

Augusto Righi

*Preliminary remarks on "The Subject and the Territory". Milan, **The City of the Future**, November 24, 2018*

Certain preliminary thanks are in order, above all to Paola Mieli, not merely for her illuminating writings but also for being a dear friend who has remained close in these rather turbulent times; and then also to my "indirect prompters": Freud first of all, followed by Lacan, and then Basaglia, Bion, Winnicott, Napolitani, and "last but not least," Recalcati, Lingiardi (I'll skip all those present in order not to seem too obsequious... though again, thanks are due!), through whom I've managed to slake my often insatiable thirst!

I'll try to be succinct, to leave room for more discussion, but wish to make certain suggestions: since, in other sessions of this conference he will come under discussion, I won't bring up Freud, who undoubtedly paved the way for the subject and 'its' territory but ... it's also important to bear that in mind!

Despite my mentioning having my thirst quenched by drinking at various sources, I will attempt, as much as possible, to keep my point of view as that of a psychiatrist who works in various kinds of services; but with regard to creativity and transgression I cannot fail to recall how much Lacan wrote about "the spoken word" and "language," whereby, due to the fact that we speak, we are obliged to submit to the laws of language that preexist our word and to which our word is necessarily subordinate: the function of the spoken word depends on the existence of the field of language. Nonetheless, the spoken word that comes out of language can never be uttered by language, since its singular event always exceeds the static and universal order of language; the Code of language [*langue*] determines the laws to which the spoken word is subject, but the exercise of the spoken word always issues from that Code, overflowing it.

Similarly, it seems important to recall that Basaglia, whose name, historically, is bound up with the institutional change in psychiatric care in Italy, having, to his credit, a solid background in German phenomenology, never wrote anything against psychoanalysis (it would have been senseless, baseless, for him to do so), nor did he ever take a stance "against" understanding the patient's "complexity" and along with it his inner world and his dynamics. Quite the contrary. And his *modus operandi* was always dictated by care for, and welcome of, the other and his diversity within a shared path and project.

It should be emphasized, however, that often such urgings ["sollecitazioni"] (forgive me for using a decidedly reductive word) must take into account the historical moment in which they occur, and surely Basaglia (and the whole group of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other professionals connected to him) took on a strongly political connotation necessary at the time (Law 180 was enacted in 1978), in order, on the one hand, to include people, and sustain as much as possible "a movement" of cultural and operational openness and, on the other hand, in order to be able to have the force to go "against" the present institution decidedly resistant to any change. And if there was the "period" of "psychiatry and anti-psychiatry," psychoanalysis similarly had to confront those who sought to reduce it to a purely cultural approach and nothing more (...there's an interesting show up in Paris right now about Freud, in which a wall panel quotes his statement of his: "... *My heritage as a Jew helped me to endure criticisms, isolation, and solitary labor.... These difficulties, in fact, helped me in the discovery of analysis. But that psychoanalysis per se should be seen as a product of Jewishness strikes me as absurd. As the work of science, it is neither Jewish, nor Catholic, nor 'pagan'*"). We are confronting the "question" of ideology that approaches knowledge yet does so squinting with "one-eyed" (and thus inevitably distorted) vision, often misaligning its contents.

I'm reminded of a story that helps me to capture the aspect of "trans-gression" (from the Latin *transgredi*: made up of *trans*, beyond, and, *gradi*, to walk) that such practices teach us. "The woodsman": Past the edge of the village, deep in the woods, there's a man who hides from the gaze of the locals. He is naked, of uncertain sexual identity, ambiguous, he doesn't speak, and he is the butt of jokes and ridicule in the gossip they spread about him in the village. Only one person has managed to approach him, daring to stray beyond the bounds of the built-up area – but from this encounter he has returned changed. No one can ever say exactly what transpired in this encounter and what made up the change the venturesome "transgressor of limits" so unequivocally reveals. He hasn't learned any particular bit of knowledge from the woodsman, since the wild man in his forest has no special tool to wield and thus no technical lesson to impart; yet what the change alludes to in this case may refer only to the acquisition of a method. This word, suggestively enough, is a compound of the Greek "*hodòs*" (route, road) and the prefix "*meta*," which, among its various meanings, here takes on that of a "mutation," "trasformation," "transfer." We might say, then, that to acquire a method implies familiarity with "the road through which one effects a transformation."

Bion, in *Transformations*, says: "Any sane mental development seems to depend on the truth, just as a living organism depends on food. If truth is lacking or incomplete, a person declines."

Winnicott, in *Playing and Reality* [page 71], says: "...the theoretician must take the environment into account, and no statement that concerns the individual as

an isolate can touch this central problem of the source of creativity,"... the place in which cultural experience is located is the potential space between the individual and his environment ..., and on the basis of play man constructs his entire existence as experience; we are no longer introverts or extroverts, but have experience of life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting incursions of subjectivity and objective observation, in a territory midway between the individual's inner reality and the shared reality of the world, external to individuals."

Althusser uses the image of rain to posit the thoroughly contingent character of an encounter; if we watch the rain falling, we see how the drops all fall in parallel, destined never to meet, drawn by the force that impels them to fall in a linear haphazardness that nonetheless by no means rules out the oblique, unpredictable motion of the atoms and their random concatenations. Likewise, for Lacan *tyche* points to the dimension of encounter that alters the self-identical repetition of *autòmaton*. It's a contingency that shifts destiny's predetermined program.

"*Rete*," meaning "net" or "network," according to the Zingarelli Italian dictionary, refers to a tool or apparatus made up of more or less large threads of interwoven textile fibers, used to catch fish, birds, or wild animals; any object made up of web of mesh of various possible materials (for instance, a mesh shopping bag, or a hairnet); a long-mesh barrier of interwoven textile thread (for instance, the meshwork of a tennis racket); an assemblage of real or ideal intersecting lines (examples: meridians and parallels); a complex structure articulated at several points, all connecting to a center (examples: electricity lines, telephone lines, the Internet). From the Latin, *rete*, *retis*, also has in it the root *retae*, *retarum*, meaning "bushes that grow by the banks of rivers."

In any event, at least 40 years ago in Italy, this mix of languages and areas of knowledge allowed there to take place an advance over the obsolescence of psychiatric hospitals, allowing several thousands of inmates to be able to recover, on their dramatically real shaven necks, the traces of the Other, to reconstruct their histories, and to put behind them an inexorable fate, which likewise meant for the professionals involved having to consider that "it's always the patient you're facing" and not branches of knowledge construed to be ideologies, and having to concede these "children of ours" to be heretics, for being able to recover, like anyone else, their own past, but giving it a new meaning. Their meaning.

To be sure, current-day reality here in Milan is organized into a set of various services or agencies, having different tasks in treatment of patients (from the hospital "Crisis Unit" to the local clinics, to the areas of community structures, to public apartments to units of social housing ...), to respond as effectively as possible to the various needs; but likewise, there are functioning "unidentifiable" places (to avoid any prejudice and/or stigma) to tackle youth and adolescent distress as well as being able to provide responses to people from different

ethnic backgrounds (with remote languages and cultures). They seek to combine within one network the person's history with his territory, which are felt and experienced at times as "outlandish" if not hostile. This falls within the metaphor Lingardi presents in a recent piece of his "on gardens" whereby "all psychotherapists should have a garden: not just to cultivate a fount of non-human emotional sustenance, but also to put to the test their gifts, similar to those of a gardener: attending to the unforeseeable, contemplating truth, exercising patience."