

# **Self-regulation, Interactive Regulation and Contemporary Psychoanalysis**

***Marina Corradi***

**Florence, Italy**

**Centro Italiano di Psicologia Analitica**

***Fiorella Fera***

**Rome, Italy**

**Centro Italiano di Psicologia Analitica**

***Maria Landi***

**Florence, Italy**

**Centro Italiano di Psicologia Analitica**

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the themes of self-regulation and interactive regulation in the context of contemporary psychoanalysis. We have turned our attention to those authors in whose work echoes of these themes are most evident. We first refer to work coming under the name, Self Psychology, including its intersubjectivist developments. Further we refer to those attempts to bridge empirical observations in the field of infant development and psychoanalytical practice. Among these latter, we refer specifically to the psychoanalytical conceptualisations of Peter Fonagy, who, following the Bowlbian tradition, attempts to marry psychoanalysis and attachment theory, and to the theoretical formulations of Lichtenberg, Stern, Beebe and Lachman.

## ***Kohut: Self-regulatory structures***

The reflections of Kohut, who first argued that the principle responsibility of the psyche was the necessary maintenance of cohesion and continuity of the self, are central to our argument. For Kohut, the regulation of self-state comes about through a particular type of relation with The Other: the Self/Selfobject relationship, in which an empathetic environment, necessary to the self, is available. In the Kohutian meaning, empathy or vicarious introspection, is both a method that delineates the limits of

psychology, permitting the perception of complex psychological configurations as well as a therapeutic instrument. Comprehension of The Other becomes the fundamental psychological act upon which a therapeutic connection is built. A brief anecdote cited by Kohut in *How Does Psychoanalysis Cure?* demonstrates how empathetic comprehension is a prerequisite to interactive regulation that result in a renewal of self-regulation. Here, we are in 19th century Germany:

Otto von Bismarck's severe and chronic insomnia, for example, was cured by Schweningen, a physician who, because of his unorthodox methods, was considered a quack by the German medical profession of his day. Schweningen, whose intuitive grasp of the nature of Bismarck's sleep disturbance anticipated some of the essential insights of psychoanalytic self psychology, came to Bismarck's house at bedtime one evening and sat next to the statesman's bed until he had fallen asleep. When Bismarck awakened the next morning, after a full night's sleep, Schweningen was still sitting at his bedside, welcoming him, as it were, into the new day. I believe it would be difficult to find a more striking clinical instance demonstrating how, via a transference enactment, the fulfillment of a patient's need for an empathically responsive selfobject can restore the patient's need to fall asleep. (To be completely accurate, I should say that with the aid of the responsive selfobject the patient's innate capacity to fall asleep is reestablished).

Yet, as Kohut observes, Bismarck could no longer distance himself from *dott*. Schweningen without once more suffering from sleep disturbances: Bismarck's self-regulation was therefore in that phase directly dependent on interactive regulation. Consequentially, Kohut emphasises the importance of self-regulation founded upon healthy interactive regulation. For Kohut, the term "structure" means nothing more than the firm ownership of a function that was previously external. We are not dealing, therefore, with the interiorisation of The Other's image, as hypothesised by object-relation theoreticians. Rather we are dealing with the formation of a new structure through utilisation of The Other. The formation and consolidation of self-regulatory structures, together with the capacity to utilize effectively the possibilities of interactive regulation furnished by one's own Selfobject, represent for Kohut the principle aims of psychoanalytical cure. Within his metaphor of Self, self-regulatory

structures are divided into three categories: primary, compensatory and defensive. While the first two types represent possible, regulatory alternatives on the road to what Kohut defines as the program of the nuclear self, the defensive structures take inadequate, we might say dis-regulatory, routes on the road to the same objective. So as to protect the Self, they maintain it in a state of isolation, a price too high to be paid. Some analogies with the process of Jungian individuation are evident, but Kohut's proposals emphasize interaction (self/selfobject relationship) as the very origin of the psyche's self-regulatory potential.

According to Kohut, just as there is no single healthy self, there is likewise no single analytical path to recovery. In the therapeutic process analytical paths are many since they emerge out of complex interactions with the environment, and they are as varied as possible analyst/patient combinations.

In Jung, on the other hand, there is greater insistence on the self-regulatory aspect. Psychopathological ailments bring with them, in varying degrees of stridence and persistence, conscious-unconscious polarisation. Any given symptom represents unconscious compensation for the unilateralism of the consciousness, and yet contains within it elements able to correct the imbalance. The analyst's job is to work with the patient towards an understanding of psychic manifestations and to give them their proper value: the analyst does this by being utterly present in the course of treatment and bringing to bear all of his or her personal experience; being ready, that is, with his or her "instinctive disposition" to maintain contact with the unconscious. In this way compensation is assigned its proper therapeutic value and the derailed or failed evolutionary tendencies of the patient are reactivated.

### *Interaction at the Centre*

Despite Kohut's strong emphasis on the relational, successive developments in Self Psychology have criticised his concepts for having, among other reasons, exhibited what we might call an excessive bias in favour of the process of self-regulation (to remain within the context of our discussion). We refer to the American intersubjectivist current (Stoloroff, Atwood, Orange, Aron) according to which

every regulatory movement is related to an interactive exchange. These authors critically revisit the concept of "structure" formation that is a stable function implying a certain degree of autonomy. Their notion of an intersubjective system puts in focus both the world of internal experience and its being immersed in a continual flux of reciprocal experience, in addition to other subjective worlds. From within that "relational paradigm" so well-described by Mitchell in his attempt to find common denominators in the complex world of contemporary psychoanalysis, the intersubjectivists' radical stance completely decentralises the focus of the analytical path, placing it in the here and now of the clinical exchange. This stance would seem to dictate that among the two forms of regulation "interactive regulation" will acquire particular pre-eminence. Indeed, the relational context itself will become the deciding factor in choosing one style of communication and self-regulation above another. For these authors, some types of self-regulatory experiences acquire a pathological arc because they render the experience of The Other less accessible. Many fantastical activities, for example, like the grandiose-exhibitionist fantasies of children, represent a defensive reaction to the lack of feedback provided by the environment. That vast spectrum of so-called "internal objects", intended both positively and negatively may also assume a pathological arc. The risk of this position could be, in our opinion, the branding of all psychic activities conducted in solitude as pathological. We might, for example, ask how we must consider the subtle movement of memory evoked in this brief passage from Coleridge:

And in Life's noisiest hour  
There whispers still the ceaseless love of thee,  
The heart's self solace , commune  
and soliloquy

The distance between these authors and the Jungian model is clear. In the latter, compensation between consciousness and unconsciousness is a function of the innate psyche, automatic and non-contextual, independent of the relational happenings, and as such, in whatever form it presents itself,

always serves to maintain mental equilibrium and promote the process of individuation.

### ***A Further Developmental Perspective***

The Fonagy

perspective, well known for its attempt to marry psychoanalysis and attachment theory, is different again. Fonagy, like the authors cited above, insists that self-regulation develops out of a relationship of parental care. He focuses, however, on a particular form of regulation, giving it precedence over the others, that he defines as reflective function. The reflective function, or the ability to mentalise, a concept derived by a partly cognitive and partly psychoanalytical tradition, is defined as ability to conceive of one's own and others' mental states. It is seen from a developmental perspective and begins with elementary modes of social comprehension, and finally arriving to the comprehension of the intentions of others. Such an ability is born out of the interactions of the child with its caregiver, who in turn is able to exercise his or her own reflective function, necessary for self regulation (indeed they the two functions partly correspond with one another), and no less important for interactive regulation. In the absence of reflective function (interacting with The Other is not possible without confusing) oneself is confusing with the Other, because the other's intentions and diversity remain unrecognised. At the same time without reflective function, it will be impossible to recognise one's own emotional states and likewise monitor and modulate states of self. The dream, then, is seen by Fonagy in its self-regulative context, as a draft form of the reflective function, in which the dreamer unconsciously attempts to represent the structural constellations present in his or her mind.

Similarly to Kohut, Fonagy's self-regulation is born from interactive regulation and develops into a relatively stable function, even if susceptible to sudden *defaillances* in specific, unfavourable conditions (the onset of various kinds of preoccupied-disorganized attachment). Unlike Kohut, Fonagy entrusts both to a higher-order function, the mentalisation that guarantees an adequate and reciprocal development of the process. The analyst exercises the same functions when regulating his or her own emotional states and those of the patient, who, from this interaction, will be rewarded with an increased

ability to recognise his or her own mental states and the mental states of others. We might say that the patient enjoys an increased familiarity with the contents of the psyche. This particular emphasis, present in Fonagy's research on psychic reality and on the symbolic game, perhaps brings us closer to Jungian thought and to the role that symbolization and amplification can have, for example through dreams, in regulating the states of Self. Jung assigns great importance to what he called "non directional" thought, whose functioning is not at all secondary to "directional thought", but rather performs the important role of interacting and modifying the conscious orientations. Fantasy and dream images are often the best possible forms with which to express recently drafted content that may not yet be graspable by the consciousness. Fantasies and dreams can prompt progressive movement toward psychic life, either automatically or via reflection, thus maintaining a relationship of conscious-unconscious reciprocal regulation.

Turning our attention in another direction for a moment, we find those coalescing currents of *Infant Research*, primarily of north-American origin, that reflect on the application of the results from abundant empirical observations of the mother-child couple to adult clinical work (on the epistemological meaning of these operations, refer to Giannoni)

In earlier presentations, reference has been made to the work of Beebe and Lachman and the ways in which development emerges as the maturation of models of experience that transform in time, via the relationship between self-regulation and interactive regulation. These principles are present from the beginning of life and share a relationship of reciprocal influence. According to this model, reciprocally regulated non-verbal exchanges are at the centre of the therapeutic action: they supply an interactive re-organisation of self-regulation, presenting themselves as new modalities that are thereby less unbalanced and more flexible compared to those already known by the patient. In forms of secure attachment, self-regulation and interactive regulation find equilibrium: preoccupied-avoidant children tend, for example, to seek escape from their dyad partner, and as a result develop an imbalance in favour of self-regulatory mechanisms. The caregiver, in this case, tends to become hyper-vigilant and intrusive. Like many others, this type of disturbed interaction can also be noted in the treatment of adults. Some "difficult" patients induce in the analyst a kind of self-regulatory activation and a

compensatory vigilance that can be felt by the patient as invasive, limiting and suffocating.

The dynamic themes that constitute explicit and symbolic narration are afterwards integrated in the experiential course of the interaction, and participate in it. In this way, verbalisation modifies the implicit styles of regulation, creating a disturbance in the dyad. The therapeutic process will be, in this way, defined in terms of a complex system in which self-regulation (of the patient and the analyst) and interactive regulation (of the analytic couple) react simultaneously, both at the level of implicit (procedural, non-verbal) and explicit (verbal, symbolic) elaboration.

A certain change in the evaluation of therapeutic factors is clear in the work of the authors we have discussed in this presentation. Indeed, according to the theories of Infant Research, change is promoted by the possibility of experiencing new, and not necessarily symbolic, modalities of both self-regulation and interactive regulation. Attention, therefore, must fall on the relevance of both these modalities, intended as simultaneous principles that are complimentary and in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

While the authors we have examined until now assign a predominant role to interactive regulation, the contribution of *Infant Research* reclaims self-regulation as a structuring mechanism of psychic equilibrium. In this sense, we find it possible to connect these ideas with the Jungian concept of compensation, so central in his dream theory.

## References

- B.Beebe, F. M. Lachmann, *Infant research and Adult Treatment*, Analytic Press, 2002
- S. T. Coleridge, "La ballata del vecchio marinaio e altre poesie" Oscar Mondadori, 1987
- P. Fonagy, "Thinking about Thinking. Some Clinical and Theoretical Considerations in the Treatment of a Borderline Patient" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 72, 1991 ( in: P. Fonagy, M. Target, *Attaccamento e funzione riflessiva*, Cortina, Milano, 2001p 33)
- M. Giannoni, "Psychoanalysis and Empirical research", in: *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol.48, N.5, 2003
- C.G. Jung, vol 16, *Principles of practical psychotherapy*, 1935, C.W.
- C.G. Jung, vol. 9, *Aion, The Self*, 1951, C. W.

C.G. Jung, vol. V, *Symbols of Transformation*, 1912/1952, C. W.

C.G. Jung, vol. VIII, *On the Nature of Dreams*, 1945, C.W.

C.G. Jung, vol. VIII, *The transcendent Function*, 1957 /1958, C. W.

C.G. Jung, vol.16, *The psychology of the Transference*, 1946, C. W.

C.G. Jung, vol.7, *On the psychology of the Unconscious*, 1917/1943, C.W.

H. Kohut, *How does psychoanalysis cure?* The University Press of Chicago, 1984

H. Kohut, *The Kohut Seminars*, Norton and Company, New York London, 1989

R.D. Stoloroff , G.E. Atwood, *Context of Being. The Intersubjective Foundation of Psychological Life*,  
The analytic press,New jersey, 1992