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**Couple's link, family's link:  
Critical nodes and changing processes**  
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**Summary**

The aim of this work is that of underlying a number of elements which, according to the authors point of view, can represent the cruxes within the speech about changing processes of today's families and couples, that led to deep variations and revolutions.

The theoretical approach the authors are referring to is that of a family and a couple, seen as a "groupal-psychic-corporal reality, where the subjects have changeable and variable inter-relations and where alliances, conflicts, intra and inter-generational contracts are deployed.

We can observe how the reflection in the face of such complex family extents requires a transfer from the intra-psychic reality to the inter-subject reality of individuals in play and their identity structure, subjective and as a group member, that is continuously changeable and unstable.

Family and couples are meaning as an object – group with an own inter-subjective reality, where displayed alliances, conflicts, intra and inter-generational contracts.

From an inter-subjective point of view we can introduce a *third space*, that is the *link* among individuals.

The attention of the clinicians is placed on the inter-subjective reality of the actors playing the couple or the family and especially to a third intermediate space, between the *inner* and the *external* reality.

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Some fundamental concepts are thus taken into account and, according to the theory of link, they represent changing cruxes in the configuration and in the sufferings of today's families and couples.

**Keywords:** family and couple object, group, links, psychic spaces, the third one, the crisis.

**Résumé.** *Liens de couple et de famille: nœuds critiques et processus de changement*

Le but de ce travail est celui de mettre en évidence quelques points que les auteurs estiment pouvoir représenter des nœuds critiques à l'intérieur des processus de changement des couples et des familles odiernes, qui ont subi des mutations et révolutions profondes et substantielles.

L'approche des auteurs est celui de la famille et du couple comme réalité groupale, psychique et corporelle où les sujets singuliers sont constamment en interrelations variables, mutuelles et mutables. La famille et le couple vont se constituer comme un objet-groupe avec une réalité intersubjective propre où se jouent alliances, conflits, contrats intra et intergénérationnels.

L'attention du clinicien est posée sur la réalité intersubjective des acteurs du jeu du couple ou de famille et de tiers qui est un lien entre les différents sujets. Un espace tiers entre la réalité interne et la réalité externe.

A partir de cela les auteurs considèrent les nœuds anciens source actuelle de souffrances des liens de couple et de famille.

**Mots-clés:** couple et famille objet, groupe, liens, espace psychiques, le tiers, la crise.

**Resumen.** *Vínculos de pareja, vínculos familiares: puntos críticos y procesos de cambio*

El objetivo de este trabajo es lo de evidenciar algunos puntos que los autores piensan puedan representar conceptos críticos en los procesos de cambio de la pareja y de la familia de hoy. Estos procesos han llevado a profundas mutaciones y revoluciones.

El acercamiento teórico al cual se refieren los autores, es el de familia y pareja entendida como una realidad grupal corpórea-sexual-psíquica, en la cual los sujetos se encuentran en interrelaciones variables y mudables. Según este acercamiento grupal familia y pareja se constituyen como un objeto-grupo, con una realidad suya intersubjetiva donde se despliegan alianzas, conflictos, contractos intra- y inter-generacionales.

Se nota como la reflexión delante estas entidades familiares complejas necesita un desplazamiento de la atención desde la realidad intra-psíquica a la realidad inter-subjetiva de los individuos en juego y de su actitud de identificación, de subjetividad y de grupo que sigue siendo mutable y movable.

Por lo que atañe la inter-subjetividad se introduce el concepto de un *espacio tercero*, o sea el vínculo entre los sujetos.

Por lo tanto se toman en consideración algunos conceptos fundamentales, que desde el punto de vista de la teoría del vínculo representan puntos críticos de cambio de las configuraciones y del sufrimiento de la pareja y de las familias de hoy.

**Palabras clave:** pareja y familia objeto, grupo, espacios psíquicos, vínculos, tercero, crisis.

The aim of this work is that of underlying a number of elements which can represent the cruxes within the speech about changing processes of families and couples. We now have family constellations that faced deep variations and revolutions.

We are thinking about a family and a couple as a “groupal reality” (Kaës, 2009) that encompasses body, sexuality and psyche, in which the subjects have changeable and variable inter-relations.

A family and a couple originate like an object-group, with its own inter-subjective reality where alliances, conflicts, intra and inter-generational contracts are deployed.

As therapists, in the face of such complex family extents, we first start our reflection with the articulation of the subject’s inner reality with the multiple external reality of “us”.

Our consideration requires a transfer from the intra-psychic reality to the inter-subject reality of individuals in play and their identity structure, subjective and as a group member, that is continuously changeable and unstable.



Gianni Turella, Orchestra, 2010 (*private collection*)

When talking about psychic spaces using a “classic” expression we refer to the inner, the intra-psychic, the intimate, external and social space. While moving to an inter-subjective view which harks back to “the theory of links” makes us direct our attention to a third intermediate space, between the inner and the external reality.

From an inter-subjective point of view this “third space” is that of the “links” among individuals (Kaës, 2008).

## The Links

One of the many operative definitions sees the “links” as an unconscious relation of reciprocity among individuals, whose functions reciprocally influence each other: in this case, the individuals influence each other within the link. The bond can become not only a tier and therefore something that burdens and chokes, but, also, a vital source for the harmonious growth of the subject. The problems of couples and families are constantly binded to these different but connected configurations (Taccani, 2004).

In fact, as individuals, one of our biggest ability is that of keeping on establishing links and at the same time activate our energies to attack and possibly destroy them. The study of couples and families from this point of view is a research of the balance of creative forces versus the destructive ones.

Of course, the couple is also a need, we eventually should wonder: why do we still have such a significant number of couples that want to access parenthood and family, although 50% of couples separate?

We are referring to two effigies of couples which Simona Taccani called “*the stone couple*” and “*the flying couple*”. They are two pictures, the former by M. Chagall (“Over the town”, 1918, Tretyakov Gallery, Mosca) and the latter by C. Brancusi (“The Kiss”, 1908, Muzel de Arta, Craiova, Romania). They allow us to say something. The first picture of page 3 (“the stone couple”) is the model of a couple that stays together at all costs, a stable and unbending couple that is still able to stay together for better and for worse, “till death do us part”. Inside the couple, the subjective, intimate and private space is very reduced. The other model is “the flying couple” by Chagall. We can imagine the lightness, the pleasantness and mobility, but, also, a greater possibility of discontinuity. These couple models are constantly changing. The *stone couple* is the traditional couple that overcame the war and arrived until the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the *flying couple* is different and belongs more to post-modernity.

An important concept concerning the duality and the network of links is “the *third one*”. “The third one” can become a crisis factor for the couple.

Arriving in the private space of the couple, the third one is the person that can have a shattering effect on its functioning. A classic example of “the third one” is the arrival of a child. Nowadays a classic couple tends not to face the arrival of the third one. This couple tends not to say “we will stay together for better and for worse”, but rather “we stay together for the better and try to avoid the worse”. Many times the couples that “explode”, see the child as a factor of great reassurance, of narcissistic completion, but actually the arrival of the third one is often a *critical factor of non-tolerance* that can also present itself as a traumatic factor.

Another important concept concerning the link’s theory is the “*re-acknowledgement*” of oneself, of the other one, of oneself in the other one. An important concept for those who

study the growth and identity development problems, as we do, is “*the re-acknowledgement in the childhood*”, i.e. creation of the link between child and parent. The re-acknowledgement process of oneself in the child, of the child in itself, of the child in the duality and in the third-part-relationship of the family network are the bases of the identity construction.

This concept still exists today, but there are premises according to which it can be undermined. Let us think about the new methodologies and procedures for the procreation and the attended childbirth. *We think that the re-acknowledgement process in the childhood can be undermined when it becomes or reduces itself only to an affective re-acknowledgement.*

An important concept when talking about couples, families, children and the society is *the time weave* in the passage from singular to conjugal to family, i.e. the current, the original, the childish, the generational time.

We can identify here some problems, obstacles and joints. The time for the couple, the child, the family and often for the links is today a very limited one: is a “no-time”. This is a time that doesn’t give peace and that can scatter some situations that “*per se*” begin in a constructive way. This situation can take to pain and conflicts, where no one takes into account anyone, precisely because the times do not coincide and are rarely synchronic. Although we believe it is important that “the perfect compromises” exist where all times work in a co-incidence, we think people do not take enough into account that sometimes there is also a no-incidence that is not pathological but physiological. It is also true that in other cases where this sort of compromise does not exist, the couple cannot find a way to function and to go on.

The configuration’s links is carried out on two axes: a horizontal one, also called cross or *intra-generational*; and a vertical one, also called intergenerational or *trans-generational*, which comes from the past. These are the acquisition key-drivers of parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, co-parenthood and of the “multiparentality”.

These two axes are important and they should be proportioned in the functional and functioning links. The ascending and descending vertical dimension is an indispensable condition to inheritance, to transmission. At the same time it can be the source of multiple problems and traumatismes. It often happens that the excess of the vertical axe, i.e. the importance of the family of origin in the couple and family universe, is so big that it becomes a burden which is not easy to elaborate, as well as a source of big conflicts inside the couple.

One of the two spouses, during a couple consultation, said: “I’m tired of having lived in three, with the father of my husband *in my bed*”. Sometimes these kind of problems become very difficult within the couple management.

But there are also positive psychic inheritances of cultures, stories, metaphors, and structure-giving myths of the family. If they did not exist, children would not be able to enter in contact with them. Nowadays in some configurations, such as the multi-parental families, it is difficult to combine the different inheritances. In fact, these heterogeneous situations can become an inheritance excess when you want to pass them on.



## **The changing processes**

Marta Badoni (2008), says: «Can we be pleased today with the word “change” or are we still facing a more mediocre process, and at the same time more clear, a true mutation, a radical change of the mind functioning?» (p. 79).

For changing process, we mean positive and harmonious processes that face very strong changes and mutations that are so strong and therefore able to provoke a change in the mind functioning. We think that a huge part of the current interest of neuroscience believes that these mutations can reach a radical anthropological change in which our functioning is changing.

Last but not least, we would like to focus also on our changing processes as clinicians.

What do we change within our different and differentiated interventions regarding the couple, the family and the individual? Which is our cognitive and emotive position towards the big changes and the current ongoing mutations and the future ones? This is a serious point.

Without a radical change it will be hard for us to intervene in a harmonious, positive and constructive way on the suffering of couples and families. As clinicians and ‘psi’ operators we should combine what we had in our minds, i.e. our family myths, with those of others. We have to be the first in metabolizing these changes with some help, with some work on us, before having to do with such a different type of link.

This personal or group work is indispensable, it needs to be done at different levels but we cannot pass through it. We have to develop a mindset in which we keep on wondering about what we think and what we feel in given situations.

The undeniable integration of the different approaches should always be and keep on being open, incomplete in a field of prolific tension, contamination, conflict, confrontation and dialogue. Our positions are neither always innocent nor harmless.

## **Therapeutic consultation**

We see the therapy as a process of re-newal, re-novation of the subject. A work for the re-founding of him/her. A work for the social, cultural and domestic re-founding of the basic agreement of family links.

When talking about family links we refer to inter-subjectiveness and the energies that are in play: narcissistic-libidinal energies that are creative but also destructive, evil, paralyzing.

We would like to underline that when talking about therapeutic interventions, the efficiency of the setting concept is still efficient and seen as a priority, also in front of the variations and changes of family configurations and sufferings.

We set our intervention depending on the times and spaces of couples and families that consult us for valuation. These times are often syncopated, very complex and in other cases agglutinated and confused: the marriage, the birth of children, the death of parents:

the narration of family events and times can become a chaos of anti- mentality, of sounds and representations with a sense. As far as inter-subjective and objective spaces are concerned, that are more or less differentiated and transitioned, we are on a similar pattern.

Of course, the dialogue is the way by which we will be able to come to terms with the obstacles we find on our course. It will allow us to keep an open thought, with no limits, which is able to make us experience from the “*Crisi necessaria*” (Racamier and Taccani, 2010) to the “*Organizzazione necessaria*” (Foresti, 2008).

*Today the crisis concept in proportion with time and within time is mystified, modified, it has become an endurable system, extended to every part of social life.*

Nowadays the crisis concept has become a watchword, the crisis is seen as a life or death sentence.

*The variation of the sense of crisis took away its temporal feature.*

The connotation of the crisis as a long-lasting condition entails as first consequence a projection of uncertainty. This uncertainty extends itself indefinitely from the present throwing a constant possible pain generative shadow on the future. In other cases it entails a rejection of time, age or parenthood.

Our goal is to go back to the previous concept of crisis, to value the status of temporariness and precariousness, in order to transform it in an action goal concerning the couples, the families or the links.

Intervene in the crisis means activating a vitalizing and vital process within the actors, including ourselves. It means opening a dialogue with the stories of the single subjects also in a trans-generational dimension that is able to open again spaces already engaged by secrets and by the unsaid, by encoded spectrums and expelled grieves that were received without the possibility of the descendants to escape them.

It is clear that this is a reinvention of new modalities of interventions that can and must take into account the present and the contemporaneity we are facing. The latter, that often is defined empty in a simplifying and erroneous way, when many times actually crossed and constantly crosses the threshold of the too full.

Ambrosiano and Gaburri (2013) wrote: «Looking for answers means also sustaining us, our patients and the expulsion mechanisms of stimulus excess... as well as making room and reconnecting to the curiosity, that often our patients seem to be frighten of...» (p. 124). What we call wise and melodic curiosity, is actually a therapeutic gift indispensable to the desaturation of the reality spaces that are full of the bulimic binges we have to face nowadays.

A part from the concepts of the crisis that we called necessary, we are also thinking about the necessary organization. The latter is treated by Foresti in the creation of the minimal efficient dose of intervention on the field of the different organizations and forces that are able to virtuously influence using a principle stated by the freedom ethics, or better, the good ethics. The influence didn't pursue the efficiency through a protocol but a personalized efficiency that could be offered at each request of intervention.

We would like to conclude quoting Donald Winnicott, whose words sound like a wish for all of us: «I know I'm doing this job in an easier way and with more success than 30

years ago. One could compare my position with that of a cellist who first slogs away at technique and then actually becomes able to play music, taking the technique for granted» (1974, p. 15).

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