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Marco Conci

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EDITORIAL

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As usual for our journal, in this issue we have done our best to collect a variety of interesting papers centered around a specific topic, thus documenting not only the richness of approaches that characterizes our field, but also its intellectual roots and its continuing contribution to our contemporary cultural debate.

As we learned from Philip Aries’ 1962 still classic *Centuries of childhood*, the concept of childhood is a social construction that emerged very slowly in the course of modern history. Starting with Freud’s 1909 treatment of Little Hans, from early on psychoanalysis contributed to a new knowledge of children’s basic needs and to the treatment of their psychological problems. Through the Hampstead War Nurseries, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham continued in London the practical work of applied psychoanalysis which they had already started in Vienna. These experiences still represent one of the main historical roots of the field of pedagogics, the development of which Helmwart Hierdeis (2016) recently reconstructed in his very well-written book *Psychoanalytische Pädagogik – Psychoanalyse in der Pädagogik*.

Another product of the war climate and its consequences upon the welfare of children was John Bowlby’s attachment theory, whose original formulation through the three classical articles “The nature of the child’s tie to his mother” (1958), “Grief and mourning in infancy and early childhood” (1960a), and “Separation anxiety” (1960b) represented such a big challenge to traditional analytic thinking that only in recent years has his point of view been at least partially accepted by the analytic community. In fact, it has been largely utilized in the field of empirical research and rediscovered in the new clinical approach to the process of mentalization pioneered by Peter Fonagy (see Fonagy & Bateman, 2006). This is what allowed the psychoanalyst Karl Heinz Brisch to use the title “John Bowlby (1907–1990) – ‘Der Bindungs-Psychoanalytiker’,” that is, “the attachment psychoanalyst,” for the chapter that Wolfgang Mertens and I invited him to write for our 2016 anthology *Psychoanalyse im 20. Jahrhundert* (Brisch, 2016).

Such a complex relationship between psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and psychological observation and empirical research, on the other, characterizes of course the peculiar role played by the concept of “trauma” throughout the history of psychoanalysis. Although Freud himself inaugurated this field of study, he later founded psychoanalysis upon the concept of “psychic” as opposed to “external reality.” Pioneered by Ferenczi in the 1930s, a new emphasis on trauma emerged in the 1960s from several areas of repressed psychic suffering: the scars of the Holocaust, the post-traumatic disorders of Vietnam veterans, and violence against women and children. In 2014, Howard Levine redefined the analytic trauma concept from a Bionian point of view in terms of “whatever outstrips and disrupts the psyche’s capacity for representation” (Levine, 2014). It would not be possible to understand the experience and method of Psychoanalytic Infant Observation without the preliminary concepts sketched out above, and it is no wonder that it was developed at the London Tavistock Clinic by Esther Bick at the time of her collaboration with John Bowlby, and under the later influence of Wilfred Bion’s theory of thinking, as we can gather from her 1964 paper “Notes on infant observation in psycho-analytic training” – which does not contain a bibliography! This is the specific topic of the central article of this issue, “Musical rhythms in an infant observation: Harmonies, pauses, dissonances, and interruptions,” authored by the Italian colleagues Silvia Cimino, Enrica Fondi, and Luca Cerniglia. Through an extensive use of clinical vignettes and theoretical considerations, they describe an infant observation conducted weekly for two years, highlighting how a mother’s problematic relationship with herself negatively influenced her child’s capacity to relate to her, and how the father was often able to moderate such problematic interactions and help his daughter separate from the mother. It is amazing how well Psychoanalytic Infant Observation can allow us to reconstruct and illuminate in such detail the interaction between internal world and external reality, that is, the conceptual question at the origin of so many ideological and scientific conflicts.
Conceptually complementary to the triadic dimension which Psychoanalytic Infant Observation so easily and convincingly opens up to us are the second and third articles of this issue, “The disturbing presence of the father: Paternal function and its initial development” by Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres and Aranzazu Fernandez-Rivas (both from Bilbao), and “Triangularity in separation” by Christo Joannidis (Athens). Their common denominator is their authors’ courage in explicitly formulating a series of considerations to which we apparently have not dared to give such a clear articulation. In fact, the authors of the first of these articles try to deal with the many open questions regarding the development of the paternal function and its impact on the new father, considering it as a process initiated already by the expectation of the birth of a child. As we all know, but as we seldom talk about, even with our male patients, it is true – as the authors write – that the new being’s mere existence inside the womb generates an exclusionary force that sets the father’s ambivalent feelings in motion, thus facilitating and promoting the later full development of the Oedipal process. The other side of this central anthropological process is at the heart of the latter authors’ contribution, which clearly articulates the triangular nature of the process of separation, as opposed to seeing it only as a two-person dilemma. The recent realization that there is no such thing as a baby, but only a mother-and-baby unit, has opened the way to the further understanding that there is no such thing as a mother-and-baby unit extra-context, outside of the triangular context including the father.

The way in which “a constant attachment to someone, be it to a child-minder, to a member of a foster family, or to a care-giver in a day-care center” is “the least harmful for small children,” is the conclusion at which the Saarbrücken colleagues Siegfried Zepf and Dietmar Seel arrive at the end of their very detailed review article concerning “Psychoanalytic investigations into primary socialization in day-care centers taking the German situation as example,” as runs the subtitle of their article, the first and longest of the issue. Apparently, only under the condition of “a constant attachment to someone” can the fundamental anthropological process take place, as discussed in the second, third, and fourth articles of this issue, that is, the very process through which we develop our own individuality. Exactly this aspect of our development seems to get lost when the primary socialization of children takes place in a day-care center, with the consequent emergence of an “other-directed” social character satisfying current social requirements. This is what makes a day-care center “something for the benefit of adults that children would never think of.”

In the fifth article of this issue, “Childhood trauma, unconscious conflict, and developmental transformation,” Harold Blum shows us the very complex manner in which, in his own version of ego psychology (see Blum, 1994), and on the basis of an intensive analytic process he conducted with a male patient, traumatic experience and unconscious conflict intertwine across developmental phases, and what an important role genetic interpretation and reconstruction played in the analytic process.

In the last two articles of this issue, “Mental collapse as a ‘disorganized attachment’: A dynamic understanding for clinicians,” by Sonia Gojman-De-Millán and Salvador Millán, and “Trauma by omission: Treating complex attachment dynamics in a Chinese woman,” by Judith Rosenberger and Han Feng, we can see attachment theory in action. In the former contribution, we see it in terms of how unresolved loss and trauma are manifested in verbatim-transcribed language and how they are to be detected and interpreted, that is, as evidence of the process of fragmentation caused by them. In the second contribution, we can see how attachment theory can help us detect the absence of the intimate and specific recognition and response by the caretaker which every child should have the right to receive – also in China.

References


Marco Conci
IFP Coeditor-in-Chief