

Object Relations Primitives to Dialogue With*

We conclude our attempt to portray a simplified version of the framework of relational objects in psychology, by pointing to primitives whose echoes we intend to seek in the physiological domain. The inner space, mostly distant from awareness, often referred to as ego, is the seat of phantasies. The inner space is reflexive, characterized by self-engaging dynamism of interpretation and projection among its internal objects, a dynamism that is sensitive – within limits – to external events. At birth this inner space is occupied by infantile reflexes (primitive phantasies) that, when triggered by environmental cues (stimuli), satisfy basic instincts. The concept of primal symmetry of the inner space is offered as a reference to a utopian situation where all the instinctual needs are provided by means of the environment (mother) and infantile reflexes. Discontent is the psychological consequence of an ambivalent environment, a situation in which similar external objects call for the activation of very different (often contradicting) phantasies. It is an unavoidable consequence of the caregiver being a subject, home for her own internal object relations. The term symmetry breaking is offered as a reference to the process of splitting the psychological inner space to fit the contradicting demands of the environment. Hence, discontent leads to changes in the structure of the psychological inner space, giving rise to symmetry breaking and the emergence of internal objects. The concept of internal object relations refers to the interactions between representations (of selves and others), within and across split-offs. The content of – and the relations between – internal objects are adaptive to a degree that determines the potential outcome of intersubjective contexts within which our psychical and physical lives are embedded. Hence, all these entities and all these processes are at the service of the organization of experience as a personal historical process: the development of templates of relations between internal objects, which are exposed in later relational, intersubjective settings.

We turn now to the physiological codomain, contemplating ideas that partially correspond to the above primitives of psychological relational objects. The hope is to succeed in presenting a physiological perspective that evokes a feeling of reflecting on relational psychological objects in a new language, lending itself to language relations of the kind described in Chapter 3.

* from pp. 88–89 in Marom 2015