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The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Dec 5, 2023

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/crisis-of-the-soul-and-the-primacy-of-technology/>

Giorgio Mosconi and Umberto Galimberti

## Crisis of the Soul and the Primacy of Technology

**Mosconi:** In recent years there has been a serious crisis in psychoanalysis, with the natural sciences refusing to accept it as being of their province and others wishing to include it in the humanities. Would the exclusion of psychoanalysis from the natural sciences resolve – as you maintain in your book, *Psichiatria e fenomenologia* – the initial conflict at the basis of psychology and psychoanalysis; that is, the division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*?

**Galimberti:** Psychoanalysis can certainly be included in the humanities. The great conflict today is with psychiatric genetics. Psychiatry, created in the 18th century, was based on the concept of the *morbus sine materia*, which means that when an individual is not well, an organic cause of his illness is not always evident. Today, psychiatric geneticists ensure us finally of a physical counterpart of the so-called mental illness. For example, depression would be a reduction in inter-neuron communication, subsequently, it would be sufficient to increase that communication (say, through the use of Prozac) to improve the situation. This, however, would not have resolved anything in the individual's history. In fact, when he stops taking Prozac, the inter-neuron communication will once more slow down, causing the return of the depressive state.

**Mosconi:** Then psychoanalysis has a healing capacity? And if so, of what does its therapeutic moment consist?

**Galimberti:** The therapeutic moment consists of talking. This is something that the Greek philosophers were already aware of-although, unlike psychoanalysts, they did not expect payment in return. Talking is unquestionably therapeutic in the sense that verbalizing discomfort produces relief. Moreover, getting to know oneself is, evidently, also beneficial. Although people nowadays avoid looking at themselves as much as possible, because coming to terms with one's own life requires time and effort, and they are usually too busy. That kind of self examination also implies the recognition and individuation of the origins of pain and vulnerability, as well as a reflection on the bases of desire and the possibility of its satisfaction; very often, pain is caused by desires which are unrealistic. Consequently, relief can be had from a slight adjustment of these two planes: desire and the probability of its being fulfilled. Self-knowledge is what is essential here, because without it the individual will inevitably and constantly be exposed to the unexpected.

That self-knowledge, therapeutic in itself, is acquired however only in the encounter with another human being, one in whom there is a reasonable degree of confidence. In psychoanalysis, transference is a love relationship albeit artificial and love as we know is acceptance leading in its turn to self-acceptance.

**Mosconi:** In his recent book, *The Soul's Code*, James Hillman openly criticizes the various schools of psychotherapy which consider the destiny of every human being as being inevitably formed in the relationship with the parents. He seems bent on destroying the foundation upon which psychoanalysis has rested from its very beginnings. What are your thoughts on this?

**Galimberti:** Very early in life, the Self must be constructed by means of a series of repressions. We must never forget that we are born in a psychotic condition, at any rate, with a multiple personality—and the construction of the Self is achieved by setting aside all those personalities inhabiting us. Therefore, the first part of our lives merits a biographical analysis, with the individuation of the models provided by our parents for acquiring experience. Mom and daddy are less decisive than the models we acquire from them, and we then repeat for the rest of our lives. The problem therefore lies not so much in establishing whether or not mom and daddy are bad, but in understanding that each one of us reacts differently to the same event; and the way of experiencing received as a child from his environment is re-activated.

**Mosconi:** Hillman actually speaks of a demon who, before our birth, assigns each of us to a particular pair of parents rather than another.

**Galimberti:** Hillman believes in archetypes, which fundamentally I do not. He is more flexible and fascinating as a writer; as a theoretician, he remains a rigid cultural determinist. He is convinced as most members of the Jungian school are that archetypes govern the lives of individuals. Among the Italian Jungians, only Mario Trevi and myself take exception to that opinion. Consequently, I would ask those Jungians why, if they genuinely believe in the force of archetypes, they insist on practicing psychoanalysis? Clearly, once the theory that the archetype would constitute a cultural DNA of sorts were accepted, psychotherapy would become useless because if we are governed by an archetype, analyzing it serves no purpose whatsoever.

**Mosconi:** Georg Gadamer refers all interpretation back to the historical authenticity of its formulation. However, he also speaks of the claim to universal validity, resolving this apparent contradiction with a process of “converging horizons”. How can these assumptions be applied to interpretation in the sphere of psychology without falling into the trap of a general relativism which would result in a general loss of value for all specific interpretation?

**Galimberti:** We must not consider the word interpretation in a reductive sense, as though there were a space of truth, and alongside it, a space of interpretation rather, the entire world is interpretation. Two individuals after seeing the same film leave the cinema with the impression of having seen two entirely different films. What then, would be the real film? The world is an offer of meanings, with each one of us recounting his own version. In this sense, each individual is an isolated, closed monad, each with a different perception of the same event. The interpretation an analyst gives will inevitably be one rooted in his own context. Before starting down the analytical path, I was a disciple of Karl Jaspers, who at the time introduced the comprehensive method, which consists of the following: what is interesting in a delirious person is not searching for the cause of his delusion, but in entering into that delusion, grasping its nucleus, at which point all the delirious forms become comprehensible. The same thing must occur in analysis. What is interesting is not understanding why someone acts in one way rather than another, but entering into the nucleus of his history, which once understood renders the story immediately comprehensible. Thus, the hermeneutic approach of analysis does not consist so much in countering a remedial version of life to a particular life story, but in entering into the nucleus of that story in order to comprehend it and, lodging within that nucleus attempting assuming that the patient is fixed in his story to widen his horizons and thus remove the fixed aspect. It should be the task of analysis to widen the horizons of meaning. However, this all lies within the humanist hypothesis, the conviction that man remains the subject of his history. Unfortunately, I am no longer convinced that this hypothesis prevails.

**Mosconi:** Then in a world controlled by Heidegger’s impersonal “One”, there is no longer space for the subjective?

**Galimberti:** Human subjectivity was surpassed with the emergence of another type of subject: technology. Technology is that dimension which more or less orders and delineates the actions of all individuals the hotel porter cannot be a porter if not in the way that “one is” a porter, and I cannot be a university professor if not as “one is” more or less a professor. Technology is a form of ordering actions and behavior, and we are

comprehensible in the light of how we execute this series of actions. When I introduce myself, the one to whom I introduce myself will understand who I am only when I specify what I do. Identity has been shifted from being to doing and, consequently, doing becomes my identification. Technology causes each of us to move exclusively within a fragment of a passage; each researcher is occupied with a very limited specialization. Even the philosopher has become specialized. Within that specialization, I cannot be held responsible for the final scope of the technical effort; thus, for the first time in history, individuals act without having in mind the final effects of their actions. This leads to a destructuring and a loss of sense. For example, are those who help produce land-mines workers or criminals? They are workers only on the condition that the final scope or eventual use of that product is considered to be outside their responsibility. Technology exonerates us from eventual uses. The actions of human beings once had a purpose, and that purpose constituted their identity when a carpenter finished a piece of furniture, he knew whether or not he was a good carpenter. Today, fragments of activity are carried out in which the good or the bad never lies in the result, but in the degree of correctness of execution of prescribed actions. Thus everyone becomes a cog in the wheels of the apparatus, and the decision-making subject as regards those actions is the organization. This is not defined power as such, but a technical structure which establishes the optimal procedures to follow in order to be a porter, a professor, a bank clerk, and so on, and the precision with which one follows those procedures determines whether or not one is a good porter, philosopher or bank clerk.

**Mosconi:** Thus, it would seem that the famous archetypes, once out the door come back in through the window

**Galimberti:** With the difference that it is a question here of one archetype only, and one which provides for the establishment as a sole value of efficiency, in view of. Not only the single operator, but technology itself does not have in view the final ends of its effort; were I pressed to say what the final ends of technology were, I would have to respond as Nietzsche did when asked what the final ends of power were; that is, it wants itself what technology wants is exclusively its own expansion. We live in a society without aims. People today suffer from depression, mania, obsession, and so on, but these are all no more than manifestations of a broader desperation: the loss of the horizons of meaning. This discomfort will more than likely prove to be provisory. However, technology will gradually mold its creature, one for which sense will no longer be necessary in order to live. At present, man is discomforted because, while he has grown up with anthropological foundations, he finds himself having to function in a context in which he is recognized only in proportion to how efficiently he carries out a sequence of actions prescribed in the interests of efficiency and productivity, while psychoanalysis was formed in a comprehensive and therapeutic apparatus, in a culture in which a man was still responsible for his own destiny, where things depended on the way in which he conducted his life. However, if the subject is technology, and I merely one who must conform to the line of behavior set down by the organization, then psychoanalysis has nothing more to say. The need for sense was not included in psychoanalytical research because it was assumed that human beings acted in the quest for meaning. Psychoanalysis was not equipped for senselessness as a rampant evil, because the search for meaning was a foregone conclusion, and it was from the point of view of that sense that one searched for the meaning of madness, but always within a meaning. Psychoanalysis is not yet aware of the fact that it exists in the age of technology. Consequently, the war between analytical schools rages on, oblivious to the fact that they have already been overcome by this scenario.

**Mosconi:** What is the role of mass communication in this context?

**Galimberti:** Technology also changes radically the way of experiencing. Once, experience was acquired by leaving home to see the world. Now, acquiring experience requires no more than going home and turning on the television, which provides a spatial and temporal horizon for the most part not perceptible by the psyche. It is possible to obtain news from anywhere, but without psychic resonance, as the psyche is spatially and temporally limited. We might be intensely aware of the fact that a neighbor has died, while the death of someone in a nearby street will be less impressive, and the death of 500,000 Tutsi may be of no interest to us whatsoever. However, as we possess that information on the world with a still primordial, humanist psyche, we find ourselves confronted with a plethora of scenarios for responsibility revealing to us the absolute

impossibility of our modifying events. Thus, messages of impotence are increasing today due to indifference to pain. This psychic insensitivity is produced by the vast quantity of information on events for which we are not responsible and to which we consequently end up being insensitive. The way of acquiring experience has been radically changed, but psychoanalysis does not confront the problems created by this change.

Moreover, the number of channels of communication available is excessively out of proportion to what we actually have to say. The success of media is due to the fact that there is no longer direct communication. The media consist of channels of communication between solipsistic hermits on Internet. With television, messages are transmitted and received, but real communication is relationship, it is facial expression, a look; it is quality of contact. Psychoanalysis continues to linger over Jungism, Freudianism, Lacanism, or what have you, when technology has already surpassed it and it has done so because man is no longer the subject of his own story, because his actions have already been programmed on the organizational chart. Therefore, either I enter the organizational chart and execute actions not based on my own decisions, or I remain excluded from it and on the fringes of Western civilization.

Psychoanalysis is still a Western therapy with a romantic background, with its cornerstone of love, sentiment, of emotional (pre- and post-intellectual) dimension. In any case, Freud recognized that psychoanalysis is one chapter of Romanticism and indicated Schopenhauer as its drive. Romanticism maintains that love can move mountains, something of which I am also convinced. But is there still space on a technological organizational chart for love? Or is love a deviation from the executive precision of prescribed action? Eroticism is not a technical category, and technology regards eroticism with suspicion because – as Freud rightly maintained – erotic education occurs halfway or late. As sexuality gradually ceases to be a taboo, there is progressively less possibility of a sentimental and emotional education determined by the inaccessibility or delay in achieving the sexual goal as that goal is progressively brought more within reach, the less time or opportunity there is for sentimental elaboration. Thus we have a rapid, efficient, technical eroticism. Once, in the interests of love, one had to write, telephone, hold one's own counsel: it was an effort of the soul. This is no longer true because technology rewards exclusively efficiency and the optimization of work: thus, two evenings to take a girl to bed should do. In this way, the technological dimension in some way atrophies the sentimental dimension.

I criticize psychoanalysis, not because I do not recognize its effectiveness, but because psychoanalysis has not yet understood that, while it was created in a humanistic era, times have changed. As I show in my latest book, *Psiche e Tecne*, psychoanalysis has not yet considered the nature of technology and the resulting anthropological modification.

**Mosconi:** In your writings, you often speak of the soul, or spirit, as the “unconditional openness to sense”, as “that game in which a meaning is introduced, and simultaneously exposed to change”. What is the condition of the soul, or spirit, in the scientific/technological era?

**Galimberti:** The soul is today in an extremely solipsistic, intimist condition. Depression is on the increase because each one tends to exclude his own soul, which has become merely a source of pain, since a soul cannot be expressed in the world. The world could not care less about the soul. While once one needed simply go out to meet friends to find an ambiance of soul, today the squares have become crossroads for cars, and meetings carefully organized. There is no fluidity between public and private. Entering the house, we close the door, and when we go out we deck ourselves out in an impersonal way in order to relate to the other, and the soul finds itself in serious expressive difficulty. When we have an expressive urge and yet fail to express ourselves, the soul suffers. Thus, to avoid suffering we discard the soul and embrace outward appearance. Once each experience was unique, thus recounting it presented the opportunity for communication. Today, all experience is the same: television teaches us what war is, what peace is, what love is, what prayer and death are, and our souls become similar to all other souls. Consequently, there is nothing more to say. The powerful effect of technology is that souls are constructed, given the same nourishment of the media, in order to render them more or less uniform. For, if all souls are uniform, they can be easily deciphered, are predictable, and predictability is always a plus for the organization.

At this point, people rush out to visit other countries, other worlds, in the attempt to acquire something resembling a unique experience. However, that attempt fails, because what they find everywhere is the usual ambiance, and one world inevitably resembles another.