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Working hypothesis and device of the workshop

The group-analytical research on the intersubjective bonds shape and quality in the contemporary world is the theme around which the EATGA Workshop 2011 rotates.

In line with the EATGA researches, whose attention is always focused on exploring the role of culture to give shape and content to the thought processes, the object of this workshop is to analyse cultural phenomena specific of contemporaneity and their effects on bonds and personal and collective identity.

In the contemporary world, two different macro phenomena can be identified:

- the first one is the dominant and pervasive presence of both the logic and language of the financial market and world within the political and daily life. This cultural phenomenon is largely shared, transversal and independent from the local cultural identities, whose fates and configurations it still directs (migrations, conflicts, exchanges);
- the second one is the massive and relentless encounter between different cultures, identities and forms of subjectivity. This encounter gives rise to a difficult and conflicting hybridization.

Both these cultural phenomena, different but interdependent, direct and influence the quality of interactions among groups, individuals, communities and establish the shape of exchanges and bonds.

Starting from the anthropological studies on exchange processes and intersubjective bond types, two basic paradigms can be highlighted: one describes gift as an exchange form that gives rise to gratitude, debt and solidarity relations and processes, the other describes trade as an exchange form which cancels the debt, and builds utilitarian and impersonal relationships.

However, both phenomena have the specific characteristic to produce cultural codes and values shaping individual and collective identities and pervading their relational, affective and emotional life.

As a result, the objective of this workshop is the exploration of the cultural theme of both exchanges and bonds, as well as and the different forms in which it is shaped in the contemporary world. Furthermore, the analysis of the coexistence, competition or incompatibility of both gifts and trades paradigms will also be evaluated.

For this goal to be achieved, a device work was arranged through small and large groups, which was conducted in a non-directive way and without suggesting a specific language, because language is a part of identity, belonging and exchange dynamics between cultures. The group work is preceded by an introductory part, which has the primary objective to offer, as from the start, evocative and representative images of the cultural theme at the centre of the workshop.

The themes proposed for group reflection and experience are:

- scenes from the movie “Up in the Air”, which exemplifies the impersonality of work relations and the unnecessary and trivial nature of bonds, group-belonging, background of individuals within the economic logics that overrule the world of work;

- theoretical and visual representation of the architecture of Palermo, in order to highlight the urban transformation and the architectural hybridizations triggered by migratory processes and their consequent melting pot. This report also focuses on the methodological options of encountering other cultures.

- the summary of the economical financial paradigm by citing Luciano Gallino’s work which outlines the individualistic and utilitarian nature of the economical financial device.

The emphasis is on the strength exercised by neoliberal culture to determine and build the “economic man”. The author writes: “humans are immersed in the social and cultural institutions – school and market, production and consumption, media and entertainment, government and politics – which intensively operate as if everyone was an economic man; (therefore) humans have in mass developed a personality which it is not even correct to say that it makes them behave as if they were economic men. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that, at this point, every human being seems to have become an economic man. “(Gallino 2011, p. 140).

- the core exposure of the gift paradigms as theorized by Marcel Mauss (1994), with particular reference to the relation between giving-receiving-exchanging describing it and resulting in solidarity and reciprocity relations and bonds.

From what has been above-stated, the following question structuring the workshop, which also shows its educational and developmental task, can be formulated: can the logic of economical exchanges in the globalized world destroy the inner world, the subjectivity, the relational life and the bond culture which bind us to others, to the community as well as to shared institutions?

Workshop processes and reflections on the experience

The main innovation of this workshop is the theme that could nowadays be redefined as “The fate of both subjectivity and relational life in the globalized economical and financial device”.

The innovation is double:

1. on the one hand, the theme concerns the topical, rather than the past or history as in other workshops;

2. on the other hand, it is placed in the project as it is a strong need to contextualize and interpret workshop processes, which requires, especially from the staff, a different mental outlook from the traditional analytical one, in which the conductor interprets the material of the group experience “without memory and desire”, that is without any preconceived assumptions about what will be manifested under his/her own presumed “neutral and aseptic” eye.

The importance of these two innovations is even clearer if we refer to the idea supporting the original program of the workshop: the proposed theme is not a simple rational and external reference to a given experience (sociological, economical or even political), but it stems from the evidence and the awareness that, currently, what men are, or have become, their way of being-in-relation is strongly determined by what we define as “the pervasive and globalized cultural device that has been in progress since the last 30 years” and whose fundamental characteristic is given by the economical and financial system. This system, through institutions and working organizations, governs the relational life, including the family, and has redefined the meaning and significance of bonds, penetrating into the innermost structure of personality.

This perspective contrasts with the more traditional psychoanalysis (and groupanalysis) which, instead, sees the culture and the outside world as a kind of epiphenomenon (if not a simple projection) of the intra-psychical and intra-family relational events or, even more radically, as expressions of presumed ahistorical and universal instances of the intra-psychical and the unconscious.

If it is true that to understand the topical world new symbolizations are required, it is likely that the psychoanalytical paradigm, that still contains sediments of nineteenth-century, must be radically re-examined. This is very problematic, especially with reference to the conducting method and to the theoretical models that guide the conductors of the group.¹

The question of this theme has been dealt with in EATGA meetings and especially in the staff preparatory meetings.

Within the latter a compromise was reached, which is very similar to what it had been done in previous EATGA workshops: the staff propose, at the beginning, some

1 On this topic J.C. Rouchy declined the invitation to be part of the staff, because he believed that considering the theme only meant either to organize directive groups or groups based on Rogers’ style...

suggestions on the theme of the workshop, but they let the groups work in a totally free and associative manner; the conductors will try to keep the theme in mind to catch any of its content and experience processes, avoiding to influence the spontaneous emerging of processes and contents (it makes you wonder if this form of abstention is really possible and if it is more realistic and transparent that the staff take the role of their inevitable influence on group processes into account).

Among the indications shared² by the staff, some aspects of the theme could have been gathered from the following issues: how to develop relationships within the WS in relation to the paradigms of the gift and exchange, what everybody expects to receive and to give in WS, how participation fees are conceived in the WS and what role the care relation has.

In reference to reflection and group experience, the following questions were suggested:

1. In the socio-cultural and professional fields of care what kind of relation is built between the aspect of gift (giving, receiving and exchanging) and the trade, that is equal, democratic and debit cancellation exchange?

2. How do these relational models interact and determine themselves in the WS? What

does everyone expect to get from the WS meeting? And what do they think they can offer? There are many issues involved: the payment of the fees, personal experience and humanity of each individual. What kind of interconnection, or relation, is built between these two models, right in the trans-cultural exchange of our workshop?

3. How is the excess of meaning of relations and bonds of the group processed? How do we consider, process and face the traces of bond?

Therefore, it is not inadequate to constantly reiterate these questions, especially because they, as well as the film and Prof. Guarrasi's report on the geography of encounters among cultures, gave the group an "ideal"³ and, for someone, real escape route to follow and to find in moments of loss and incomprehension.

The workshop immediately places its participants in an uncomfortable position of lack of normal and consolidated reference points, and of the effort to build a relationship/place of lack of understanding of the other - stranger with whom to produce and exchange gifts.

This inconvenience is identified and collocated in the absence of a common and shared language. Despite the fact that the proposed language of the Other is not understood, it is highly hoped, though it remains in the background, that it is still possible to grasp the meaning and the feeling, although this is not evidently expressed.

The lack of understanding, experienced as a fault and /or as impossibility, declines within the group, in various ways:

1. the lack of understanding of a foreign language makes it impossible to participate in and forces the abandoning of the group for the inability to understand what the other says;
2. the lack of understanding of a language produces an excess of translation and creates the illusion of the exchange;
3. the lack of understanding of a language generates the absence of translations and triggers the processes of absence and loss.
4. The lack of understanding causes silence.

Tested on the unbearable feeling of the lack of understanding, the group, both in small and large group sessions, follows escape routes through the proposition of many interventions on immigration, carers and the delegation of care turned to them, on the cities that change appearance and identity as a result of emigration and immigration processes.

These interventions seem appropriate insofar as they respond to questions posed to start off the WS and the group takes the form of an assembly of experts that discusses breakdowns and merits of

2 Remind that J. Shaked, conductor of large groups, did not attend planning meetings including that of Berlin.

3 These questions have been perceived and treated for a long time as theoretical tasks that must be responded to and on which to confront oneself with on a theoretical and rational reflection level.

globalization and understands limitations, potentialities and drifts. However, the more language of understanding is followed, the more the sense and the feeling seem difficult to share and to communicate.

Some passages seem to be representative of this phase of the group:

- at the end of the session of large group focused on mutual enrichment that come from confrontation with diversity, it was requested to one of the quietest people in the group to say something. And from the silence emerges the desire to waken each mind, but the mind remains asleep, because it is focused on the task of understanding the others well, “what they say in their own language”, rather than what they make me feel.

- in larger group one of the participants spoke about his feeling that globalization contains within itself “annoying” themes and contents that is embarrassing to talk about and for this reason they are always moved and removed from people’s sight and thoughts.

- in the small group in which there were major absences and waivers for participation, a participant told a dream in which a man held her head in his arms and she felt good, strong and safe. In the same group, another participant tells a trip to Japan, and the difficulty in finding and buying some milk, even though she spoke fluent English. On the one hand the safety and on the other hand difficulty, support and comfort sought and found in the sharing of a belonging (to be psychoanalysts?) and the difficulty of being understood and recognized in the expression of a need.

Anger, aggression, exclusion, incomprehensibility, strangeness strongly show themselves especially because they undermine the competence of listening and understanding of professionals who lose pieces/participants who are professionals in other fields and other skills. The shared reading of the words of greeting of a participant introduce in the group the theme of the disease but also those of blindness and deafness to whom is not the same (professional vs. non-professional, anglophones vs. non-anglophone, etc) and, referring to what was above stated, “whoever can’t find the milk, goes away...?”

It is obvious that this is referred not only to whom has left, but also to everything belonging to everyone which was excluded, that cannot be shared, that was quiet, sleepy and silenced by the language of understanding! It is so obvious, but also so difficult to feel and to take as an emotional task of each one and of the group as a whole.

Globalization triggers the building of new ghettos as recognition and affirmation of identity devices, but also as a defense against the risk of identity annihilation. As a consequence, there are many references to the work of cultural mediators such as operators of the bond and the exchange among national groups, but also the curiosity about what happens in the near ghetto. However, this curiosity is morbid and can happen only by spying through the keyhole. Leaving the ghetto and asking of the other telling about oneself becomes an unconventional and risky operation.

The risk of this change is expressed within the group, the metaphor of the transfer of plants. A plant, in fact, which is transferred into a larger container is deprived of some of its roots. The risk consist in the ability to cut the roots that are no longer needed , by selecting and differentiating them from those vital and producing new lymph.

The risk in this Ws, is the comparison with the changes that EATGA is facing, and which concern the innovation of the Ws, that is the analysis of current cultural phenomena, the testing of theories and the technical device that we have, the verification of their depletion and/or their explanatory potential, etc..

Since the beginning, with reference to these themes, I invited the participants to “feel the theme of globalization and trade on their skin”, both the group and the conduction wavering between innovation and tradition, technique and experience, inheritance and transgression.

In fact, during the WS, it seems that the staff only marginally kept the (mental) reference to the theme. It is probable that this is due to the difficulty to go beyond the psychoanalytical theoretical framework and its following method: this step can be done only if the relationship between the historical-social culture (or trans-subjectivity, as it was defined by Silvia Amati), the structure of interpersonal relationships (and the values that guide the meaning of the other and the exchange logic), and the structure of personality was re-conceived in a given historical time.

So the different ways and meanings to be-in-relation and the structures of subjectivity were inscribed in a social-historical cultural framework: the trans-cultural experience must (not) stretch from these frameworks, otherwise we would always be faced with the same ghosts of intrapsychic psychoanalysis. It is not enough to know that, generally, there is a relation between culture and personality, but it is necessary to think about the historicity of contents that structure all the different levels of subjectivity (individual, interpersonal, and transpersonal): concepts such as personality, unconscious, bond, affections, etc. do not make sense if they were not placed in a shared historical-cultural device.

The difficulty of the staff, as it often happens, has become more visible in the large group and, particularly, in the final day. At this level, all the limits of our way of thinking about the transpersonal mind become apparent, which nowadays is not understandable unless we set up from the effects of globalization, and the power of relations existing in it, the speed, the virtual and the immediacy of communications and relationships. Therefore, the notions of sexual taboos, the oedipal complex and good enough mothers will not certainly help us! Rather, for example, awareness of the triumph of desire without limits fueled by commercial logic of consumptions, the recognition of the logic of the dissipation, as evidenced by Baudrillard, Caille, Recalcati, etc. (see also Profita and Ruvolo, Plexus in October 2011), where there is no place for the old super-ego.

So the idea of neutrality and abstention of the analyst from the analytical process will not certainly help us, not only because the process happens in the relationship between patient (participants) and analyst (conductors), but especially because the group analysts must be aware to be crossed by the transpersonal meanings of participants and need to take a position and a critical vertex of observation on the phenomenon that they want to observe: they cannot do it from a “non position” and without recognizing what men are, individually and collectively; they do not simply depend from a father, rather than a mother and a family genealogy, but from a cultural-historical device in progress which crosses and structures them.

An example, taken from the large final group, may perhaps be useful to identify possible ways of interpretation of the workshop in Palermo.

In a dream, a participant who moves closer to the till of a bar to pay for something that probably has had, but the cashier cuts his hand and the participant-customer thinks that she acted on behalf of Mafia. Among the verbalizations of the group there is also the one that

associates observers of Ws to the Mafia, because they are also organizers of the Ws and manage payments.

During the session there is also a chain of associations which concerns trust and, in particular, a participant emphatically wonders: "In whom can I place my trust?". And he answers "in no one!".

The dream connects two meanings: the payment and the mafia crime, as if it should propose two opposing perspectives on the theme of bonds:

- the first one is the economical (or market) one, which is legal and in which there is an equal exchange, so a price in money is paid in exchange for consumption or service, but it does not create the bond, it does not create any relation between the cashier and the customer, after the payment the interaction is dissolved because there is no outstanding debt;
- the second one is illegal, criminal, in which there is no equivalence and both violence and bonds are generated, in particular of a collusive and an enslaving type.

The cutting of the hand seems to show that the law of the Mafia is in force and this law does not allow the act of payment and its logic of unleashing and autonomy, for it (Mafia) is the legalized economical/market exchange that is excluded, as if it was illegal!

In the opposition between these two laws/logics, probably the observers-organizers are similar to the Mafia, perhaps because they - as well as Mafia - have expressed a critical position toward the market and the trade exchange system. Perhaps this dichotomy market/Mafia cannot represent another possibility that is the logic of the gift, in which the debt is constituted by gratitude and bond. It is significant that the final restitution of observers (a gift?) did not appear to be welcome in the end of the Ws and it occurred in a climate of both conflict and poor willingness to listen. It is also significant that the theme of the mafia staff re-occurs in Palermo in a similar manner as the one in the previous Ws in Marsala; despite that, the well-known fact that the staff members had made a great effort at organizing the Ws, including spending their own money for travelling and other expenses, without being paid. Perhaps, this generates the suspicion that there is an occult, undeclared and illegal profit, as if it were not credible that anyone could possibly offer their work for free, or as if the debt that it induces was not acceptable...?

The theme of trust seems perfectly connected with these meanings: if you cannot trust anyone, every gift seems poisoned, it contains a trap that leads to logics of illegality and instrumentality, which, in terms of the local culture, refers to Mafia.

A solution to the pacification of relationships, when trust does not circulate, is certainly the equivalence of the market exchange. All economical theories from Adam Smith onwards are based on the economical individualism of appropriation that postulates the lack of trust as a fact of nature: everyone "naturally" tries to get something for himself/herself to the detriment of others, so the payment is the best way to avoid conflicts and rancor. It must be considered, with reference to anthropological studies, that in primitive societies the exchange of goods used to occur within a complex ritual in which any direct contact between the parties was avoided: the proponent left his/her goods and went away, and if anyone was interested, he/she went to take what was offered, leaving in the same place what he/she gave in exchange and went away before his/her bidder came back.

The contact in the exchange is seen as extremely risky. With money, there is a measure which tends to avoid this risk and makes an idea of fairness possible, which does not entail trust: giving trust is risky, but it is even riskier if what we have internalized is the culture of economical individualism of appropriation.

In the care relation all this is radically questioned: care implies that one wants the good of the other: here the individualism of appropriation (having) logic becomes a real obstacle; because there is care it is essential to establish a relationship of trust that goes beyond the payment; care occurs within a shared context (trans-subjective and inter-subjective) in which well-being is an outcome of the relation (giving and receiving in trust and gratitude, and not in the equivalence of exchange), therefore it is not possible to achieve this outcome in a logic of appropriation/having.

For this reason, the care relation is the “third way”, which is difficult to see if our own trans-subjectivity, which thoroughly pervades us, is the one in which legality and illegality, economical exchange and poisoned gift, without trust and without gratitude, are in contrast.

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