

Bus as therapy group setting metaphor: Lista de Espera, a journey inside the group

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Abstract

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Abstract-This work aims to analyze the film "Lista de espera", from the perspective of group dynamics working among the passengers of a bus station.

The interest is placed on the foundation of the group and the conflict that is generated over time between participants; going through the basic assumptions we can see how it comes to teamwork in the performing stage.

The film is a metaphor for what happens in a group psychotherapy, where differences become object of work and transformation for each participant: only to participating at the affectivity in the group became possible to change. The analysis of cohesion's factors accompanies the course of the narrative, which in its conclusion shows us the way of the dream as a possible direction to express the desire to belong to the group.

Key words: travel, life stages of group, factors cohesion, dream.

Cuba, early 90s. In a Cuban coastal town bus terminal, dozens of people are waiting to leave – someone to the east for Santiago, someone else to the west for Havana.

The group space is a dilapidated bus terminal, the waiting passengers' common goal is the journey, but there is just one bus and, after midnight, like Cinderella's coach, it changes its destination: on even days it goes to Santiago, on odd days it goes to Havana. Temporal dimension acquires, therefore, a fundamental significance for passengers, whose attention is focused on the clock, which marks the passage of time and the destiny of each person.

At the beginning of the movie hope to leave is what animates passengers and it is what motivates them to have confidence in a positive change. At the beginning of a therapeutic group as well, the infusion of hope is a therapeutic factor, essential to retain the patient in therapy, in order to make other therapeutic factors act. It allows the patient to stay in a group therapy, also waiting for real improvements or changes in other patients inside the group (Yalom, 1995). The patient-passengers are hoping to begin a journey towards that goal which will enable them to reach a new territory, which will broaden horizons and it will give them new opportunities or resources to use during life.

Passengers are waiting in an extreme tense climate, increased especially when the speakers, constantly framed, warn that the last "one ticket" is going to be released. Tension is about being a member of "who leaves" group or being excluded from it.

"Queue is the highest authority in these cases" is a striking joke, but it also reveals what will be group development, because it is about to take shape. At this moment arrives Rolando, a blind man, who intends to overcome the line and to grab the only ticket left, because of his state of blindness. After an initial compassion for Rolando, everyone exaggerates their uniqueness, each one occupied to stake their own personal rights in order to get the ticket ... "I had five operations," "I was waiting here for five hours with a child" and still "Everyone knows their problems". It seems to prevail dichotomous aut-aut primitive logic: "Mors tua vita mea" (your death, my life), it is a logic that ignores complexity and complementarity present in our existence (Lopez, Zorzi, 1999).

When the group is getting a shape, into each participant's mind starts the expectation that for level or deficits presented there are privileges, so each one tries to get the leader's attention.

This conflict state, draws the group therapy storming phase. It is the conflict stage, based on dominance and rebellion, where each member's main concern is to be on top or bottom with respect to a hypothetical importance hierarchy that each one attributes to the therapist thought. Conflicts and rebellions into a therapeutic reality are related to a need and to an opportunity for everyone to take part in a group space and to assume or not a dominant position (Tuckman, 1965).

In the bus terminal the atmosphere heats up, revolt desire is going to emerge.

Because of the need to have a reference point, passengers ask for more explanations from Fernandez, terminal director, given voice to what Bion (1961) defines dependence basic assumption, characterized by the need of a leader to depend on totally, who has the solution to every problem and also to whom it is possible to get needs and desires realization. Fernandez puts the group in front of a certain limit, frustrating the need to project onto him the omnipotence: the bus is out, everyone must go home because the terminal is going to close. Anger and helplessness feelings are mixed in a confusion and chaos picture, where utopian desire to change things and build a new group's history ability revived, setting free creativity and imagination, reversing rules and bureaucracies.

Who expressed this desire is Emilio, rather than lose Jacqueline, a young woman he has just met, he gets on a stool and he clarifies the purpose and boundaries of that group space, he proposes an alternative: all work together to fix the bus.

Each group is formed around a messianic idea -a compelling and addictive idea- and a person who is the spokesman of it. In the film the undifferentiated mass of people become a group that feeds itself with solution messianic idea: confidence to being able to fix the bus. This group birth evokes the therapeutic state in which nascent group develops the group illusion, proposed by Anzieu (1976). During this stage it is common to hear phrases like: "we're good, we are the best team in the world", phrases that are based on an illusion of community, that responds to a threat Ego unity, security and preservation desire (Blacks, 2004). In this view individual forces can be aggregate and fusional state (between terminal and individuals) take them out of isolation, alienation and helplessness. Leaving passivity man can join a group and

by the group he can act the truth (Sartre, 1963). In the film is a fusional state that leads individuals to decide to join their forces in order to search for what is lacking: to find necessary information to repair bus, without any worry about destination. Someone can feel himself isolated even when he is not alone, he may be in a group without diving into it, as the man who, in the film, remains deliberately aloof, with his box full of food: from the group he can only take but he is not willing to share. When, with "Stadium Brothers Community" evolution space group is created, it takes shape as a collective entity capable of thinking and processing. The group common space is not understood in a geographic or organizational way, it is primarily a mental and relational space (Marinelli, 1991, Siracusano, 1986). Not everyone is able to be part of this common space, someone decides to escape from it without thinking about group transformative potential, scared to be fully integrated into it. So the group defines its external borders and resources that will be used for work group. For example Cristobal, a man with rigid and obsessive behaviour, does not agree to share the same problematic experience, and he does not accept potential transformative teamwork. He gets angry, and he forces his entire family to leave the terminal at night under the pouring rain...

If Emilio is the first who thought and dreams about group, then it establish itself as an imaginary object in all other passengers mind as well. As submitted Rouchy (1998) the group, even before existing in reality, it is as imaginary object both in the therapist and in patient's mind. This mental space is the place for a common goal and for a therapeutic setting that will contain the group. While this imaginary object is going to be formed, confidence in group process, in order to create a valuable therapeutic tool thanks to mutual interaction, is fundamental (Foulkes, 1975).

Emilio seems to assume Genius Loci group function: a person who, as working group leader, takes the role to animate group identity, to link group progress with its affective base (especially when it is going to change) and to enable its evolution. In a therapeutic group, this function is taken unknowingly by a subject. Genius loci is a key figure who feeds the group's emotional spirit and who maintains harmony between life group different elements (Neri, 2004).

So it is clear that group is formed. Fixing the bus is a common aim felt by everyone and it becomes a goal for which everyone is willing to believe in others contribution and to reveal his own resource.

This group is variegated, it is like a social microcosm, both for the age because there are old people, children, adolescents and young adults, and for the ability to stay in group and participate in its active phase. The group becomes a "laboratory" that allows participants to experience a constructive interaction between people from socio-cultural reality far from each other and, over time, it leads to enhance diversity and possibility to exploit different point of view (Corbella, 2003).

The space group, rundown station, it is both real physical and collective psychological space, which reflects inner individual world and its boundaries; Rouchy (1998) defines it as a transitional space in which it becomes possible to metabolize psychic reality in relation to a social one. This dynamic allows people to

locate an archaic painful and so unthinkable stimulus, inside space group which acts as a container capable to transform content into thought.

Group holds the ability to detoxify individual mind from excessive voltages that occupy it, so group think can elaborate anxieties.

Corrao (1981) defines "gamma function" the group ability to think and so to "metabolize" sensory elements, tensions and emotions that are anti-thought, as the mother's alpha function develops the child's archaic unthinkable elements and turns them into digestible ones (Bion, 1961). In the movie the main characters - Emilio and Jacqueline - feel the pain for having to give up with their desires and to leave their countries because of lack of "economic" resources, this pain of loss find its place into space group and the group can process it.

In a therapeutic group, as in this movie, different stories come together in a common transitional space, within which is possible to develop a shared history that crosses different mind places.

When a group is getting a shape, rules (functional for therapeutic work) change according to institutional framework and to work conditions (Corbella, 2003). In this stage is possible to structure a specific norming group that leads on cohesion. It is a stage where rules are defined and they leads a transition to identity that is expressed as group culture (Tuckman, 1965). In the film, while men are working to fix bus, women define some rules: they create, for example, a traffic light for the bathroom (blue cloth for men, red cloth for women, green cloth to indicate bathroom free).

In a sharp contrast between masculine and feminine, a logic of opposites dominated like an aut-aut, in which the other just like each one, struggling to be recognized in his complexity, and he is reduced like a receptacle for others projections. This differentiation between males and females with their tasks belongs to a role stereotype, but during the film it will be possible to glimpse through a person stereotype, for example when two boys fall in love despite they were boasted their machismo.

Speaking about therapeutic group, at detection and confirmation of its identity stage, to sit in a circle allows members to see each other as in a mirror, both with respect to physical and mental aspects of gender identity (Corbella, 2003). So in the film being sat around dining table creates a family atmosphere that allows a therapeutic corrective recapitulation of primary group family development, where rigid roles can be renegotiated, and each one may experiment themselves in another one role.

Time goes by and lack of food begins to become a problem, the man with the food box goes in the bathroom and eats a can of meat, but the group ignore it. So it becomes obvious the "what is not said" culture occurrence threatens group alliance and it creates sub-groups and divisions; in a therapeutic setting "what is not said" undermines the group as a valuable container confidence, its emotional contagion invades several therapeutic sittings atmosphere. Destructiveness seems to affect an integrative process and it tries to empty the relational experience, it appears as a hit to dual parenting container (maternal rêverie and paternal structuring containment) because through its regulatory aspects, the fixed and no-fixed variables, it gradually

introduces the reality principle (Rugi, 1994).

Into the movie an exchange of tips and strategies to solve problems manifests peer support: Rolando, the blind man, and Emilio exchange advice on how to conquer Jacqueline, the woman who knows herbal property, the "witch", counsels a woman to use ginseng in order to rediscover couple intimacy pleasure in a new alliance that allows women to overcome the "what is not said" taboo. Even during group sessions, participants offer several pieces advice and information that others can use to develop an alternative perspective about their situation. It is very important that therapeutic group consider recommendations and guidelines as suggestions, as alternatives, and not necessarily as peremptory directives to be absolutely followed (Yalom, 1995).

To answer a basic food need, "witch" decides to cook a soup for everyone; in the meantime two guys try to fish in a barren sea. Miraculous fish catching is possible thanks to two sacks that the blind man was hiding, which contain some lobsters that were dying for lack of water. With the lobster donation duplication miracle starts: each participant shares stocks that he was holding: onions, potatoes, rice, and so making possible altruism therapeutic factor: in the group it is easier to earn than to lose (Yalom 1995).

Meal preparation mobilizes adults and children. This is comparable to the performing group phase, in which interpersonal structure becomes the focus for directed group task activity. Roles become flexible and functional, group energy is channelled toward a goal. In this phase, the intimacy is very frequent among group members and the leader, the feelings and needs can be expressed without censorship (Tuckman, 1965).

After sharing a friendly moment, all together they moved out of the terminal and they start to dance under the rain, this action assumes a cathartic connotation: couples dance and kiss each other in the street without any sort of hesitation.

Emilio and Jacqueline, after having confessed their love to each other, return into bus terminal with the idea to paint it and clean it in order to make it beautiful.

Each participant give his idea and his help: they sow herbs, they create rooms and they prepare camps to sleep. Avellino, "the old wise man", creates a library that had been the dream of his life. The group takes care of bus terminal, as if they were to stay there lot of time, and so they learn how to be in relationship.

Interpersonal learning is possible because the group becomes a "social microcosm", where people, as well as telling their story, experience themselves at an interpersonal level. The group evolves into a social microcosm, a miniature of each patient social universe (Yalom, 1995).

In this atmosphere a married couple in crisis recall an old memory: the room where they stay together when they were engaged "a little ugly and smelly hole... it was like heaven for us" says the wife. This regression to past experiences allows this couple to rediscover intimacy pleasure. Regression in a group setting, can be a transformative and evolutionary tool in a therapeutic sense, because it leads to reliving and directly facing past experiences once again but in a different way, and thus it becomes "a symbolic re-enactment" (Corbella, 2003).

The group is constantly changing: spiral metaphor represents time dimension in a group, which is free to move both forward and backward, in a situation where past present and future are potentially usable. In a group it is possible to return to an archaic fusional phase, but it is even possible to cross all personal growth key stages to constructively directly face unsolved problems, to get a new and more advanced way of relating and project oneself into the future, using roles also taken to implement sensations never felt before (Corbella, 2003).

While the group is living its temporal reality, an external one is lurking: one day a bus to Havana arrives at the terminal. Someone can leave the station but this time no one wants to buy the one ticket available, no one wants to be "privileged" and so be ejected from group. Rolando was nominated to leave because of his condition but he confesses that he faked his blindness and he doesn't want to go. Even the man with the box full of food was unmasked, no one knew about his box. The group accepts Rolando's confession but they take their anger out on the box and they grab food from it.

It is through a within script element that the group history moves through, is the expedient to find within Lista de Espera book system to continue the story. Two guys are reading that someone is ill and suddenly Avellino asks for help, while he is dying he leaves his legacy to the group and he asks to be buried in this bus terminal. Group's history has already been written and it is a cyclical ritual that regards, in its essential plot, the story of each group.

The group lives its final mourning stage, it is time to say goodbye and it is time to face the pain that emerges in this physiological process of separation. The leader's task is to "bring the group to himself" and not allow people to "run away", it is necessary that this objective could be developed at intra-psychic, interpersonal and group level. A group, at this stage, is called to accept the reality of loss, sadness and pain experience, adapt it to environmental change, withdraw emotional energy and use it for another relationship (Tuckman, 1965).

The funeral takes place in a sorrowful and meditative atmosphere, for Jacqueline's boyfriend, Antonio, as well who arrived at terminal and he takes part to mourning. Antonio is like reality and Jacqueline represents ambivalence between to stay or to move on.

So Jacqueline should leave bus terminal with her boyfriend but she feels the desire to stay, she doesn't want to leave and abandon what now feels like home: "I want to go, but I also want to stay."

Next scene is about flourished reborn station, and even Jacqueline, who did not leave with Antonio, she is carrying Emilio's baby, she's pregnant. It seems clear here the pairing basic assumption that is expressed when the group shares the fantasy of being together while it is waiting for an event, a person or an idea that will solve all its problems. Frequently this "messianic hope", as Bion calls it, is directed to a pair within group. It is central here, the idea that future that preserves hope feelings (Bion, 1961).

At the end of film Emilio, Jacqueline and the other group members wake up in a cold,

dirty station and with amazement, they discover that they have dreamed what happened. They look at each other with complicity, because they all had same dream. The one who has not dreamed is the box owner, who represents inability to take part to affective elements because he is not emotionally group involved (Pages, 2000). In a collective dream everyone collaborates in space group reconstruction, this act contains hopes, desires and needs and it gives new meaning to life in its complexity; when the emotional group container, bus terminal for this film, is consolidated no one wants to leave anymore.

A group dream is a product that can be interpreted, but it is mostly a true representation of what each individual has received and processed. This is an elaboration of what happens in an individual inner world proposed in different language, not a verbal one (Corbella, 2003).

A dream is often able to express in a symbolic way group process evolutionary crisis moments and sometimes it can act as a process accelerator. Thanks to "fellow travellers" and to imagery dream language it is possible to face and solve problems and also understand the value of limit concept. Group dream can be a container in which a psychic content can be expressed and carried out by another component (Kaes, 1993).

This film seems to say, as in Social Dreaming assumption (Lawrence, 1998), that dreams comes first and that dreams are looking for a dreamer ...

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