

The Photolangage method in a family mediators group

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Abstract

The present study deals with some reflections emerged from my experience of many years making use of the Photolangage in training groups for family mediators.

The choice of this method in training courses makes reference to the theoretical model of crisis event interpretation elaborated by Kaës. This model constitutes the theoretical basis for both my practice as a family mediator and for my work within training groups.

Key Words: Photolangage; Group Dynamics; Mediation Group.

As everybody knows, within his theoretical model of crisis event interpretation, Kaës defines the transitional analysis as “a psychoanalytical practice which makes the basis for creating thought by means of the elaboration of the experience deriving from the perceived breaking between two states”¹. In this view, to carry out the psychical working over of the crisis, it is necessary to create a setting which promotes both holding and transitional space functions.

Kaës underlines that the crisis concept is to be considered as a change within a process, a perturbation in either individual or group regulation mechanisms. This perturbation is perceived as a threat and prompts to the search for some new intra-subjective and inter-subjective regulation mechanisms. The crisis concept refers to the experienced breaking in the continuity of intra-psychical and inter-subjective ties and, consequently, of thought processes, i.e. mentalisation and symbolisation, which allow the regulation and working over of drives.

The crisis concept elaborated by Kaës recalls the notion of change introduced by P. Watzlawick (1967, 1973) who, moreover, makes a distinction between a “first type

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¹ R. Kaës (1979), p.65.

change”, which does not affect at all the system within it occurs, and a “second type change”, involving a re-organisation of the system. As Watzlawick underlines, a second type change ever implies a logic gap, i.e. the passage from a logic level to another, which creates, according to the author, a paradox. Kaës refers to this notion and enriches it with some Winnicott's reflections regarding the paradoxical structure of the transitional object and the concept of the transitional area. This area is conceived as a precocious way through which the infant tries to face up to the end of the fusion with the maternal environment, and, also, as the resulting creation of a link between two logic levels: the internal world and the external world. In this view, the paradox of change is placed within the transitional process, and the working over of the change involves the tolerance and elaboration of a paradoxical phase through the creation of a transitional space. The working over of the experience of crisis may occur only if a setting has been created which performs the functions of a protected space, of holding (Winnicott, 1965) and of container (Bion, 1962). The protected condition assured within this setting makes it possible to tolerate the paradox and to promote, starting from the interaction, a symbolic working over, i.e. the creation of new symbols which signify the union within the separation and the continuity within the discontinuity. These symbols constitute a new code for regulating the relationships and the working over of drives. The proposal for a praxis of intervention which may promote the creation of a transitional space, then, has been advanced by Kaës starting from the studies on transitional phenomena, object and spaces by D.W.Winnicott (1971), the works on alpha function and catastrophic change by Bion (1962), and the proposals on the functions of the psychoanalytical setting by Bleger (1979). In this perspective, a psychoanalytically-oriented intervention is based upon the elaboration of the crisis experiences through the restoration – by means of the connection between the intra-psychical space and the inter-subjective space - of a transitional area which may generate symbolisation processes. According to Kaës, three main dimensions of breaking converge within the experience of crisis. These dimensions represent, one the one hand, the source of several individual, couple and group difficulties, and, on the other hand, the starting point for intervention settings on crisis situations: the union-separation dimension, linked to the notion of transitional space (Winnicott, 1971); the container-content dimension (Bion, 1962), connected with the concept of group psychic apparatus (Kaës, 1976, 1993) and the continuity-discontinuity dimension, linked to the functions of the psychoanalytical setting (Bleger, 1979).

This hypothesis on the elaboration of the experiences of crisis works in different ways depending on the individual, couple or group level. Consequently, as it will be shown further on, this hypothesis may constitute a basis for: 1) interpreting experiences of crisis and change which occur in training operator groups where, according to Kaës, the training “lowers the crisis through an elaboration of the crisis itself, acted within a controlled situation: a passage from a shape to another which mobilises an ideal of perfection of the Self without mixture, breaking or splitting (...) but which also involves a terrible risk: the risk to be de-formed and destroyed”²; 2) and for intending the intervention of couple mediation.

Indeed, in every couple different patterns of relationship are associated with conscious and unconscious alliances, and with complex inter-subjective and intra-psychical disposition, so that, when a crisis occurs in conjugal life, it derives from a crisis of the intra-psychical and inter-subjective regulation patterns adopted by the couple. In this view, then, it is also possible to consider the mediation intervention preceding or following a conjugal separation as a moment in which the mediator promotes some regulation and elaboration processes - both at an intra-psychical and at an inter-subjective level - of the crisis experienced by the conjugal couple and by the family system. More specifically, this theoretical frame could be also adopted to interpret the intervention of family mediation – within a psychoanalytical perspective – as the creation, starting from the experience of crisis and breaking, of a transitional space in which it could be possible to promote some processes of mentalisation, elaboration and creation of new meanings and new ways of conceiving the life as a couple. This is the reason why, in a previous work (Zurlo, 1999), I could have referred to this theoretical approach to propose a method of intervention in case of conjugal crises adopting photography as a mediator and a facilitator of communication and change processes within the couple.

2. Narration of the experience

The group experience conducted by using the Photolangage method that I am going to present concerns a training group of family mediators. The group is composed of 13 mediators. A three-hour group meeting has been devoted to the Photolangage. I animated the group myself.

I announce the task and the question which introduces the group experience “Family

² R.Kaës (1979), p.45.

mediation: what does it mean for you? Say it by means of a photo”. After choosing their respective photos, all the group members sit in a circle with a photo in their hands. As I had announced at the beginning, I myself have chosen a photo.

Maria is the first person to show the photo she has chosen. It represents a railways interlacement; she says she chose it because it symbolises what she is interested in most in her job as a social assistant and in the profession of family mediator, that is human relationships, a relationship interlacement. She thinks that in the mediation it is important the meaning that relationships can become ever more intertwined.

Her remarks immediately suggest to the group the idea that the mediation intervention is an activity linked to the alternation between disarticulation and re-articulation and between continuity and discontinuity.

Michela intervenes saying that the railways represented in the photo make her think of too cold, detached, unaffected relationships. In my opinion what she says indirectly expresses the feelings of loss and anxiety provoked in the group by the image introduced by Maria, which suggests the idea that relationships are constantly changing.

Laura affirms that, at the moment of choosing a photo, the railways photo had impressed her but she had not chosen it because it had provoked in her a strong feeling of confusion, confusion in relationships. Her comment has been taken up again by several group members: in that photo, they argue, there is too much confusion to think of a mediation intervention. The anxiety provoked by some elements of breaking and discontinuity linked to situations of crisis, then, starts to be expressed since the first exchanges in the group. I intervene saying that the photo makes me think of relationships interlacements and that the junctions may represent the mediation moments that the mediator could promote, but also the moments in which there are changes of direction.

Sandra states that she was also struck by that photo but she had not chosen it because she had found it too full of exchanges and articulations. Then, the group discusses the emotions provoked by the relationships interlacement. According to some group members, the interlacement provokes anxiety, there is too much confusion; on the contrary, for other group members, of whom Olga is the spokeswoman, the image expresses the meaning of life, which is characterised by a constant change and an interlacement of various relationships. Anna adds that the railways interlacement does not represent for her only a confused situation because – she states more exactly – in both directions the railways always lead to a point, always join up in a point.

From this point of view, the group discussion shows a constant alternation of a feeling of disorganisation and breaking and the effort to hold together, to keep ties, to join people. Michela says that the railways in the photo makes her think that relationships have too defined limits; other participants talk again about the railways articulations and they state that they notice some train direction changes, which means that there are some points where it is possible to go off the rails. After that, the group seems to discuss the railways solidity and rigidity, that is to talk about its limits, with regard to the perception of risks associated with change, of risks of derailment.

Finally, discussing the same photo, Carla intervenes saying that in her opinion, it does not make her think about family mediation. Instead, the photo suggests to her that the railways are similar to some parallel lines which never cross and, consequently, do not leave us any opportunity of intervention and of mediation. At this point, I intervene saying that the group seems to perceive that, actually, mediation deals not only with the creation and establishment of relationships, but also with separations, that is to say with changes which sometimes create situations where relationships do not interlace any longer and become like parallel lines, which involves feelings of loss and mourning processes.

I feel that the group is experiencing, on the one hand, the fear of being confronted, in mediation, with some breaking and confusion experiences and, on the other hand, the responsibility for following, and sometimes promoting, changes perceived to be potentially catastrophic and, for this reason, a source of anxiety and destruction (the risk of derailment), or a source of experiences of loss, a source of depressive anxiety (the parallel lines which do not intersect any longer).

I also feel that the group – alternating the perception of the railways as having too defined limits, the perception of the railways articulations as a moment where there is a risk of derailment, and the perception of the railways as parallel lines that never intersect – grasps and describes the importance of establishing a setting in mediation situations, namely some limits neither too defined nor inexistent, which allow to elaborate the experiences of crisis through the creation of new meaning connections.

The second photo, presented by Olga, shows a grape harvest. Olga says she has chosen it because it marks that there was a teamwork and that the moment has come in which all together can harvest the fruits of their labour. She adds that, in her opinion, family mediation is a work done by adults and children altogether in order to harvest fruits further on. Anna, who is sitting beside Olga, intervenes saying that she chose the same photo. She takes the photo in her hands, she looks fixedly at it and she says that, in her

view, that photo represents the reason why she decided to attend the family mediation course: she says she has already had many experiences and she would like to share the results with other people. While saying that, she looks at the photo, she stops in mid sentence and, with tears in her eyes, she says she cannot go on talking.

I feel Anna's doubt with regard to her inner abilities to "harvest fruits"; it seems to me that this doubt reveals some difficulties to carry out a reparation or elaboration of experiences of crisis which touch her personally and are closely linked to her motivation with regard to her training experience within family mediation. The group appears then to alternate a reparation movement supported by an idealistic impulse, as expressed by Olga's intervention, and a movement of depression, strain and loss, as expressed by Anna.

Olga, who had at first highlighted mainly the idealised aspects of the teamwork, now also underlines the difficulties; this allows me to say that the photo makes me also think about the difficulties to obtain some results in mediation intervention and how this difficulties may cause some deep doubts.

Diana intervenes to say that the photo makes her think about the passing of the seasons: good seasons and bad seasons. Other two group members state that in the photo there are too many people for carrying out a mediation intervention (a different way to express the same doubts as Anna on the reparation and elaboration abilities). Instead, other group members add that, at the moment of the choice, the photo in question has made them think about foreign workers outside the European Community, and that they said to themselves: "Poor people! How much labour! How many difficulties!"

It may be seen here how the group, by means of the different interpretations of the photo chosen by Olga and Anna, little by little proposes some images which enable them to verbalise the anxieties expressed by Anna without being able to talk about them. In this stage, the group is confronted with the work of mourning, the elaboration of loss. It may be noted here that the group used, in the group association chain, some displacement and projection processes (the foreign workers image), and some rejection and rationalisation processes (the statement according to which there are too many people for carrying out a mediation intervention). In the group it repeatedly emerges the issue of elaboration of crisis, the creation of a continuity within the discontinuity: a crucial issue with regard to family mediation. In my opinion, there are two relevant aspects here: the spokesperson function (Kaës, 1994), carried out by Anna, and the function carried out by the mediator-object, the photo, which enabled Anna to "place" her emerging preconscious presentation in the group, and enabled the group to

verbalise, during the deployment of the association chain, the affective and symbolic meanings associated with the photo.

The following photo is presented by Alessandra; she says to have been at first struck by two photos, one representing some puppets, which she rejected, and the other one representing a woman who is wearing a mask. In her opinion – she tells us – carrying out family mediation means looking beyond masks, beyond the roles that the two couple members act when they come to a mediation meeting: “Drop your mask” she concludes. Diana intervenes to say that she is afraid of that photo, but she does not know why. Michela adds that, in her opinion, in that photo there is something unreal, something grotesque. Michela's words seem to enable Diana to define precisely why she is afraid "It may be that what I am afraid of is that the couple coming to the mediation meeting is grotesque, untidy, upset”.

Laura intervenes saying that the photo representing the masked person, chosen by Alessandra, makes her also think about the role of the family mediator, who, in family mediation interventions, cannot only pay attention to house, money, children... If the mediator carries out a mediation intervention in this way, even the mediator is wearing a mask.

The group discusses how the members of a couple going through a difficult period, and the mediator himself, can wear a mask to defend himself in difficult situations. Even the mediator could need to undertake and act his role in an automatic way (“house, money, etc.”), to wear a mask in order to protect himself from anxieties that may arise when dealing with upset people, who are going through a crisis period.

Diana intervenes and says that however a mediator cannot do without a mask, without an established role. Then, the group argues that masks, roles, even when they constitute some defences, are useful and necessary, and that one should understand and accept them within himself and in his own interlocutors (in our case the couples members asking for a family mediation intervention).

I have the impression that the group exchanges concerning masks are actually some exchanges on mediation and communication. It may be observed that it takes place, within the group, a change from an idea of the mask like something external, which covers and thwarts to communicate, to an idea of the mask like an established role, which guides the behaviour, so becoming a condition for the communication and for a creative expression of oneself.

The connection between mediation and communication is also taken up by Carla who decides to present her photo, which shows some young people, men and women, talking

each other round a little wall. Carla says that she has chosen that photo because, in her opinion, it represents a kind of communication able to spread a positive attitude to mediation. Sandra intervenes saying that she has chosen the same photo but for different reasons. The photo represents some men and women talking each other, and this makes her think that, in mediation intervention, the mediator deals with people who are different one from another owing to their gender and because they want to separate, to be unlike. According to her, the sense of diversity could be also represented by the features of one of the two men, who seems to be Asian, and then a foreigner, a different person.

Diana intervenes saying that she likes it very much the idea of the little wall as a moment of meeting and exchange; it is a low little wall, which one can sit on, not a wall separating flatly, not a high wall.

Diana's intervention, by using some negative sentences, renders explicit the difficulties the mediator runs into when he tries to promote a link among different and conflicting needs; it seems to me that the group is wondering: "Have we confronted with too high a wall, which separates one from another and makes the communication impossible? Is it possible to find a mediation among different and conflicting needs? And are we able to carry out this task?"

This doubt is verbalised by Sofia, who underlines that the people in the photo are looking in different directions; for this reason, she says, in her opinion the photo cannot represent a mediation situation. On the contrary, another group member, Clara, states that it seems to her that the photo in question represents an untroubled exchange, an untroubled mediation intervention. Anna intervenes to say that she has been struck by the person in the middle of the photo, who attracts attention. She does not describe expressly this person as a mediator but her intervention has the effect of turning still further the group discussion to this direction. This is proved by Diana's intervention, presenting the following photo.

Diana presents her photo, a mature man portrayed in a thoughtful attitude. She says she has chosen this photo because, for her, that man represents the ideal mediator. She says that she is going through a period of idealisation of the mediation training course she is attending, and that the person in the photo seems to be a wise, thoughtful, sensible man, able to settle any difficult situation.

Maria intervenes to say that, in her opinion, the man in the photo looks too authoritative, "he takes after Hitler", she states looking at the photo more closely to see if the man has also a clipped moustache. Clara says that he looks too thoughtful to be a mediator, and

that he seems to be a psychoanalyst. Carla intervenes and says that, at first, when she had seen that photo on the table, she had thought "Ah, that's the mediator", but she had not chosen it because she feared not to be able to come up to this ideal type of mediator.

I intervene presenting in brief the photo I have chosen (which shows a smiling young man, wearing a short white overall). In my opinion, this photo expresses the importance of mediator aptitude to listen.

The mediator image goes on creating and modifying itself within the group. Olga says that the photo I have chosen makes her think of a child, even a Down child. Anna, instead, says that the person in the photo makes her think of a male nurse, of someone who works in social contexts and that this makes her reflect on the importance of professional nurses in many difficult situations. Claudia intervenes saying that, in her opinion, the photo expresses too much simplicity and that she thinks of a mediator like someone having more expertise.

Diana (who had presented the previous photo, the one of "the ideal mediator") says that, at first, she had found this image too disappointing, but now it seems to her that it expresses a more realistic mediator representation. Sandra says that the white-dressed person in the photo looks like a cook, and that she likes the idea that mediator could be someone who prepares, creates something. Diana intervenes again to say that he could be a pastry cook, who prepares something delicious starting from a muddle hotchpotch.

Michela presents the following photo (showing a man, a child and an old woman, seemingly of peasant stock, who are talking each other) saying that she has chosen it because it represents the three generations which, in her opinion, are always involved in every situation of family mediation: children, parents, grandparents. Some group members intervene to say that the photo could be showing some Slavs, some gipsies; some group members notice the absence of a mother, many others see in the photo a family gathering with a paternal grandmother, a father and his child, in order to reconcile the couple and to persuade the mother, who has probably gone away, to come back home. According to some group members, the lack of the mother prevents this photo from being a representation of a situation of family mediation. Some others underline the importance of grandparents' role and grandparent-grandchild relationships. Finally, Diana says with enthusiasm that she has suddenly understood that the old woman in the photo represents "Mrs. Giulianella", the matchmaker of the village where she lived. In ancient times, she says, there used to be matchmakers to arrange marriages and to solve marriages in crisis. By means of the latest image of family mediator which has emerged, it seems to me that the group has gone so far as to think

that the mediator role is not at all something new, something extraneous: in the past, old people, grandparents and matchmakers already behaved like family mediators. I think that this passage is important because it is evidence of a progressive familiarity with the mediator role, a process that promotes the identification of the group members with this role.

By presenting different photos concerning the family mediator image, it seems to me that we have seen an elaboration process in which the group members at first have come into contact with an ideal mediator image, a threatening, persecuting image (the mediator as a thinker, a wise man, a psychoanalyst, but also as Hitler) and with which it was very difficult to identify themselves, and then they have gradually created a more complex mediator image which has made the identification possible.

By means of the next photos – the photo presented by Paola (a very stylised bronze statue of a man), which reminds the group of the idea of human beings burnt following an eruption, that is to say the idea of lives and relationships which have been destroyed; and the photo presented by Clara which, on the contrary, represents a very united couple - it seems to me that there is, within the group, a re-emergence of catastrophic phantasies about the destruction of relationships, and, as a defence mechanism, the recourse to the negation of the breaking and the crisis. (Clara says that, in her opinion, the mediation is useful to restore love and affection within a couple, an affection similar to the one represented in the photo that she has chosen, negating, in doing so, the conflict, the experience of crisis). Anna intervenes to say that she is wondering whether the couples which have been experiencing a conflict for a long period, the couples which separate, have ever had good moments, have ever been “real couples”.

Silvia intervenes to say that it might be supposed that there have been good moments in the past of any couple asking for a mediation intervention. She adds that the photo presented by Paola has made her also think of all that was before the separation, for example the children born of couples which separate, who were born in any case during happy phases of the couple now going through a difficult period. Then she presents her photo (which shows a young man sitting in a playpen together with a child and busy at playing with him) saying that she has chosen the photo because it represents a serene father-child relationship; she supposes that, after a conjugal separation, a relationship as good as the one in the photo could be the family mediation intervention aim. Clara states that, in her opinion, that photo could represent a successful mediation intervention. Laura says that she had thought that the father and his child are in the mother's house; the photo represents a moment in which the father comes to see his

child who – “as usual” - after the separation has been granted to its mother. Sandra and Olga underline the affection and the playing situation which unite the father and the child represented in the photo. The father, Olga says, has put himself in the playpen, has put himself at the same level as his child; moreover, it seems to be able to contain, by means of his gesture, the child aggressive gesture; the children of divorced couples, she says, very often show an aggressive attitude towards their parents. Diana says that the photo makes her think that mediation interventions need fathers eager and able to keep a relationship with their children, but it also needs mothers who allow that, without being jealous and without trying to leave fathers out after the separation.

The meeting is going to finish; Laura presents the last photo but one (which represents a diver at the moment of the emersion). She says she has chosen it because it makes her think that it is necessary to reach rock-bottom to come to the surface. Several group members agree with this interpretation; it is underlined that the person in the photo is alone, that he must manage by his own efforts. Everyone agrees that the photo communicates a will to re-emerge, to manage. Clara intervenes to say that one could even think of someone who wastes his time and does something useless³. The image of the dive suggests to most participants the idea of someone who makes a jump, that is puts into effect a breaking experience; it is underlined again that the person seems to manage the problematic situation. I intervene to say that the image of taking a dive makes me think about experiences of breaking and change, as well as the anxiety connected with any experience of change.

Finally, Claudia presents the photo she has chosen (a photo showing a man in meditation); she says she has chosen it because it makes her think of meditation, of the importance of reflection during the mediation route. Anna intervenes saying that the photo strikes her because of the sensation of loneliness that it expresses. Of course, there is some light in the photo, she adds, but the person is sitting in the shade.

We have got no time left, I intervene to say that the photo makes me think of a reflection route, a personal training route similar to the one that they themselves are doing. However, in the photo there is also an aspect of loneliness, of sadness, an aspect which makes think of the experience of separation and breaking which the mediator is confronted with; of course there is sadness, but also meditation, reflection, thought.

3. The functions of the intermediary and the role of a familiar mediator: some

³ In Italian “to make a hole in water” (“fare un buco nell’acqua”). N.d.T.

reflections

I think that one of the most significant aspects of the experience reported is that it enabled the mediators within the training group to communicate each other their respective representations on family mediation settings and on the people involved in the mediation process, the couples going through a difficult period and the mediator.

As underlined by J.M. Barbier in a work devoted to the process of identity building "the concept of identity is first of all a mental and narrative structure built by individuals with regard to themselves or other individuals with whom they come into contact, within a situation based upon their mutual relationships."⁴ Mental and narrative identity structures are strongly linked, on the one hand, to the representations that an individual builds about himself, his actions and the situations he is confronted with, and on the other hand to the affects associated with the action images and with the self-in-action images.

As shown before, during the discussion on family mediation intervention, started from the photos, it has been possible to render explicit some representations concerning family mediation settings as well as some images concerning the self and the others in mediation situations. The discussion has also enabled the participants to express their affects connected with these representations. In this perspective, I think that, in the training experience regarding family mediation previously described, the use of the Photolanguage method, giving the participants the opportunity to render explicit their representations and to express and verbalise their affects, has contributed to structure a professional identity in each group member.

Another aspect I would like to devote my attention to concerns the notion of intermediary as described by Kaës (1983,1985) with regard to both the representations of the family mediation activity and to the assumption of the role of family mediator by individuals within training settings. Indeed, I think that the representations emerged during the group meeting show that the family mediator role assumption derives from a group members confrontation with the different dimensions of the intermediary functions.

Besides - as Kaës underlines in his work on Freud's notion of intermediary, when he describes, among the elements for a metapsychological structuring of the intermediary concept, the topography of intermediary - an intermediary is not only a place (paradoxical, border, utopian) but it is also an entity located in that specific place, an

⁴ J.M. Barbier (1996), p.12.

entity embodying or representing this border-entity. Kaës gives some examples of individuals who embody this function: “the figure of the Pope, the minister or the messenger, Harlequin-servants, i.e. composite and multiple characters”⁵. Even the family mediator is a third figure placed in an area between two locations or two subjects. Reflection on the figures which embody the function of the intermediary is linked, on the one hand, to the different representations of the family mediator that have emerged in the group, and, on the other hand, to the different profession (social assistant, psychologist, lawyer) that can participate to a family mediator training, which seems to further underline the composite and multiple nature of this figure.

I am conceiving the function of intermediary both referring to Freud’s intermediary categorization, which is the focus of the work published by Kaës (1985), and to the hypothesis proposed by C. Vacheret (2000), who conceived the maternal function as a model for the function of intermediary. As Kaës has underlined the concept of intermediary is one of the most relevant categories ever introduced in the history of thought within which this category has been associated with three main characteristics.

The first characteristic assigns to the intermediary a function of joint and connection, through the creation of continuity starting from discontinuity and the reduction of antagonism among clashing and conflicting elements or forces. The second characteristic associates the intermediary with the representation of a process of transformation or transitio. Finally, the third characteristic conceives the intermediary as part of a structure which is responsible for its transformation. In this perspective, the category of intermediary is connected with the whole phenomena producing all of the transformations and the transition from an organisation level to another, and the intermediary thought is underpinned by two phantasms: on the one hand, the positive aspects, concerning the transformation, the creation and the transition processes, and, on the other hand, the negative aspects, connected with being hybrid, spurious, indefinite

It has been possible to observe the emergence of these different characteristics of intermediary since the representations of the family mediation activity as they have been expressed by the training group from the very beginning, starting from the photos. We have seen, for example, that starting from the photo presenting the railways interlacement, many metaphors of the family mediation setting have been produced which enabled the group members to represent it: as a situation in which relationships joint and disjoint; as a confused situation; as a breaking situation; as a situation in which

⁵ R. Kaës (1985), pp. 913-914.

inter-subjective ties do not interlace anymore, becoming similar to railways, to parallel lines; or, in addition, as a situation in which there is an oscillation between the risk of not changing and the risk of losing oneself in change, of going off the rails, etc.

Therefore, we have seen clearly the emergence of the first characteristic of intermediary, which underlines the function of joint, connection and creation of continuity starting from discontinuity, and the emergence of the second characteristic, which associates intermediary to the representation of a transformation or transition process. Finally, we observed the expression of the two phantasms which underpin the third characteristic of intermediary, both connected with the whole phenomena producing all of the transformations and the transition from an organisation level to another: on the one hand, the negative phantasm which underlines indefiniteness, anxiety, the confusion deriving from change; on the other hand the positive phantasm which highlights the creative power of change.

But there are some more intermediary functions representations emerged from the group experience conducted with the Photolangage method. It is possible to catch these representations in a better way starting from the reconstruction of the different moments distinguished by Kaës within the elaboration of freudian concept of intermediary. According to Kaës, it is possible to distinguish in Freud's studies three conceptions of the intermediary category. In a first period, that includes the works of 1895-1896, the intermediary category is connected with the function of para-excitation, i.e. with the function of body protection from the external stimuli which, because of their intensity, would risk destroying it. The concept of para-excitation is crucial in all Freud's works; this notion has been associated with that of Ego in the *Compendio di psicoanalisi* (1938) where Freud deals with the function of para-excitation carried out by the mother towards her child. Vacheret (2000) refers to the freudian conceptualisation of para-excitation as carried out by the mother - combining it with Bion's conception concerning the mother capability defined rêverie and with Winnicott's conception concerning the functions carried out by the mother (holding, handling, nursing, object presenting) - in order to describe the transformation aspects of the intermediary function interpreted according with the model of the maternal function.

Referring to these authors Vacheret underlines the transformative dimension and the instinct holding dimension both peculiar to the maternal function and, according to her hypothesis, to the intermediary function.

In my opinion these aspects of the intermediary function occur in the training group when its members, with regard to the photo representing the railways interlacement,

reflect on the railways rigidity, and, then, on the possibility to carry out an holding function with respect to the risks linked to any change and transformation process.

I think that, on that occasion, the group members reflect on the role of family mediator with regard to the assumption of a function of intermediary, which has to guarantee the instinct holding dimension as well as the transformative dimension.

The way of conceiving the intermediary function as a instinct holding function is also expressed when the group members reflect on the difficulties that a family mediator encounters when dealing with couples which turn to him. These couples are perceived as grotesque, untidy, upset owing to the conflict and conjugal crisis which produces a destructuring of the codes which organise behaviour and regulate the instinct elaborations.

On this occasion, the group members seem to reflect on the role of the mediator conceived as an intermediary who takes over the holding function and the elaboration of some elements never thought of and, also, unthinkable for the couple having problems.

b) Following Kaës' description of Freud's conceptualisation of the intermediary category, in a second period which includes the 1899-1907 works the intermediary is conceived as a compromise-formation, a formation emerging from a conflict. In this perspective, the function of intermediary results from the tension between rival forces and the intermediary formations try to create ties and establish negotiations among these conflicting formations.

These aspects are crucial within the conception of the intermediary from a dynamic point of view. As a process that reduces antagonisms thanks to the re-articulation of conflicting elements, the intermediary function participates in the establishment of a process of dynamic structuring involving new integrative ties (that is the unifying action of the life instinct). This establishment has always to confront with an opposite possibility to establish a process of destruction and paralysis of the meaning connection activity (that is the disrupting action of the death instinct).

In my opinion these aspects emerge during the exchanges concerning the photo which represents the grape harvest. On that occasion the group members seem to wonder about their capability of repairing and carrying out an intermediary function which may connect and integrate conflicting elements: that is the conflict between life instincts, which tend to join, and death instincts.

A similar question also emerges during the exchanges developed with respect to the photo which represents some young people, men and women, sitting round a little wall. As we observed, the group members seem to reflect on the difficulties linked to the

assumption of an intermediary function which may connect different and conflicting principles. The conflict between life instincts and death instincts, union and separation, is also highlighted during the presentation of the photo showing the bronze statue - evoking in the training group the representation of burnt human beings and, then, of destroyed lives and relationships - followed by the presentation of the photo showing the two people in love, which symbolises union.

c) In a third period of Freud's conceptualization, the intermediary category, according to Kaës, refers to Freud's second topography, which identifies intermediary formations with border-entities, such as the Ego, entities sharing the characteristics of two different groups and placing, with respect to them, in the position of third entities.

At this level, we observe the intermediary function to identify itself with the third-person function, the paternal function. As a matter of fact, with regard to the concept of intermediary from a genetic point of view, Kaës distinguishes between two level of analysis.

The first level, which connects the intermediary function and the intermediary formation, on the one hand, and the concepts of helplessness state, para-excitation, relying, on the other hand, and which joints the couples of union-separation, excitement-stillness, continuity-discontinuity. At this level the intermediary function is linked to the maternal function in its transformative and instincts holding dimensions.

The second level concerns the functions of transformative passage and the development of symbolic functions. At this level the intermediary function corresponds with the function of a third person, with the paternal function and with the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, a phase in which the construction of the symbolic order performs the intermediary functions.

In this perspective, in my opinion, it is possible an interpretation of the group exchanges with regard to the different representations of the family mediator. Actually, the first representation of the mediator as a thinker and a psychoanalyst can be interpreted as linked to the ideal, and probably still too distant, representation of the mediator as an intermediary who makes it possible a transformative passage and the creation of a new symbolic order. By means of the next photos the representation of a function of transformative elaboration is expressed again, as proved by the image of the pastry cook, which converts the irreconcilable and inassimilable elements of the conflict (the "hotchpotch") into something good to be assimilated and introjected. Finally, through the image of the father who plays in the playpen with his child, it seems that the group has become able to catch a crucial aspect of the concept of intermediary.

In the conclusion of his work, indeed, Kaës proposes a definition which tries to make a synthesis of the different moments of the intermediary function. According to this definition, the intermediary function builds “a bridge over something that remains broken”, and “comes nearer what remains separated”⁶. I think that the image, elaborated by the group, of a father who comes to see his child granted to its mother after the separation - image through which the group reflect on the fact that a successful mediation intervention needs fathers eager and able to keep a relationship with their children, but it also needs mothers who allow that, without being jealous and without trying to leave fathers out after the separation - expresses exactly the definition of intermediary proposed by Kaës. Indeed, it “comes nearer what remains separated”, builds “a bridge over something that remains broken”, and carries out a function of transformative elaboration.

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⁶ R. Kaës (1985), p. 924.

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