

# Three-Layered Psychological Analysis of an Epidemic: Impact and Legacy of Covid-19

*Granier F.<sup>1</sup>, Ielapi L.<sup>1</sup>, Pantaleo F.<sup>1</sup>, Soverchia G.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

The global emergency caused by the spread of virus known as “Covid-19” caught many people by surprise, revealing the precariousness not only of health, but also of many other areas of our life, such as relationships, the economy, politics or the environment. The purpose of this article is to explore broadly how quarantine and the perception of the virus influenced, in an interconnected way, the emotions and behaviors of individuals, society and the human species. From a symbolic and psychodynamic point of view, the COVID-19 can be considered as an unknown, unpredictable and invisible enemy. Due to its indefinite nature, individuals and societies have put in place special defense mechanisms to defend themselves from an intolerable state of uncertainty and anguish. From a broader point of view, the arrival of Covid-19 consists in a breach in the human illusion of omnipotence. It has put humanity in front of its limit and weakness. This unpleasant contact opens the way to an uncertain future. Change seems inevitable, but the nature of it is still unknown. Whether it will be a regressive or evolutionary transformation will depend only on us, as individuals, societies and species.

**Key words:** *Covid-19; defense mechanisms; complexity theory; eco-psycho-dynamics.*

<sup>1</sup> Associazione di Psicoanalisi della Relazione Educativa, Rome, Italy  
Email: apreonline.net@gmail.com

## Individual

The global emergency caused by the spread of virus known as "Covid-19" caught many people by surprise, revealing the precariousness not only of health, but also of many other areas of our life, such as relationships, the economy, politics or the environment. The purpose of this article is to explore broadly how quarantine and the perception of the virus influenced, in an interconnected way, the emotions and behaviors of individuals, society and the human species. The current situation, unique in its kind, together with the prophylactic measures adopted by governments and media exposure has concretely changed individuals' way of life. The extent to which this virus has an effect on habits and what surrounds us is, of course, mediated by our way of relating to it psychologically through subjective variables, such as perceived risk and the strategies, conscious or unconscious, that we put in place to protect us (Gilman, 2010).

In Italy, the first news about the virus called "SARS-Cov-2" and known as "Covid-19" began to spread in early January 2020. Two Chinese tourists were hospitalized in a Roman hospital because of positive results of swabs. In the following days, further cases turned out to test positive too, especially in Northern Italy. After almost a month, the virus was still mistaken as a banal flu by a majority of the population. Moreover, the risk of serious physical consequences seemed to concern only the elderly and people with serious previous pathologies. In this first phase, information provided by the media and the scientific community was confusing and contradictory. The uncertainty of this whole situation involved the entire population, leading to a split: on the one hand, panic and mistrust spread to xenophobia, and on the other hand, there was a devaluation of the problem to the limit of manic denial. As a result of this state of illusory omnipotence, infecting and being infected by other people was at risk. Defense mechanisms initially used to protect the self from a possible crisis, became rigid and pervasive, failing in the

primary purpose of defending the individual (Gazzillo & Lingiardi, 2018). Subsequently, the fast spreading of Covid-19, the number of the infected subjects and the physical implications of the virus have dismantled the first defenses put in place and have shown a new reality that upturned millions of lives. Political institutions, with the aim of safeguarding physical health and the national health system, explicitly requested people to stay at home, to go out only in cases of need and to respect the Prime Minister's Decree, causing the country to fall into a state of alert and quarantine. Social distancing measures and instructions have been imposed to prevent the spread of the virus and any aggregative place or activity was prohibited. Schools and universities have been closed and most of work activities stopped. People began to confront a new reality. The individual was forced to reorganize himself, trying to keep his daily life active and respecting at the same time the rules imposed on him. Work, school and social relations have moved onto the web. First of all, it can be useful to clarify the emotions experienced by those who have been involved in the past by a similar epidemic and who have consequently been forced to quarantine (Brooks et al. 2020). A moderate number of researches highlight how samples of people interviewed during an epidemiological quarantine show a high prevalence of disorders and psychological stress, among which are identified: emotional disorders, depression, stress, insomnia, post-traumatic stress and anger. Particularly relevant are irritability and low morale with prevalences of 57% and 73% respectively experienced (Yoon, Kim, Ko & Lee, 2016; Hawryluck, et al., 2004; DiGiovanni, Conley, Chiu & Zaborski, 2004; Lee et al., 2005). On the other hand, feelings of anger, torpor, confusion, anxiety and mourning emerge from qualitative studies (Cava et al., 2005; Reynolds et al., 2008). It is essential to give importance to these experiences also in the period following the quarantine, since it has been shown that this continues to affect individuals even for long periods of time following the period of "imprisonment". This

has proven to be especially true with regard to health professionals (DiGiovanni, Conley, Chiu & Zaborski, 2004; Desclaux, Badji, Ndione & Sow, 2017). Some factors that proved to be able to mediate these responses were the clarity and punctuality of the information received. On the other hand, among the factors that exacerbated experiences of anxiety and confusion were the sense of helplessness and the feeling of lack of control (Mineka & Kelly 1989).

### *The Threat is Everywhere: Moral Panic*

Individually, the arrival of the Coronavirus can be considered a traumatic event, unpredictable, from which there is no possibility to defend or prepare oneself for (Freud, 1986). In this sense, Covid-19 has destabilized the reality of many, in whom experiences of anxiety, uncontrollability and impotence have arisen. Regarding these experiences, primitive defense mechanisms are often activated to remove the intolerable feeling of uncertainty. This has actually manifested itself in various ways. Some people denied the problem which turned into the devaluation of the risk and consequently to the non-respect of the health rules imposed. Other people, on the other hand, fled from their region to a safer one or assaulted supermarkets as a result of an uncontrollable anguish. Moreover, there have been cases where the threat has been identified in certain categories of people considered as “strangers”. For example, authorities were deemed unable to handle the situation, entire nations were accused of conspiracies and attempted biological attacks, or some individuals were considered unctors, for example foreigners, runners or young people. This paranoid defensive mechanism permits the subject to condense the problem into an external and physical enemy who, once identified, can be fought with much more effectiveness than an invisible threat. This process allows anguish to be temporarily replaced with the best known and tolerable emotion of anger.

A study conducted in the Philippines during the Covid-19 outbreak (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020) highlights how the cultural context affects individual psychological reactions. It should be noted that moderate levels of anxiety, hypochondriac symptoms, tendency to avoidance and the search for reassurance were found in all of the population interviewed. What emerges from the research is that subjects residing in areas outside the capital report a greater tendency, than those living within the city, to implement avoidant attitudes. The researchers attributed these findings to an educational and awareness gap as well as to a lesser proximity to confirmed Covid-19 cases. This could mean that less cultured sections of the population are more prone to fall into a form of “moral panic”.

Moral panic consists of a scenario in which individuals, perceiving a threat, respond with fear and concern, identifying the problem in an external enemy, who is not part of “us”, good people, but rather of “them”, malicious, foolish, unconscious. In this way, moral panic promotes prejudices and consequently stigmatization. These extreme attitudes sometimes result in irrational and xenophobic behaviours, but they are considered reasonable and justified by the person because they protect him from a threat perceived as extremely concrete (Gilman, 2010). Moral panic is the fear of one threat or several threats arising from individuals defined as “deviant” or “popular demons”. These people, engaged in showing chaos in different ways, are accused of threatening values, lifestyles, communities and society. The threat originated by these “deviants” is perceived as less scary compared to the real danger it entails. In this specific Covid-19 period, the threat of contagion, the concerns about physical health and the fear of death, amplified by the media and by the restrictions, increase the perceived fear, transforming it into moral panic. A panic that guides the behavior of individuals and that pushes them to look at each other as possible enemies. In fact, all those individuals considered careless (young people or runners) or carriers of the disease (like the Chinese at the beginning),

end up being considered by the mass "popular demons".

### *A new reality*

It is possible to compare the shock of the virus to mourning or trauma. Life prior to the appearance of the virus is gone and there is no certainty as to when it will return. Traumatized people live in the three worlds of before, during and after the trauma (Bloom 2002). Pre-virus life has become a lost object. Denial and protest of non-acceptance intertwine and meet with depression generating malaise and pain (Bloom, 2002). Trauma affects the perception of external reality and the impact of loss is different for each individual. The path of acceptance and adaptation will be influenced both by the external environment and by the degree of confusion caused by the situation which in this case is characterized by uncertainty. Traumatized individuals can see and relate to the world differently from the pre-trauma, for example with deep doubts about the predictability and stability of the world and themselves.

This global event has opened a window to our fragility, a feeling that until a few months ago was forgotten, segregated and believed to belong to someone else, someone far away, unfortunate or less deserving. This sudden and violent contact with fragility and helplessness, together with the inability to tolerate uncertainties and adapt to change, can give rise to emotions such as anger, sadness and frustration. In addition, the defense mechanisms that can be activated in this crisis condition are numerous: intellectualization, splitting, removal, displacement, denial, repression, and trivialization. However, a factor that can determine the experiences and the degree of use of defense mechanisms is the ability that Bion (1970) defined as "negative capability". "Negative capability" is, "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Bion, 1970, p. 169). Therefore, it is the ability to tolerate a state of uncertainty and

powerlessness, managing to stay centered on the present, without the urgent need to fill the void we perceive and without having to simplify superficially to reduce the complexity of what surrounds us. If the negative capability cannot be successfully exercised, there is the risk of regressing to the schizo-paranoid position described by Melanie Klein (1957), with the risk of being stuck in the dysfunctional friend-enemy dichotomous dynamics that derive from it and that are able to increase selfish, xenophobic or stigmatizing behavior.

The anxiety of the virus, although always present, contrasts with the adaptation attempts put in place. Sometimes the state of isolation and the feeling of widespread malaise lead to greater attention to the importance of interpersonal relationships. Some individuals have understood that personal comfort can be rediscovered in others. Looking out the window to sing all together and the various voluntary initiatives are some proof of this. The tensions and stress that previously led to a spread of fear can now be addressed by a more socially acceptable defense mode such as altruism, sublimation and irony. As in other physical conditions, the human mind must be plastic and able to adapt to any kind of situation. Nobody can now imagine what will happen and perhaps, if there had been more psychological preparation, many forms of discomfort could have been avoided. In the context of illness, the human being is called to pass a great test that can also be seen as an opportunity, an opportunity to get to know each other, to learn to count on each other and to be able to create something new and different, compared to pain and anger. At last, this period of emergency could be crucial to lay the foundations for a better future (Zeller, 1990).

### *Society*

We could look at the virus in terms of an event. An "event" does not mean a "fact" that simply happens, but something that has a virtue, a force, a property, a vis, something that does something (Ronchi, 2020). In this

perspective, an event could always be traumatic, to the point that it could be said that if the event isn't a trauma, it is not an event and so literally nothing happens. Events produce changes and transformations, and the virtue of this consists in making possible operating methods that "before" were impossible or even unthinkable. Therefore, the event generates something, the "possible real", where by "possible" we mean the opportunity of doing something, nothing abstract or fictional (Ronchi, 2020). It follows that the event can be seen and thought of on the basis of what it creates in the future (and not from the past), because it produces changes, because it creates reality and the "possible".

However, we are too close to the Covid-19 event to be able to see the future it bears and our very human fear makes us unreliable witnesses at the mercy of "hic and nunc" (now and here). The anguish of contact and the fear of contamination take over and allow our daily lives to be devoured by an invisible, intangible, delocalized enemy. In this unknown, mutant situation, the characteristics of invisibility, diffusivity and danger would seem to open the doors to the unknown, a psychic and irrepressible void (horror vacui), since it envelops us from the outside without producing internal organization of meaning, activating states of confusiveness and immobilization (Weber, 2020). All this does not happen to the individual, but concerns the entire community, unprepared for the anxiety of uncertainty in making decisions. We find ourselves in the critical and stressful need to develop scientific knowledge while the danger is already active and hitting us. In fact, we do not have an already validated protocol of action, but we must create it instantly, without making too many mistakes and causing catastrophic results.

### *Chaos and immunitas*

So how does society manage to organize itself to cope with Covid-19, to prevent itself from falling into irreversible chaos? According to the "*theory of complexity*" (Morin, 1977),

adaptive complex systems would evolve towards an intermediate region between order and chaos, the so-called "chaos margin", and the global development of our complex system (human society) would happen through self-organization. Self-organization is understood, within the following paradigm, as an innate quality of the system that permits creating order in front of a relatively large disturbance. When a complex adaptive system organizes itself, what happens is truly surprising: it produces new and unpredictable phenomena called "emerging phenomena", which make our existence possible (Morin, 1977). Therefore, the community, at the time of the pandemic, finds itself having to move quickly before even understanding what is happening, rearranging the chaos through rules and prohibitions that seem to erect a "wall" that divides, but which at the same time is built for the other, whoever it is. Therefore, the "other" would be radically reduced to the "anyone" dimension and the physical distance imposed in all its forms, including the meter of distance to the bar, could make up for the impossible handshake with that "anyone". In this scenario, the "wall" would be understood as an alternative way of communication and not of exclusion, as the only way that does not "desolidarize", as its construction is driven by a common need: that of protection (Ronchi, 2020). However, this collective organization based on rules that should limit contagion seems to interfere widely with the social attitudes, limiting the functioning of intersubjectivity, which would thus be reduced to an involvement of the other merely in function of the "nobody can save himself". Forced into isolation, we entered into a void that prevents us from feeding our Self, which is usually woven into relationships, the raw material we are made of. Being part of a group allows us to cultivate our thoughts, our affections, to acquire new skills, to enrich our individuality and develop our original uniqueness in more advanced memberships (Tagliagambe, 2020). Thus, the sense of sharing, specifically the principles of exposure, involvement and participation belonging to the Greek model of the "pòlis",

is outclassed by the “immunity democracy” (Di Cesare, 2020). “Immunitas” goes beyond politics and extends itself to the governance of human lives in their many aspects, becoming the primary good for the neurotic citizen, obsessed with threats, hygienic-sanitary rules and with his own protection, and therefore, he is ready to accept every extraordinary and restrictive measure. On the other hand, the “communitas” is lost and freedom is considered negatively or not in the sense of expansion and creation, but in the sense of safeguarding and protection. It is a system of rights seen as guarantees and insurances guided by the “noli me tangere”, behind which we would hope, perhaps naively, to see the front of civilization and progress (Di Cesare, 2020). The strategy of avoidance would work in an acute way, to escape death, but in the long run it does not increase life, but deprives it of those activities, those encounters that would color it with serenity. Withdrawal could drown in boredom, isolation could degrade in marginalization, the emptiness could be filled with exhausting cautions, with obsessive precautions. Not being with the other, for the other, through the other, could confuse us, uncovering the painful lack of recognition that only the relationship with the other can give us.

### *An Objectless Threat: the Fragmenting of the Masses*

In solitude, the ideas of danger and the fantasies of threat grow and the subject's body and mind are perceived as fortresses to be protected from an objectless threat. Clinically we are facing the traumatic transfiguration of fear in anguish (Recalcati, 2020). In this passage the danger is felt everywhere, as it can no longer be located in a phobic object, but it spreads to the hands, in the mouth, in money and in everything we touch. The identification of an external enemy (the phobic object that arouses fear) allows the passive helplessness of the collective anguish to channel into an active defensive attitude. Moreover, this process allows the social body

to paranoically cement by thickening its defensive boundaries to strengthen one's identity (Recalcati, 2020). So, what happens when this enemy is no longer identified externally, but it spreads among us and ends up grafting into our bodies?

The most powerful collective form of defense against the threat is the paranoid defense. This defense mechanism could be put in check and implemented to escape from an impending danger which, however, has no face. The “caring” attitude would be replaced by a panic regression which arises not from a viral infection, but from a psychological one. The collective body is dismembered giving life to a fearful mass, that tries to move away from the source of the threat and to break down the evil power of the danger from which it would like to escape. The mass, now lost and fragmented, crumbles, losing the unity that distinguishes it (ibidem). It follows that the sentiment of collective identity produced by the paranoid defense is replaced by that of individual defenselessness for which we feel alone and without protection. The euphoria of the mass, which involves the cancellation of critical thinking by favoring regression to an illusory condition of omnipotence, turns into impotence.

The pandemic seems to highlight the other side of the mass. When the social body lives itself as helpless, imposing and exposed to a disease and the defense mechanisms are no longer involved in defining the boundaries of our identity and our health, death returns as the absolute protagonist of the scene. If being together, united by the same passion or by the same ideal, creates a feeling of identity and security, in the time of contagion, each of our fellow men is colored by the appearance of “greaser”, of disease, of death. Elementary ritual forms such as slogans, hymns, flags and applause at a certain time, conceal the void of solid ideal systems and put in foreground the need to feel intact and try to claim (or perhaps seek) its identity in the presence of uncontrollable forces that threaten disintegration. For this reason, the anxiety of the infection brings with it the unconscious or conscious presence of death and causes the

common and shared perception of the virus to be deeply associated with a high mortal risk. All feared and mysterious diseases seem to be felt as morally if not literally contagious (Lingiardi, 2018), and as long as a disease is treated as a diabolical and invincible predator, and not as a simple disease, almost all people who are affected by it could only feel demoralized by discovering what pain they're suffering (*ibidem*).

*"The disease is often experienced as if it were a war in which the sick become the inevitable civilian casualties of a conflict. When we are born we have a dual citizenship: in the realm of the healthy and in the realm of the sick. Although we would all prefer to always use a good passport, sooner or later we will be obliged, even if for a short time, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place"* (Sontag, 1978, p. 71).

One of the main functions of the metaphor is to move us away from the object we have before our eyes and take us to a more disembodied point of view, a fundamental function at a time like this in which the object in question is represented by our suffering. However, in this case, suffering would be further exacerbated by a symbolic universe, which risks reinforcing the idea of viruses as an invincible and insurmountable enemy. However, is it really possible to expel the concept of death from illness? Does not every disease contain a depressive element inevitably linked to death or transience? We should probably replace the metaphor of war with one of citizenship, taking into account that the health-disease arc is played in a delicate balance that involves the body and mind in close connection with the environment we live in. The caring attitude cannot be separated from the holistic vision that considers the individual as a psychophysical unit that creates itself from the relationship with the other and from the ecosystem in which it is immersed (Tagliagambe, 2020). What awaits us could be seen as a great test of civilization: to demystify disease and rectify its meaning. Reducing its universe of symbolic transfigurations and containing irrational

panic reactions would not mean denying the gravity of the situation, but trying to transform the fearful and lost mass into a civilian collective whole, capable of rational reaction to the threat that looms (Recalcati, 2020).

### *Species*

The coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic, far from being an accident, is a structural aspect of globalized development. It is no coincidence that this invisible and aggressive enemy spread right now, in the midst of globalization, during the climatic and environmental crisis, where there's the exploitation of natural resources, in a society based on productivity and massive consumption. These "coincidences" make us reflect on the fact that perhaps it is not the virus that came to us, but as many researchers say (Di Marco, 2020), it is we who have thoughtlessly gone to get it in the Wuhan markets.

According to Bateson (1972), the triad Mind-Environment-Society are three interdependent and interacting systems or better "ecologies". Therefore, the mind is equivalent and belongs to the larger ecosystem, not only to individuals: man is a subsystem of a larger and more relevant system. Therefore, nature is within us and we ourselves are nature. What happens in our internal world and what we do spills over to the external world too. Hence the idea of an ecological mind (Dodds, 2012), understood as the ability to consider man and nature as a complex and interacting environment. From this theory's point of view, man would no longer place himself at the top of the hierarchy of the living, but instead inserts himself into the ecosphere. Man is a part in the Whole. Unfortunately, man has preserved the Baconian idea that nature should be fought, exploited, subdued. Daughter of the ancient biblical interpretation for which man would be the absolute master, this anthropocentric approach has been maintained even by the most recent ecological theories, for which nature should, yes, be

exploited, but in a "sustainable" way (Pergola, 2020).

### *Perversion and Illusion*

If we consider the Mind-Environment-Society triad as indissoluble and constantly interacting, we can trace some transferential elements starting from the experience related to the neonatal period. Until now, Earth has been considered by Man, in psychoanalytic terms, as a partial object proper to the schizo-paranoid position defined by Klein's theory. According to Melanie Klein, the first phantasmatic relationship of the infant is the one which enters into relationship with the mother's breast, which is immediately split into good (satisfactory) and bad (frustrating) breast. Before the mother is conceived by the newborn baby as a whole person (depressive position), the baby aggressively relates to the breast, with greed and envy. Greed consists mainly of the baby's desire to "suck completely, bite away, take out and devour good contents of the mother's body" (Klein, 1947, p. 417). On the other hand, envy does not stop at the only passive dynamic of "emptying and completely drying up the breast", but also presents the active dynamic of putting what is bad, therefore the bad excrements, inside the mother, to damage and destroy her (Klein, 1957). In this perspective, these aggressive fantasies remain in adult age and are moved to Mother-Earth. Greed, for example, can be observed in the exploitation of the environment and natural resources, sucking oil away from the depths of the earth. In the same way, humanity's envy can be seen in its tendency to pollute the environment and release of waste continuously, as if it were excrements. In fact, our conception of an Earth capable of absorbing all the waste reflects the same childhood expectations towards the mother. Therefore, our relationship with the planet brings us, from a psychodynamic point of view, to the symbolic identity between Mother and Earth and represents our collective fantasy of a Mother Earth understood as a generous, inexhaustible breast that resists our continuous attacks.

With these assumptions, is it perhaps weird to ask whether the coronavirus is a way that Earth has to communicate with us its needs or rather its way of imposing limits on us?

Globalization carries the myth of development based on the idea of infinite growth. This development model, son of an economic liberalism without rules aimed at producing and consuming more and more, has disastrous consequences, including the coronavirus. The myth of infinite resources and infinite freedoms, the fantasy of our omnipotence, now fails, collapses in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The omnipotent fantasy of the infinite and therefore blind faith in limitless economic development, the idea of limitless progress and potential limitless environmental exploitation are modern perversions (Pergola, 2020). The one who subverts reality in favor of the pleasure principle is perverse, because he is unable to tolerate the anguish and frustration that derive from his finitude and partiality. The pervert uses defense mechanisms such as omnipotence and idealization to keep up the illusion of being infinite and indestructible (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985). Unfortunately, with the arrival of the coronavirus, the illusion has ceased.

From a purely medical point of view, the Covid-19 in itself is not "bad" since it simply does its duty as a virus: it finds a host in which to live and reproduce so that it can run its course. However, in terms of collective unconscious, it represents and means something else. This emergency situation implies the sudden collapse of our illusions and imposes a traumatic encounter with our limits, both from an individual point of view, with the measures of restriction and isolation and the constant presence of death around each of us, both for what it concerns the whole human species. Humanity, now and in the near future, will no longer be able to pollute and exploit natural resources, will no longer be able to produce and consume in a perverse way. This period is a difficult and delicate moment precisely because the end of the illusion certainly implies a collective trauma. On the other hand, this emergency situation



will not last forever, surely things will change forever, surely it is a unique event in our history as we know it, but we do not know exactly when or how things will change.

### *Towards the Future: the Hope for a Catastrophic Change*

If we think of it in Bionian terms, the arrival of the coronavirus may not be limited only to be a "*nameless dread*" (Bion, W. R.1967 p. 128), therefore traumatic and regressive, but it can give way to a sort of evolution and change. For this reason, we can believe that the virus could represent what Bion defined as "*the new idea*" (Grinberg, de Bianchedi, 1993, p. 14). The new idea consists of a potentially destructive force, which upsets the structure of the field in which it occurs to a greater or lesser degree. In this way, an interpretation upsets the structure of personality, a revolution where the structure of society and the arrival of a virus could upset an entire species (Grinberg, de Bianchedi, 1993). Initially, since the idea is new and threatens the pre-existing structure, attempts are made to deny it, expel or destroy it (as could be seen with the initial defensive reactions to the coronavirus). On the other hand, if the anguish of the unknown and therefore of the new idea is tolerated, this leads to "*catastrophic change*" (Bion, 1970; Grinberg, de Bianchedi, 1993). It is called "change" because it is an event that determines a subversion of the order or system of things and "catastrophic" because it appears in an abrupt and violent form and because it awakens feelings of disaster in the individuals or groups in which it occurs. In Bion's terms, catastrophic change constitutes an evolutionary phenomenon of mental growth. It can be compared to an explosion that transforms a "pre-catastrophic" moment into another "post-catastrophic" one (full of emotions). It is therefore associated with a transformation. It is not a disaster, but the starting point of an evolution (Grinberg, de Bianchedi, 1993).

On the other hand, there is also the possibility that the frustration of meeting the limit cannot

be tolerated and therefore we will continue to defend ourselves from the new idea and no new thought will be born. A delicate point could be the compensation fantasies that already circulate: the saving expectation or the unrealistic claim that there is someone who will repay us from all points of view, both economically and emotionally. Even if there was a sense of guilt, this would consist of a sense of false guilt, given more by the fear of reprisal than by a real capacity to love. The virus will be the representation of the bad breast retaliation. In this case, we would remain in a schizo-paranoid position, characterized by the massive use of manic archaic defenses and compensation fantasies, in which our species will continue to rage with envy and greed on Earth. On the contrary, if we face this period with "negative capability" (Bion, 1970), with the ability to tolerate the frustration of our limits and to tolerate the anguish of this difficult and confused moment, capacity of thought may arise. We will focus on our actual bonds and affections more realistically and moreover on our limits, our true profiles, which we tried to deny in the illusion of omnipotence also favored by technology. We will be a little more aware of who we are. In this way, a real sense of guilt typical of the depressive position can arise in us. So that the Earth can no longer be conceived as a partial object to be exploited and devoured, in a parasitic way, but as a whole and living object, towards which to feel gratitude and with which to establish a relationship of exchange and co-construction.

## References

- Bateson G. (1972), *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*, University of Chicago Press.
- Bion, W. R. (1967). *Second thoughts: Selected papers on psychoanalysis*. Butterworth-Heinemann (trad. it. Riflettendoci meglio, Astrolabio, 2016).
- Bion, W. R. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation: A Scientific Approach to Insight in Psychoanalysis and Groups*. London: Tavistock.
- Blum, H. P. (2003). Psychic trauma and traumatic object loss. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 51(2), 415-432
- Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*.
- Cava, M. A., Fay, K. E., Beanlands, H. J., McCay, E. A., & Wignall, R. (2005). The experience of quarantine for individuals affected by SARS in Toronto. *Public Health Nursing*, 22(5), 398-406.
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, J. (1985). *Creativity and perversion*. Free Association Books. (trad. it. Creatività e Perversione, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 1987)
- Desclaux, A., Badji, D., Ndione, A. G., & Sow, K. (2017). Accepted monitoring or endured quarantine? Ebola contacts' perceptions in Senegal. *Social Science & Medicine*, 178, 38-45.
- Di Cesare D., Bonazzi M. & Remuzzi G. (2020). Il pensiero dell'immunità opposto a quello della comunità. *Corriere della Sera*, 16 febbraio.
- Di Giovanni, C., Conley, J., Chiu, D., & Zaborski, J. (2004). Factors influencing compliance with quarantine in Toronto during the 2003 SARS outbreak. *Biosecurity and bioterrorism: biodefense strategy, practice, and science*, 2(4), 265-272.
- Dodds J. (2012), *Psychoanalysis and ecology at the edge of chaos*, Routledge, London.
- Finzi, S. V. (1986). *Storia della psicoanalisi*. Edizioni Mondadori.
- Freud, S. (1896). *L'ereditarietà e l'etiologia delle nevrosi*. Tr. It. In Opere vol. 2, (1968). Torino, Boringhieri
- Gilman, S. L. (2010). Moral panic and pandemics. *The Lancet*, 375(9729), 1866-1867.
- Gosling, J. (2008). HIV/Aids: an encounter with death or a journey into life?. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 53(2), 261-269.
- Grinberg, L., Sor, D., & de Bianchedi, E. T. (1977). *Introduction to the work of Bion: groups, knowledge, psychosis, thought, transformations, psychoanalytic practice*. Jason Aronson. (trad. it. Introduzione al pensiero di Bion, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1993)
- Hawryluck, L., Gold, W. L., Robinson, S., Pogorski, S., Galea, S., & Styra, R. (2004). SARS control and psychological effects of quarantine, Toronto, Canada. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 10(7), 1206.
- Notes on some schizoid mechanisms*. (trad. it. Note su alcuni meccanismi schizoidi. In Scritti 1921-1958, pp. 409-434. Bollati Boringhieri, 2006)
- Klein, M. (1957). Envy & gratitude. *Psyche*, 11(5), 241-255. (trad. it. Invidia e gratitudine, Martinelli Editore, Firenze, 1969)

- Lee, S., Chan, L. Y., Chau, A. M., Kwok, K. P., & Kleinman, A. (2005). The experience of SARS-related stigma at Amoy Gardens. *Social science & medicine*, 61(9), 2038-2046.
- Lingiardi, V. (2018). *Diagnosi e destino*. Torino: Einaudi Editore.
- Lingiardi, V., & Gazzillo, F. (Eds). (2014). *La personalità e i suoi disturbi: Valutazione clinica e diagnosi al servizio del trattamento*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Maggiori, L. (2020). *Coronavirus e inquinamento, è brutto dire 'noi l'avevamo detto'. Eppure è così*. Il Fatto Quotidiano.
- Marigold D. C., McGregor I., Zanna M P. (2010). *Defensive Conviction as Emotion Regulation: Goal Mechanisms and Interpersonal Implications*. In Arkin R. M., Mineka, S., & Kelly, K. A. 1989
- Mazzoni G. (2015). *I destini generali*. Bari: Laterza Editore.
- Moreno Di Marco, Michelle L. Baker, Peter Daszak (2020) Opinion: Sustainable development must account for pandemic risk. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Feb 2020*, 117 (8) 3888-3892; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2001655117
- Morin E. (1977) *Il metodo, ordine, disordine, organizzazione* trad. it., Feltrinelli, Milano, 1988.
- Nicomedes, C. J., & Avila, R. M. (2020). An Analysis on the Panic of Filipinos During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines. *Psychology today*.
- Pergola, F. (2019). *PolisAnalisi. Una clinica del sociale*. Franco Angeli: Milano.
- Proulx, T., & Inzlicht, M. (2012). The five “A” s of meaning maintenance: Finding meaning in the theories of sense-making. *Psychological Inquiry*, 23(4), 317-335.
- Reynolds, D. L., Garay, J. R., Deamond, S. L., Moran, M. K., Gold, W., & Styra, R. (2008). Understanding, compliance and psychological impact of the SARS quarantine experience. *Epidemiology & Infection*, 136(7), 997-1007.
- Risé, C. (2020). *Il Covid-19 non ci è arrivato addosso. Ce lo siamo andati a prendere noi*. Arianna Editrice.
- Ronchi, R. (2020). *Le virtù del virus*. Doppiozero, 8 Marzo.
- Salvatore, S., Palmieri, A., Pergola, F., & Ruggieri, R. A. (2019). Trasformazioni sociali, affettivizzazione della sfera pubblica e ricerca di senso. *Education Sciences & Society-Open Access Journal*, 10(2).
- Sontag, S. (1977). *Illness as metaphor and AIDS and its metaphors*. Macmillan. (trad. it. Malattia come metafora. Aids e cancro. Torino, Einaudi,1978).
- Tagliagambe, F. (2020). Coronavirus. Come liberare la mente dal pifferaio che ci tiene prigionieri?. *Il sussidiario.net, Il quotidiano approfondito*, 4 Aprile.
- Weary, G., Tobin, S. J., & Edwards, J. A. (2010). *The causal uncertainty model revisited*. na.
- Weber, C. (2020). *Fare i conti con un trauma sconosciuto*. Associazione di studi psicoanalitici.
- Yoon, M. K., Kim, S. Y., Ko, H. S., & Lee, M. S. (2016). System effectiveness of detection, brief intervention and refer to treatment for the people with post-traumatic emotional distress by MERS: a case report of community-based proactive intervention in South Korea. *International journal of mental health systems*, 10(1), 51.
- Zeller, M. (1990). *Sickness, suffering and redemption*. In *The Dream: The Vision of the Night*. Boston: Sigo Press.