

In pursuit of authenticity

Pablo Castagnetto

Abstract

Based on the particularity an emotive experience activates when we connect with other's authentic expressions, the author reflects on how the search for authenticity resides in every one of us, and turns into a main element in the most serious patients' experiences, constantly deprived of the possibility to freely express their experiences and the most genuine aspects of themselves. Understanding that working among these aspects represents the primary core and an essential element of the transformational potential psychoanalytic multi-family groups have, the author propose an original articulation exercise between J.G. Badaracco y C. Bollas, particularly between the concepts of normogenic interdependence and transformational object. In this last conceptualization, the transformational object experience is for the infant, an alteration/metamorphose process of himself, which many times we find in the centre of the individual and collective search – in adult life – of potentially transformative object relations. These elements seems very close to the multi-family groups experience, in which uprising of normogenic interdependences allows repairing and transformational expression of authenticity. Through relating his personal experiences in multi-family groups, first as a training participant, then as a conductor, the author reflects on the way that uprising of authenticity represents a founding moment in the therapeutic process, and how through it transformational potential allows manifestation of hope, emotive result of the multi-family work.

Keywords: authenticity, transformational process, transformational object, normogenic interdependences, de-identification

With García Badaracco we learnt how systematically in the most serious ways of suffering, the most truthful part of people is one of the aspects that we may find more damaged.

In that sense, the collective setting that he imagined seems to – in a particular way – allow free expression of his experiences, and that phenomenon mostly responds to a nuclear aspect of the multi-family groups, which is its transformational potential.

We all know that particular moment when one voice that seems to arrive differently, from what we could call the most truthful, the most genuine and the most authentic part of a person, finds its way through the others.

Usually, it is a singular affective moment, in part related to the certainty about the value of what has just been said. This certainty frequently precedes the comprehension of its content.

This is an interesting fact: we emotionally vibrate with a truthful manifestation independently of its content. We perceive it in an intuitive and straight way, without consciously using our reason.

I am referring to those highly emotional moments, in which we perceive some of its struggle making its way, some of its pain, when we feel that something unheard has been said “for the very first time”. It rises as a promise, as a liberation, as a pray.

If it is true that from the sympathy with our genuine potential, we are able to recognize everyone else’s, it is not less true that frequently the possibility of being more genuine appears denied to us.

In this way, the evocative power that the arrival of a genuine expression awakes, may respond to the permanent debate of the authentic trying to express itself in every one of us.

On the other hand, we may say about the genuine, the authentic, that with those words we usually describe an aspect of the human life that seems to appear clear to us, which has been –for the last decades- the centre of the psychoanalytic research.

However, the excessive use of the terminology we usually handle, as Bollas sees it “though transitionally essential to individual and collective efforts of objectifying the signified, eventually loses its meaningfulness through incantatory solicitation, devaluing any word's unthought potential" (Bollas; 1992: 64)

According to what we just said, we find that when we talk about the genuine, or the real of people, this word’s unthought potential seems to be even more important. The ineffable aspect of the term and its explicit connotations are equally important.

The core of its essence seems to reject the possibility of being represented, and this is an element that, as far as I am concerned, confers it an additional fascination. Its essence is evasive to its conceptualization, as well as it is to its objectification in a discourse.

Regardless this “failure to see” the true self in the way an unconscious sense it is seen, as Bollas says, this difficulty may respond to the fact that true self only exists in the context of an experience, and depends on its nature, allowing idiom opening, understanding this concept as the singular presence of being, the idiom of each one's personality.

The fact that the development of our singular idiom depends on the nature of our experiences in order to be, is probably something Badaracco agreed with when he

thought about his concept of normogenic interdependences, also knowing how that same nature of certain experiences radically blocks this possibility.

Furthermore, I think that when he insists on the importance of the significant halo surrounding the concepts he uses to found his metapsychology, he worries about the risk in which as conceptualizations, they precisely distract us from their less explicit connotations, from their most essential characteristics.

In this sense, “the essence of our encounters with the object” is an aspect studied in such a valuable and interesting way in the work of authors like Christopher Bollas. If it is true then that the transformational power of the multi-family groups lies precisely in the nature of this encounter experience, I hope suggesting an articulation exercise between these two authors, could be as productive to our cause as it has been for me.

For that matter, we are going to briefly mention his transformative object conceptualization, which he understands as “the infant's first subjective experience of the object (...) A transformational object is experientially identified by the infant with processes that alter self experience” (Bollas, 1985: 14)

And he says: “Not yet fully identified as another, the mother is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation. Thus, in adult life, the quest is not to possess the object; rather the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self, where the subject-as-suppliant now feels himself to be the recipient of enviro-somatic caring identified with metamorphoses of the self” (Bollas, 1985: 14).

Let's also say that Bollas extensively develops this concept, analyzing the several forms that the collective searching phenomenon for the transformational takes place in adult life.

For me, the image of this subject as a suppliant, as a recipient of enviro-somatic caring identified with metamorphoses of the self, as well as the collective search of the transformational in adult life, both aspects seem to be really close to the experiences our groups allow. And I think, for that matter, that this should be precisely, a very important objective we could have today: to never stop thinking of how to create the conditions that allow our groups to be experienced this way, as a transformational possibility.

In fact, when I found this concept developed by Bollas, I felt quite faithfully represented the one that has been my experience, when I took part in the APA's big group in Buenos Aires for the first time.

In that opportunity I had found almost unbelievable to see myself seconds before intervening as another patient, without being afraid to say something inappropriate or insignificant.

Instead of those difficulties, I remember an emotional and pleasant sensation, as far as I remember inedit, in which I experienced the group as a sea in which you could jump in, and those experiences started from the certainty I had, that I would have been received with open arms by that group of strangers. Strangers that I heard talking about themselves with contents I don't remember today, but loaded with the musicality of the language of the authentic, the singing of the genuine.

Afterwards, I had participate in that group in another opportunities, and even though I think I didn't had the chance to experience that feeling again, that mark has remained in me, and worked as some kind of guidance.

The evocative power the genuine of that collective setting had to me, may had as a significant fact, some of the value "authenticity's founding moment" – Badaracco told us about in his cure process description – had. Experience which he also attributes an essential therapeutic value, related to the recognition and reconciliation possibility that represents for both patients and families.

We all know those particular moments the multi-family groups involves; and the emergence of these moments not only surprise us but we might also say there are a result of the work inside the group and the productive phase in their history.

The transformational power of this "founding authenticity", is probably a phenomenon as complex as valuable, directly related to that very emotional result the multi-family experience has, which is the rise of hope.

It is as if that future possibility hope inaugurates, that rising moment of authenticity in the group's development, was a result of its evolution and an emerging opportunity which offers itself as a germinal element, in a growing movement that changes us by reciprocal influence, bringing us closer to our roots, bringing us closer to the possibility to intuit something else about the others and about ourselves.

I think these kind of experiences inaugurate another reflexion point related to the spontaneity in our participation in the groups. This seems to be a complex element the conduction technique has, among which would be useful to keep thinking.

Let's briefly consider what García Badaracco said in his book "Multi-family Psychoanalysis" when he reflects on "the followed path": "the idea of an spontaneous setting and being available as a foundation of the therapeutic relation, was the multi-family group germ". It seems rightful to ask ourselves, for instance, how his spontaneity may have been a carrier of this role.

Among the same lines, Bollas on "Being a character" seems to offer a possible answer to that question. He surprisingly observes the fact that object relations theory does not pay enough attention to the different object structure, that it is often seen as a subject's projections retainer. "Certainly objects bear us. But ironically enough, it is precisely because they hold our projections that the structural feature of any one object becomes even more important, because we also

put ourselves into a container that upon re-experiencing will process us according to its natural integrity" (Bollas 1992: 4).

Although García Badaracco's concept about "de-identification" function of certain experiences might be contemplated in this phenomenon, Bollas seems to address it in a more singular way, focusing on the encounter's quality among these diverse natural integrities and their potential.

He even refers to the value that has "to enjoy the risk of being processed by the object - indeed, to seek objects, in part, in order to metamorphosed, as one "goes through" change by going through the processional moment provided by any object's integrity" (Bollas, 1992: 59)

Adding: "Each entry into an experience of an object is rather like being born again, as subjectivity is newly informed by the encounter" (Bollas; 1992: 59)

And finally stating: "This collisional dialectic between the human's form and the object's structure is, in the best of times, a joy of living, as one is nourished by the encounter" (Bollas; 1992: 60)

With García Badaracco we learnt the value this true self dimension has in our patients experiences, and that to trace its path seems to be a faithful guiding thread of the development of everyone participating in that experience.

Furthermore, I think introducing in these ideas about multi-family psychoanalysis, the work of certain authors unconnected to these experiences, might be equally faithful to its essence.

Finally, I would like to transcribe a fragment from Bollas in "Being a character" that I found very enlightening: "And of ourselves, I think it can be said that we are spirits, that we shall scatter our being throughout the object world, and through the winds of interforming human mutualities.

A dream that defies its content, it enjoins the world through the dream work. We will have had, then, a spiritual sense, a notional grasp of the force to be what we have been, and this presence, valued yet ungraspable, is consolation amidst the human march to wisdom's end, punctuated, as always, by the question mark." (Bollas, 1992: 65).

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