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## Elvio Fachinelli's "Excessive Joy"

### Summary

One hundred years ago, Freud traced an outline of power, group-cohesion, identification, and a form of the subjective/social bond. A century later, digital commodity capitalism and hyper-modernity have served to undermine the position and properties of both leader and masses, with a ubiquitous screen-mediated virtuality that requires a reformulation of Freud's initial ideas on the subject. Towards that end, I will examine the "virtual" nature of the contemporary "leader", a social-media composite best exemplified by the figure of Trump that is continually resurrected by QAnon followers. As well, I will analyze the "masses" or disparate conglomerations that are brought together by the virtual leader's insistent "lifting of the veil," a perverse articulation of statecraft endemic to our moment. I conclude with some considerations regarding what the next few years may have in store for us.<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Man and His Work

Today, Italian psychoanalysts of various schools consider Elvio Fachinelli (1928-1989) as one of the most significant figures in the history of Italian psychoanalysis. At the same time, he is all too often pigeonholed as a militant psychoanalyst of the political protest movements of the 1960s-70s.

He was born in Luserna, a village in the Italian Alps in which German, Italian, and Cimbrian were spoken (the latter is a local language known only to a few thousand people). After studying medicine and psychiatry in Milan, Fachinelli became a member of the SPI, Società Psicoanalitica Italiana (the Italian branch of the IPA) and underwent psychoanalysis with Cesare Musatti, one of the historical founders of the SPI. Musatti was the editor of the Italian translation of Freud's Complete Works and later became very well known in Italy thanks to his television appearances. Fachinelli himself contributed to the Italian translation of Freud; he translated *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the essay "Negation".

Being a member of the SPI did not prevent him from co-organizing, in 1969, a protest against the IPA International Congress in Rome. This action was in the wake of the protests that, starting from 1968, spread across Europe. The way in which he staged the protest attracted attention and received strong media coverage beyond psychoanalytic circles. In spite of that, Fachinelli never left the SPI, not even when, in 1988, he published a conversation with me in which he thoroughly attacked the way in which the SPI co-opted analysts, and called into question its authority and openness (Benvenuto, 1988).

Fachinelli sided more and more with the culture of the radical Left; specifically, he collaborated with the journal *Quaderni Piacentini*. This journal was one of the noble sources of the movement that was then called "extra-parliamentary", since it preferred action in society rather than in political institutions. In the 1970s, he became himself one of the leaders of the cultural Left thanks to his collaboration with *L'Espresso*, which was then the most prestigious Italian weekly magazine and had a non-radical leftwing orientation. Along these lines, he founded the journal *L'Erba voglio*,<sup>[1]</sup> which soon became a publishing house of the same

name; *L'Erba voglio* promoted young writers, “extravagant” books and essays.

In the meantime, Fachinelli had approached Jacques Lacan, whose writings he admired. Lacan proposed to appoint him president of the Italian society of psychoanalysis inspired by his work, but Fachinelli refused.

Fachinelli did not have a purely psychoanalytic culture. His reading interests were far-reaching, from literature to philosophy. He was particularly influenced by the Frankfurt School and Walter Benjamin; later by the Parisian avant-garde of that time.

At the same time, he set up a number of initiatives that were quite heretical with respect to psychoanalytic practice and linked to social themes. He initiated an anti-authoritarian and libertarian pedagogical project through the creation, in Milan, near Porta Ticinese, of a self-managed nursery school<sup>[2]</sup> In 1974, Fachinelli summarized his experiences and reflections on that decade of political and cultural struggles in the book *Il bambino dalle uova d'oro* [*The Child of the Golden eggs*]

Starting from the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, Fachinelli focused on clinical and apparently more individual problems; however, his psychoanalytic approach was always in tune with a broad cultural perspective and his sensibility toward emerging social phenomena. In these years, he published *La freccia ferma* [*The Still Arrow*] (1979), a study of the processes of negation of time and death present both in the individual and society; *Claustrofilia* [*Claustrophilia*] (1983), an investigation of the fusional desire that would accompany every stage of life and be manifest in the process of the psychoanalytic treatment; and *La mente estatica* [*The Ecstatic Mind*] (1989), a visionary essay about some altered conditions of consciousness.

## A Dionysian Unconscious

One of Fachinelli's early writings, “Il magistrato e la tarantola” [*The Judge and the Tarantula*] (2010b) already embryonically presents almost all the themes he will develop in the following years. A patient of his – a judge in his forties – has twice decided to cheat on his wife and sleep with a she-friend. But both times he has a vertigo attack that derails the affair. The second time the attack follows a dream the patient had the day before the adulterous appointment: “[The dreamer] wanders around the staircases and corridors of the courthouse, which is a real labyrinth [...] In his wanderings he sees written on the floor, ‘Di Pietro’, the name of a Minister for Justice [...]”; at this point he wakes up with vertigo. The judge associates the dream with epileptics and the women bitten by the tarantula spider he used to see as a child in his native village on the day of Saint Peter [*San Pietro*]; these women shook convulsively for days on the paved [*di pietra*]<sup>[3]</sup> church square, trying to establish a bizarre contact with the crowd, while the *carabinieri* stringently monitored them.

The *tarantolate* – that is, the women who are allegedly bitten by the tarantula spider – are the ministrants of a very ancient and demi-pagan ritual of Southern Italy: these women scream, wail, and enter into a state of paroxysmal agitation.

Fachinelli observes that, through the vertigos, the judge not only escapes from sexual temptation, but he identifies with the *tarantolate*. In fact, “the tarantula's bite is the mythical representation of a profound crisis of the individual”, yet also a way to pursue a new psychic balance through the search for “another” way of communicating with others. Just as the *tarantolate* were contained by the *carabinieri*, so is the judge by “Di Pietro”,<sup>[4]</sup> namely, by a judicial mausoleum. The vertigos – a hysterical mimesis of a mystical cure – stand as the staging of an attempt at connecting *differently* with others, which the judge does not accept.

In this early writing, we can already observe the essential point Fachinelli will develop for the rest of his life: we resist our unconscious not because it makes us suffer, but because it connects us with a dimension he subsequently called “ecstatic”, that is, with what I would call a Dionysian mode of expression. In addition to being related to a “mystical” form of sociality, the symptom also *actualizes the unconscious*, as if we were in

a deconsecrated theater. For Fachinelli, the unconscious is at the same time an excessive erotic experience, a kinesthetic way of being, and an attempted modality of being-with-others. Fachinelli was always interested in *making room for the unconscious* – and *giving it time* – as an agency we fear because essentially it is *too pleasant*. He deemed it to be a source of as yet insubordinate life that drives us toward *others* in historical temporality. Fachinelli did not share the usual reading of the Freudian phrase, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* (“Where Id was, shall I be”); he did not intend to drain the unconscious like the Dutch drained the Zuider Zee (following Freud’s own metaphor); he instead wanted to make the sea flood the earth, and enliven the hard stone of the courthouse with the feminine and fluid forms of movement. Fachinelli tended to weaken the defenses, yet, unlike in the classical analysis of defense mechanism, this was not meant to establish more efficient and less costly new defenses, but rather to let something be expressed, which he initially calls *desire*.

In the 1970s, Italian psychiatrists and psychoanalysts were divided with regard to the terminology one should use. Some always spoke of *needs*; others, seduced especially by the French thinkers of the time, spoke incessantly of *desire*. Fachinelli adopted the latter term, but not for exactly the same reasons as the Parisians. Fachinelli realized that the infamous needs to be satisfied, perhaps through trade unions demonstrations, are nothing but the desires deemed to be reasonable by “wise men”, that is, the wishes that the Authorities allow us to try and satisfy through adequate and correct responses. Fachinelli instead derived from Lacan the project of promoting the *désir*, namely, a demand that is necessarily inadmissible and inappropriate for every establishment (even if left-wing), and never satisfied by any “response”, be it governmental, medical, or even affective.

At a meeting in the 1970s, a girl, infatuated by the Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller, started to speak about “radical needs” – that year, it was *de rigueur*. Elvio burst out laughing: “When I hear people speaking about needs, I always think they want to go for a piddle”.<sup>[5]</sup> This is a good example of Fachinelli’s lightness; he was a sardonic and caustic critic, but never verbose or oracular.

His writing style was also usually ironic. He did not display any polemical resentment, and oscillated between erudite arguments and literary moments. His tone was fluctuating and airy. He did not indulge much in the jargon of the time, even though, as a columnist for *L’Espresso*, he knew how to speak persuasively to his contemporaries. He was leftwing but did not speak Marxese.

## **The Arrow and the Stone**

Fachinelli’s thought soon began to revolve around a dichotomy, which assumed different forms; on the one hand, life as a Heraclitean *movement* and kinetic temporalization; on the other, the *anxiety* of spatialization and petrification. Political and motor unrest, creative joy, convivial moments in their nascent state, the “mouths that open up” in a rediscovered *agora* (hence his interest in media “from below”, such as the free radios that proliferated in the 1970s – he would have been fascinated by the internet) belong to the first register, which I would call *vital-temporal*. The sanitary and technocratic management of needs, bureaucratic control, the inhibited institutions aimed at protecting us from the dynamics of life, the “shut mouths” characterizing even the meetings of the *Società Psicoanalitica Italiana* (“it is remarkable that most of those who belong to the two extreme levels of the Society [the SPI] – candidates and trainers – keep permanently their *mouths shut*; the former even though they are present; the latter precisely because they tend to be absent” (Fachinelli 2009, p. 85)) belong to the second register, which I would call *deadly-petrified*.

Speaking about the experimental and self-managed nursery school of Porta Ticinese, Fachinelli once wrote:

“In comparison to the children of bourgeois Milanese mothers (well wrapped up; as soon as they move they are reproached [...]) those at the nursery seem a different species. Through the way in which they move, run, touch the ground and each other, they make the others seem motionless, almost catatonic”

(Fachinelli 2010d, p. 227).

On the one hand, we have catatonic motionlessness and being wrapped up; on the other, movement and running. Life is a kinesis in space, or an arrow.

In the case of the magistrate and his dream we mentioned earlier, the first aspect of the dichotomy revolves around the signifier “stone” [*pietra*]: Minister *Di Pietro*, the day of *Saint Peter*, the *di pietra* pavement on which the *tarantolate* convulse, and the cold marbles of the Milan courthouse. The second aspect is here centrifugal eroticism, vertigos, shaking, and a “feminine” opening up to others. Subsequently this second aspect assumed in Fachinelli’s writing aquatic, marine, and ecstatic forms. But this dichotomy between the *vital-temporal* and the *deadly-petrified* initiated a dialectic that was in turn vertiginous; the desire or bite as the *arché* (origin and command) of movement and of the temporalization of life is itself only apparently movement and temporality. Gradually, Fachinelli ended up thinking that the *arché* paradoxically consists of a radical and original – *sacred* – closure. At that point, the welcoming of historical time appeared to him as the product of a receptiveness to something timeless and pre-historical. Dragged along by a reckless dialectic, life and time enclose themselves into the motionless anxiety of institutions because they repress or alienate their source, which is finally – according to the late Fachinelli’s intuition – an experience difficult to bear, namely, an *excess of joy*. As time goes by, life negates itself and is petrified in the world of the “shut mouths”, because it cannot sustain for long the excess that generates and relaunches it. Life exhausts itself in a sad repetition since it does not want to go back to what directs it, namely, the gift of joy.

We may wonder whether Fachinelli met here the notion of *jouissance*, or enjoyment, which emerged as central in the late Lacan. This issue should be investigated elsewhere – bearing in mind that Fachinelli privileged the term “joy”, perhaps because he had in mind what Joyce once said, namely, that he and Freud in the end shared almost the same name.

But the anti-authoritarian activist increasingly worried whether the temporal arrow really moves. The arrow may also be motionless, like the one on road signs; it merely *represents* movement without accomplishing it. The river of life-temporality continuously runs the risk of flowing back through a circular bend, reducing life-temporality to a mere representation of itself, such as the one offered by the *tarantolate* in the church surrounded by the *carabinieri*.

Fachinelli wanted to connect psychoanalysis with two major themes that dominated twentieth-century thought and art, namely, temporality and the Life-world (*Lebenswelt*) of phenomenology. Fachinelli thus updated Italian psychoanalysis. Few analysts – such as Lacan, when he talked of logical time – have dealt with time, within and without the psychoanalytic setting.

Starting with Bergson and Heidegger, time has turned out to be the only truth that is still credible, as the actual non-presence underlying everything that is present. On the other hand, in different ways, from Nietzsche to the late Wittgenstein, the idea that there is no reason, matter, God, or atoms grounding knowledge gained consensus; there is only life, whose insistence produces the form in which it acquires a meaning and, as time goes by, forgets itself. Temporal change as the ultimate truth of things, and the thrust of life as an irreducible source and foundation of representational forms, are the horizon with which modern humankind thinks its truth and task. Fachinelli perceived the centrality of these themes in our times.

In Italy Fachinelli is mostly remembered for advancing a distinction between a (good) “psychoanalysis of demands and questions” and a “psychoanalysis of responses” (to be overcome). He is also remembered for his attempt to link psychoanalysis with (anti-authoritarian) politics. But, frankly, if Fachinelli’s work were reducible to yet another variant of Freudo-Marxism, I would not have become his student. When I met him, in 1974, I had already prematurely departed from the Marxist horizon, and was orienting myself toward a liberal form of reformism. Fachinelli believed in Revolution (in a sense that I will try to specify), while I regarded it as yet another illusion. At bottom, in spite of a shared fondness for Lacan, we came from different cultural backgrounds: Fachinelli was heavily influenced by Frankfurt Hegelianism; I spent my best

years in the Paris that was bitten by the tarantula of post-structuralism. These differences did not prevent us from working together. I believe that we were reciprocally attracted by the drive to deal with many things at once, and get lost in the many streams of “interesting things”. In fact Fachinelli was a psychoanalyst, journalist, editor, director, writer, and political-existential leader... How could he have taken himself seriously without such a feverish amateurism?

However, since the early 1980s, thanks to his sensible historical ears, Fachinelli realized that communist Hope did not have a future. He did not wait for the fall of the Berlin Wall to acknowledge it. But at the end of the day he was never truly a Marxist – rather, he was a *vitalist* liberal. After all, for many twentieth-century intellectuals, Marxism was only a – rather tight – jacket and tie they wore to make their bare and thorny anarchism presentable. Fachinelli never believed in the mystique of the People:

“Sooner or later every group is overwhelmed by difficult and above all entangling problems. In the end I believe only in what can be obtained, *in the long run*, by means of personal intelligence and one’s own *personal* resources”.

For him Revolution was the possibility of generating new and surprising individualities, and not the fusion of individuals in a collectivist mishmash. He wanted to be pervaded by the sounds of life, which do not produce a concert but stand out in their solitary and dissonant individuality. Because the different sounds “become singular voices, with different timbres and tones. When we face them, there is neither expectation nor fear. Only wonder” (Fachinelli 1989c, p. 25).

## The Abolishment of Time

The essay *La freccia ferma*, “The Still Arrow” (Fachinelli 1979) opens with the case history of an obsessional patient. For this small businessman in his forties,

“from the moment he wakes up in the morning until he falls asleep at night, *everything* must be carried out according to a ‘system’ of meticulous and complicated rules [...] His simplest movement involves the obligation to comply with so many precise processes that he prefers to sit” (Fachinelli 1979, p. 11).

These rules and processes are inferred from the Ten Commandments, but the impure acts that are derived from them thanks to an unbridled chain of associations overrun most of his everyday life. For example, “saying the word *giallo* is an impure act, because *giallo* refers to *limone* [lemon], and *limone* to *limonare* [to snog]”. In this paralyzing system of prohibitions, it happens that a very urgent act becomes impure. Being compelled to carry out this indispensable act, the patient then enacts the “abolishment”. He repeats backwards every action he has carried out since the moment when the impure act occurred, behaving like when we rewind a videotape to go back to the beginning. Fachinelli sees in this obsessional abolishment a *technique to abolish time*. In other words, time loses its continuity and irreversibility; it is fragmented into a series of “nows”, which follow one another and are reversed. Time is spatialized. As in Zeno’s paradox, the arrow is never really moving. Hindered by the infinity of “heres” and “nows” it needs to go through, the arrow freezes into an icon of movement.

Trapped by a series of connections that are in their own way far too logical, the obsessional seems to protect himself from the dynamism of life by going always back to the starting point. As in some primitive or fascist cultures, the obsessional aims at an Eternal Return of the Same. This motionlessness is the epitome of every social and institutional form that freezes life as desire. The same happens also within the psychoanalytic institution: “Some analysts have the clear impression that before undertaking this impossible job they were more alive – and *especially more ‘mobile’, in every sense* [emphasis added]” (Fachinelli 1979). Fachinelli was always somehow ambivalent with regard to the psychoanalytic profession, which he practiced with passion, but of which he always pointed out the limits.

On the one hand, we therefore have the arrow of time, where nothing is ever repeated; on the other, the circular time of primitive societies and “obsessional” institutions, where the source of life circularly turns against itself through representation. Fachinelli detested circular shapes; he regarded many of his SPI colleagues as “rounded off, blunted, and blunt-ended people”. A snake that bites its own tail; the round and shut mouths of some training psychoanalysts – these are defenses against the sharp thrust of historical time. Fachinelli loved edges, corners, and arrows; his style was open-ended and caustic; his sentences were often interrupted by ellipses.

## The Static Machine

Eighteen years after “Il magistrato e la tarantola”, Fachinelli published another short text, titled “Sulla spiaggia” [On the Beach] (1989c). The protagonist is no longer a patient but Fachinelli himself lying on a beach. In a state of pleasant passivity, a physical and intellectual epiphany irrupts from the sea, like Ulysses emerged from the waves heading toward Nausicaa: “After an extenuating search, I was accepting something that, in a certain sense, came from the outside... It was neither a meditation nor a reflection [*raccoglimento*]. It was a welcoming [*accoglimento*]” (Fachinelli, 1989c, p. 19). In giving himself in a distinctively feminine way, Fachinelli, like Nausicaa, *welcomes* something. While the judge contained by *Di Pietro* refused femininity – he did not make love to the girl; he did not accept to shake with pleasure like the *tarantolate* – Fachinelli accepts it, and receives “joy with a sense of gratitude”. While Freud and “spatialized” – topical and topological – psychoanalysis demolish and continuously reconstruct dams and defense barriers, we instead need to “let [things] flow in and away, dive [into them], and swim into the current” (Fachinelli 1989c, p. 19).

In the meantime, Fachinelli had realized that the obsessional and institutional defense against time and history was connected with the loss of the dimension of the *gift* and *welcoming* (Melanie Klein called it “gratitude”). For the arrow not to come back at us like a boomerang, we need to *shoot* it by means of an inaugural act of free giving, and only welcoming it allows us to swim into the current.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Fachinelli indeed swam in the grassroots radical movements – as if he had been called from a beach he himself ignored. And yet, the privileged objects of the satirical irony of his writings of the time were not the reactionaries, the bureaucrats of the Communist Party, the asylum psychiatrists, but, on the contrary, precisely his psychoanalyst colleagues and many of the radical extra-parliamentary groups. After all Fachinelli *criticized from within* both the extra-parliamentary Left and the psychoanalytic movement. He liked Karl Kraus, who had been one of the most caustic critics of psychoanalysis when it originated in Vienna. As a hilarious wet blanket and a Shakespearean *fool* in the Catholic-Communist Italy shaken by radicalism, Fachinelli pointed out with (un)timely precociousness the sectarian drift of the leftist movement, which however fascinated him as long as it kept moving. Similarly, he denounced the sclerosis of the psychoanalytic society, when it became entrenched in order to defend its reputation. And yet there was always a note of pessimism in his claim to liberate life-temporality.

Fachinelli is a pessimist when he draws conclusions from his experience, in 1968, with a group of students at the University of Trento. In Italy, the student protest movement originated at the University of Trento, especially in the faculty of sociology. Fachinelli accepted to participate as a psychoanalyst in one of their counter-courses (antithetical to the official courses) focusing on psychoanalysis and society. He was especially surprised by the way in which the 1968 group decided to close the door to new potential participants. In fact,

“as soon as the closed group was created, the process of differentiation [...] from the alien elements present in the group continued with the same violence; and in parallel [...] a process of increasing conformity to an image of homogeneous group, perfectly fused in the unity of its members [was promoted]. What was alien, *different [diverso]*, concrete, tangible [...] had to be eliminated [...] to

make room for an always more perfect and hence more intangible *identity* [*un uguale*]” (Fachinelli 2010a, pg. 174).

From here also followed the tendency to persecute individuals and subgroups that appeared as a *diversion* [*diversivo*] from the ideal unity of the group: “The unavoidable expulsions and internal fragmentations [...], as the outcome of a continuous defense of the continuously threatened group ideal, mark the itinerary of a *process of sectarianization*” (Fachinelli 2010a, p. 175). At the end of the day, there will always be someone who is more hardline than me and will purge me. Speaking as a libertarian, in 1968, Fachinelli perceived already the *clinamen* that then led to the diaspora of the various Marxist “cults”, and subsequently to the years of leftwing terrorism (the late 1970s).

Informed by his experience in Trento, between 1974 and 1976 Fachinelli organized a self-education group in Milan – in which I also participated until it was disbanded. First and foremost it was an *open* group; new members could join in at any weekly session. They were only required to sooner or later contribute to the group with a trauma they had lived. Fachinelli behaved as an analyst but refused to be “the analyst” or “trainer” of the group – this ambiguity did not fail to trigger a protest, and some participants turned the attack on “rigid roles” and “authoritarian leadership” against him (one of his most vehement critics was Giovanni Arrighi, a theorist and economist who then became well known in the United States).

I enjoyed that fluid kaleidoscope, also because it was an arena in which most of the movements, doubts, crushes, and deliria of the swinging Milan of those roaring years promiscuously stepped on one another’s feet; the rising stars of feminism and Autonomia<sup>[6]</sup>, but also the reflux of political engagement toward more intimate interests and the North Star of psychoanalysis – a new path of individual Salvation that followed the disappointments of collective Revolution. Fachinelli then dissolved the group. When I asked him in private why he did it, he candidly answered: “I was not enjoying myself any longer!”. He was substantially unfaithful to his passions and creations – as well as to his women, when their relation entered the tranquility of routine and the mere *need* for self-perpetuation.

The fact that he “killed” his own group when it was gaining momentum should not surprise us; Fachinelli similarly detested long psychoanalyses. I saw him amiably mocking a common friend who confessed us he had already been in analysis for four years – a period of time that is today considered as minimal. As the Talking Cricket of the Pinocchio-analysand, Fachinelli grasped the twofold character of the great cultural and media stir caused by psychoanalysis at the time. On the one hand, being no longer a punctual practice and having enormously lengthened in time, it was presenting itself always more like a militia that required a spiritual conversion. On the other hand, precisely by isolating the analyst and the analysand in the protected enclosure of a “dual culture”, it lacked therapeutic effectiveness and also that *opening* to the times of life and to that *awakening* that makes life creative. Behind the masscult of Freud, Fachinelli perceived some form of *freudulence*, and in my opinion this involved a partial distancing from his profession and vocation. He considered psychoanalysis to be itself afflicted by a sectarian syndrome – like the Trento students he supervised – that is, self-absorbed in an ironclad harmony with its own ideal image aimed at keeping differences away (for instance, he denounced the tacit dogma according to which a homosexual could not be a good psychoanalyst). He sensed that the spreading of “psychoanalése” was based on illusions, which would have been unmasked sooner or later.

As a defender of Freud, the psychoanalyst is the victim of a typical perception error. He does not acknowledge the seductive force of psychoanalysis, whereby he sees only resistances and misrecognitions in the passions it elicits. Enlisted in psychoanalytic patriotism, he lashes out at every movement and research program that might be (or already is) in competition with psychoanalysis. Unlike such a bad-tempered crusader of psychoanalysis, Fachinelli favorably followed many extra-analytic developments – for instance, the therapies inspired by Gregory Bateson’s ideas, or some strands of anti-psychiatry (Laing, Cooper, Szasz). I am certain that today he would also be interested in some fascinating achievements of neurosciences, from Francisco Varela and Gerald Edelman to Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese.<sup>[7]</sup>

In those years the cult of Marx and Freud had already constructed disciplined institutions, acclaimed professionals, and gigantic machines, which, however, were running around in circles.

“Those who look [at psychoanalysis] from the outside or afar, as a stranger and as a future generation, see a gigantic apparatus [...] whose movements have been carefully and precisely prearranged, and whose functioning has been registered and controlled. But this apparatus is static” (Fachinelli, 1983a, pp. 36-37).

As a “stranger” and a “future generation” especially with respect to what he belonged to, Fachinelli saw in the feverish psychoanalytic mobilization of those years a secretly motionless machine.

## From Money to the Gift

In 1975, at a conference in Milan, Fachinelli read out a text on money in psychoanalysis.<sup>[8]</sup> He impertinently observed that many analysands identify the analyst with a prostitute. This is the case not only because the analyst is paid by the hour, for what is after all a fleeting performance, but also because something pertaining to the realm of Eros is unleashed when one deals with an analyst or a prostitute. Fachinelli derived the equivalence between money and time that regulates the analyst’s fee from Freud’s unfamiliarity with the dimension of the gift. The analyst, like the prostitute, provides an essentially pleasurable service, but often does not *give* anything. With this intervention Fachinelli broke a taboo. Needless to say, a young Lacanian participating in the conference brought everything back to Holy Language: “Money is symbolic; in psychoanalysis everything is language!”. Losing his patience, Fachinelli replied: “Bringing everything back to language is idealistic! I’m interested in the money one dumps on the analyst”.

In the end, Fachinelli did not disdain the idea that the analyst sells himself on the streets of a big city in order to enable some people to finally be themselves for some time. But soon he had to recognize that the relationship between the analyst and the analysand is not similar to that between the prostitute and the client. Far from it! Contemporary psychoanalytic treatments are actual marriages; all we still need is someone officiating it! They tend to last as long as an average marriage or cohabitation.

When I informed him that we would title the book that collected various interviews and reflections on the training of psychoanalysts, *La bottega dell’anima* [*The Soul Shop*], he objected: “Why shop? Psychoanalysis has now turned to industrial production!”. I still feel he was exaggerating; today, more than ever, psychoanalysis survives as a corner shop, which finds it difficult to resist the supermarkets of psychotropic drugs and cognitivism. But, according to Fachinelli, the threat for psychoanalysis did not come from its small-scale humility – which he practiced – but from framing the analysand and the analyst into a marital relationship. Alternatively the threat came from some prestigious psychoanalytic monasteries, where every clock had stopped.

However, independently of whether we identify it with prostitution or marriage, Fachinelli saw in the traditional psychoanalytic relationship a lack of the dimension of free [*gratuito*] *gift*, and conversely of grateful [*grato*] *welcoming*. This did not mean that the analyst had to work for free. Beyond the regular payment of fees, he grasped the customary *avarice* of “normal” analysts.

This trait emerges already in his comments on the Porta Ticinese’s nursery school, which are far from adopting the eulogizing tone of the bards of the alternative pedagogy of the time (Fachinelli, 2010d). Against the Rousseauian refrain, Fachinelli observes that, when left alone, children spontaneously and irresistibly tend to establish among themselves markedly mafia-like relationships. He adds:

“This fascist society [of young children] appeared to us as the immediate outcome of an ‘anti-authoritarian’ behavior [...] understood as the generally accomplished abolition of the figure and position of the adult with respect to the child [...] Eliminating the figure of the adult [...] an iron



hierarchy emerges, based on force and prevarication, and it marks the relationships among children” (Fachinelli 2010d, p. 172).

Could this not be an epitaph for everything that was at the time naively proposed as anti-authoritarian? Just as the innovative group of Trento students tend to become, by means of an endogenous evolution, a fanatic and paranoid sect; just as the emancipatory Revolution results in the repressive bureaucracies of Stalinism and Maoism; just as the Freudian call for manifesting the Id is stranded in the “shut mouths” of the training analysts and obsequious students, so the children liberated from adult supervision tend to become a tyrannical society. What is rotten in Revolution, so that it unfailingly turns into its opposite? As Saint-Just put it, why is revolution sooner or later “frozen”?

At the anti-authoritarian nursery school, Fachinelli clearly realizes that children have a desire for authority; adults should not withdraw but *pleasantly participate* in their games and lives. Children ask adults to *donate* their attention, and not to let them turn into bullies. Fachinelli remarks that, otherwise, *everything turns into shit*. The school materials, made available to the children so that they may play with them, are crushed and destroyed; as soon as the adults fade away, they are in turn “soiled with shit”. Fachinelli himself is given the nickname “Elvio shat”. Without the *desire* to give, when the adults provide only for the children’s needs, the *need* to go to the toilet bursts on the scene.

Ultimately, for Fachinelli, a liberating psychoanalysis and social action had to navigate the difficult waters between stone and shit – the stone of the judge’s courthouse (the abolition of history in endless analyses and bureaucracies); the shit of the “anal time-money” (2010e), of performing without giving, and of consuming without gratitude. Their combination generates the grey universe of the conservative and motionless “stone asses” [*culi di pietra*], who are unable to graciously give and accept the gift of life.

### **The Paradox of Repetition**

Elvio and I became friends when I brought him a piece I had written on groups. Borrowing a motto from Didier Anzieu, my conclusion was that “the [sphere of the] collective is a dream”. Fachinelli liked this idea, perhaps because it echoed with his impression that a sort of primary process – similar to that of dreams – dominated the political spectacle.

He could detect the two sides of the dream. The dream is the “royal road to the unconscious” and shows it to us in its authentic and unbridled movement; but, at the same time, it is also the mask of desire and a mere representation. The dream certainly takes place, yet it does *not exist*. Thanks to it the living truth befalls [*accadere*] humankind, but it also makes it fall back [*ri-cadere*] into an imaginary representation. The Freudian dream and acting out [*Agieren*] reveal the source of drives, but they are also its repetition, in the sense in which an actor repeats; we perform life and do not live it. For libertarian vitalism, it is crucial that we may live *in conformity with the truth*, and that life is *truly* life. Fachinelli acknowledged this ambiguity of force – which by unfolding itself also freezes itself in its representation – both in psychoanalytic practice and social and political life.

In “Il paradosso della ripetizione” [The Paradox of Repetition] (Fachinelli 2010c), he highlighted the two sides of repetition in psychoanalysis. The subject repeats in a “good” way by remembering, living the transference, and reinserting his own past into a historical becoming; but he also repeats in a “bad” way, in *acting out*, the compulsion to repeat, and the death drive as a tendency to *return* to the inorganic state. Fachinelli tried to separate the two – progressive and regressive – sides of repetition. He distinguished mere *reiteration* [*replica*] (a reproduction lacking originality) from *reduction* (“a repetition that is more schematic and poorer than the original [...] as when we speak of being reduced to obedience” (Fachinelli, 2010c, p. 31) and *resumption* [*ripresa*] – which in turn referred back to Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelsen*. In Italian *ripresa* also means “acceleration” with reference to a car that is already in movement. The *ripresa* as resumption and

acceleration is a way of relaunching the past into the future that is open to confirmation and modification. The neurotic repeats always the same mistakes; in him the living force *is reduced* to reiteration. But there is also a propulsive kind of repetition, which by presenting the past again actualizes life.

The collective movements of the time were themselves twofold like a dream. They expressed a primary process and a wild state of convivial enjoyment; but they were also a closure into the *representation* of sects and political mythologies. The revolutionary dream did not lead to a real awakening but backfired as a terroristic nightmare, which shed blood in Italy at the end of the 1970s. Those who wanted to embrace the armed struggle believed they were acting; they actually brought the original convivial drive back to the frozen antiphrasis of death; performing a bloodthirsty ritual, Revolution killed – for Fachinelli Revolution was joy, and not methodical putting to death. *Mutatis mutandis*, by promoting free association, psychoanalytic technique makes desire happen, but at the same time it runs the risk of representing it and presenting it again, perpetuating its endless flow. Even the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams runs the risk of making the subject fall back again into the sleep of an endless transference. Can a dream that is not a nightmare ever lead us to an *awakening*?

Every time Fachinelli describes one of his new discoveries, or an unprecedented experience, he speaks of his own awakening. “This idea of changing perspective [...] all of a sudden woke me up. I am now lucid, vigilant, and ready” (Fachinelli 1989c, p. 16). When he thinks he has been granted access to the “claustrophilic area” – that is, a childhood area of enjoyment related to staying within a sort of maternal womb – he writes that “in these cases there is an intellectual excitement, a kind of joyous awakening from an unsatisfied lethargy” (Fachinelli 1983, p. 65). Where there was tiredness and sleep there is now an intensification of sense perception and excitement, thanks to a sparkle that comes from the inside or the outside.

In this way, Fachinelli reversed the stance he himself had adopted up to that point; the analyst opens the subject entrenched in timelessness to history, but only to the extent to which he makes him available to an unexpected *grace*. Was the tarantula bite not already the allegory of this return to an immemorial harmony that breaks with temporal continuity, as a hole into historical inertia, without which, however, there would be no resumption and creative change? Did the paralysis of his obsessional patient not – negatively – witness to the *sacred source* of every historical movement?

In fact Fachinelli was always more inclined to think that in our hedonistic society problems are no longer caused by prohibition and its transgression – as Freud still believed – the tension between pleasure and guilt, or the Lacanian dialectic of a law that creates its own subversion. *In the end, the fear for the world of life did not result from cultural or superegoic prohibitions, from God the Father or the Other, but was related with the human difficulty to accept an excessive joy.* Fachinelli thus replaced political agitators with the mystics – and some great creators – as examples of (even in this case a few) people who dared to accept that excess and re-converted their lives.

### **The Short Dream of Awakening**

Fachinelli realized with time that the mere Dionysian apology of a kind of irreversibility that – unlike Lot’s wife – never looks back is a utopian ideal that leads to sectarianism. Obliterating the primitive archaism does not radicalize our enthusiasm but actually reduces it to the obedience of circularity. In order to have a *resumption* and *recovery* [*ripresa*] it is instead necessary *to make the past present again*, in a sort of hallucination.

This has indeed always been the fundamental problem of the philosophies of life; if it is the case that the springing source of life (Eros according to Freud) grounds every human form, why then does this thrust, as it articulates and thus represents itself, reduce itself to the circular and reversible forms of anti-life? “Human

culture, which is an outcome of Eros, paradoxically weakens it by sublimating it [...] The ego unconsciously works for its own death” (Fachinelli 2010b, p. 24). If Eros is the *arché* – as a principle and command – of human movement, why is it regularly – and perhaps inevitably – the case that it is frozen in repetitions and mere representations?

Freud tried to answer this question with his myth of the life and death drives. But Fachinelli understood that Eros and Thanatos are not two twins who sometimes work together and some other times thrash each other – as suggested by psychoanalytic clichés. Fachinelli knew that Thanatos does not really run parallel to Eros but is rather one of its vicissitudes, and prolongs it. I would dare to say that Thanatos is the ultimate truth of Eros. Hence Eros is also the vital negation of our ultimate Truth. Fachinelli detected the tragic aspect of every serious reflection on the world-of-life [*Lebenswelt*] – namely, that life is afraid of obliterating itself because of the excess from which it originates, and therefore alienates itself in forms and defenses, but in so doing it petrifies like Niobe; it brings forward death by endlessly preserving itself.

In fact, the actualization of the truth of life as a source corresponds to the fever of an ecstatic moment, an interlude, and an ephemeral euphoria. Fachinelli referred to the Portuguese revolution of 1975 – which he observed on the ground – as a “rapid germination that, at the same time, has already shed its blossoms” (Fachinelli 1976, p. 41). Fachinelli’s political radicalism had a melancholic inclination. For him, the truth of life does not last long but burns in the precarious joy of an Indian summer; it is like a sudden heat wave, an ephemeral resurgence of the summer, when the autumn cold is already prevailing.

Why does the dream of awakening life in its truth always remain a short dream that soon fades away and never leads to the prolongation of the awakening? Why does the fleeting awakening, going back to its phantasmagoria, find itself in the stasis of a new sleep? We always postpone the awakening... to a little later. Fachinelli agreed that “the collective is a dream”, but in the end this means that the subject does never really wake up from the collective dream – except for some special moments, which are ecstatic, unexpected, and intense.

On these occasions the source of the resumption [*ripresa*] is reactivated and, paradoxically, it brings out what is most regressive, namely, an extra-temporal state of original grace.

## **The Lacanian Answer**

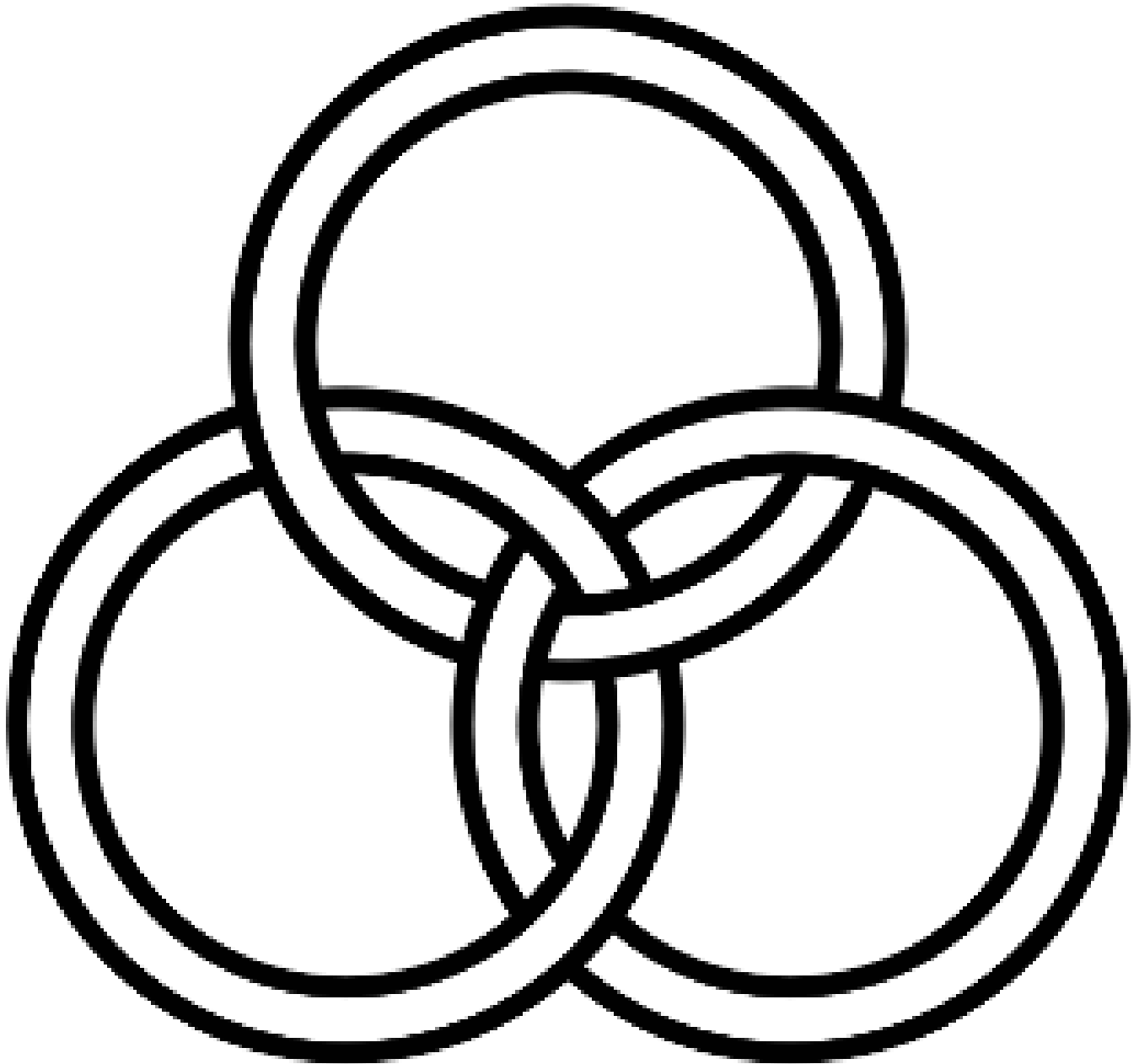
Fachinelli saluted the liberating potentiality of Lacan’s thought for psychoanalysis. He derived from him the impertinence of the *désir* as opposed to the management of needs, and the idea that the unconscious does not dwell in our depths, but has to be *recalled* outside ourselves, that is, in the Other. One could say of Lacan what Sartre said of Husserl: “He finally freed us from inner life!”. But Lacan ran the risk of giving too many answers, and produced slogans ready to be repeated by his followers, such as “The unconscious is structured like a language” – a great, fascinating answer, but an answer nonetheless; a petrification in the formalism of the *linguisterie*. Fachinelli was instead interested in Lacan’s *basic question*: if suffering originates from the ego’s resistance to *jouissance* – or enjoyment – of the Other, what will happen to such a *jouissance* were it to be given free rein? Why does this enjoyment suffer in the comfort of the representational circularity of the compulsion to repeat? For Fachinelli, these questions have to remain open; we should not answer them by means of the – however plastic – topologies of the Möbius strip, or through the École Lacan set up.



Fachinelli and Lacan

In 1974, Lacan intended to entrust Fachinelli with the leadership of what should have been his Italian school. This was a good political move; Fachinelli was not one of his direct students, and even a member of the IPA. Above all, Lacan thought highly of him. And yet Fachinelli refused his offer. At that time, he told me: “Lacan is repeating Freud’s own mistake; turning psychoanalysis into an institution. Like Freud he will suffer bitter disappointments”. Fachinelli was proved right; in 1980, Lacan dismantled his school. His *answer* was a failure. On the contrary, many IPA rigid schools continued to prosper. Why are bureaucracies so long-lasting and resistant, while the living movements that deliver actual truths are so ephemeral? There is no “vitalist” answer to this question. The emergence of life is *brief*, but this brevity relaunches life.

Lacan’s answer was also conceptual. Seeing how the enjoyment that is consubstantial with life is from the beginning captured by the network of language, Lacan ended up enclosing this overwhelming enjoyment into an eternal symptom (the so-called *sinthome*), where the only possible kind of circulation is that of a labyrinth. *Jouissance* as a sharp impulse of life that *gives itself* prior to any round form was no longer accepted as a gift, but spatialized again in the Borromean knots to which, so to speak, Lacan had enchained himself in his last years.



Borromean knots

But what does it really mean to accept desire or enjoyment as a gift?

### **Lacan and the Neapolitan Gesture**

When Lacan visited Milan with the intention of founding the Italian branch of his school, in a public discussion, Fachinelli repeated a gesture that is well known in the history of philosophy. We are told that, during one of their frequent discussions at Cambridge, the economist Pietro Sraffa distressed Wittgenstein by mimicking a Neapolitan gesture – brushing the underneath of one’s chin with an outward sweep of the fingertips of one hand – that ambiguously means some form of refusal. Sraffa provocatively asked Wittgenstein: “What is the grammar of this gesture?”. It seems that this prompted Wittgenstein to abandon the theory according to which language is a picture of facts. Fachinelli made Sraffa’s gesture to Lacan and asked him what it meant. Lacan could not answer. Apparently, thanks to this act Fachinelli wanted to remind the Master that language is not everything, since there are also gestures. The objection is banal, and indeed

Lacan eventually had no difficulty in replying – but this is precisely the point; he replied, that is, he did not accept to be *called into question* like Wittgenstein. Lacan said that Neapolitan gestures have themselves a linguistic structure. He noticed how that gesture as a *signifiant* does not at all resemble its *signifié*. But Fachinelli was not challenging the answer; he was rather interested in a *question*, namely, that of incessant life as located beyond the network of language and the *Écoles*. Does psychoanalyzing only amount to acknowledging the symbolic articulation and the compulsion to repeat – to which we have to give in – or is it able, at least for a moment, to open us to enjoyment and bring us back to the inaugural *event* of life?

The gesture in question, which was famous in the past, used to be referred to as the “Neapolitan gesture” par excellence, and abroad it was considered to be elegant and witty. Jean-Baptiste Greuze left us a painting titled *Le geste napolitain*; pretending to be a street-seller, a young Portuguese man enters the house of a beautiful Neapolitan girl, but she pushes him away by performing the Neapolitan gesture.



Greuze, *Le geste napolitain*

There are different interpretations of the painting; although the gesture indicates that the girl refused to grant her favors, this is ambiguously contradicted by her almost amorous look. By mimicking the unclenching of the fist, the gesture implies an opening toward the other, and thus ironically overrules her rejection. We are soon persuaded that the girl is *not* saying “I don’t want you” to the boy, and that precisely through the delicate gift of that gesture of negation she is accepting his offer. By repeating this gesture, which appears to retract its content, Sraffa gave Wittgenstein something to think about and reminded him that the sign of negation does not resemble anything. Paradoxically, it can only resemble the *fact* that the sign of negation negates; it is therefore necessary that something is thus affirmed, or asked for, in negation. This is a theme

that Freud himself investigated in his essay “Negation” (1925), which Fachinelli translated into Italian and commented on.

If the acceptance of a request emerges precisely as the other side of a refusal, then, more generally, the fact that life negates itself in the representation that annuls time – the infamous *Symbolic* – amounts to a masquerade staged by the affirmative origin-truth of life, which can be revealed in the climax of this elimination. Life needs its own deadlock in the representational and imaginary answer in order to relaunch itself. *There is no progression and progress without “mystical” regression – this is Fachinelli’s basic message.*

Reading Lacan’s *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992), Fachinelli realized it is a crucial text; in this seminar Lacan thinks about *das Ding*, the Thing, namely, something that resembles what Fachinelli tries to unearth through the experience of “ecstatic joy”. But even in this case, he reproaches Lacan for being too Freudian, that is, entangled in the dialectic of obedience and transgression – the Oedipus complex. Although in this seminar Lacan evokes the mystics “excessive joy, which is at the heart of the ecstatic experience, is put aside. Against the background of the absolute achievement of the Thing, [for Lacan] there is essentially only *suffering*” (Fachinelli 1989b, p. 195).

After all, from Sade to Lacan the truth of life would lie in suffering. Yet at the same time, precisely by circumscribing the Thing, Lacan came very close to the *excessive pleasure* that the human being tries to perpetuate by renouncing it – but he did not overcome the Freudian dialectic of the law as the prohibition of incest that makes it enjoyable.

## **Claustrophilic Area**

The first and last chapters of *Claustrofilia* reaffirm Fachinelli’s peculiar hypothesis; many psychoanalyses become endless, and “nothing moves” in them, because the analyst and the analysand are entangled in a spatial anxiety they cannot unravel. Yet in the central chapters of the book – where, in an apparently chaotic and almost oneiric fashion, he juxtaposes passages about the analyses of his patients – we are told that, if on the one hand claustrophilia is the major obstacle to the movement of analysis, on the other – when it is not “repeated” in analysis but lived again in its original and almost magical form – it does not lead to representational sleep but the awakening of the event; it can actually stand for a propulsive resumption [*ripresa*] of analysis. Fachinelli’s claustrophilia repeats the same ambiguity of the transference, which Freud first described as an embarrassing difficulty for analysis, and then instead as the indispensable source for conducting it – when it is well handled. Just as for Freud analysis thus becomes a reconstruction of desire by means of the love for the analyst, so for Fachinelli analysis becomes “a resumption [*ripresa*] of desire by means of a regression to a symbiosis with the analyst”. The “bad” psychoanalytic *claustrum* [cloister] is therefore the becoming chronic of a critical pre-temporal stage – essentially, of the fetal state, in which the baby enjoys remaining within the mother and her intimacy. This state must not be prolonged at one’s pleasure *as a repetitive representation*, but take place again in the here and now of the relationship with the analyst, through a spasmodic intensification of the five senses.

Fachinelli moves from accusing analysts of de-temporalizing analysis in repetition, and thereby withdrawing the subject from the vital thrust of history, to the idea that analysis becomes chronic because the analyst does not consent to be “bitten” and awakened by a timeless, ravishing, and pre-natal call. Ultimately, one needs to become feminine, since the gift and being welcoming are feminine qualities that our society – including the psychoanalytic society – has suppressed, as it completely relies on the masculine functions of defense, control, and fight-or-flight response.

Unlike what Fachinelli previously believed, it is no longer a matter of participating in the flow of the historical movement by transgressing prohibitions – God and Marx had at that point already been dead – but

of discovering that the historical movement is the resumption [*ripresa*] of a more radical kind of welcoming the gift of life, which is fixed and takes refuge in forms and representation in order not to die.

Describing this claustrophilic state, Fachinelli refuses the term “fusion”, and this not only because he intended to distinguish his position from that of the theoreticians of the mother-child symbiosis. Actually, he thinks that the importance of claustrophilia rests on the fact that it is an *area*, something that is after all spatial – and thus different from a Kleinian “position” or a Freudian “stage”. In opposition to temporal stasis, it is an ecstasy (*ekstasis*) whose field originally corresponds to the maternal womb that be-falls us [*da cui accadiamo e cadiamo*]. This is a paradoxical choice, since the Greek word *ekstasis* indeed means coming out and being outside oneself. What is at stake is not the complete lack of distinction between the mother and the fetus, but a relationship in which the utmost *gift* is answered by the utmost *welcoming*.

But if being in the maternal womb is the utmost joy, and being born is a fall, it is nonetheless the case that in life we have to fall again and again, because – and this is the propulsive paradox of psychoanalysis – it is only by *coming out* in the time of history that the *real joy* of the gift and of being welcoming can be lived again, even if only for an instant.

## Let it Live

I have fond memories of my spring walks with Elvio in Milan. We ventured to the Navigli, Milan’s canals, and talked about anything. In the 1970s, the Navigli were sad canals lined with old industrial buildings worn by time. But both of us loved those modest waterways; they give meaning to a city like Milan, which is otherwise devoid of mirroring waters.

At a small restaurant on the Navigli, we discussed abortion with his girlfriend. She had no children nor wanted any and claimed that the prospect of housing a set of coagulating cells in her belly left her with no emotion whatsoever. Although he supported the right to abortion, Elvio was unconvinced. He said that the ultrasound scans show that the fetus *moves*, listens to voices, and perhaps even plays. Smiling, he then asked: “As a woman, how is it possible that you are not curious to see what you were able to create? Wouldn’t you like to know whether that thing was delivered with two arms, two eyes, and everything else in place?”. With these apparently banal objections, Elvio was anticipating *Claustrofilia*, which pays a lot of attention to the pre-natal dimension. But above all, in spite of his girlfriend’s somewhat dreamy affability, he was disquieted by her contempt for *the grace of life*, and – once again – her reduction of sexuality to an optimal and solipsistic management of needs. Giving birth is never rational; the species perpetuates itself thanks to the fact that women *accept* the task of graciously giving life.

While Elvio was defending the *presence* of the fetus, I looked at the almost stagnant water of the Navigli, which seemed to have been enchained to the stone embankments. Sipping a glass of white wine and smiling, Elvio continued to repeat: “When only a few months old, the fetus moves; he sucks his thumb!”. The canal appeared to be motionless among the concrete and the industrial debris.





Fachinelli with his daughter Giuditta

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## Notes:

[1] The name “L’Erba voglio” – literally “the herb ‘I want’” – is derived from the Italian saying “L’erba voglio non cresce neanche nel giardino del re”, something like “You can’t always get what you want”.

[2] Fachinelli recounts this experience (with L. Muraro and G. Sartori) in the book *L’erba voglio* (1971), which then lent its title to the homonymous journal and publishing house.

[3] *Di Pietro*, *San Pietro*, and *di pietra* all evoke the signifier *pietra*, i.e. “stone”.

[4] Literally, “Of Stone”.

[5] In Italian *fare un bisogno* (literally, “to make a need”) means “to go to the toilet”.

[6] *Autonomia* was a radical and at times violent movement that hegemonized the radical Left in the second half of the 1970s.

[7] Rizzolatti and Gallese are members of the Parma scientific team that discovered mirror-neurons.

[8] “Il denaro dello psicoanalista”, in A. Verdiglione (ed.), *Sessualità e politica. Documenti del congresso di psicoanalisi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976). English translation “The Psychoanalyst’s Money”, *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 18, 2019, <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/the-psychoanalysts-money/>

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