to the fall of the social guarantors, just as I do not think that subjective suffering is the 'localization' of social unease, an unease that does not concern the individual but that the individual expresses in the social macro-process.

Instead, I hypothesize that the conceptual tools built by the previously mentioned authors: word-bearer, spokesperson, alliances, and phoric functions, are a wealth for approaching the individual within his/her bonds. But they need to be clarified and therefore figured out. For example, the 'symptom carrier' according to Kaës (2007) bears and assumes a proxy, it somehow overlaps and, in some ways, re-interprets the concept of Pichon-Rivière's (1985) 'spokesperson' and Foulkes' (1977) 'location'. All three authors, while not denying the individual implications, emphasize the particular position of the subject within the group: it is finding oneself in that position that causes one to express a certain discomfort. If re-interpreted, with the unitary lenses of the subject, the symptom would not express and not 'localize' a social unease, but it expresses the vital process of the individual, his/her own crisis and own unease often in a way that is appropriate to the social and cultural situation of the period.

This clarification leads us to have a 'positive' view of the human being, that is to say, to assume that he/she may have the ability and the possibility to deal with his/her own situation, to deal with his/her own crisis and fragility and to lay the foundations of his/her own consistency. This is not about exasperating one's own assertion, but about understanding one's own history and present bonds with others and the world.

In conclusion, the issue is not about the autonomy or the subjugation of the individual, but about the consistency of the subject, the quality of its understanding in relation to its existence. It is not content-based, but it concerns an existential quality, regardless of skills, achievements, hardships or disabilities of any kind, including psychological ones.

A more substantial consistency where solipsism develops because it demands an expression of opinion and a questioning of oneself that is otherwise covered by adherence to the duties and expectations of others on the individual.

Suffering and caring

If the suffering has to do with the fatigue of the subject in its being in the world, the suffering of the hyper-modern man, can be found in his expressive exasperations, demands and solipsistic affirmations; culturally determined manifestations, exasperating forms of individual affirmation with the consequent need to refuse any support for social and family footholds.

These are the culturally determined manifestations of suffering. Manifestations that are also found in artistic scenes and jokes: there are no longer ‘Napoleon and Jesus Christ’, today we come across forms of expressive exasperation via the body, behaviours, mood (depressive disorders, eating disorders, vigorexia, workaholism, closure, *hikikomori*, instability and crisis in couple and family relationships and denial). Basically, an expression of the attempts and methods of control of a world that it believes it has to dominate, but it feels the weight and effort in doing so.

Given that the subject of this work concerns so-called social psychotherapy, I find it interesting to be able to deal not only with the manifestations of the hyper-modern man’s malaise, as mentioned above, which are culturally determined, but also with the responses that social and health professions have formulated to deal with it.

Then we can ask ourselves whether the healthcare organization itself is not informed of those founding principles of hyper-modern culture. The need to ‘do it alone’, no longer as a body and social organization that takes care of the needs and necessities of its members, but a culture that exacerbates the need to take care of its own needs, often by putting one’s own money in and, if they do not succeed, there is a risk of being accused of incapacity or theft at the expense of the other who can afford it. In either case, the subject is always unfit to participate in the society of the ‘great’.

A culture that is an expression of today’s man, of hyper-modern man!

If you have the ability to do a job and you don’t, you’re described as unwilling, a slacker who wants to live by sponging off of those who do. If you do not make it, you are unfit, a ‘poor soul’ who needs a ‘handful of bread,’ which ‘altruistic’ society gives you.

Is this not the culture of ‘you have to go to work’? Of differentiated autonomies? Of services in relation to the ability to contribute, of private health services? Medicine delegated to private facilities, just as psychotherapy is delegated to private schools and private practice. Training of course, but also private clinics with first-class services for those who can afford them, and social services, when there are second-class services and long waiting times, for everyone else. Or as D’Elia also states, the thousands of online facilities or clinics open and operating with young colleagues who often work for a few pennies. Perhaps waiting to be able to enter the world of adult professionals with a chance of earning more money.

However, one wonders how the profession of psychologist and psychotherapist are inserted in this world. D’Elia rightly points out that psychotherapy has historically addressed the individual discomfort of the wealthy social classes. Psychological distress was often deemed individual and thus treated in private for those who had the resources to bear the cost.

Even now that psychology and psychotherapy have become widespread, services are often private, or with some so-called ‘sustainable psychothera-

py' services in the studio or via online platforms. It is true that health services have a shortage of psychological staff, often young colleagues are less fortunate than those who preceded them, having precarious employment or working as a 'freelancer', and often, diagnosis-oriented performance is required, or time-limited interventions are required for a few sessions focused on symptom resolution.

All of this is certainly a limitation for a psychotherapy that you want to define as social. However, I think that 'social' also has a value other than being accessible and sustainable for everyone, it has a value that affects above all the healthcare professional, who should be aware of his/her role and function and should always preserve the complexity of the human being as unique in his/her singular unity. Finally, it would be necessary to place the human being, with his/her specificity, within living beings, with whom it shares fundamental needs of reciprocal interconnection, but also to bear in mind that it has its own specificity, which leads it to comprehend the implications of its work and its modes of being. Therefore, a psychotherapy that has a positive view of the subject, that understands its discomfort and malaise in whatever form it is expressed, giving up easy solutions and helping it welcome crisis as an inevitable part of life, so that it can acquire the consistency and freedom that it needs to be able to creatively realize its life.

This multifaceted understanding of the qualification of 'social' encompasses different ways and forms of caring, but above all an integrated and complex world view, where living individuals are not isolated but continuously interacting with each other.

If we do not want to refer to what the epistemology of complexity has taught us, we would only need to dwell on some global phenomena that have occurred in recent times. The pandemic is an example of this, and it has shown how impossible it is to care for one's own backyard in a global society. It is not possible to take care of one's health in the face of a massive ecological transformation. It is not sustainable, as D'Elia affirms, to exploit the universe and use it to satisfy one's own needs, to not consider the consequences of this culture. A world that we use for what we need, but that we do not preserve or care for as our own and our future.

This is where social and political conscience emerges. Or at least it should emerge. What do we do as health professionals in this world? One solution could be to make sure the individual has the tools to live in this world and has the resources and resilience to compete with others. If that were the case, there would be a great risk, on the one hand of operating on the individual viewed in an abstract way, and on the other hand of being blind despite the glasses with which we look at the world. I think we can go beyond Freud's definition of psychological well-being of the individual that derives from the ability to love and work. At the same time, we must bear in mind the current risk that could lead us to unques-

tioningly run after the patient's requests to find a solution to that existential vacuum, to that feeling of pervasive anxiety at a time when the natural tendency to run, by pursuing the chimeras of self-realization via illusory rhythms and goals, goes into crisis. When the subject feels, on any grounds, that the opportunity has come to change pace, it concentrates on itself, to be helped in being accompanied to take care of its solutions which are no longer in line with its becoming.

There is no doubt that the request that comes to us professionals from our patients, is to return to being active and resilient, being able to hold the reins of one's destiny. We must not be surprised, it could not be any other way, because that is the way we are, us and them. It goes without saying that such a request often finds skilled professionals capable of supporting requests for *restitutio ad integrum* [restoration to original condition], to 'normality'. A restoration in the ability to work and love? Or to be performing efficiently and able to run at the pace of modern society? Or, as D'Elia seems to propose, in contrast to the prevailing culture that subjugates man and takes away his dignity and truth, to resist the current state of affairs?

He argues that: 'It is therefore necessary [...] that psychotherapy be able to grasp the very rapid changes affecting contemporary humans and learns to recognize as soon as possible both the direction of the anthropological mutations in progress, and the nature of the interactions between macro-social and intrapsychical phenomena, especially in relation to the most common forms of psychic pain which are widespread in our society.'

D'Elia's proposal seems interesting to me, it makes the professional leave the partial and simplistic interpretation of reality in order to access a complex vision capable of capturing the changes taking place that are the responsibility of contemporary man, a proposal that seeks to overcome dualism, both mind/body and individual/society, as well as not automatically identifying individual manifestations by pathology; but he then adds 'An unprecedented capacity for connection that can unite the history of the patient-system (couple system, family system, group system) as a longitudinal, transgenerational time variable, as a stratified sequence of traumatic, de-evolutionary, unprocessed occurrences, and simultaneously with ongoing anthropological mutations and their impact as iatrogenic determinants.'

On this second point, I would like to make some clarifications. D'Elia stresses the need for psychology to make a connection between the patient's personal history and ongoing anthropological mutations and their impact as iatrogenic determinants. I have the impression that going beyond the pathologization of individual manifestations finds a limit in the presentation of the patient's history, when he states 'traumatic, de-evolutionary, unprocessed occurrences.' I wonder whether, in considering

certain events to be de-evolutionary, there is not the risk of standing on an ideal vision of the process of the subject, who is supposed to have a direction and follow a certain 'given evolutionary' trajectory. And therefore, to assume that there are traumatic situations that would highlight de-evolutionary trajectories for the subject. I think this risk can be avoided by talking about the vital process of the subject and not the evolutionary process, so that we can place ourselves on the specificity and uniqueness of the individual subject, on the actual process of that individual subject, where the solutions are its own and are functional to it, thus completely overcoming normal/pathological, mind/body, and individual/society antinomies. Therefore, a settling on that single suffering subject who presents its own process of life and its own unique and singular suffering, which could also be expressed through recognizable and common manifestations with others, but in any case, they are its own and only its own.

To return to what I stated about the vision of the man I adopt, I believe that everything that the subject encounters in the course of its existence, implicitly actively moulds it into the most functional form for itself. So, there would be no evolutionary obstacles but only the realization of the processuality of the life of the individual subject. This goes beyond the pathologization of behaviours that, although to an observer may appear pathological, have a function for the subject. This does not mean underestimating situations but recognizing that they have their own functionality, to be accepted and taken for what they are. It will be the subject who will welcome them and not be dominated by them.

Here we return to the theme of suffering and freedom. The specificity of homo sapiens is its ability to grasp itself in its solutions, the ability to have a return to itself that brings a different quality to one's existence. A quality that could lead the subject not to submit to the historical and cultural determinants that have defined it, but to access another possibility, free from the self-eco-organizing tasks that implicitly work at the level of consciousness. What we want to propose is a positive vision of man, of his chances of returning to himself. It is a condition for accepting what characterizes him and, consequently, dealing with his own suffering. I believe that it is an alternative way of thinking about the human being, including the type of man today, which leads to the utmost respect for what he is and for the individuality and uniqueness that characterizes him. A man who belongs to his world, to his culture, who has been organized on the basis of these cultural organizers, but who is also potentially endowed with the ability to understand himself in those specificities. Suffering is not understood as the result of traumatic and de-evolutionary obstacles, but a suffering as the difficulty of the subject to comprehend and accept what belongs to it. For example, his having to keep up with technology or having to realize himself. It is the struggle to accept what

we are implicitly led to perceive that produces suffering because, as living beings, we are led to adopt the historical solutions that have determined us. Caring for and accompanying the patient to understand and welcome his/her solutions, in the functionality of his/her relationships, does not translate into work on the psyche in order to adapt it to society. There is nothing further from adaptation. The message is not 'the world sucks, that is the way it has always been, and you need to deal with it.' It does not mean adapting man to culture and society, because he is already adapted, he is adapted as a subject of that world; that world belongs to him because it is he who is organized/configured in that way by that world. At the same time, I do not think you can operate by saying: 'the world sucks, it is inhumane, dehumanizing, and takes away human dignity with its demands and inequalities and it is necessary to combat these.' The world is so because this is our world, it is so because it is the result of a processuality that belongs to all of us. What appears is the result and the expression of what today is the homo, in his *technologicus*, *oeconomicus*, hyper-modern and hyper-individualist sapiens. The revolutionary potential lies in acknowledgment, with its inevitable consequences; only if one can bear the gaze towards the self.

This is the proposal I would call psychology or psychotherapy of 'Presence' that goes beyond 'Resilience', as a fortification of the subject to adapt it to society, but also of 'Resistance', as an opposition to the socio-cultural determinants that inform every segment of life. It goes further because I believe that culture and society are the macro-expression of the process of the subject, so man today is his culture. He does not have to adapt it because it is already his. I also think that it is not interesting to resist, because one would remain in the contrast of opposites. I instead think it is necessary to take note of the state of affairs, that we are no different from our culture and our society: we belong. Hence, what is needed is Presence therapy, it is needed to embrace who we are and, consequently, to deal with the implications of this way of being.

This is where political consciousness arises, but also ethical and clinical responsibility. On the political front, awareness of the implications of our practice and our actions, the inevitable consequences of our being educators, clinicians and men of this world. Our taking responsibility and the choices we believe we can make to influence the world. On the ethical and clinical front, respect for those who come to us, for their way of being and for the reasons that led them to seek our help. I think that working to restore the broken object is inappropriate, as it would not grasp and welcome the value of suffering, which, as a crisis, presents a promising opportunity. What I am trying to say is that the suffering and discomfort of contemporary man, expresses the limitations of contemporary culture, the crisis of basing life on hyper-performance, speed, connection, self-

doing, excesses, the repudiation of values and guarantors that have organized the existence of the generations that preceded it.

Blessed suffering, if we accept it, for it could be an opportunity to go beyond the limits that hyper-modern society and culture has defined. Thus, psychotherapy is social, as D'Elia affirms, not only because it is made sustainable and available to ever-wider parts of the population, but also because it allows us to understand the complexity of the human dimension, the interconnections between different planes and horizons (synoptic and wide-angled). I would also add it is social as well and above all if we consider the patient and, consequently, ourselves, part of this world, which has informed us of its presence since the first day of our existence. It is social, therefore, if we look at complexity not to adapt or fight it, but to welcome it for what it is. From this, we make our choices, which will certainly have an impact on the other, but above all will have the taste of making us feel free and able to find creative solutions to implement our existence. It is very likely that it is a laborious and uncertain step, imbued with suffering and anguish, but open to a future that is not defined by what has informed us: our culture.

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