

## Group and Rite

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### Abstract

This text attributes several significances and functions to social rite and its construction inside group. Certainly, these have a social value in maintaining and keep cohesive group, but also they can stimulate new experiences, not already known and coherent.

Author poses three different notions of social rite and he compares them to other three opposed notions. First of all, (a) the containing function and creative of social rite inside group, contrasting to ceremony, which makes rite's structure more formalized. Then, (b) notion of rite is viewed as a shared dreaming's narrative rite. Finally, (c) social rite is prospected as a construction of contents, and of shared contents, and prospected as opposed to the static and destructive valences of ritual.

**Key words:** group, rite/ritual, rite/ceremony, narrative rite, shared dreaming

I want to remember here today our group's leader, Francesco Corrao, who together with Claudio Neri, brought Bion's thought to Italy, tracing a path, for the psychoanalytical community, to feel in group, to feel group itself.

So, well, to remember Corrao I'll try to do something as I saw him doing in the formative group to a direct experience. He was used to propose to group, just at the beginning of seance, some different suggestions. Suggestions were apparently disconnected each other, and not connected to an explicit source: rather, they usually recalled several different points. And it was always happening that, even before group had felt what his proposal to think together was like, or why, or before having try to given an answer, he had already boarded group on ship. Group was already dreaming and narrating, animated by his stimulating elements, left there to all. And the whole group was thinking, and individuals.

I intended to propose to remember Corrao, in a day we are reunited and we can express our gratitude to Claudio for his long work at Sapienza, and I am glad to talk about our shared heritage.

I'd like to recall it now, by starting now from giving some elements in our reunited work group. I'll underline an aspect to consider together. In many years with groups, I was convinced by experience that group's seance always starts from the first pronounced word, its sense and its alone, at the beginning of seance. First given word sounds as a *la*, a note for all the whole seance of the group, and for his melody! The *la*, changes, by combining in other chords, but the note is stable.

Now with the same method, by proposing different suggestions, I'd want to explore today our theme, rite, evoking different disciplinary fields, to try to distinguish two opposite rites. I.e. rite which keeps, or can transfer, and makes static its contents. And rite which rather produces, contains and explores contents, to mature and to transforming them.

I suppose this is a good question to process together, students, operators and therapists who works in a seance, both, individual and in group: to keep a distinction among two different meaning of rite.

### **Group's rite and ceremony**

First suggestion I have in my mind is difference between Rite and Ritual, and Ceremony and Cerimonial. Similarly, in a contiguous field, it is possible to considering the difference between Mythe and Legend: Mythe continuously produces and modifies its social contents; Legend is static, and formalizes them. Many authors as semologists and literary criticiens studied this, as we all know.

For us, psychologists and operators who work with the psychic, thoughts and feelings, and with subjective experiences, both, of individual and individuals inside group, knowing what rite is like and its process, is very important. Considering difference between Rite and Ceremony for instance could help. In fact rite has in itself a social nature. It organizes and promotes social contents and meanings, as it is within a complexe and active relationality: while the ceremony formalizes it, rather, through a static and aesthetic device, that performs a secondary function, by recalling to an evocative and conservative character. Meanings of rite, viewed by ceremony's side, are rather placed on a background plan.

### **Dreaming.**

The second suggestion points to the elements of dream within the grou, indeed a particular kind of dream, which in psychoanalysis, in classical, individual analysis, we would call a dream of transfert.

I was just Claudio Neri who in his book (see note 2) more explicitly, and also in terms of didactics, indicated the concept of field of the group, its various historical conceptualizations, and selected and formulated a distinct field of the group as a space not geometric and inert, but active space as a shared "emotional and mental state".

On this basis he then pointed out the difference among the work *on* the transfert in the individual seance, and the construction of the field which group tend to make. In this sense also the point of psychoanalytical interpretation (from Latin *inter-pretium*) in the transition from the dual seance to the group one, changes perspective. In fact the processing work in the group does not has the task of revealing criptic contents which are present. It is rather understood as a container of the set of elements simultaneously expressed on different plans and directions, which attributes their significances by introducing them into its various processes and elaborating orders.

I'd like now to add to this a transversal question, concerning the dream's nature and its working in group. We could eventually come back to this, and considering nevertheless the many difficulties we meet, when we are looking for distinguishing what individual or social and undifferentiated psychic functions are operating in a shared field. We do not always know who is dreaming in a group, what dreamer narrating a dream produced a dream – the common field; or individual, by his subjective experience. Or dream which is narrated in group is an individual dream, which has been changed by group's experience. So, I mean – who dreams? Group? Together? Single individuals in their exchanges? Or is the same field, the dreamer – as an independent subject? Or even the analyst is a dreamer, through his representation of group?

Everyone of us has his/her experience, or directly or reading dedicated literature, and today it is important to experience the experience we make now together, and with our dreams. And it will be important to hearing relators and their thoughts and ours.

Now I will pass to the third suggestion.

### **Rite and Ritual**

Ronni Jaffè in a contribution appeared in 2005, for the monothematic edition, n. 24, of *Funzione Gamma*, wrote about a mortifying rite. He shows in it when rite can become bearer of death, using a clinical example.

He describes the difficult evolution of a group formed by young anorexic patients, who periodically returned to an empty set of elaborative and symbolic functions, filling the session time with concrete stories about food issues such as nutrition counts, weight etc. This backward return had become a mortifying ritual that took place at every entry of a new participant and: the whole group was reallocated on that occasion to the primordial, replaying the initial discourse, which had been evolved with so much effort towards more shared expressions and endowed with sense. Group re-begun to follow a rigid and ordered ceremonial, which denied every symbolic process, concretely refusing any sort of thinking process and emptying the group of any significant function.

That text made me think long about, and I keep it in mind, asking for example, given my interest in that, if the groups are suitable for anorexic patients, particularly homogeneous groups, i.e. all patients with the same syndrome. Those of us here between the students who followed my courses on adolescence, and read some books required for exam preparation, have looked for understanding these aspects. I had some useful and interesting conversations with them.

I remember some meaningful conversation with someone of them. A very good student for instance told me a time, with great simplicity, that in the group one can feel like in a body, as in the body, inside of it, and that this could be helpful in recovering a sense of own body, and an experience indeed of it, also before its cognition. She declared on this basis that group is also useful to make participants feeling more strongly their own presence, and that one of group's apparatus. Group, in this sense, could vicariate with its

strengthen the deficient functions of subjective identity and rehabilitate sensory and affective functions of individuals, thus increasing individuation of him(her)self, through the experience of similarities and differences inside of group.

For instance, she continued, conversation in group can proceed linearly, or by jumps. Contrast maneuvers and emotional oscillations can be made between opposed poles, useful in developing experience and detection processes.

It seems students can think, also in a original way, in their courses, can't they!

Consequently, we could state that the rite to narrating in a therapeutic group (and possibly in group-course!) can be regressive as long as regression is useful to experience of remote psychic objects, otherwise silenced; and not just to perform the opposing function to changes, as we saw in that anorexic group, which repeated a ritual.

This is an interesting hypothesis, mainly inherent to timing and the quantity of elements which are taking part to process. The hypothesis at this point is that rite, if work goes well, can contain change, and increase the contents, by keeping them alive, and amplifying them and making them more livable, transforming the same group into a container of evolving sources.

I have placed three themes, these: the idea of rite which contains and the ceremony which formalizes; that of the dream, with its narrative rite; and that of rite against ritual. They are too different perhaps, or overwhelming. But let's say we are preparing here today to develop our ideas and our process of thinking and feeling, and sharing if possible. We will start by one of the many, even casually as it could seem, because to say with Winnicott, the streets, psychologically speaking, all lead to Rome.

But on the dream in particular, and on the rite which accompanies its narrative it would press me to make an observation. We have mentioned that an important distinction between individual and group's dream has been made, and between the dream of transfert in the analytical couple and the dream of the group field.

So I'm wondering, but is it really important that we recognize who the dreamer is? And to distinguish which gravitational forces it is supported by the dream and its narrative? I would say yes, it is important if we think of discriminating its contents, exploring its meanings and directions, assigning them a meaning or many dynamic meanings to share and evolve them.

But I would also add that letting a dream float in the group, producing its informality and incomprehensibility, its multiplicity of sense and multidimensionality can generate in the whole group an useful rapture, a sort of common dream. This could create an access to the ineffable dimensions, otherwise not investigated, toward the indiscriminate odds of the single personality, silently not recognized, that have remained in the extra-orbital gravitational fields, outside the main orbit of the identity.

Viewed from this side it seems that the rite in its repeated editions, which help to preserve the group's narrative and its image patrimony, however has a value, as well as constancy, both productive and propelling. The rite provides cohesion and consistency, but also enters into experience of not coherent and known elements.

Now I would quote a paragraph that I translated from a correspondence with our guest speaker from France Professor Denis Mellier, at the time when the theme of this Conference was being proposed:

By Denis Mellier, from his French text to this meeting: Le rite été étudié par de nombreuses disciplines en sciences humaines et sociales (storicantropologico- religieuse, ethno-psychiatrique, musicologie etc.) pour sa puissante signification et sa fonction sociale, car il est à l'origine des représentations syncrétiques et primitives des sujets individuels et des groupes.

Par l'utilisation d'un dispositif de soin "social", constitué par un petit groupe qui effectue un processus d'analyse, cette origine, comme base commune de l'histoire et de l'identité collective, peut être trouvée, élaborée et différenciée et la crise complexe des participants individuelle peut utilement se trouver reconnectée à travers les représentations psychiques des participants.

Le processus de crise sociale et des attentes de transformation et de régénération qui font partie de celui-ci, peut être traitée au sein du groupe, qui dramatise les expériences des individus en lien avec leur base sociale.

It seems here we can conclude that rite develops in a complex "commuting" (see Neri, note 2) from individual journey to being a part of the group, or more groups. The rite, the ritual, and again the rite: the reassuring return to constancy, periodically, and the new and complex perhaps turbulent adventure towards the unknown.

With a concluding reflection I still put a note on the dream, and then we will start working together, freeing us from our starting note, our *la*, holding it in some corner of our attention.

This is my concluding note:

When will the transfert appear in a dream, or the field, are we always sure to distinguish whether it is a transfert, or instead from a field?

It is not enough to have dreamed the "analyst" or the "field of group" or the features of the seance, transferred to another person or situation - to say we have a transfert's dream! When we enter, or we are suddenly led, in the area of transference and trauma, or turbulence, or just in the indefinite, the whole scene changes. Our relation with the presence of the object, with the non-object, or even that we still can not place, that we are facing (transfert), is different, or we have to create it.

The narrative rite led us to a new rite still to be founded. We don't know if we can do it. No one assures us that we will be able to do them, not even the rite.

Perhaps it helps us to know that in some corner of the mind sometimes overwhelmed by uncertain experience, we know that we have experienced the rite, a form of memory that reassures a small part of us in the new storm without rite containing that is preparing itself.

And today, I do not know what rite we will do. But I'm very interested in knowing. Thank you for your ritual but fresh and encouraging attention.

### **Notes**

1. The rite has been studied by several human and social sciences (historical-anthropological-religious, ethno-psychiatric, musicological etc.) because of its powerful meaning and of its social function: the rite is in fact it at the origin of syncretic and primitive representations, both individuals and of groups. Through the use of a "social" cure device, formed by a small group that does a process of analysis, this origin can be found, elaborated and differentiated and the complex crisis can be found as a common basis for history and collective identity individual participants can easily reconnect, through the psychic representations of the participants.

The process of social crisis and the transformation and regeneration expectations that form part of it can be dealt with within the group that dramatizes the experience of individuals in connection with their social base.

(2) Neri C.(1998), *Group*. International Library of Group Analysis 8, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia.

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