



## The young and the old's gaze to the sky dispels the clouds of selfishness and self-referentiality

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*Abstract:* The authors took note of the current incurable fracture of intergenerational communication in the contemporary society and hence proposed Play as the only available tool to bridge this gap. They found the operative concepts belonging to C.G. Jung's analytic-psychology indispensable to resume the intergenerational dialogue, making particular reference to the archetypal polarity *Senex et Puer*. The authors then pointed out the usefulness of this concept in play, with the aim of demonstrating the value that each generation involved in the study's topic could provide for each other. Young people open the windows of the elderly's mind on the panorama of the contemporary world through the acquisition of computer knowledge; the elderly gift young people valuable support for them to root their energy and reach towards innovation and creativity.

The success of the initiative, financed by the Ministry of Labor, supports the future prospects of an experimental continuation of the project. Play, recognized as a dimension of the psychic life of all human beings from the beginning of life to its final phase, reveals itself as a non-theoretical, but a biological basis, supporting the functionality of the project.

### Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the gambling market in Italy has grown dramatically and inexorably. At the beginning of the 90s, its gross spending was around 5 billion lire; in the early 2000s the amount had tripled and in 2005 it was close to 30 billion euros. Following the Bersani-Visco reform in 2006<sup>1</sup> which favored the entry of foreign competitors, the income<sup>2</sup> in 2010 reached over 60 billion euros. Even the economic crisis of recent years has not slowed down gambling's growth. In 2016, the largest Italian

<sup>1</sup> Law n. 223 of 04/07/2006 converted in law n. 248 of 04/08/2006

<sup>2</sup> Income refers to the sum of money bet by all the gamblers.



company was one belonging to the gambling industry, with a total income of 96 billion euros, far higher than Enel's income, for example, which was almost 74 billion euros<sup>3</sup>. That is 4.4% of GDP, just below the state's investment in education or food. A river of money flows straight out of the pockets of Italians, who are estimated to have lost 181 billion euros in the last eleven years<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, this money offers only partial returns to services due to the paradoxical effect of a decrease in tax revenue despite the growth in business. There is no country in Europe that has lost money in gambling as much as Italy<sup>5</sup>.

In light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic that has overwhelmed the whole world and Italy in particular, the total spending on gambling was reduced to 88.38 billion euros, about 17.3 % less than in 2018. However, in 2021 the figure unfortunately bounced back up to 107.5 billion: a record year! This definitely does not benefit the state which instead has lost 35% deriving from taxation<sup>6</sup>.

The phenomenon of gambling is in fact undergoing great change. In recent years, due to the advancement of the Internet technology in increasing the number of offers, like in the drug market, and the gradual digitalization (Gandolfo and De Bonis, 2013) in the context of the pandemic, there has been a surge in gambling too. Gambling has made its transition online, as inferred from the data provided by Customs: 44.30% of spending on gambling comes from physical gaming and 55.70% from remote gaming (Blue Book, 2020). This transition brings about at least three worrisome and extremely dangerous aspects. Firstly, online gambling compared to traditional games (Lotto, SuperEnalotto, Totocalcio, etc.) results in lower tax revenue for the State, going from 12, 6% to 4%. In other words this causes a decrease in GDP. The second aspect is the extreme accessibility of both legal and illegal online games, and therefore results in a true phenomenon of cannibalization of the new compared to the old (Gandolfo and De Bonis, cit). The third, the most insidious, is the fact that the reduced tax burden allows a much more favorable payout rate (ratio between the amount earned by winning and the amount played), thus stimulating gambling and predictably, addiction. In other words, in traditional games, the player is taxed more and therefore earns less, wins less and therefore, they play less and less.

### **Psychopathology of gambling**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder - DSM 5, released in Italy in 2014, includes Gambling Disorder (GD) in the non-substance related Addiction Disorders. GD was previously included in DSM IV - TR in Impulse Control Disorders. The transition to addiction in fact involves the complex pathology linked to gambling which cannot be *tout court* exhausted in the context of a deficient impulse control, but which has very similar symptoms to those of traditional drug addiction. The diagnostic definition of the severity of the disease is very important. Without prejudice to gambling as a playful activity present in many cultures, in some individuals this can become a "persistent or recurrent problematic behavior linked to gambling that leads to clinically significant discomfort or impairment" (ib.).

In addition, many pathological players have significant physical problems, such as tachycardia, angina and poor health in general. They also often have psychiatric comorbidities, such as depressive and/or anxiety disorder, personality disorders, especially in cluster B and substance use. Healthcare costs

<sup>3</sup> Dossier of Filippo Torregiani "Gioco d'azzardo: i numero di un mercato fuori controllo" in 2017

<sup>4</sup> F. Torregiani, cit

<sup>5</sup> Mentioned by a project of Public Notice, National Association of local and regional institutions "Lose or life" in 2016

<sup>6</sup> [www.avvenire.it](http://www.avvenire.it) of 4 january, 2022



directed to GD amount to approximately 85 million euros per year (Scale N.M, 2016). In addition, “indirect” costs are added such as the loss of work capacity, the loss of property, the risk of getting into situations of indefinite loans and the social emergency of loan sharking (Scale N.M., cit). DSM 5 also states the incidence of Gambling Disorder in the American population is 0.2% for females and 0.6% for males, highest in African Americans (0.9%), lowest in Hispanics (0.3%). In Italy, in 2016, the number of Italians who made at least one bet were 1.79 million, 15% more than the previous year<sup>7</sup>. Yet it is estimated that just 24,000 people in 2015 were under treatment at the SSN facilities, whereas the Department of Drug Policies estimated in 2016 the number of pathological gamblers from a minimum of 300,000 to a maximum of 1,300,000. According to the Annual Report on Addiction, Addiction and GD, in the Italian population, 2% of players at risk and 1.9% of pathological players are amongst the age group ranging from 19 to 79 years, and in 2020 the subjects under treatment in the SerD of Lazio with GD are 718, with 50% over 50, many already known, while the under 20s are practically absent, we can see the evident major discrepancy between the number of individuals at risk and those under treatment of the SSN.

### **Populations at risk for gambling disorder: the young and the old**

It is known that the populations at greatest risk for developing gambling addiction are minors and the elderly (Regional Plan 2017-2018 Pathological Gambling - Lazio Region). In fact, the 2021 Gambling Observatory, a study carried out by Nomisma, focused on these 2 age targets: young people between 14 and 19 years and people over 65. For the former, not only 29.2 % of students have gambled at least once and 3% have problematic behaviors related to gambling, but also 40% of all pathological gamblers start gambling between the ages of 9 and 12<sup>8</sup>. It hence makes sense that effective prevention must begin at that age. According to the latest ISS survey, although gaming has decreased in the Covid 19 pandemic, the time spent on gambling increased by nearly an hour as restrictions loosened. Furthermore, although in 2020, only 42% of young people gambled compared to 48% in 2018 and 54% in 2014, this trend does not reflect the fact that gambling in presence is slowly being substituted by online one. According to the Blue Book drawn up by the Customs in 2020, physical gambling accounts for a spending of 39.15 billion euros compared to 49.23 billion euros for remote gaming. A another truly impressive statistic is that the global amount of spending of online gambling reached \$1 trillion by 2021<sup>9</sup>, considering that 73% of gamblers use smartphones. Again with regards to gaming and minors, in a recent research carried out by Piepoli Institute for Moige in 2021 (Moige, 2021), it emerges that only 1% of children play in gambling halls, but also that 65% of retailers never verify the player’s age. Furthermore, it can be seen that 23% of minors gamble online and that 88% gamble either because their age has not been verified or because they lied, evidently showing the lack of objective age assessment methods. Therefore, there is an understated problem for minors regarding gambling and internet addiction<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Online Game Research Osservatory contributed by the Agency of Customs of Sogei et al in 2016/17.

<sup>8</sup> ISS data 2018 (2021), [www.iss.it](http://www.iss.it)

<sup>9</sup> [www.lamiafinanzia.it/2011/le-entrate-globali-del-gioco-dazzardo-online](http://www.lamiafinanzia.it/2011/le-entrate-globali-del-gioco-dazzardo-online)

<sup>10</sup> Regarding gaming and internet addiction we highlight that 6% of minors report to playing video games more than 4 hours per day, in which 45% played from smartphones and 13% downloaded games that are not suitable for their age without parental control (Moige, 2021).



For an in-depth study on the relationship between addiction and youth, there is a vast literature from which we can refer (Caretti and La Barbera, ed., 2010; Giacolini and Leonardi, 2016; Berivi et others, 2019; Berivi et others, 2020).

For the elderly, the problem is not merely numerical. In fact, if we look at the data revealed by a 2014 research carried out by the Abele Group in association with Libera, in which the population under 65 was interviewed on a random sample of 1000 subjects, a prevalence of 14.4% of gamblers at risk was found and 16.4% of gamers with GD. In terms of access to treatment, however, the under 65s, as well as minors, are the big absentees. In the Lazio Addiction report of 2021 in subjects under treatment in public facilities, there were 718 and the distance between the onset period of 26.4% and the average age of first access of 41.7%, the gap was about 15% of untreated use, with an average age of 42 years. For the elderly group, an important aspect to be evaluated is that addiction-related disorders tend to be often underestimated. On one hand, this may be due to the isolation in which the elderly live and hence gamble, therefore represents an extremely understated phenomenon. On the other hand, it is thought that the slowdown of old age and a greater impulse control due to life experience make them immune to addiction development (Del Corno, Plotkin, 2017). In fact, not only can isolation and loneliness function as a breeding ground for problematic gambling development, but also the effects of aging on the brain in this context can trigger pathological gambling. In fact, as we have seen, the phenomenon of gambling in the elderly population is gradually increasing, becoming a real social emergency<sup>11</sup>.

Among the vulnerability factors identified so far, others can also be listed: the loss of a defined role in society which occurred with the transition to retirement, the emotional isolation, feeling useless and the loss of the parental role in raising children in the family - what relational psychologists once called 'the empty nest syndrome'. These are situations that can cause great suffering for the mostly silent elder individual. Furthermore, possible separations without the reconstitution of a family reality, the possible economic impoverishment caused by low pension, the death of a spouse, can lead to the *humus*, so to speak, where the propensity to play can arise, which perhaps acts together with the illusion of an easy win or fills the void with the gamble's excitement (Savron, 2014; Zaranek, Lichtenberg, 2008).

In 2013, Serpelloni summarized the different profiles of the 2 populations at risk as can be seen in the following table.

	Prevalence	Main motivation to gamble	Type of gamble	Frequency	Reason
<b>Young</b>	Larger %	Competition Money	Cards Internet	Lower	Less time available
<b>Elderly</b>	Smaller %	Socialization Anti-tedium	Bingo Slot Machine	Higher	More time and money available

Tab. 1 - Profiles of 2 types of gamblers based on age group.

<sup>11</sup> Survey "Anziani e Azzardo", Abele group, Auser Nazionale 2014



*The table shows an essentially correct observation, but perhaps simplified, as we have mentioned. We have so far considered some of the risk factors for the development of GD in the young and the elderly. Let us now briefly identify the protection factors.*

*Among the protective factors that reduce the likelihood of developing an ADI, or “neutralize” the effect of possible risk factors, are: the presence of a spouse, having a higher level of education and income, being able to rely on a social and family support network (Zaraneck, Chapleski, 2005), as well as emotional stability, a positive sense of self, a higher level of life satisfaction and participation in religious activities can also represent possible protective resources (Hong, Sacco, Cunningham-Williams, 2009; Lai, 2006). The family and community as they offer support and opportunity to develop positive relationships and adequate social skills, can incisively contribute to counteracting the risk of gambling for the elderly. In addition, cognitive strategies (such as realizing the danger associated with gambling and the real odd of losing), or behavioral strategies (such as deciding on amount of money to bet and stopping when it is finished, not reinvesting the won money or not gambling alone), help prevent and limit gambling problems (Tse, Hong, Wang, et al., 2012).*

*In addition to this, in line with the bio-psycho-social perspective proposed by the World Health Organization, the definition of “active aging” emerges, coinciding with a “process of optimization of opportunities relating to health, participation and safety, aiming to improve the quality of life of elderly people”. This definition is in continuity with the progressive emergence of a new culture of aging which, integrating the promotion of new interests to the dimension of loss and decay. The spread of the concept of active aging, in addition to having stimulated the interest of many scientific works, has enhanced the possibility of benefiting from paths aimed at promoting psycho-physical health, therefore the opportunity to plan ad hoc preventive interventions. The increase in the average age of the population in Italy and around the world requires a rethinking of healthcare in which the psychological well-being of the elderly becomes a central element. In particular, a group of researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the New England Research Institutes studied the effects of the use of video games not only for the speed of information processing that slows down in old age, but also for the reduction of the possibility of developing dementia. The results were exciting: the possibility of developing dementia decreases by 48% (Medina, J, 2017: 159). In addition, Bryan James (in Medina, cit) ascertained the link between cognitive decline and socialization, where the elderly with intense socialization were 70% less likely to develop dementia (Medina, cit. 31).*

*For young people, as for many other pathologies, the protective factors are the family, school and social network (Serpelloni, G, 2013).*

*The strategies to combat GD drawn up by the National Observatory for Gambling (2017) with regard to prevention in minors reaffirm 3 areas of action: universal prevention, selective prevention<sup>12</sup> and, finally, indicated prevention. The cornerstones within them are: increasing knowledge is important, but it does not change gambling if not combined with community development strategies; campaigns that start with “Do not” or just based on the knowledge of risks can even be harmful (Messerlian & Derevensky, 2006), as already demonstrated by important international projects such as Unplugged<sup>13</sup>. Knowledge of the data does not produce lasting changes (e.g. Bala, Strzeszynsky, Cahil, 2008; Bala*

<sup>12</sup> See also Capitanucci, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> UNPLUGGED is a school program for prevention of smoking, alcohol and substance use amongst teenagers, based on the model of Social Influence and Normative Education. Unplugged was created and evaluated in the multicenter



MM, Strzeszynski L, Topor-Madry R, Cahill K., 2013). *The interventions on Life Skills are important, but peer education is better, which is even better with the presence of an adult network* (Croce M, Lavanco G, Vassura, 2011). The recent Decree no. 136 of 16 July 2021, again on the subject of prevention, reiterated the need for direct prevention on specific targets, selective prevention, proposing alternatives to gambling and not just mere demonization of gambling and, finally, the need for methods that have EB scientific references, as well as the development of scientific research<sup>14</sup>.

The In.Tra project, therefore, is part of selective prevention; it targets youth and people under 60. It proposes play as an alternative to gambling, indicating as a psychological and social action, using the comparison between generations from the Jungian perspective of integration between the archetype of *Senex* and *Puer*. Through this, we would like to provide a pilot research that can contribute to the identification of effective and scientifically supported methodologies.

### **Play as a clinical treatment**

Play as an expression of the individual in their psychic life and of the interaction with others, is an ancient concept<sup>15</sup>. However, the first images that are certainly evoked by this term in our interpretation as psychoanalysts are those of little Ernst, Freud's nephew, described by the Viennese psychoanalyst, playing with his reel that appeared and disappeared accompanied by his "o-o-o" at the moment of throwing away his toy and his "da" when the toy reappeared, thus drawing out one of the most famous clinical vignettes in child psychoanalysis (Freud, 1920). Or we see Melanie Klein struggling with the first analyzed child named Fritz, who was then known to be her son (Grosskurth, 1987), and with her anxiety as a novice therapist in this area. Or Winnicott with his squiggle game, which in a sort of drawing ping pong, not only allowed the child to outline his internal world and in the meantime also establish a therapeutic alliance, but also introduced to the treatment the necessity that the analyst enters the relationship in an active way by drawing with him (Winnicott, 1968). Apart from these fascinating and evocative images, play remains for psychoanalysis a communicative means of a derivative nature that can allow the clinician to access even the most difficult children and adolescents in the most complex cases, especially traumatic ones.

From the cognitive point of view on the other hand, Piaget's contribution shows us that play follows the child's development of the ability to deal with reality in its complexity. According to the author, through playing the child tries to transform the world in his own terms. During play, therefore, the process of assimilation<sup>16</sup> reigns over accommodation (Piaget, 1945). He theorized 3 fundamental phases of the game. During the games played from the moment of birth to the first year of life, imitation plays the primary role through which the child partly deludes himself into dominating reality like his parents. This on the other hand can build a sense of continuity and identity. This is then followed by symbolic or fictional games from 2 to 6 years, which accompany the child in his mental and

European project EU-Dap (European Drug addiction prevention trial), organized by OED Piemonte in collaboration with University of Turin, starting from 2004. The randomized controlled trial for the first time involved more than 7000 students of 143 schools of 7 different European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Austria, Belgium, Germany and Sweden) to test the efficacy of the program.

<sup>14</sup> Health Ministry – Law no. 136 of 16/07/2021 G.U. General Series n. 238 of 05/10/2021.

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed description see Castellazzi LC, *Il gioco in età infantile*, 2019, Libreria Ateneno Salesiano, Roma

<sup>16</sup> Assimilation and accommodation are 2 fundamental concepts of evolutive development according to Piaget: assimilation refers to the child's capacity to select and incorporate new information into preexisting schemes, while accommodation allows the child to modify the existing cognitive schemes based on the experience of the new cognitive schemes.



emotional development. In the stage of symbolic-prelogical intelligence, objects can represent more than what they are. The function is multiple: from imitation, the child can move on to the representation of emotions or the staging of the relational components of his own reality and that of his care-takers. Pretending while playing allows the child to pass from the imaginary, intrapsychic and relational plane to reality, alternating powerlessness and power, feeling and venting. Games with rules follow suit, from 7 to 11 years. They correspond to the logical-concrete stage of intelligence. The transition from the *sacred* rule dictated by adults, to the rule set by mutual consent between peers marks precisely the transition from family to peers, from obedience out of fear of punishment to the rule as a social organizer (cit).

We will continue the discussion on play as a therapeutic factor later on.

Looking more closely at the problem of gambling, Roger Callois, a sociologist, anthropologist, French literary critic, is often cited, who defined the space of play as a pure space (1967). In particular, the author divides play into 4 main categories:

- *agon*, that is competitive play, respect for rules as in chess, football, running, sport competitions in general;
- *mimicry*, therefore play as simulation, the search for illusion, such as doll play, masquerade, theater, disguise;
- *ilinx*, the search for thrills, the risk, falling into the void like in dance, rides, roller coasters, extreme sports;
- *alea*, where chance, luck, chance, the challenge of destiny prevail. The victory is due to fate that is challenged over and over again.

According to our view, Callois sensed that gambling is a type of play that moves away from the perspective of Piaget or psychoanalysis as we mentioned earlier. Precisely because it refers to chance, luck or an illusory destiny, gambling ends up representing an autistic object<sup>17</sup>, just like a psychotropic substance. Taking up the conception of Bergler (1958), who mentions the gambler as one who wants to take revenge over authoritative parents, having been the helpless child in the past. Play becomes the space where power is deceptively held in the hand of the player who, like the addict, believes that he dominates the substance when he thinks he cannot dominate others, by which he feels continually dominated and threatened.

This is why in the case of selective prevention on populations at risk, the transition from solipsistic play to solitary play in the presence of another player, subsequently, to collaborative play can pave the way for the transition from a dimension where one tends to avoid emotional and relational problems, to one of derivative<sup>18</sup> elaboration where problem solving can take place.

### **Gambling as autistic play**

We would now like to briefly go to the idea of play as prevention and treatment of pathological gambling. To this end, let us return to Tustin's (1972) concept of an autistic object. According to the author, the autistic phase, which the child goes through in the first 5 months, allows the child to avoid the distressing

<sup>17</sup> We refer to the autistic object of Tustin (1972): the autistic object is an living object transformed into "dead thing" while animism transforms inanimate objects living.

<sup>18</sup> From the theoretical perspective of this project, the derivative elaboration represents the most advanced form of the conscience of problematic contents and of unconscious conflicts (Freud, 1915-17: Langs 1973-74: 1988)





experience of emptiness and separation. In this phase, the child reduces living people to the state of the dead, while on the other hand, gives life to inanimate objects through animism (Tustin, cit). These are two opposing tendencies: one favors regression treating others not as people but as things to be willingly manipulated; the other, animism, instead marks the development, maturation and recognition of others as living humans, separate from oneself. The images emerging in the child's scenario, when an internal image of the other person has not yet formed, are inhuman images of frightening, omnipotent and persecutory nature. Generally, these images are humanized through emotional relationship with parents. The autistic object, on the other hand, blocks this fundamental emotional component in the relationship, so that the gap between persecutory perceptions and ghosts is not filled. As a result, the child is increasingly distressed and defensive towards others. The autistic object does not bring about changes in the nerve transmission along the sensory pathways, but inhibits the experience of pain and the affective echo of pain perceptions by blocking the anatomical center of emotional life – the limbic system, by altering the electrical potentials normally recorded in it.

The barrier function to the emotional contact between the perceptive ego and the child's phantasmal world was at the time (Grassi, 1998) highlighted in the description of Paolo, a drug addict, who in the scene set up for Sand Play Therapy posed two prehistoric animals advancing and threatening to the area occupied by the other miniatures. Paolo, referring to the autistic use of heroin, commented: "The barrier is heroin. I manage to avoid those animals by making myself heroin, because I don't dream with the "stuff". When asked: "In the scene where are you?", He replied: "I move constantly, so I am not captured by monsters ... And even if one of them manages to grasp my body, I freeze. I don't feel anything anyway". In our opinions, this last statement clearly highlights, the blocking of emotions dictated by the autistic object, which also serves to fill the void of despair evoked by the loss in human relationships, according to Tustin. In addition, it blocks the transition to animism, i.e. the phase where one is able link others with living images and/or with objects of reality imagined as living. In other words, it is experienced as an absolute bodily part of the self and its absence may entail the experience of mutilation.

Regarding the remarkable impact of the autistic object, writes: "*It induces ecstatic sensations secretly representing a withdrawal from nightmares and when it fails, due to the contrast, the nightmare is magnified. Expectations beyond human means to satisfy them are promoted; it leads to a period of frustration and the situation becomes cumulative [...] It promotes sensations within the body that make it seem as if the necessary self-satisfaction and pseudo-self-sufficiency are present*" (1972). On the other hand, autistic space is an empty space that opens into the abyss of infinite nothingness, as there is no object that can fill it, except for the persecuting primordial ghosts. Therefore it represents a psychopathological development of that area that could instead be filled with the objects' images, where the child may have already built up images of the object within himself.

In summary, for all these characteristics described, we consider gambling as an autistic object and we therefore believe that the task of prevention and psychological therapy for the gambler is the transformation of these defenses into transitional objects and phenomena.

The technique of play introduces a third factor into the therapist-patient relationship. This factor promotes the abandonment of the absolutely 'me' object which is gambling, in favor of other subjective and partially objective objects, those of the transitional play.

For Winnicott, the transitional object is an object of the external world, a material, the first "not me" form and possession of the child. It can be a teddy bear, a doll, a soft toy or a hard one. Its main





characteristics are: the nature of the object; the child's ability to recognize it as "not-me" and to invent the object itself; the initial differentiation of the others apart from oneself, hence the beginning of an object relationship (Winnicott, 1971: 13). The transitional space, on the other hand, is an area in which transitional phenomena develop, which are marked by the transformation of inanimate material objects into animated objects; precisely the first form in which the relationship of the child's Self with external reality is built. In orgasmic relationality, the instinctual dimension of relationships is realized so that an individual can actively establish it or passively undergo through it. It is defined orgasmic because it recognizes an acme in itself, assumes a distance and therefore is based on the category of separation. In the phase defined by Tustin as autistic, the instinctual needs and related responses of the mother are experienced and structured in terms of bodily phenomena and substances of a material nature. In the case of a *sufficiently good mother*, detention and satisfaction are no longer expressed in terms of material substances, but by living images that emerge from the background of the black hole of despair in the child's primordial mind as persecutors or rescuers. These images characterize the subsequent hallucinatory phase and are a representative psychological evolution of phenomena previously experienced as corporeal-material. They are also the precursors of mental images, such as the idea of the absent good breast of the mother; negative hallucinations will instead tend to regress towards the experience of absence as the presence of a "bad sting". Winnicott wrote: *"The orgasmic relationality integrated into the scheme of the Self's relationality strengthens an immature Self instead of destroying it. In the absence of a play relationality, the instinctual drives overwhelm the Self or the child is forced to resort to the autistic object" (1965: 37).*

### **Play relationality (of the Self)**

Still following Winnicott, in the existential category of the sense of identity (play relationality), there are no instinctual drives in place, no orgasmic relational climax, the anthropoanalytic continuity is realized *a priori*. The relationality of the Self opens the child's personality to transitional phenomena and transitional objects during play: they belong to the external world, outside of the individual, thus implying a stark recognition of them being "not-me", even if they are an expression of inner psychic reality. The child thus experienced the object as detached from himself, at his own terms and in other words, separation of the object from the self allows instincts to happen. The experience of the drive in the transitional object is accompanied by the detachment of its image from the maternal figure, who is therefore recognized as a human being. The mother figure is at first a reliable presence, that is, attentive to the child's solitary play; subsequently she would enter into a reciprocal relationship with him, interacting with his transitional area. Tolerance of frustration will allow the mother, on one hand, to control her instinctual responses, and on the other hand, the ability to pay attention, which is essential for the development of transitional phenomena. Attention is not a natural phenomenon: it psychologically "contains" the child's instinctuality in "his conscious sphere" and this containment gives the child an inner sense of cohesion and unity. This situation is defined by Winnicott as a "holding situation" in which the attention-container is structured as a configuration - a form that reproduces the vital rhythm of the child's instinctual needs. Attention is the container-father element that allows the mother to support the child against terror and angry tensions related to the experience of separation as a threat to one's existence and absolute dependence on an external object (Tustin, 1972). The importance of the father-male element in the conception of Tustin is thus stressed through "the regularity of the sessions, the adherence to a disciplined technique, the



attention and analytical vigilance, the interpretations" (Tustin cit) which provide a container in which John's infant self (the case report cited by Tustin) could begin to grow. The attention span in psychotherapy is assimilated by Tustin to a male component in therapeutic communication. In fact, in the clinical case cited, the loss of the button stabilized it as a construct of the mind, equated to an omnipotent nipple-penis-father. In this case, the analysis does not help much in providing a real experience, but only helps to tolerate the feelings triggered by their loss.

### **The archetype of Senex/Puer**

The concepts of *Senex* and *Puer*, such as the concept of autistic play and relational play outlined above, are the fundamentals of our pilot project precisely because they capture and highlight our proposal for an indissoluble intergenerational connection in its bipolarity.

On the psychic side, the archetypes of *Senex* and *Puer* are expressed with Divine Figures pertaining to the "imaginal world" (Hillman, 1967). These divinities are part of a universe of psychic images characterized by specific structures, peculiar processes, characteristic affective tones and dramatic figurations. Each of us, in the arc of his existence, finds himself in the middle between the two polarities of permanence and change and is forced at every moment to make a synthesis of this antinomy. Only when these conflicting opposites meet for the individual can one's personal meaning as well as suffering arise.

The first basic assumption – the fundamental in our research, is thus that the *Senex/Puer* archetype manifests itself in every individual regardless of his biological age. We emphasize the importance of the coexistence of both *Senex* and *Puer* polarities in every individual regardless of his biological age. We therefore consider that in the personality of each of us, from an early to old age, there are an old and a young person, each with its particular positive and negative characteristics.

From this perspective, Jung proposes that the *Senex* aspect of the archetype represents the individual as he finds himself as a result of his personal history, not only as "it is found now", but also as it consolidates in its permanence – specific structures, characteristic processes, peculiar affective tonalities. The *Puer*, on the other hand, embodies the drive, the tendency and the psychic energy oriented towards innovation and change. The very nature of the bipolar *Puer/Senex* concept implies that its coexistence in the human being is completely independent of biological age (Hillman, 1967). It is actually a paradox in its reality, because the child is young and old at the same time and so, as he dies and grows continuously, he is also the bearer of a configuration that changes during the life cycle, for which he is both a past experience and an openness to the new. Precisely the consubstantial bipolarity of the archetype from the beginning of life allowed Hillman to partially criticize Jung when pointed out the difference between the mission of the individual in the first half of life which is merely dedicated to the development and consolidation of his social adaptation, and the second half of life, supposedly dedicated for the perspective of meaning of life. According to Jung, this takes place with an individual's choice operated from the perspective of meaning that unfold before the inner horizons of the subject, for example: embarking on a spiritual or religious path, pursuing of a sociopolitical ideal or affirming cultural values or personal contents. In time, *Senex* is the past, already realized, while *Puer* is the future, what must yet be realized. The *Senex/Puer* polarity provides the archetype necessary to build the story from a psychological point of view. For example, the dialectic between *Kronos*, chronological time, and the eternal youth of *Puer*, which manifests itself in the potential future, can translate into the right time, that is, the *Cairos*. Within it, the coincidence between chronological time and eternity is translated



into history. If this does not happen, if a creative synthesis between the two polarities is not achieved, *Senex* becomes the sclerotic past, made up of crumbling beliefs and institutions, while the *Puer* gets rid of time and becomes “anti-historical as protest and revolt” (Hillman, cit) - a directionless future. Without the enthusiasm of the eros of *Puer*, *Senex* loses its “idealism” and aspires only to “self-perpetuation”, through cynicism and tyranny (Hillmann, cit). At the same time, *Puer* manifests itself as opposed to the values of *Senex*, with deception, loquacity, slander, selfishness, deceit.

A man can be captured by *Puer*'s social rebellion, the technological revolution or physical adventure with double energy but with a loss of purpose. Every innovation is adored because it promises the original, while what is already historical, belonging to *Senex*, now becomes the enemy to be killed. From this attitude, play will not be able to guide the personality from omnipotence to reality, which moreover does not cross out the relationship entertained by *Puer* with the primordial origins, but only affirms the mythical meaning present in all realities. The layers of mythological perspective make the “crudeness” of reality meaningful and tolerable and, consequently, indestructible. Hillmann argued that the underlying problem of *Puer* is not the absence of “realism”, but the lack of psychic reality (1967, cit). In our opinion, this can be filled with play because the soul aspect of play, that is the animation produced by play, as claimed by Tustin (1972), means that every new inspiration, every “new idea” of *Puer*, needing *mentalization* (Fonagy, Target, 2001; Allen, Fonagy, Bateman, 2008) can start to go into order of *Senex* so that its new values and meanings can be historicized.

Hillman (1967: 33) at this point, however, argued for the existence of a way of “being” in ambivalence that “can understand the archetype in its bipolar entirety and lead down to the deep psychoid level”.

### **Metapsychological fundamentals of the In.Tra Project.**

As we previously mentioned, albeit briefly, the In.Tra project starts from three metapsychological fundamentals of psychoanalytic thinking: play and the clinical and creative use that can be made out of it, the archetype of *Senex/Puer* seen in its internal dialogue between the polarities, both in evolutionary and identifying terms, mediated on the cognitive level by the Self and on the emotional level by the archetype of the Soul (Jung, 1921), therefore psychotherapy.

As we observe in our current world serious intergenerational conflicts which, not to our surprise, can result in very similar dysfunctional and/or pathological behaviors. If we look at the phenomenon of addiction, we found a huge lack of communication between adolescents and young adults and people over 50 in psychoanalytic terms of transgenerational relationship. In both cases, instead of a vital relationality of the archetype of the Soul (Jung, 1921; 1946; 1951; 1957) we are witnessing a fall in relationality in favor of a solipsistic and self-referential withdrawal that is nourished precisely by gambling and all forms of addiction, with or without substance use. Thus, gambling ends up assuming the same role as the autistic object as described by Tustin, and acts as a barrier to communication and to a specific soul relationality of feeling, in its role as a psychological function as it is described by Jung (cit).

Neuropsychological research confirms this phenomenon: in our contemporary reality, the subcortical neurological systems of reward, which exercise precisely the role of drive satisfaction in the limbic system, are greatly strengthened at the cost of a worsened cortical system which, based on the relationality of the Self, are no longer able to control and limit the exuberant dominance of primitive instinct in the human being. This actually translates into the increasingly intense mechanism of instinctual satisfactions, accompanied by an ever greater atrophy of the cortical structures, including the executive



functions of problem analysis, problem solving and decision making. The autistic withdrawal of people over 50 and adolescents and young adults can therefore be fueled precisely by forms of addiction to material objects that are experienced as the 'absolute me': internet, compulsive shopping, gambling, video-porn addictions. This leads to not only a transgenerational incommunicability, but also a *Senex/Puer* conflict, which we mentioned in the description of the archetype.

Two main operational perspectives were therefore followed. The first aimed to offer the elder generation theoretical and practical tools necessary to operate more effectively in the IT world (digital skills), contributing to the improvement of their ability to understand the surrounding reality. On the other hand, the focus was on the rehabilitative ethical use of play, giving the action an ethical meaning.

Specifically for play, Jungian-based analytical psychology, together Winnicott's psychoanalytic approach to play, recent discoveries in neurocognitive science made on split-brain subjects by Michael Gazzaniga (2005; 2009) and referential activity of the mind identified by the research on multiple code conducted by Wilma Bucci (2021), has historically demonstrated that play represents a functional dimension of the mind and the brain. In particular, the right hemisphere specialized in activating the emotional sphere, according to Bucci and the psychosensory sphere, Gazzaniga's visual-spatial synthesis operations, precisely represents the psychobiological laboratory of the so-called "Emotional Intelligence". The fundamental discovery was the following: the "Formal Logic", correlated to the intellectual-cognitive activation of the left hemisphere, provides us with interpretations of reality (in 80% of cases distorted) and false memories (in 80% of cases distorted), unlike the right hemisphere which, with its symbolic-analogical mentality<sup>19</sup>, processes the truth by behaving as an "emotional spectator of reality" and authentic memories (Grassi, 2000; 2012). The right hemisphere is the actor of behavioral choices according to ethical principles based on the awareness of reality and the truth of events. Play is the expression of this emotional intelligence from the earliest years of life to the very last; it is therefore a functional heritage that is not only the prerogative of children, but of people of any age. There is obviously a profound difference between creative play and gambling<sup>20</sup>: the first stimulates the emotional sensory areas of the right hemisphere; the second manifests itself only as an erotic-aggressive drive discharge at the service of omnipotence and drive evacuation by the left unconscious system determined by the sense of limit as an essential component of the psychic functioning of the human being. In the young, as well as in the elderly, the sense of limitation produces an intolerable anguish of death that is expelled from consciousness with the gambling disorder, but unknowingly leads both to their own ruin caused by gambling and its consequences both in intrapsychic terms of emotional alienation and in relational terms with the dramatic consequences for affective and social relationships.

Considering *Senex et Puer* as two parts at stake, orienting the adolescent's life choices from day to day and reinforcing behavioral models consistent with ethical choices in the elderly, as models for the young people in terms of values and behavioral choices, is a path that we feel appropriate and very interesting to take. In our opinion, the increase in communication between generations through the acquisition of a language

<sup>19</sup> With the word truth we refer to the concept defined by Gazzaniga (2005; 2009) and Langs (1973-74: 1988)

<sup>20</sup> Some authors hypothesized that gambling represents a form of play for adults, aimed at entertainment, excitation and socialization (Shaffer, Korn, 2002; McVey, 2003), or a solution to anxiety and depression (Vander Bilt et al, 2004) without it threatening their well-being (Hope and Havir, 2002). It even goes to the extent of gambling potentially being the cure for Alzheimer disease (Sobel, 2001). We believe that is it rather difficult looking at the issue in such simplistic way that also can be said about the creative use of psychotropic substances. For now we would like to be clear that in our work, gambling is referred to as problematic play and/or pathological play.



shared by both is the right “release”: the computer language, of the web in general and of videogames in particular, as a socializing factor for *Senex* can be the winning choice for its being a solution for the problem where gambling arises in the first place. This would be even more so if play takes on a neurorehabilitative function for thinking processes as well as exerts a neuro-rehabilitative impact towards the visuospatial and emotional sphere, that is, activating the neurobiological structures that process emotions<sup>21</sup>.

Regarding the Soul, it is known that for Jung this archetype not only favors communication between the conscious and the unconscious in a dynamic symbolic process (Jung, 1916). The dialogue with the Soul, which studs the whole Red Book (2009), accompanied Jung throughout his life. According to the analyst-psychologist precisely because man, in the arc of his evolution has sacrificed contact with the unconscious and its symbols with the conscience, has paid a very high price by living unilaterally with the real risk that the unconscious will then breakthrough in the consciousness with personal and social disasters that many times have been faced by humanity. Dealing with the archetype of the Soul, in its theoretical, metapsychological, clinical and ethical correlation, is beyond the scope of this work<sup>22</sup>. It suffices to say that psychotherapy was considered as a fundamental step that accompanied the experimental work of the game aimed at the elaboration of the emotional and symbolic contents aroused by the game itself and by the relational passages provided.

### Conclusions and prospective

With the project, we have therefore created an experimental context of play in which the participants could experience all those intrapsychic and relational dynamics that characterize social life that is common in all of us. The participants of the group at the beginning had to go through a preliminary phase of familiarization both with each other and with the IT operating tool. This initial phase presented aspects of extreme heuristic interest, considering that everyone has to actively participate in the construction of a human environment based on safety in mutual relationships. In this sense, the neurocognitive contributions of S. Porges about the primitive processing of information on the development of human relationships based on security (2017) have been proven to be valuable. Neuroception<sup>23</sup> as an initial process of acquisition of knowledge of the surrounding world, both in its helpful and dangerous way, represents a basic concept for all the subsequent phases of the project’s development. We then learned the importance of the body in human relationships, even the most elementary ones, as well as the importance of the neuro-vagal involvement of the body for the purpose of developing sociality and shared cooperation. The next phase of the project, that is the transitional phase, allowed us on one hand to face the autistic pockets in which the game was in danger of being trapped due to their self-isolating and self-referential action; on the other hand to verify how the transitional space operated in favor of a revival of the creative-soul relationship between the over 50 and under 30, not only as expressions of two generational dimensions in human terms, but also as symbolic representatives of the two temporal dimensions: past and future. We have consequently identified 3 evolutionary stages:

<sup>21</sup> According to this perspective, *NeuroRacer*, a game that requires simultaneous activation of mathematical thinking (left hemisphere) and synthesis of visuospatial connections to emotions (right hemisphere), was used. In this way the connection between the two cerebral hemispheres was increased and as a result, between the thinking process and sentiments. (Medina, 2014: 2017).

<sup>22</sup> For a more in-depth study see our previous works (Grassi, 2011; Berivi, Carabini, 2006; Berivi 2010: 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Neuroception is the process through which the autonomous nervous system evaluates risks without the help of consciousness (Porges, 2017:19).



- A) Transition from the IT object used autistically to the transitional IT object used as a form of access to sociality: computer literacy of the "elderly" facilitated by young people;
- B) Creation of interactive games aimed at creating situations of antagonism between young and old;
- C) Creation of interactive games aimed at creating situations of solidarity and cooperation between the two poles *Senex/Puer* for the purpose of the collaborative solution of problems.

This sequence was defined as follows because:

1. The initial help of young people, who tend to be highly innovative according to Hillman, allows them to invert their role with the over 50: the young person is no longer just *Puer*, but also *Senex*, for the elderly who instead is called to do by *Puer*. We have verified the effectiveness of the reversal of the polarity of the archetype. Young people were enthusiastic about being able to be computer teachers for the elderly and the latter were extremely stimulated in their *Puer* aspect by learning and improving their computer literacy which opened up new perspectives for them;
2. The second phase of the game was antagonism, precisely in respect of the evolutionary sequence of psychic development outlined by Freud and other authors. The first form of approach to the outside world is characterized by images of danger and insecurity; the outside world is therefore a dangerous one and the antagonistic approach is the first way to meet the "world"; the new conceptualizations of Porges have allowed us to work with the aim of establishing and consolidating an atmosphere of security necessary for "social involvement" (Porges, 2017)<sup>24</sup>;
3. The verification of the absence of danger or a real threat could therefore lead the participants to the experience before immobilization without fear and, immediately after, to the experience of social involvement (S. Porges, cit) which nourishes everyone's sense of security and allows them to achieve important relational results.

The expected results in the elderly were consequently probably a significant recovery of mental functions in the process of cognitive atrophy and a subsequent discovery of further development potential, unexplored up to that moment. Regarding young people, on the other hand, the expected results were a significant revival of a language of values (ethical and cultural) which risked not being developed in a manner adequate to their developmental needs. In other words, the under 30 being the *teacher* and the over 55 being the *taught* and vice versa; also verified the close connection between mental functioning and development and increase of "social involvement".

How did this happen? Through the comparison with the behavioral mode of play of the over 50, the nature of the psychic instances brought into play by the latter, as well as through the enhancement or not of the instances themselves. The protagonist of a specific game became an evocative stimulus both in the elderly and in young people, reflections, emotions, feelings and new behavioral intentions. The psychoeducational group provided for the elaboration of these themes emerging from the game. In contrast to the autistic object, through which the external world as portrayed as threatening, the transitional function of play appears to be a precious tool for promoting an intergenerational relationship that provides for a creative integration between young and so-called elderly and not a conflict that could result in the "scrapping of the elderly" that could potentially lead to the loss the indispensable

<sup>24</sup> "The system of social involvement is a funzional collective of neural pathways... It projects bodily sensations and constructs a window through which bolidy sensations can be modified along a continuum that extends from the state of safety and calm, that promotes trust and love, to a state of vulnerability, that promotes defensive reactions" (Porges, 2017:41).





contribution that they offer in terms of cultural enrichment and value to the younger generations.

Psychotherapy has been increasing working in the dynamic elaboration of emotions and the related images (dreams, derivatives) that this comparison entails, especially the anguish related to psychological development.

It is on the basis of this medium-term scenario that the intergenerational partnership proposed to carry out an action on gambling that can transform it from pathological gambling, at risk or overt, into neurofunctional rehabilitation for the elderly and the attainment of a sense of social involvement of all young generations starting with adolescents and young adults.

According to the Jungian perspective, any knowledge of man cannot become such if it has not first been lived as a form of experience, that is to say that we truly know only what we experience firsthand. Archetypes as cognitive experiential categories precisely represent the neuropsychological fabric of our mental functioning. By archetype, Jung meant *an a priori category of experience and knowledge* of the psyche, with neurobiological roots in the human genome, expressed in behaviors that assume the function of patterns of behavior and imaginal dimension, and psychological roots in the world of the basic instincts of human being and imaginal universe linked to emotions - the subject of research on mental functioning by Bucci (2021).

To conclude, the operational synthesis of the theoretical principles of these authors - Tustin, Winnicott, Hillman, Jung, Bucci, Porges, carried out with our Intergenerational Transfer Project, seems to demonstrate the importance of play as a functional dimension of the mind for our whole life cycle both for its relational effects on the mind and for its biological effects on the body from an intrapsychic point of view. The *dynamis Senex/Puer* seems to have manifested its importance regarding the search for a solution to gambling, both regarding the development of creative intergenerational relationships with meaning for the young, as well as regarding the elderly's reacquisition of relational skills with the world, of their increasing impact on the world, therefore in preventive terms. Furthermore, for the younger generation, play constellates and enlivens the dimension of meaning (specific to the paternal function and to the system of values connected to it). We are now more convinced that the transitional Play is of utmost importance for the intrapsychic and relational development of the person. Not only! We were able to note how important a stable intergenerational relationship is, indeed, and even how it is at the origin of our physical well-being. We hypothesize it as a new prognostic criterion also with reference to possible future physical illnesses. Gambling therefore presents itself as a key element of a selective prevention not only against pathological gambling, but also, due to its predictive abilities, against serious, even physical diseases, entrusted merely and tout-court to the treatment phase, when interventions can often be late. If play, as Winnicott argued in his work, is the basis of cultural development, the current impoverishment of play in our present society seems to be strongly correlated to the notable lack/deficiency of transitional play for how the society is structured, often frenetic and stressful, as transitional play requires time to devote to not only the child outside of us, but also to the child inside us. According to Winnicott, since our cultural life is related to play, our daily life is dramatically devoid of this fundamental necessity. Between the lines of this finding, it is dispensable to focus on the recovery of transitional play. However it must also be said that only a cooperative sensitization between youth associations and "elderly" groups can give an initial adequate response to the problem itself, in which gambling is still only an epiphenomenon of underlying hidden conflictual turbulences, therefore even more dangerous in terms of personal and social negative impact.





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