Toward a powerful and responsible therapeutic ecology.

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Abstract

Starting from an analysis of the relationship between Bateson's thought and some aspects of postmodern psychotherapeutic thought, particularly related to Social Constructionism, this article proposes a reflection on the theme of the therapist's power and responsibility. The author, attempting to deduce the position derived in this regard from Bateson's lecture, recalls the need for the therapist's identity to bring as a dowry in the process of therapeutic connection the right to exercise one's own multifaceted and polyhedral power and the duty to assume ethical and technical responsibility. Only in this way, with the affirmation of a "powerful" and responsible mind, the therapist can continue to be fruitfully part of a co-constructive process.

Bateson's thought: a hard lesson

As a "committed laborer in the Western sciences" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 408), Bateson is rightly counted among the most enlightened and illuminating thinkers of the 20th century.

His theoretical work is not specifically tied to a science, but rather to a "suggestive inventory of studies and reflections so well expressed by the locution that gives the symbolic work its name" (Manghi, 2004, p. IX), which is an ecology of mind or an ecology of ideas.

Rather than a theory, his work can be considered a lesson of knowing, "a new way of understanding ideas and those aggregates of ideas that I call 'minds'" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p.190): a lesson structured, in my opinion, from a few key points.

First of all, the idea that the unit of survival is not the individual or the species or the bloodline but "the organism in the environment and not the organism against the environment" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 274).

The idea of relation with reference to understand living systems through languages "no longer operating through the scalpel of oppositional dualism (mind-matter, emotions-intellect, ego-individual-society, quantity-quality...), but through the connective 'dance' of relation" (Manghi, 2004, p. 4), whereby it is necessary to know that "we are dealing only with the relation between the thing and some other

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thing or between the thing and us, or part of us, never with the thing itself. We live in a world that is made up only of relations" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 429).

The idea of a complexity according to which "knowledge is like an intertwined or interwoven whole, like a cloth, and each piece of knowledge is meaningful or useful only by virtue of the other pieces" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 53).

The idea to give up the primacy of conscious purpose (Bateson, 1972/2000). The idea of the necessity of creativity, with the blue guitar being "the creative filter between us and the world, is present always and everywhere" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 398).

Finally, the idea of sacred, which "is connection, total connection, and not the product of splitting" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 448).

Bateson's, as mentioned, remains a difficult, in some ways impossible thought, which, for Longo (2003), "remains partly obscure" (p. 9), for Gritti (2022), leads to "having to give up the presumption of its definitive understanding" (p. 1). The authority of these observers makes less frustrating my personal inability to land, despite years of distracted and more or less thorough readings, on an unambiguous and exhaustive hermeneutic of his thought.

With an interpretive audacity, on the one hand relieved by the need to assert, not with doubtful humility but with certain ignorance that, about Bateson, I know that I know nothing, and on the other tickled by the free spirit with which Bateson himself invites us to approach knowledge, I push myself to perhaps audacious but possible reflections: in general, on his relation to post-modern thought (Lyotard, 1979), in particular, to some extreme positions within post-modern psychotherapeutic thought, such as that of Social Constructivism (Gergen, 1985; 1992).

These are, of course, my own assumptions towards which Bateson would probably abhor and ironize: "Sometimes I even tried to rid myself of the responsibility their continued reliance placed on me, saying, "But in fact they do not know what I am doing. How can they know when even myself I do not know?" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 13).

Bateson and post-modern thought

Marked by the crisis of the great ideals of the modern era, in a climate of general disorientation in which, in the face of the crisis of secular ideological and existential pillars, "we are overwhelmed by information but still lack the logical schemes to keep it at bay" (De Masi, 2013, p. 825), post-modern culture has challenged certain explanatory models of reality.

Social Constructionism, in particular, by emphasising the influence of environmental factors on human behavior and suggesting that relationships between people create reality, goes so far as to argue that there is no objective truth and that since all social constructions of the same phenomena are equally legitimate, no construct can be more legitimate than another.

In the debate on the processes of knowledge, we can recognise a construens aspect to this paradigm, starting with the idea of it as a complex phenomenon centered on the subject.

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Some of its extremes, on the other hand, have manifested a destruens aspect, participating in that climate of liquidity (Bauman, 2000) aimed at fragmenting and destabilising the certainties on which our culture has been founded: in which, as Bauman (2001/2002) puts it, "one has the feeling that many games are being played at the same time, and that during the game the rules of each change" (p. 159). This aspect is particularly problematic in the context of scientific discourse, with the temptation of equal legitimisation of non-scientific reports with those derived from empirical research, with the risk of the "'liberating' liquefaction of all cohesion, all coherence, and all hierarchy" (Manghi, 2004, p. 18).

In my opinion, Bateson's should be considered a valuable contribution to the construens side of post-modern thought. With respect to its destruens aspect, one can agree with Manghi (2004) in arguing that "if Bauman, as we have said, certainly cannot be counted among the apologists for a certain 'postmodernism' ... this is even less true, if one can say so, for Bateson" (p. 15).

We can argue, in other words, that Bateson, in general, nurtures and supports certain concerns of postmodernist thought, but not some of its extremes.

The therapist as a subject of knowledge

A more specific thought invests the relationship between Bateson's thought and the psychotherapeutic field touched by post-modernist thought represented, in particular, by Social Constructionism.

On the construens side, attacking "a kind of colonial mentality in the minds of academics and practitioners" (Hoffman, 1992/1998, p. 27), this paradigm initiated a series of revisitations and innovations that contributed to the establishment of a complex and lively theoretical framework.

In the words of Fruggeri (1998), "it is a perspective that implies a figure of a therapist who does not allow himself to be bound by the dictates of his system of reference, even though he knows the techniques, who does not hesitate to make linear statements, even though he is systemic, who does not give up making diagnoses even though he is a constructionist, who does not avoid giving prescriptions, even though he knows that control is an illusion, who does not refuse to give advice even though he knows that it is not advice that changes people" (p. 47).

It should also be pointed out, looking at the destruens side, that this perspective constitutes "a real threat to the status quo in the mental health professions" (Hoffman, 1992/1998, p. 22).

The ideas of the Self as a narrative and liquid reality, of the therapeutic text as an evolving process, of the individual as a social product and not also as the bearer of an intrapsychic dimension may push one to consider the therapeutic narrative exclusively as a social product of the therapeutic conversation in which the therapist's knowledge and identity are peripheralised, if not also denied.

The therapist, who in this logic claims the right to know that he or she does not know, may be pushed to consider the relationship between self and patient endowed with an excessively horizontal configuration. This aspect, which destabilises the classic asymmetrical set-up of the therapeutic process, appears to

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contribute, in more general terms, to that risk of "a psychotherapy that risks becoming liquid, disoriented in the face of a world disoriented by epochal changes" (Vallario, 2019, p. 28).

Madonna (2003), since many years brilliantly engaged in translating a Batesonian psychotherapeutic model from assonances with Whitakerian thought, pointing out that "the enormous possibilities of Bateson's theoretical contribution have so far remained largely unexpressed" (p. 23), and that the latter did not intentionally formalise but only launched "new ideas for thinking about psychotherapy" (p. 24), points out how the English thinker's contribution has met the fate in psychotherapy of being considered a vague reference point or of being trivialised.

Aware of this, in an attempt to infer a position close to Bateson's ideas on a topic that leads back to the identity of the therapist, I start by pointing out that there is a part of his thought addressed to the psi sciences, i.e., psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry, that is decidedly critical.

He speaks of a pathology of psychological and psychiatric thinking that consists in crossing, mixing and confusing the language of the physical sciences with the language of the mind, "because one is led to think that the world of the physical sciences must somehow be part of the mental world" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 263): "But if we speak the language of the mind, we are not dealing with a case of summation, but with a case of logical product" (p. 262).

Bateson does not think much of a certain therapeutic practice, which is considered "a horrible business" (Bateson and Bateson, 1987/1989, p. 307), because of the "temptation to confuse the idea of manipulation with the idea of cure" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 404) and because of the fact that "now, in the behavioral sciences, about three-quarters of all hypotheses are basically dormitive principles" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 273). Madonna (2003) explains how "Bateson's aversion was directed at manipulative, technicist therapy based on the primacy of conscious purpose, which aims to change people by intervening on them, rather than at the very idea of psychotherapy" (p. 25).

At the same time, there is no doubt that Bateson's thought represented one of the richest and most authoritative tributaries in the river of Systemics, that third revolution (Grinker, 1967) that psychotherapeutic epistemology, psychology more generally, has experienced.

Traversing the first- and second-order cybernetic parabola, he talks about the need to think an ecology of mind and, consequently, an ecology of science, that is, a non-dichotomised way of thinking, in which "inside" and "outside," mind and nature are not separated but move isomorphically: "The fundamental rule of systems theory is that if you want to understand a phenomenon you must consider it in the context of all the complete circuits relevant to it" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 394).

Bateson is one of the leading architects of the critique of reductionist and mechanistic thinking in science, arguing for the constructive function of the knowing subject: "I think perhaps the most interesting (though still incomplete) scientific discovery of the twentieth century is the discovery of the nature of mind" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 524).

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His thought reinforces Wittgenstein's idea that the world does not possess causality in itself, but that this is the result of the work of the intellect prescribing its laws of nature (1914). He credits Kant, along these lines, with the shift in knowledge from the objectivity of the world to the subjectivity of the knower: "Kant, in the Critique of Judgment, states that the primary act of aesthetic judgment is the choice of a fact. In a sense there are no facts in nature; or, if you like, there is in nature an infinite number of potential facts: from among these, the judgment chooses some, which, by virtue of that act of choice, become truly facts" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 524).

The idea that "there is no such thing as truly 'raw' data, and every record is to some extent subjected to processing and transformation by man or his tools" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 22) affirms the principle of an inescapable relationship between the way the subject knows and the being of things.

Bateson (1972/2000) writes: "You do not 'really' see me: what you 'see' is a pile of information about me, which you synthesise into a visual image of me. You construct that image for yourselves. The proposition 'I see you' or 'You see me' is a proposition that contains within itself what I call "epistemology" (p. 521).

Bateson speaks of observed systems, arguing for the need to consider systems in their interaction with the larger environment, and is among those who later speak of observing systems, of an observer belonging to the very field of observation.

By virtue of this, it becomes a well-established assumption that the observer enters with his biases and theories to observe, describe and explain, proposing himself as an active part of the observed reality: he acts on maps that constitute his territory of action but which do not correspond to the real territory.

The observer who in his neutral, rational and competent dimension described, is succeeded by an observer who, included in the system with his knowledge, stories, emotions, motivations and fantasies, participates and constructs: "What does an 'action' consist of?" An action is an element carved out by the observer in the flow of behavior, an element of the behavior of an "individual" carved out in the flow of interaction between two or more individuals" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 254).

So far we can register a position that is in tune with that part construens of Social Constructivism regarding the therapist's protagonism as a knowing and operating subject.

The therapist subject of power and responsibility

The discourse becomes more difficult by referring it to a therapeutic process that is increasingly a process of knowing co-constructed by the relationship between therapist and patient, no longer uniquely directed and determined by a therapist endowed with technical power by virtue of mechanistic logic.

The systemic therapeutic logic of co-construction, subverting the classical logic of description, has helped to replace the traditional Freudian image of the therapist conceived as a mirror (Freud, 1912), focusing on the importance of interaction and construction of the clinical relationship.

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The therapist is not engaged in aseptically sending his representations back to the patient; he is not the repository of an objective, absolute and almost dogmatic truth, standing in a position "outside" the therapeutic system; he is not an instructor of the therapeutic process with the absolute competent function of transmitting content and skills: he cannot put himself forward as the one who interprets the patient's truth in his own way and hopes that everything will go in the direction of change.

The therapist acts and thinks, bringing emotions and affections into play in the service of the therapeutic narration that is co-constructed. He is the bearer of a technical knowledge and competence with which he knows a great deal: he knows he exists, he knows he is doing something in a relative and plausible way, he recognises himself as part of the therapeutic system, and he is the mediator of the encounter with the patient's suffering. He moves within a relationship that cannot be predicted but in which it is possible to intervene uninstructively, very perturbatively.

It is, to put it in Batesonian terms, the connection between the patient, for whom the therapeutic process constitutes a territory in which to be able to experience parts of himself ignored or feared within a relationship that is a guarantor of new ways of being and that contains the unpleasant emotions and frailties associated with this journey, and the therapist, for whom the therapeutic process represents a territory in which he is called upon to touch unknown territories and suffering, fragile and feared parts of himself, and to lead this journey, which co-constructs the therapeutic process.

By relocating the Freudian metaphor of the mirror, it is the entire therapeutic experience, with its actors at play, that becomes a mirror of the internal and external dimensions of the patient and the therapist himself, and of their relationship.

The interpretive difficulty in this scenario is linked to the therapist's relationship with his technical power, more generally with his technical responsibilities.

The right of the therapist to "polyhedral power"

The assumption of therapeutic co-construction, if in Batesonian terms you prefer to talk about a "process that connects", in my opionion does not deny the relational asymmetry that characterises, by its very nature, the therapeutic process within which the therapist is transformed from "master" into "facilitator" of change: "His function is above all to introduce into the system elements of greater complexity, to increase its possibilities of choice over the system's univocal and stereotypical view of its own reality, so that the system can reconsider it and set the evolutionary process in motion again. But it will be the system itself that will "create" the forms and directions, wholly unpredictable, of its own change" (Onnis, 1991, p. 16).

This asymmetry is also recalibrated through the recognition of the complexity of a polyhedral power (Vallario, 2013; 2016) that the therapist holds.

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The therapist achieves this through a power that is not expressed in the terms of rigid authority, but materialises with flexible authority: the therapist should not authoritatively think of centralising the guidance of the therapeutic process in himself, but should share it with the courage of action and reflection that characterise therapeutic work.

Think of the film Ariaferma (2021), where Gaetano Gargiulo, the prison officer who takes over a decommissioning prison, played by Toni Servillo, is called upon to stand up to Carmine Lagioia, the most dangerous inmate, played by Silvio Orlando. In a tense situation brought about by a situation of suspension in which guards and thieves have to live with the emergency, Gargiulo, even within a connection that becomes more human and cooperative by the day, in which the roles of the protagonists seem to take on increasingly blurred contours, does not give up maintaining the rigour that the asymmetrical function of responsibility requires of him.

What I am talking about is a power in the sense of potis, "that can," and potior, "that can more": in the sense, therefore, of an actor who in the therapeutic setting has possibilities and faculties that are greater, on the level of technical knowledge, and that are, at the same time, more protective and more willing to open up to the newness of change.

This is a polyhedral power in the sense of πολυς, "many", εδρα, "faces": in the sense, therefore, of proposing multiple aspects.

These aspects, in my opinion, can be five, also in the light of Bateson's thought.

The power of the therapist is, first of all, uncertain (Vallario, 2013; 2016).

Engaged in a "long and arduous" work (Freud, 1937/1979, p. 499), by its very nature "impossible" (p. 531), the therapist must have the Socratic awareness that he has no power: if you prefer, that he has limited power. Minuchin points out: "A therapist is an expert who accepts uncertainty, who joins with the family in an attempt to expand and enrich its ways of relating, challenging its beliefs and helping it to identify alternative ways of relating to each other" (Minuchin et al., 2007/2009, p. 18).

This characteristic is echoed in the concept of openness proposed by Bateson: "An explorer can never know what he is exploring until the exploration has been accomplished" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 20). Or, again, when he writes, "In order to think new ideas and say new things, we must unpack all the ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 47).

The therapist's power is also ethical (Vallario, 2013; 2016).

The therapist chooses on the basis of subjective, relative, questionable interpretation. His power, in this sense, qualifies as the ability to assume consciousness, within these limits, of his pragmatic choices, hence of intervention, and of his epistemological choices, hence of theory, within a framework of coherence. Cruciani and Chiodi (2011) speak of the ethics of psychotherapy as "defining the system of values that underlie and direct therapeutic practice itself" (p. 66). This dimension of power is embodied in an assumption of responsibility and competence that does not debase into a misunderstood power of action.

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This characteristic is echoed in the concept of humbleness proposed by Bateson: "But we scientists are, or should be, rather humble about what we know. We do not think we really know the answers, and this has some very curious consequences" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 406). A concept that returns in the discussion about the sacred: "We don't think we really know the answers and that has some very curious consequences...We seriously believe that one day we will know all these things and we believe that they can be known. This is our sacred" (Bateson, 1991/997, p. 407).

The power of the therapist is disturbing (Vallario, 2013; 2016).

In the presence of the patient and family who ask him for confirmation of his point of view, he has the power to disturb, to break established balances, through a reading capable of going beyond contingent meanings. Whitaker and Bumberry (1988/1989) write about patients that "they need an experience that frees them from the blocked perspectives that they themselves have developed...Ultimately they need the disruption of their state of well-being, the freedom to develop the kind of anxiety necessary to fuel a massive growth effort" (p. 33).

This characteristic is echoed in the concept of courage proposed by Bateson (1972/2000): "As therapists, clearly we have a duty. First, to shed light in ourselves; and then to look for every sign of light in others, and to help and strengthen them in all that is wise in them" (Bateson, p. 531). A courage reiterated when he explains that "that chaos where thinking becomes impossible" must be confronted (Bateson, 1979/1984, p. 192).

The power of the therapist is complexifying (Vallario, 2013; 2016).

Complexifying, which transforms the unique and rigid thinking of the family system into weak and flexible therapeutic thinking (Vallario, 2010), is a counter-cultural operation, both in reference to the simplistic canons carried by the family about their own history and in reference to the increasingly mass mediological cultural canons. It is a chance that gives patients "an opportunity to see their family in a more complex light, to let go of the distorting good/bad dichotomies toward which they have regressed" (Whitaker e Bumberry, 1988/1989, p. 33).

This characteristic is echoed in Bateson's proposed concept of polyhedral and multifaceted nature through his "inspirational muses", what he calls the giants of the past: Lamarck, the founder of evolutionism; William Blake, the poet and painter; Samuel Butler, the writer and critic of evolutionism; Robin George Collingwood, the philosopher, historian and archaeologist, and William Bateson, the father of genetics and father of Gregory himself. "At times when the idea pursued fails to manifest itself and all the work undertaken seems in vain, it is no small comfort to remember that greater men than ourselves have struggled with the same problems" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 16).

Finally, the therapist's power is delegating (Vallario, 2013; 2016).

The therapist must be aware that he is working on the road to change not by replacing patients, but by seeking their cooperation and drawing from them resources, suggestions, and opportunities aimed at the therapeutic goal. Whitaker (1988/1989) writes, "I feel comfortable pushing the family because I believe their potential is limitless, that they have the capacity to progress and broaden their horizons if they find the courage to try. My job is to fight to mobilise that courage"

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(p. 33). In this regard, when asked by patients about the length of the therapeutic journey, Freud (1913/1975) responds: "much like Aesop in the fable of the wayfarer who asks how long is the way the answer we give is a "go!", and the motivation for this decree is that we must learn to know the wayfarer's step before we can calculate the length of his journey" (p. 338). A metaphor in which we anticipate the idea that the therapeutic process "does not presuppose anything except the reality of the other, the mutual making of the encounter and the also mutual transformations that follow" (Trevi, 2008, p. 18).

This feature is echoed in the concept of vitality proposed by Bateson, when he invites us not to consider useful those soporific assumptions that "put the 'critical faculty' to sleep" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 24). Or when he reiterates that "to explain observed phenomena we must always consider the larger context of the learning experiment, and every transaction between people is a learning context" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 291)

The therapist's duty of responsibility

The recognition of a therapist's power strongly proposes, at the same time, the theme of the therapist's assumption of responsibility within the therapeutic process.

The therapist must not relinquish his power: this responsibly must not be bound to a self-referential position, but made possible in a collaborative dimension, in which the patient enters with his knowledge and in which therapist and patient build an interactive context.

In the process of therapeutic deutero-learning (Bateson, 1972), the therapist collaborates in "changing the change" through relationship but also by taking responsibility for introducing his own knowhow that ontically defines his therapeutic function.

The responsibility is to respectfully acknowledge the existence of the other not as an object but as a subject of the process of therapeutic co-construction.

The responsibility is to consider one's own power not absolute but relative, not antithetical but complementary to the therapeutic interactive process that produces the symbolic processes that arise in the therapeutic relationship. The problem is not to give up one's technical responsibility but to lower it into the relationship aimed at change. Fruggeri (1998) explains: "The problem for a therapist is neither to be powerful nor to magnanimously renounce the exercise of power (a sentiment that typically reinforces a "powerful" identity), but to take responsibility for one's power of construction within a constraint given by the relational character that all social construction always entails" (p. 64).

Responsibility is, finally, to feel oneself to be a critical part of the therapeutic process, in the dual meaning of a subject who examines the situation and who accepts to face in the therapeutic process his own frailties, and is about making himself the interpreter of that "double description (Bateson, 1972), which allows the therapist to always operate on two levels: the level of his professional competence and the level of the interactive relationship, which becomes, in the final analysis, the criterion on the basis of which he makes his technical choices"

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(Fruggeri, 1998, p. 47). Responsibility also means doing so by not giving up, always and in any case, observing one's own role in the process that veers toward change. "For anyone working in the human sciences, this implies that every new discovery and every new advance is an exploration of the self. As the researcher begins to probe unknown areas of the universe, the other end of the probe is always immersed in its vital parts" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 376).

In the "mutual and creative co-construction of meaning" (Piperno and Stancati, 2009, p. 65) of the psychotherapeutic process, the therapist must still be acknowledged hierarchically connoted cognitive, emotional, and technical domains within a relationship that remains asymmetrical. The therapist, guided by the relationship, discriminates, choosing to find criteria to determine what information is important for the purposes of his work.

Minuchin (1981/1982) points out: "The therapist, the one who influences and changes people, stands within the field he is going to observe and influence. His actions, though regulated by therapeutic goals, are the product of his relationship with the family-client" (p. 11).

He does not give up playing an active part in the search not for absolute truth, but for trustworthiness and viability, that is, a cognitive capacity that allows the therapeutic process to proceed on the road to change.

Like an actor, in the sense of agens, "the one who acts", the therapist, on the one hand, plays a part by making use of traditional epistemological principles, on the other hand, improvises by creating himself. He enters inside the therapeutic process with his own biases and theories to observe, describe and explain, offering himself as an active part of the observed reality. He operates on maps that constitute his area of action, but which do not correspond to the real territory. He intervenes in the field of observation, influencing and modifying it.

To use a metaphor dear to Minuchin (1974/1976), the therapist acts like an anthropologist, as "he associates himself with the culture he studies in order to understand its structure firsthand" (p. 125), but unlike the latter, "he is projected toward changing the culture with which he associates himself" (p. 126).

He acts with the goal of change, some of it profound, some of it unknown to himself.

Conclusions

Power and responsibility constitute two dimensions of the therapist's identity that are in danger of being dangerously denied by a certain interpretation of Social Constructionism.

The recognition that the therapist does not have an objective description of the patient, more generally of reality, and that he does not possess an exclusive self-referential and one-way power to direct change is not to recognise the impossibility of a power of intervention in the therapeutic process inspired first and foremost by its epistemological foundations.

Such an interpretation leads toward a deresponsibilising choice and, in my opinion, irresponsible choice.

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It is undoubtedly true that knowledge must feed on a multidimensionality that also makes the patient a co-constructor of the therapeutic process, defining deutero-learning (Bateson, 1972).

It is equally true that the therapist is an interpreter of a knowledge, which is knowing, knowing being, knowing doing, which, in its self-validation (Bateson, 1972), cannot but be placed at the service of the therapeutic process.

Think of the concept of educated hermeneutic consciousness mentioned by Gadamer (1960), which values in openness to the other the awareness of one's own thoughts.

A therapist, even the one most willing to indulge in a kind of respectful anaxertiveness in co-construction, moves through the therapeutic process strong in his own epistemology referring to the reading of suffering, i.e., diagnosis, and the idea of change, i.e., therapy.

One cannot deny the epistemological, theoretical and technical premises of the therapeutic function without denying the nature, dare I say the ontic dimension itself, of the figure of the therapist.

To confuse the logic of relativistic knowledge, i.e., open to giving value and full rights of citizenship to all the different actors and viewpoints of a knowledge that is "a kind of complicated, living, struggling, cooperating entanglement" (Bateson, 1991/1997, p. 399), with the idea of nihilistic knowledge logic, i.e., for which everything is objectively equal to the opposite of everything, risks denying data of reality, perhaps even common sense.

To claim that the fingertip of the index finger of my right hand at the beginning of this line came across a key with the letter "A" written on it is undeniable. It is equally undeniable to claim that this writing letter for someone could be a triangle, a tower, two moving legs, a stylised penis, and so on. But in entitling these second perceptions to citizenship, one must start from the real fact that "A" is the key on a personal computer keyboard.

The post-modernist understanding about knowing that one doesn't know, risks transferring the logical fallacy that equates relativism with nihilism from the process of knowledge to the therapeutic function itself: there is no knowledge, there is no therapeutic function.

Both knowledge and therapeutic function, while relative, cannot that to be.

The therapeutic encounter should certainly be considered a context capable of creatively generating new meanings but it cannot flatten technical positions with non-technical positions. Summarising and extrapolating Burioni's (2017/2018) words, "everyone can have their say, as long as what they say is supported by data" (p. 13).

Narrative co-construction lies in the logic of an interpsychic relational dimension but is necessarily based on individual intrapsychic dimensions: "In this sense in every interactive situation there is always a double level, the level of individual construction and the level of co-construction. The two levels are distinct but partially overlap" (Fruggeri, 1998, p. 44).

This vision does not exclude but on the contrary enhances, the foundation of the psychotherapeutic process as a relational process where therapist and patient cooperatively fulfill their function on the road to change.

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Just as the patient brings to the therapeutic encounter his story, the therapist brings his story with his personal but also technical background: the latter is acknowledged to him scientifically, socially, and personally by the patient who, when he looked him up for his problems in the telephone directory or via the Internet, did not read under "pastry chef" or "bricklayer," but under "psychotherapist".

As Efran and Clarfield (1992/1998) noted, "although Bateson (1972) emphasised the importance of an ecology of ideas, he gave us no indication that we need to stuff the whole ecology into our car to take it to work with us" (p. 216).

Just one more way to say, following Horace, that est modus in rebus.

A moderation that, in my opinion, some interpreters of Bateson have forgotten along the way.

The extremization of post-modernist thought itself and of Bateson, leads to the danger of asserting nihilistic positions that risk drowning in a simplistic and liquid egalitarianism the achievement of a complex and solid relativism that has defined the very nature of that third psychotherapeutic revolution that has manifested itself through the systemic paradigm.

In my opinion, from the power of the therapist descends the duty of responsibility.

The therapist must take responsibility, in the sense of respondere, that is, "responding" to the right-duty of his power.

I believe Bateson (1979/1984) also refers to this when he speaks of the relationship between rigour and imagination as a fundamental requirement of evolutionary and mental processes: "Rigour alone is death by paralysis, but imagination alone is madness" (p. 287). A concept already anticipated earlier, when he pointed out that "progress in scientific thinking comes from a combination of vague thinking and rigourous thinking, and this combination is the most valuable tool of science" (Bateson, 1972/2000, p. 110).

The ecology of mind is not intended to make the therapeutic process the equal of an egalitarian self-consciousness group but, rather, to make it a collaborative context in which the therapist's power is assumed with responsibility.

Let it be neither exalted nor belittled, but responsibly considered as a real dimension that is expressed in the relational bond of therapeutic connection: "it is neither a matter of emphasising power nor of demonising it; power and responsibility should, if anything, be reconsidered from the Batesonian distinction between the "whole" and the "being part of" "(Fruggeri, 1992/1998, p. 64).

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Section: **SPECIAL SECTION**
Verso un'Ecologia della Mente, 50 anni dopo
Steps to an ecology of mind, 50 years later

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