

The self in ruin: psychic loss and failure
Eliane Michelini Marraccini (Org.)
São Paulo: Primavera Publishing Co., 2010, 360p.

About ruins and re(constructions): the subjectivity of the loss

Regina Maria Guisard Gromann

This book was born after an invitation made by Eliane Michelini Marraccini for a conference about a concept which was developed by her – *The Self in Ruin* – as a result of a doctorship research defended in 2007 at the Fundamental Psychopathology Laboratory of PUC-SP. This creation was originated from a deep clinical experience and had its evolution from the psychopathological and psychoanalytical studies on, focusing on the question of the possible work of mourning by a Self ruined by melancholy. How the loss of the object loved can start the process of the loss of the Self – a loss that can show its impoverishment – placing the subject in face of an impasse position towards life. In this measure, the proposal of the author was of putting it into movement, searching for expanding and deepening this important notion resulting from the research through interlocution and inviting different coworkers to discuss about this issue, and using their own clinical experience as their background.

In the first article of the book, entitled “The Self in Ruin: loss and collapse”, Eliane Marraccini presents her doctorship work to the readers, based on the study of a case from which derived the concept that was the motivation for this book. The clinical case that embodies the thesis, and mentioned in this first article, shows us in a deep and detailed way the

winding paths of the journey set out in this psychoanalytical process, composing a metapsychological construction which makes considerations between the mourning and the melancholy.

According to Marraccini, the notion of the Self in ruin is related to a collapse of the self after a shock of a traumatic experience of losing someone loved, of his love, or of something that had occupied that place – a collapse that could come in a dramatic, or sometimes complete way. This failure occurs in a psyche working primitively, but that keeps itself relatively secure before an intense and outstanding loss which, despite being real, consists of an imaginary loss representing itself as essential for the psyche.

This is a complex notion, because it reunites different aspects to be considered: it is related to a failure in the psychic constitution that only shows itself in the emergency of a loss and its consequences, involving a disturbance of the self, the narcissistic structuring, and the strengthening of the ego, which are the founding elements of the subjectivity. In this sense, it also carries a regression that influences the functions of the ego, separating the subject from his psychic reality, from his environment and from his relationship with the other.

The relevance of expanding this concept and of its deepening is related, essentially, to the clinical handling with patients of a difficult approach, having as a basis the melancholic condition and the mourning work, the points of reference for the psychopathological study.

The articles gathered here put, under different angles, the psychoanalytic processes of patients who passed through a collapse of subjectivity due to a real loss, which started an important psychic loss, reactivating primitive ways of functioning that had never been elaborated before and which made themselves present in the current loss. So, in this way, they reactivate the need of a reviviscence of a clinical appointment – this one often presenting an impasse in its evolution – and producing pain and suffering.

In the article named “The tyranny of the ideal in the ruin of the self”, Homero Vettorazzo traces a relevant way in Freud about the constitution of the self and the psychic structuring from the identifying processes in the narcissistic foundations on. Through a clinical impasse, the author focuses on the trajectory of some patients who showed a regression, impelling the process of a “regressive undoing of identifications”, degrading the self in the “beloved images of the childhood”, reducing it to distant images of himself, and getting submerged in the Nothing. In this sense, his text offers us indispensable reflexions about the clinical handling and the transferencial scenery in which the situations of such nature appear in the analytical setting: patients who show a little symbolic availability, invasive overflows of great intensity, “accusing failures in the primary repression”, a precarious membrane of the ego, making evident the inability of filtering the

excitement and the difficulties to enable itself symbolically, acting that disable the wish of analysis, which is a founding and basic ethical condition for the analyst, even when he is feeling a deep anguish.

Sérgio de Gouvêa Franco draws a rich line passing through Freud, Melanie Klein and Winnicott in his article “The Dismantling of the Self and essential care”, in order to approach the theme of psychosis and the initial care of the subject, setting different perspectives around this theme. Concepts such as regression, Oedipus Complex, and anxiety get relevance and distinction under different views, aiming at approaching the theme of the psychosis. Being supported by a clinical case, it debates not only the psychoanalytical work in the referred to field, but it also presents the relevance of this care under the point of view of the construction of the case, discussing the importance of the qualitative research in the clinic. Based on Fédida, it mentions that the written report of the clinical case is not the patient’s description, but it is the narration of an appointment between he and the psychoanalyst, as well as what comes up while they work together. This way, the author mentions that the careful work made by the psychoanalyst goes from the appointment with the patient in the setting – attentive to the regression to traumatic and invasive primitive states – until the construction of what they lived in the clinic through the written report of the case. For him, this construction has “the dimension of the search, of the advance in a still dark area”, saying that “the case does not exist without the analyst’s work”. Thus, Sérgio offers us the chance for reflecting in order to understand the abatement of the self and its possible reconstruction in the clinic of psychosis.

In the article “The Violence of ideals in the Anorexia: The body self in ruins”, Ana Paula Gonzaga and Cybelle Weinberg approach the clinical work with adolescents suffering from anorexia. Based on Freud, Lacan and Dolto, they point out the structuring function of narcissism under its various aspects, especially when getting relevance in the initial times of the establishment of the self, and that can become to constitute as a narcissic identification, resulting in serious pathologies, such as anorexia. Therefore, they consider the initial moments of the fundamental psychic constitution to understand the constitution of the ego and its developments in the ideal agency under the field of narcissistic identifications. They also mention that, in the clinic, it is possible to notice a “body in ruins”, presented by excessive anguish, but which is not recognized as such by the subject, emphasizing the relevance of the first relations established with the mother. They put in evidence the violence of a tyrannical ideal delineated by the unconformity felt in a body which is seen as a deformity. In this manner, besides the need of realizing the mourning in a child’s body, the adolescent faces the failure of not corresponding to “the imaginary body” imagined by the mother. They also mention the professional obstacles to deal with the family that privilege

the childhood to the detriment of the growth towards adolescence, a moment when the mourning work in the face of the loss of the child's body and of the parental images cross mutually with the identity and the body image – key points for maturing.

In her article named “In the frontiers of the ego”, Maria Helena Saleme focuses on the different ways an egoic disarticulation shows itself, and the ego being submitted to a compulsive force. Based on Freud and Aulagnier, Maria Helena's starting points are four clinical situations in which the compulsion and lack of control determine the relationships of the subject in relation to his environment and, consequently, the construction of his identity. In this path, she brings up the relevance of the mourning between the mother's speech and the identification that he realized about himself, demonstrating new changes of the ego in the course of his life, depending on his capacity of psychic reorganization in face of these changes. The author also presents the importance of the psychoanalyst's work in promoting these passages when the subject is at the discretion of an intense excitability and of a disarticulated ego, trying to offer himself in the transference as a support so that the subject can enable himself symbolically.

In the article “When life loses its sense”, written by Heloísa de Moraes Ramos and Miriam Malzyner, there is an approach of the relation between the depressive states and the artistic potential portrayed in two scenes: the first one, that mentions the lyrical singer Maria Callas, making reference to the split between the music star and the woman; and the second one, in which a university teacher is authenticated by the writer Paul Auster. Based on Winnicott's thoughts, the authors offer to the readers the gift of references and fundamental reflexions in what concerns the relation between the depression, the art and the primary psychic processes. They point out the relevance of this correlation for overcoming and elaborating the loss, for the integration that comes from the contact with the creative potential and its power, as well as for the possibility of giving a sense to life or not.

Enabling us to have contact with the hard path of a drug addicts clinic, Cláudio Eugênio Marco Waks and José Waldemar Thiesen Turna start their article “The glory of the ruin in drug addiction” with two paradoxical conceptions in its title. Based on the Fundamental Psychopathology, they mention the pathic and deep experience of their clinical works, as well as in the psychoanalysis, having Freud and Lacan as their base. They start the article exposing the changes and questions in face of a drug addicted person. They mention the importance of the differences between the experience and the treatment, pointing out that, in the experience, the psychopathological narrative can bring new information about this subject, while the treatment ends up by separating the patient from his

commitment to his body, by means of words, which is lived by him as a “moral intervention”. When they traced the metapsychological path of drug addicted patients, they showed us that the loss that makes them turn up into a self in ruin is really precocious, concerning their own subjective constitution, and keeping them from realizing the possible mourning, and throwing them into an existence between the glorious ups and abyssal downs of the melancholy-mania.

In his article entitled “Melancholy, pain and ruin”, Paulo José Carvalho da Silva offers us a portrait of the self in ruins through the history of the psychopathology and the philosophy, attributing this collapse not only to the contemporary men, but also giving a glance at the different times. He narrates, starting from Seneca’s ideas, two different ways of the suffering of the loss, focusing on the filial loss: Octavia and Livia, two mothers who behave in opposite ways in relation to the loss of their children. It is a scary narrative that makes us dive into the turnings of the mourning and their possible consequences. He also focus on other thinkers of the melancholy since the Ancient Greece, who approached the human suffering for the extent of the tragedy, passing through the *spleen* of the European men of the 19th century and ending up in hysteria. The portraits of the self in ruin are still focused on the cases of religious women, as well as in the famous case of the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, Ellen West, in which he mentions another feature of melancholy: the fascination for death in a case of anorexia, in which it was possible to notice the question of the idealization of the woman’s body in the melancholic scenery.

Using part of her doctorship research, Adriana Campos de Cerqueira Leite shows us, in the article named “Rosa: Burying for being born”, a clinical case in which, through a hysterical organization, she explains the impossibility of the mourning, revealing melancholic traces. This case refers to a patient who looks for an analyst after a serious accident, followed by a breaking up with her love. It is an intense psychoanalytical process in which the author shows, through the most significant moments of this trajectory, Rosa’s possibility of realizing the embodied mourning using “the languages of the organs”. She makes use of the melancholy as a paradigmatic model in order to understand the clinic of patients with hysterical organization, when their defenses are in collapse.

Maria Beatriz Romano de Godoy starts her article “About the ashes...” with a beautiful narrative that shows the meeting with the maturity to re-establish, by means of the mourning, some lost aspects of the youth: from the loss to the death all along the lifetime and of the time that passes by. After that, the author reflects about her clinical experience focusing on patients who have losses and spend their existences surviving them, unable to realize their necessary mournings. From this introduction on, the author keeps narrating, in a detailed and sensitive way, the psychoanalytical path of a patient who, after suffering from the loss of her

brother, starts her psychic ruin, revealing a precarious psychic organization, which was previously built up superficially. She reveals her journey going from tormenting moments of interruptions and restarts in her clinical evolution, exposing an overwhelming emptiness. Beatriz points out the relevance of the handling of transference-countertransference process, and offering us a metapsychological construction of her clinical experience.

In their article entitled “The exogamies in the clinic of men and women”, Regina Maria Guisard Gromann and Marciela Henckel portrait two clinical situations, one of a woman at a maturity age that searches for analysis after a depressive episode related to a middle-aged crisis, which made them possible to see the impasses and transformations originated by this trajectory; the other case was of a man who complained about a problem of sexual inhibition, which led him even to the disappearance of the desire, and leading him to think about the nature of his psychic impotency. Two cases through which it is possible to notice the elements that suggest a “self in ruin”. The first one allows us to observe that the depression made a transformation possible, establishing a favorable emptiness for the emerging of fantasies via auto-eroticism, beginning with the mourning and establishing exogamic displacements. On the other hand, the second case emphasizes the idea of a poor and empty Self, questioning the desired condition of the subject and observing that the complaint of a “depression” was not enough for the comprehension of the case. In both clinical processes, the authors emphasize the relevance of the construction in the analysis, as well as the expansion of the self in the reconstruction of the oedipal trajectory and of the identity constitution, leading the subject to the creation by means of exogamic movements.

In the article named “Autonomous babies? Self-fecundated mothers?”, Adriana Grosman and Julieta Jerusalinsky approach the study of the link between the mother and the baby, emphasizing the foundation of the self, as well as how the new ideal of autonomy in the modern times make an alliance with the present phallic fantasies, which were offered to women just by motherhood in the past times. They point out that it is through this slope that they intend to render problematic the concept formulated by Eliane Marraccini. Beginning with the Lacanian referential, the authors allow us to visualize the importance of the Self in connection in order to constitute itself, distant from self fecundation, keeping in check the imaginary fantasies of the present times in generating a baby in the self sufficiency. They go on mentioning the relevance of the founding movement of the alienation-separation couple during its establishment and all through the subject’s life, and always being revisited. They also refer to how much the suffering of the autonomous babies is not noticed by their mothers, who put them in the position of “object child” and of the ideal of a narcissistic autonomy, and

suturing the missing place. They describe a clinical case treated in a context of interdisciplinary practice, which gives us the dimension of such suffering.

Estamira's fragmented psychic construction is showed in the article written by Elisa Maria Ulhôa Cintra, "The self in ruins in the documentary *Estamira*", in which she writes, by means of psychoanalysis, the lessons that come up from the impressive life of this referred to woman. Composing phrases that bring in them, in a contradictory way, the lucidity and the insanity, the author presents an intriguing portrait of the force of life in fight for a tanatic action in the pulsion of death. The setting of the nature mingled with this fight gives us the real dimension of how the Self, even if being born from violence and misery, can still have, in certain moments, the condition to survive even if it happens in a fugitive way. Although being hit by the depression, the paranoia and the schizophrenia, Estamira resists but, inexorably, she is remitted and mixed with the nature, in the detriment of any construction of the culture.

In her article named "The loss, the mourning and the narcissism: a rereading of *Mourning and Melancholy*", Maria Cristina Perdomo shows three clinic trajectories of patients who suffered from unbearable pains after violent and unexpected losses of people they loved, and who saw themselves deeply touched and without enough time to activate their defensive barriers in face of such an invasion from the real world. The author shows us that the psychoanalytical setting offered them a resting place so that they could transform in words the strong emotion experienced and the condition for them to metabolize a mourning made eternal in the pain, in a long and hard work. Starting her work as a clinical doctor and based on Freud and his classic text named "Mourning and Melancholy", as well as on Fédida, the author deepens the studies about the work on the eternalized mourning and on the cronic depressive condition without structuring it as the melancholy.

We would like to thank Eliane Michelini Marraccini for providing us this generous opportunity of reflection and advancement in our clinical experience, giving us the honor of taking part in such group work, enabling us to have the continuous movement of constructing and reconstructing through interlocution new ways for our work.

REGINA MARIA GUIARD GROMANN

Clinical psychologist; psychoanalyst; Master and Doctor in Clinical Psychology by PUC-SP; teacher and supervisor at Universidade Paulista; researcher of the research group named "Interpersonal and family Relationships in the Contemporary life" at Universidade Paulista – UNIP (Brazil)
e-mail: rgromann@uol.com.br