FUSION

I. ONE OF THE BASIC MECHANISMS OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE

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Abstract: *Fusion is one of the fundamental mechanisms of mental functioning, an essential element in all object relations – with variations only in the degree of participation – along with the component connoted by separateness. There is a continuous dialectic relationship between levels of fusion and separateness in every human relationship.*

Among the goals of the basic human search for an object we should also include the attempt to establish common mental areas with sufficiently similar objects through fusion. Mental contents can flow freely between the subject and the objects through these shared areas. Human beings seem characterized by an extremely sophisticated and continuously changing boundary system.

The simultaneous dialectic presence of three levels of mutual relation is stressed in object relations: the level of fusion, the level of incomplete separation and the level of complete separation. The three levels are compared to the three positions (one more primitive: Fusion as well as the Kleinian PS and D).

Key words: fusion, separateness, boundaries of the Self, positions CA-PS-D, potential space, symbolic thinking.

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Introduction

During recent decades, more and more complex models of mental activity have been proposed. These also include a *dialectic of experiences and positions* (Ogden, 1992a, 1992b), *multiple realities* (Kafka, 1989) and levels – or whatever one wishes to call the continuous interaction and integration of features of the psyche that are quite different from one another or often seem incompatible. Frequently, what was first considered in a diachronic sequence now tends to be seen in a dynamic synchrony. It is this specific feature of dialectic integration that permits human experience to be better illuminated in its full and rich complexity. Winnicott's *transitional phenomena* could also be seen within this approach and I could share his plea (1971, p. XII): “[...] to ask for a paradox to be accepted and tolerated and respected.

The following hypothesis and reflection on fusion may fit into such a context, as I wish to emphasize the **essential and continuous relationship** – let us say dialectic – **between levels of fusion and separateness in every human relationship**, in childhood as well as in normal and adult mature life. I believe that **fusion is one of the fundamental mechanisms of mental functioning** (Fonda, 1991, 2000a), **an essential element in all object relations – with variations only in the degree of participation – along with the component connoted by separateness.**

My thinking is based mainly on the object relation theoretical view. The drive theory would give some different views, which in a different moment could be interesting to develop too.

There are few papers in psychoanalytic literature specifically devoted to fusion. In particular, I mention the book “Fusionalità” by Neri, Pallier, Petacchi, Soavi and Tagliacozzo, published in 1990, to which I shall refer. In addition, I rely on the more recent book by Bonfiglio (2018) “Simbiosi/Fusionalità e costruzione della soggettività”, and take into account the observations that Bolognini has made on the topic in his writings (2002, 2008).

On fusion

Often in psychoanalytic literature, we come across implicit and explicit examples, or short digressions, of aspects of fusion in works that discuss other concepts, including the concepts of primary process, symbiosis, narcissism, dependence, identification, projective identification, empathy, Self-object relations, and others. In addition, it often appears that the concept of fusion in itself has proven to be of interest to authors – mainly because of its

pathological aspects and in conditions of massive regression. In less recent literature the notion of total fusion was often mentioned, although I see this concept rather as myth than reality, because clinically it does not exist even in infancy (it may exist only as phantasy, expressing a desire or a fear). Under certain circumstances the *physiological* degree of the fusion component can alter itself and increase (e.g. in an amorous relationship that culminates in orgasm), leading to the desire to dissolve momentarily into the object. In severe pathology the increase in fusion may give rise to fears of melting or losing oneself within the other, thereby producing different symptoms and mechanisms of defense. The fusion component may also decrease excessively, provoking a state of *alienation* (from *those similar*), such as in estrangement and in autism.

A hypothetical path

I offer as the starting point of my current discussion a quote from specific excerpts about identification from Freud's "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921, pp. 107-108):

"One ego has perceived a significant *analogy* with another upon one point—in our example upon openness to a similar emotion; an identification is thereupon constructed on this point, (...) The identification (...) has thus become the mark of a point of *coincidence* between the two egos (...) identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object (...) it may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person (...) the mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality (...) we are faced by the process which psychology calls 'empathy [Einfühlung]' and which plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people." (*My italics*).

I will add a further (and somewhat banal) consideration to what Freud wrote: *when the Ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point, the boundaries of the Self weaken in that very point to such an extent that they are likely to fade away into an undefined-fusion space*. In other words, when we are unable to separate what is ours from what is somebody else's, for the simple reason that they are equal and impossible to distinguish, *the perception of the common and of the shared* occurs and the *mine* is replaced by *ours*.

We would therefore experience an automatic dissolution of the boundaries of our self in more or less defined and controlled areas. This would take place every time a *space of*

coincidence, that is, an identity, is established between some of the contents of the Self and an external perception.

More precisely, we could say that during fusion, rather than a dissolution of the boundaries of the Self, we are dealing with their expansion, as even the coinciding object, or rather its coinciding parts, are included and perceived as various degrees of the subject's Self that become separated from other areas characterized by diversity and separation and thus perceived as non-Self. As early as 1929, Federn had written about the permanent fluctuation of the boundaries of the Self.

It is the exact coincidence of our movements with those of our image in a mirror that makes the boundaries of our Self expand by encompassing that image and conferring to it a high degree of belonging (although in the case of the mirror, it is not a *total belonging* because the awareness persists that what we see is a reflected image). In the exact moment where the movements do not coincide, the boundaries would recede, and the image would assume a higher degree of separation and non-belongingness.

A limited fusion experience therefore takes place between two people performing the same music, carrying out synchronized movements, or between people wearing the same uniform or discovering mutual similarities of mental contents.

Given this, it is not entirely correct to wonder whether Self boundaries exist or not, but rather we ought to consider the wide range of situations in which the **coefficient of separateness** may vary greatly. The strength of the boundaries of the Self can vary, with larger or smaller eyelets.

The experience of fusion un-differentiation can involve a subject on quite an overall level (when singing in a choir fusion involves those parts of the Self which are mostly active in that moment – namely the voice and certain emotions – that are generating a moderate feeling of overall fusion), or it can be confined to more limited areas of the Self (for example, in cases of emphatically experienced events, fusion may temporarily involve only particular conceptual-emotional areas or contents).

Therefore, quite different fusion experiences are possible: partial or global, temporary or permanent, peripheral or central. These types occur on the basis of whether – as in the latter case – they involve only peripheral areas of the Self or they involve the core of the Self (Grinberg, 1976, would call them 'orbital' or 'nuclear').

Fusion disappears either through a closer look at reality in the identity-coincidence area, enabling us to separate our own reality from that of others, or because we are experiencing frustration and aggression. Aggression seems to reduce fusion, while it appears that libidinal-affective cathexis and fusion are mutually linked and seem to increase reciprocally. In this latter case, the libido takes on narcissistic connotations.

The term ‘fusion’ means both a process and the result of said process. Fusion can be used as a defensive mechanism, but this issue goes beyond the scope of the current work.

The search for common mental areas and fusion channels

Among the different aims of the basic human search for an object, we should also include the attempt to establish (after birth) a relation with sufficiently *similar* objects, with which we can establish partial fusion relations that would generate *common mental areas* through which **mental content can flow freely between the subject and the object** (or objects). This is the basic situation in which the human mind may develop, establish structure and function. I hypothesize that there is a perpetual need to be able to exchange parts of the constituent elements of our mind with external objects in an exchange-fluctuation that occurs on a more or less fusional basis.

The need for fusion appears proportionally connected with that of the growing, changing and re-shaping of the Self in order to face ever-shifting external and internal realities. Aside from a wide fusion component in childhood, we regularly come across an increase of fusion in object relations during adolescence, primary maternal preoccupation, when falling in love, or during analysis. In similar fashion, from the outset group life is marked by moments when we face the need to integrate and introject important changes. It is not surprising that this occurs in activities such as singing, dancing, shared meals, group celebrations, sharing identification with a leader, as well as other elements in which individuals *coincide*, enlarging the eyelets of their individual boundaries and intensifying group fusion. Such fusion fosters the diffusion of contents, the forming of shared culture, and the subsequent adjustment of individuals to this newly shaped culture. This aims to preserve a persistent homogeneity, which in itself is the basic condition for the wide use of fusion. As we shall see, it is also linked to fluctuations between the depressive position (D), where individuals feel more separated, and the paranoid-schizoid position (PS), where the coefficient of fusion is higher.

In order to achieve a desired relationship that is sufficiently rich with fusion and to avoid being imprisoned within our own individuality, we are ready to falsify whatever necessary. We not only dig through previous introjections and identifications to find something that matches the outer world, but are also prone to changing ourselves by using introjection and, in particular, identification to become *more similar* to those around us. In so doing, we seek to find the necessary conditions that allow us to expand beyond the narrow constraints of our Self. Beyond this, we also do our best to change the outer world by using projective identifications and other means in order to make aspects of that world *more similar* to that of our Self.

A painter sets color to canvas in order to match parts of his inner world. If he has talent, he succeeds in matching through his paintings his inner world to that of others as well.

Desires and feelings constantly seek to distort perception by creating *illusions*. One of the functions of illusion is that of blunting certain *non-coincidences* with objects, thereby allowing for a higher degree of fruition of fusion. It suffices to consider falling in love, in which we project the image of an ideal object onto another object, having then the impression that such a distorted image of the beloved object is real and that it matches our expectations. At the same time, a person is stimulated to adjust him or herself to the ideal image projected onto him or herself by the other person. Consequently, we face a *crescendo* of *coincidences* that increasingly intensifies fusional shared experiences to the extent of becoming “two bodies with one soul”. Eventually, initial disappointments, the perception of being different, frustration, and consequent aggressiveness reduce this excessive fusion to more physiological levels that, in case of unhappy love affairs, culminate in a complete end of such relationships. Obviously, most of what has been said up to now also concerns the mechanism and purpose of transference.

When faced with an unknown object, even before *proposing* an area of fusion, a sequence of messages is sent to establish the feature of such object, i.e. whether it is living, human, sufficiently predictable, whether it at least partially matches familiar features, and whether it is culturally similar: in other words, whether it is suitable to establish fusion *coincidences*.

The acknowledgment of similar, common-shared elements between two persons begins to soften the boundaries of the Self by establishing limited fusion areas that are characterized by a particularly amplified receptivity of unconscious communication. A stimulus is sent that aims to activate, or rather, induce the other person to become attuned, to open himself by activating and directing his own receptors to catch the slightest expressive nuances of the other

person. Such probes or messages can be of a more regressive type, such as touch or its equivalents, or they can be more evolved, when the *coincidence* is proposed in mental contents that is more symbolically elaborate. A similar function, which is by far richer than that of touch, is the *lock-and-exchange of glances* that can either instantly open wide eyelets in the boundaries, or close them tight with glacial distances.

We may hypothesize that fusion creates a passageway, an opening in the boundaries between subjectivity and the outer world through which contents flow that can be different from the contents that had established that opening. Thus, in fusion the unconscious finds a physiological channel through which it can relate with the outer world, bypassing the Ego. As Semi (1999, p. 46) writes: "... each individual is sailing day after day over an ocean of communications from unconscious to unconscious of which he is totally ignorant. By sheer effort, the ego manages to tear off tiny fragments of these communications and working with language and representing them by words manages to transform some of them into preconscious and conscious thought." Furthermore, the Self does not have the capacity to perceive, discriminate, and process many kinds of contents; these types of contents thus become both part of our "unthought known" (Bollas, 1987), the "unthought unknown", the "unrepressed unconscious," or the "structural unconscious" (Bonfiglio, 2010). Bonfiglio (2018) describes the ways that the unconscious-unconscious "direct flow" acts in the analytic relationship.

From these considerations, we are presented with the image of a human being that is continuously driven by the need (akin to breathing) to establish limited fusion areas within different parts of the Self, with different objects, and to varying extents and lengths. It appears essential – long before the conscious exchange of symbols and then, later, alongside it – that we are able to take advantage of the connection to the network of other minds, both in order to elaborate our own contents and to introject the experiences of others in a kind of mental exogamy.

We can identify three main areas where this process occurs: the individual (human object), the one pertaining to the group (culture), and the inanimate one (spatial-temporal physical reality) (Fonda, 1991). On an even more general scale, we could link this to the fundamental human need to be able to "deposit" (Bleger, 1967) one's own undifferentiated mental contents into an external space, which then proves to be not entirely "discriminable" – separate from itself.

Skin-to-skin contact is a powerful apparatus to widen the eyelets of the boundaries of the Self, thus increasing communication on the fusion level. Anzieu (1985) describes the fundamental and structuring *no touching rule* that precedes and anticipates the Oedipus prohibition. Through prohibitions, the child is urged to replace touching with sight and hearing – as far as the receiving function of the relationship is concerned – and to find words that are equivalent symbols of touching – in the emitting function – in order to replace the primary tactile communication, which is too rich in fusion-concreteness, with a separate and symbolic modality.

Such early regulation in the family setting is later extended and becomes a general rule in human relationships. In adult life, however, the function of skin-to-skin contact persists (shaking hands, displays of affection, sexual contacts) to favor more intimate relationships that have a more intense fusion component. Anzieu (1985) writes: “the primary prohibition of touching [...] imposes living beings [...] with a separate existence [and] specifically opposes the clinging drive”. That is, it imposes a modality of relationship with objects that is marked by a higher degree of separation and a lesser degree of fusion.

Replacing touching with speaking is therefore a tool for separation. At the same time, however, the voice remains a powerful means of sensorial contact (sound, tone and modulation) and also a vehicle of fusion. This is of particular interest when dealing with interpretation.

Projective identifications are the privileged communication tools during the early stages of development. In order to force the boundaries of the object and introduce contents, we must first look for an opening in its boundaries and expand it to establish a micro-area of fusion. A certain proportion of these areas already exists between us and our peers, making communication possible. An *alien* frightens us precisely because it possesses nothing *similar*, no *coincidence*. It places us in a situation of isolation, impermeability, and incommunicability, a situation where we are entirely powerless to use and control the relationship. Indeed, humans have an innate propensity to offer areas of similarity-coincidence-fusion, as well as to seek them out, provoking them and expanding them in the other, and narrowing them on some occasions.

In childhood this function is partly supported by an innate toolkit, so to speak, of receptivity and expressiveness (face recognition, tendency to imitate etc.) but also by skin to skin contact.

Amplified receptivity is also found in parents, who are predisposed to this by their own innate toolkit, which we could liken to the idea of *parental instinct*. This manifests in the "primary maternal preoccupation" (Winnicott, 1958), in activating certain modes of response to the child's requests for attachment and in the (pre) disposition to open wide eyelets in their own boundaries to offer fusion to the child and receptivity to his or her projective identifications.

Symbols can form and the qualitative leap toward symbolic thought can take place only when and where the boundaries are well-defined and a potential space may be established.

The degree of fusion varies and, when increasing, limits the ability to think symbolically up to the point of completely preventing it. In communication, however, symbols also require a **fair amount of concrete and sensory elements** ("*beta*") to be fully communicative. **Communication must therefore take place in a context where there is an adequate relationship between fusion and separateness** so that a *three-dimensional* figure can be composed: the symbols articulated with a background, its contours, the emotional color, and the appropriate dose of concreteness-reality.

B. Orasanu (2018) looks at this from a similar though slightly different view: "The child with no words, the *infans*, subsists in the child with words [...] the most sophisticated adult is accompanied in thinking and communication by the *infans* not only because he/she lives on, but because the first one cannot go without the second one".

In emphasizing the interaction of various elements, I would quote Kohut (1971, 292): "Theoretical work (in psychoanalysis), deprived of this constant contact with the material that can be observed only through empathy, would soon become hollow and sterile and limited to a painstaking examination of the mechanisms and psychological structures and thus lose contact with the breadth and depth of human experience upon which the whole of psychoanalysis should be based."

I would say that such *contact* is achieved due to the interaction or – in Ogden's words – thanks to the simultaneous dialectic activation of all three positions. Conversely, a flat perception of the other – similar to the one mentioned by Kohut – has also been noted by Ogden (1989b) as a result of an over-activation of the depressive position.

Nutritive metabolism

What has been written up to this point brings to mind **a human being characterized by an extremely sophisticated and continuously changing boundary system**. Due to stimuli (coincidences) of either inner or outer origin, the eyelets in the boundaries widen so much that they disappear in some areas, while shrinking in others. This must occur in part as a way to provide adequate quantitative balance within separate and fused areas in order to provide sufficient cohesion and stability to the Self.

In order to properly utilize a healthy and necessary fusion component, the cohesion of the Self and its boundaries must be sufficiently solid and secure, but not rigid. Only in these conditions will it be possible for them to float calmly, with varying levels of temporary openings and subsequent narrowings. This will allow certain parts of the Self to have enriching – even fusional – contact with parts of external objects without the danger of being imprisoned within them. An optimal cohesion of the Self appears to be the condition for and the result of such a harmonious fluctuation. B. Orasanu (2018) commented on this as being “a kind of pulsation of the fusion and separation phenomenon, which somehow resembles the image proposed by Florence Guignard’s (1977) ‘psychic breath’.”

Bolognini (2002) investigates what happens in empathy, which assumption is "the identifying contact in a condition of separateness". He also specifies: "The shared livability of specific fusion contact areas destined for intimate communication is possible precisely when people have achieved separateness, individuation and a sense of self that is sufficiently solid and defined in its limits" (2008, p. 101).

In this vein, Bonfiglio, (2018, p. 35) quoting De Toffoli (2014, p. 269), writes: "*The adequate conditions of security*, supported by the analyst and the structure, allow the analysand to shift the attention from the protection of ‘what he considers to be the boundaries and the integrity of the psyche’ to allowing the latter to ‘expand and include previously neglected data and previously unrecognized experiences of his own, experiencing a new level of identity.’"

We could also say that the fusion component is meant to perceive and establish contact with these aspects of object relations for whom the secondary process has no knowing capacity.

At the closing of the boundaries between the Self and the non-Self, a trace of the intimate contact with the interiority of the other would still remain within.

A *nutritive metabolism* of this kind can be disturbed or impeded *from the outside* by intrusive, possessive or incorporating objects to which fusion openings are dangerous. *From the inside*, obstacles can come from an intense subject's greed or voracity, as a result of vital needs that have remained traumatically unsatisfied. Such a subject then tends to incorporate objects reactively, remaining rigidly attached to them (Fonda, 1995), or to attack them enviously. In such a case, there seems to be an underlying longing for a nutritive fusion with the object, but this is experienced as an impossibility. Indeed, this fusion is felt as dangerous, because the Self risks being imprisoned by the intensity of its own *hunger*. Such fears can then nourish a tenacious and rigid rejection of any closeness-fusion.

Fusion-separateness, continued

Discussing a paper by Winnicott (1945), Ogden (2016, p. 17) writes: "The paradox of the **simultaneity of separateness** (the child that attacks the mother and the mother that welcomes the attack) and **unity** (the child and the mother who have a *shared experience*) is the experiential ground where 'the first bond that the small child establishes with an external object, an object that is external to the Self from the child's point of view' can grow'" (my emphasis).

This dialectic is not unique to childhood but to the whole of life, as Bolognini (2008) points out when speaking of the interpsychic as "a functional level with high permeability shared between two psychic apparatuses" and "a level of 'broadband' functioning, in the sense that it allows for the natural and non-dissociated coexistence (but in continuity) of states of mind in which the object is recognized in its separateness, with others in which this recognition is more nuanced. This occurs not for pathological reasons, but for a temporary and transient condition of commensal and cooperative fusion which is part of the normal, healthy mental coexistence of human beings."

Another interesting perspective, which draws the essence of Oedipus into the picture, is found in the work of Loewald (1979) and developed later by Ogden (2006, p. 662). The latter writes: "Thus, for Loewald, incest is felt to be wrong, [...] because it destroys the demarcation between a *fused* form of mother-child relatedness (primary identification) and a *differentiated* object relatedness with the same person. [...] the individual's capacity for healthy object relatedness of every sort—his capacity to establish a *generative dialectic of separateness from, and union with*, other people—*depends upon the living integrity of that barrier*" (my underlining).

This appears as a further aspect of the **essential relationship between the levels of fusion and separateness**. Indeed, Loewald and Ogden emphasize the importance of **these two levels being well separated by a solid barrier (such as that of incest) so that they can interact dialectically without merging with one another**. The intrinsic link is emphasized between the barrier of incest and the dynamics of the boundaries of the Self. The boundaries begin to take shape well before this, but at the same time, they are also an essential element for the correct structuring of the oedipal situation. The purpose in object relations is to differentiate them, perceive them distinctly, and then integrate the components of fusion and separateness without confusing them. This means mediating the tension between the drive towards autonomy and the healthy attraction towards unity (Ogden, 2006). **In this way a binocular vision of reality is also acquired, where both sides, the separated and the fused, coexist and complement one another**. This type of dialectical dichotomy expands and thus consolidates with a suitable overcoming of the oedipal focal point.

Boundaries of the Self related to the Kleinian positions

We may attempt to introduce a model of normal, full and mature object relations and observe it from the perspective of the Self's boundaries. By using a spatial metaphor: starting from the bottom up, we might establish the *simultaneous* presence of *three levels* (even though it is, in fact, a continuum) within a reciprocal dialectical relationship of communication and integration. In reality, it is not an issue of space, but rather of interacting modes of operation.

At the *first fusion level* there is no distinction between subject and object because there is no boundary between the two Selves. A multitude of undifferentiated sensorial non-mentalized contents, emotional and affective coloring, atmospheres, *irradiations* of repressed or split traumas and much more, freely flow within a shared space.

A diffusion of contents is taking place, and this can be more or less indiscriminate and non-conflictual (conflict can occur only at the two higher levels). Therefore such diffusion of contents in itself does not generate suffering. The contents are either apparently mute or they are perceived, but generally not thought, at least until they are *recuperated* at the third level, the level of separation. This fluctuation is implicit in the Mahlerian idea of *symbiosis*. It is also akin to the idea of *deposit* suggested by Bleger (1967). Rosenfeld (1987, p. 158), although in a different theoretical context, refers to something similar when he states: "Those who have studied these early forms of communication stress the uncontrollable experiences the baby has

with its mother. *Her mental processes are somehow transmitted to the baby in a manner akin to osmosis* (Steiner 1975, 1982; Felton, 1985). They are absorbed by the child without it being able to do anything about it..." (my italics). Rosenfeld again (p. 187) states: "Tustin (1972, 1981) using Hermann's (1929) suggestion that 'flowing over' is a precursor of projection, has suggested that flowing over and oneness are a process by which the illusion of primary unity is maintained..."

At this level even those sensations that are little differentiated would spread, constituting the background, the color, the basic constituents of affects, the fusional component of empathy, and so on. These contents can be part of both the inter-subjective and the trans-subjective environment. At this level many elements of group psychism would also spread.

These elements have the features that Bleger (1967) described as *ambiguity*, since - taking up Freud's (1910) work *On the Antithetical Sense of Primary* - there is still no "separation of pairs of opposites"; they coexist without conflict.

Neri et al. (1990, p. 13) state that, in fusion areas, the movement of shared contents is freely floating and lacks clear direction. Fusion "is not accompanied by intrusive violence", and Tagliacozzo wonders if the fusion is not "an expression of a more precocious mode, prior to the constitution of the spatialization processes, which allow for the mechanisms of introjection and projection" (ibid, p. 84).

At the *second level*, the level of **fragmentary separation**, the boundaries of the Self shift (going up towards the third level) from being disconnected fragments of separation to more or less extended areas of incomplete boundaries that still have large eyelets. They eventually become quite defined but still not enough to lead to the activation of the *potential space*, as understood by Winnicott (1971, pp. 104-110).

In such conditions of incomplete and fragmentary distinction, in the relation between the subject and object, centrifugal-projective or centripetal-introjective currents start to take shape. Then only one could have projective or introjective identifications because these currents presuppose at least a fragmentary experience of *inside* and *outside* (Tagliacozzo, 1990). At this level, communication would therefore consist primarily of projective and introjective identifications, which go (with increasing penetrative force) from communicative to evacuative ones, eventually penetrating an object to control it from within.

It is mainly at this second level that the subject projects into the object the contents that the subject asks the other to *contain*; that is, to transform undifferentiated contents into thinkable elements, in order to return them to the subject on the third level in the form of symbolic thought. At this level, the first movement in the process of Bionian *containment* would take place.

At the *third level* we encounter a **defined degree of separation**, characterized by *sufficiently stable Self boundaries*, allowing for the existence of an intermediate *potential space* that makes symbolic thought possible, as their pertinence to the subject or object is clear. That being said, their meaning as fully human communication is provided for by the simultaneous presence of the *background* given by the messages flowing through the first two levels.

When the boundaries take on a clearer demarcation, the contents cannot pass beyond them. It becomes possible, however, to *evoke representations* in the other of homologous symbols, having the character of those *similar* and not of the concrete *being*. This is how that qualitative leap toward symbolic thinking takes place. The projective identification arouses the feeling of being penetrated (as if the door had been left open), while the communication of symbolic thought seems to stop at the threshold (as if one were knocking at the door with a message in hand).

Let us now try to compare these levels with the **positions**.

As far back as 1967, Jose Bleger had introduced and added an earlier and more **primitive position** to the two classical Kleinian positions, in which non-differentiation and symbiosis prevail. He called this position **posicion glischrocarica**. Tagliacozzo (Neri et al., 1990) introduced a **fusional position** (F) preceding the PS and D positions. Ogden (1989 a, b, 1991) describes a **contiguous-autistic position** (CA) that also precedes the two classical positions.

The starting points and approaches of these authors greatly differ from one another. Neither Bleger nor Ogden thoroughly discusses real aspects of fusion. Nevertheless, I believe it appropriate to refer to what is only outlined or clearly implied in their writings. Far from excluding it, both authors assume the presence of fusion aspects in more primal positions.

As far as Klein's **paranoid-schizoid position** is concerned, this implies an incomplete separation from the object to such extent that the line that separates good and bad is clearer and more in the foreground when compared to the line between subject and object. The separation

between subject and object is sometimes so incomplete that it leads the subject to perceive the good and the bad parts of his Self as identified – we could also say *fused* – with the analogous part of the partial object. When speaking of projective identification, Klein clearly states: "In so far as the mother comes to contain the bad parts of the self, she is not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be the bad self". (Klein, 1946, p. 102). Carstairs (1992) also described the presence in Klein's works of references (albeit undeveloped) to aspects of indistinction of the child from the mother.

The **depressive position** in itself is, by contrast, characterized by the achievement of the separation from the object. It also implies that this had not been present or that, at least, it had not been complete in previous stages: "The child becomes aware of himself and objects are perceived as being separate from his Self" (Segal, 1964, p. 95).

The **three levels** described above would therefore **also characterize the state of Self boundaries in each of the three corresponding positions.**

I would like to draw your attention to Ogden's idea (1989b) concerning the importance of the dialectic and integral relationship among the three positions in every human experience. Only after having diachronically developed and assessed the functioning of all three positions can they fully interact with all levels and segments of one's Self. By using such dialectic interaction, the human being can present him or herself to the other to achieve relationship on all Self levels.

I mentioned earlier that there was a **system of constantly shifting boundaries** as a result of stimuli (*coincidences*) of both internal and external origin. In parallel, it would also seem that this involves **fluctuation among the F (or CA), PS and D positions.** It would be interesting to examine the possible cause and effect relations among the state of the boundaries, the related positions and their remaining characteristics.

Further aspects

In this work I make extensive use of the concept of fusion for explorative purposes, therefore it would also be useful to try to delimit it.

Let us begin with **symbiosis**, which is often not differentiated from fusion, especially in the equivalent use of the terms "symbiotic relationship" and "fusional relationship". I believe these two terms should be distinguished, taking into account that fusion is one of the elementary

components of relations, and it can be both fleeting as well as enduring. By contrast, symbiosis is a mode of existence in relation with an object, a complex organization, substantially pathological and relatively stable where extensive fusional areas exist with a certain rigidity, hindering a vital and healthy fluctuation between fusion and separateness and subsequently impeding a maturing evolution.

As far as **identification** is concerned, we might join Schafer (1968) in stating that no identification can occur without fusion; however, something is needed in addition to fusion in order to establish a mature identification. The term *primary identification* is often used to label identification where fusion has a quantitatively overwhelming or even exclusive role, thus being used as synonymous with fusion.

The use of terms such as ‘identification’, ‘self-identification’ and ‘**empathy**’ is not always clear, although these concepts seem to be sufficiently defined, thanks also to Bolognini’s work (2002) on psychoanalytical empathy. I shall limit my remarks on this issue and only state that, in empathy, fusion is an essential, but insufficient element. This is because it must be accompanied by a conscious component of introspection and elaboration grounded in separateness. Very often, the term ‘identification’ (considering it as a temporary condition) is used to describe an empathic relation. All three share, among other things, a partial fusion.

I will propose in a later writing a brief overview on the role of fusion in the analytic session, as well as in certain other areas like the mother-child matrix, groupality and the meta-ego.

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