

By our selves or in pairs?

Problems and resources of two different group conduction modalities

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Abstract

We shall conclude asserting that the comparison between mono-therapy and co-therapy has to be pursued according to the fact that they are to be considered not only like two interchangeable dispositives, but like two technical fundamentally different, with the possibilities of different applications, according to the needs to which the therapist is called to answer. Pierre Privat and Dominique Souligoux write at this regard: “to us it seems that...in order to facilitate the organization of new relationships in the group just like the put in evidence of a particular position of the adult, the mono-therapy’s dispositive reveals itself more favourable in the cases of groups of latency children and groups of children that develop towards levels of oedipal pathology.” At last alluding to children in pre-school age or with problematic areas of abandonment type and of separation they conclude asserting that “...the co-therapy can be a necessity with some small children or children whose functioning places itself in the register of the archaic, because the presence of more adults permits to represent the splitting issue as well. The work on it’s reduction will be as much more possible as the defences will be able to develop adequately relying on this dispositive’s peculiarity. The real presence of the couple increases the possibilities of containment and permits the work on projections and on splitting.”

Key words:

Introduction

When we have been offered to present this paper we discovered to be part of a debate that from many years is engaging the most important theorists and clinicians of the sector.

Initially this scared us but a fast view on our practice has been enough to feel legitimated to participate at the debate. We both worked with the two techniques, furthermore we have been a therapeutic pair in the past and we are now waiting to work together once more. At the moment we conduct groups of children and adolescents by our selves.

We didn’t only discover that this issue divided the psychotherapists since the origins of group psychotherapy, but, confronting ourselves with the problem, we found out that one of us preferred mono-therapy and the other one co-therapy. The sense of this difference will be cleared along our way.

A detailed analysis of the issue’s literature is not possible here so we shall just say that if on one hand in Britain they soon became certain supporters of mono-therapy, on the other hand in France initially there has been a general union of the

psychoanalysts in favour of psychotherapy groups conducted with the co-therapy technical, but then other psychoanalysts, even not entirely refusing the co-therapy technical, opposed themselves and pointed out some of its limits. It is possible to find all this in a paper of 1985 whose title is: “Groupes: un ou deux psychothérapeutes” written by Jean-Bernard Chapelier, Ophélie Avron and Pierre Privat for the *Revue de Psychothérapie Psychoanalytique de Groupe*, to which we refer for who is interested. It doesn't appear to us that, till today, in the Italian psychoanalytical literature the problem here faced has been debated.

Few words to arrive quickly to explicit our point of view on this issue.

We decided to begin the comparison between co-therapy and mono-therapy starting from two elements, that we consider as basic in the therapist's group conduction clinical experience and particularly in the conduction of children's and adolescent's groups: the first element is in regard to the therapist's necessity to regulate the distance between himself and the group during the therapy's course, the second one is in regard to the impact of the couple's reality on the group.

Regulating the distance

The weather was nice, the water was green and white, powerful and fast; its sinuous course was disseminated of obstacles, crossed by rapids, by opposite currents and by a more calm water: power and sweetness mixed together.

A canoe passed by: its pilot directed it through the rapids with discreet, fine, efficacious strokes of paddles. He seemed an equilibrist in the middle of the foam and of the waves. Would he pass? Would he turn over? He managed to pass.

My partner, my old companion, nudged at me; “Look – he said in a loud voice that could be heard beyond the rapids' noise- here is your ambiguity that passes by, don't you think? The water is strong, the currents cross each other, anything could turn over the canoe, but something small is enough for this rower to be balanced between the currents.”

“You are so right – I said- and you can see so well! What capable sailor is the one who is balanced and keeps the route, close to the foam with some strokes. A galley certainly wouldn't be able to pass from there. A light paddle can make it where a hundred rowers would crack up in vane.

Here is a nice ambiguity, for a Self that is good at it”. Paul-Claude Recamier

The problem that the therapist has to tune the distance between himself and the group assumes all its importance in children's groups because, differently that in adult groups here we have to deal with a precise fact: the difference in between generations.

The question that, with Chapelier, Avron, and Privat we ask ourselves is: “In what way, when we are adult is it possible to be part and parcel of a children's group?”

Particularly the problem arises in groups of children of latency age, because it's in this phase that children use an horizontal relationship way, between peers, noticeably

narcissistic, with a defensive purpose in regard to a relationship with the adult too erotized. “This mechanism of narcissistic investment between children – write Chapelier, Avron and Privat- can unite children against the therapist or therapists and build a fence between adults and children. But it can also englobe the therapist, if he takes part of the game, in the group’s functioning and he tends to be nothing else than a member of the group among the others.”

For a therapist there are more possibilities to be listened by the children’s group, in his interpretations and clarifications, if his voice comes from inside the group, that is, if the process of negation of the difference between generations occurs, he has been integrated in the group’s internal. Because his integration can occur, the therapist has to be ready to catch the signals coming from the children concerning their need to make him become one of them.

Clinical example

We are talking about a closed group, composed by three girls and three boys, between six and eight years old, that started one year and a half ago. We shall call them: Matilde, Nicole, Anna, Gianluca, Francesco and Alberto. The dispositive adopted is the one of a word-group conducted in mono- therapy, privately, that covers the possibility of using the psychoanalytical psychodrama technical.

At a certain moment, a series of very traumatic events strike the group: in September, after the summer vacations, Alberto’s parents tell the therapist by phone that their son won’t continue the treatment. Alberto, a psychotic child, has done significant improvements, almost unexpected, during the one year of therapy, improvements recognized even from the parents. Such decision results incomprehensible for the therapist. Few time later, even Anna will be obliged to suddenly abandon the group because her father has been transferred in another city for his job. To these sudden abandons we must add Francesco’s planned and prepared exit from the group, that was arrived at the end of his treatment.

One month after the recommencement, the group was reduced to four members: Matilde, Nicole, Gianluca, and the therapist. For none of them its easy to accept what happened and everyone begins to reveal an anxiety that increases more and more. The therapist tries to give an answer to the children’s questions about the sudden abandon of their mates, but he has the feeling that his voice doesn’t arrive to their ears. What the therapist thinks is that the group is looking for someone to blame for what happened and in this sense he proposes himself to the children with his interpretations, but, at this point, he doesn’t have any doubts: he has been put out of the group. Not only his interpretations result unacceptable, but his proposals result unacceptable as well, just like anything else he tries to do to involve the children. For the therapist being out of the group means living an emotion of anxious impotence connected to the fact of not being able to help the children, his counter-transference reveals a sense of loneliness, maybe the same loneliness experienced by the children as the consequence of the abandons experienced. Ideas of death begin circulating:

“Maybe a car ran into Alberto” says Nicole. And Gianluca “I made a dream where I fell till the end, where it was black and where I never stopped.” The therapist begins to feel very worried of the group’s survival, because the children, till then very constant in their participation to the sessions, begin to make some absences. For who is present at the sessions the situation becomes more and more difficult and the therapist is always present. He takes a decision: conscious that it could increase the group’s difficulties, after two months from the abandons, he adds a new member called Federico. In our groups we arrange that a child exits when we think he has finished with his therapeutic pathway and that new members can enter during the group’s life. As Velia Bianchi Ranci writes at this regard, the entrance of a new member generally constitutes a moment of revival to the origins, “in which it seems that the group restarts a pathway, a bit like if it was a new group. But since the group aims at the growth of the individuals and not of the group, the progresses and the regressions are equally accepted, as long as the therapist conducts the group through all this giving a meaning to what the children are experiencing, so that the individuals are helped to share and understand their own emotions, and to use this comprehension in their future life.”

After a first moment of the new arrival’s acceptance, the emotions inside the group change. Anxiety and disorientation loss shared by all become an uncontrollable aggressivity and the children’s screams fill the whole session’s length. It gives the impression that they are trying to build a sonorous involucrum. They push themselves against the walls, they overturn the chairs, they attack one another. The therapist is forced to contain them physically in order for them not to get hurt. Nicole’s parents tell him that in school their daughter revealed mild fits and that the paediatrist diagnosticated them as epileptic. Little by little their aggressivity concentrates on Gianluca, the most fragile and disturbed child of the group, the one that above all expresses the unease- that they are all living- with his behavior. We have the advent of the “scapegoat” phenomena, phenomena that verifies itself frequently inside groups and through which, as Jean-Bernard Chapelier and Colette Neuville write, one of the group members becomes the *souffre-douleur*, that is the victim of the other members. A literal translation of the term *souffre-douleur* in the Italian language is a neologism: suffer-pain. We permit ourselves to use this neologism because we think it describes very well the position to which Gianluca is tied to from a certain moment on, that is the one of someone that feels (suffers) the pain for all. J.B. Chapelier and Colette Neuville specify that this phenomena has the function to shift aggressivity and that “in the psychoanalytical group psychotherapies... it is generally interpreted as a displacement of the negative transference on one of the group members.”

The therapist accounts that the only possibility to exit from this no-go moment is to be the receiver of the group’s negative transference, to become the scapegoat. But the therapist can’t become the scapegoat until he isn’t again an integral part of the group itself. Federico, the last arrived, is the one that gave them this possibility because he

wasn't in the group yet when the sudden exits of Alberto and Anna occurred, and so he didn't suffer the abandon experience.

During one of the last sessions, Federico proposes the group to play blind-man's buff and addressing himself to the therapist he asks him: "Do you want to play too?". This invite, for a moment, frees the therapist from the other children's projections of the negative objectual representations, and gives him the possibility to take them on himself, projections that are making him a "bad object" to expel and that, colluding with his inadequacy sense due to how things are going, contribute to make him feel not capable. The collusion between the therapist and Federico, on this level, can only be more mild.

The therapist accepts Federico's invite and the children give him the role of the one that has to find them with his eyes closed. Finally the therapist can let himself go and since the children get down on the floor on all fours, he imitates them and starts his research. The excited children run away and scream very loudly. He hears them bump against the chairs and the wall. For a moment, one more time, he fears that they will get hurt, but he can't open his eyes. So he decides to use his voice and begins a sing-song whose words are the children's names: "Matilde! Gianluca! Nicole! Federico!". His voice becomes a sonorous container of the children's excitement and little by little their screams end. Slowly they get close to the therapist and start touching him, at the beginning shyly then they start hitting him with little slaps on his head and on his body. The therapist is in the game, he huddles up, and he "fakes" to be afraid: "Ouch! It hurts. That's enough, please!" The children jump on him and give him some underhand punches. At this point he's sure he has again been integrated in the group and so he tells the children what he previously had tried to say without results: "We all got worried because our mates didn't come to the group anymore and I think that you were also mad at me, thinking that I was responsible for this, like if I've been the one that sent them away for then substituting them with Federico. You have been afraid thinking that the same thing could also happen to you." In the most complete silence, Gianluca answers to these words. "I'm very sorry that Anna doesn't come anymore". To the words of Gianluca echo the ones of Matilde and Nicole: "Even Alberto and Francesco don't come anymore." In the attempt to give the children a way of facing the pain now expressed, the therapist turns to the possibilities that the dispositive offers and tells them that it could be helpful for every one, in that moment, trying to invent some stories that could be played together. The children can now accept his proposal and Gianluca suggests the story of a family of lion cubs that gets lost in the jungle because the mother lioness falls asleep. Needless to say that the role of the sleeping lioness is been played by the therapist. This is just the first of a series of stories with the same kind of contents that, if we can say so, will have a development of the lioness's character that from sleepy becomes watchful and protectiveness. We witness to a "group's reconstruction on a depressive modality that permits to exit from the groupal illusion in order to recognize its limits and feel how difficult it is becoming big."

With Chapelier, Avron and Privat we can say that “this adult’s incursion in the children’s world made it credible.”

As we have seen, in the group’s work, it’s the phenomena of the negation of difference between generations that permits the phase’s constitution which is said of groupal illusion, thanks to whom a sureness climate shared by all the group members can be established. The illusion is to be all similar, to be a “good group” conducted by a therapist that, having passed from the position of adult to the one of “mate”, is freed from his position of libidinal object and super-egoic function and becomes a “mate-therapist”.

With the children’s group therapist’s definition as mate-therapist we want to indicate the particular position he has to occupy in regard to the group and that is the fact that he has to be at the same time inside and outside the group, where this implies to be at the same time a bit adult and a bit child.

A children’s group therapist’s characterization in these terms, that is as “adult and a bit child”, evokes the concept of ambiguous object used by Paul-Claude Racamier in his book “The genius of the origins” in which, talking about ambiguity as “one of the most precious and unrecognized qualities of psychic’s life qualities”, he frees it from the negative meaning to which it’s been relegated and assigns to it the character of “what puts together two opposite qualities and participates at the same time of two different natures” specifying: “far from negating the differences between individuals between sexes or between worlds- ambiguity affirms them, without opposing them. Ambiguity keeps to the people’s differences as bisexuality keeps to the differences of sexes: it’s the psyche’s basic quality. ”

We think that the idea of the children’s group therapist as an ambiguous object, here only outlined, would deserve to be investigated.

The clinical example described clears how difficult it is for the therapist during the therapy to regulate the distance between himself and the children’s group. In it’s functioning and development each group is different from one another therefore precise rules that can orientate him aren’t available for the therapist, in that “continuous oscillatory movement” that, at the same time, gives the group the possibility to shape and to the therapist the one to “be in resonance with the member’s fantasies (to be inside the group) for then getting rid of them in order to be able to talk about them (be outside the group)” so, at last to interpret. This movement is also what permits him to assume a maternal containing function and a paternal super-egoic structuring and reassuring function, in regard of the children, according to the moments.

Here is the question that, at this point comes up in the comparison between mono-therapy and co-therapy: is it possible for a pair of therapists to make use of the same availability and mobility in regard to the children’s group, that we have seen is one of the most important aspects that the therapist alone can use in his group conduction?

Or better, is it possible that in a co-therapy the couple of therapists as couple could arrive to experience that identificatory encounter with the children that the clinical example showed us as possible for the therapist that works by his self?

Our clinical experience, even if it doesn't permit us to give a definitive answer on the problem, permits us though, to say that for a couple of therapists, it is more difficult to participate to the group's dynamics in the terms described above. We feel to agree in a particular way on one point with Chapelier, Avron and Privat when they say that in a co-therapy the illusion of undifferentiation can be met mostly at children's level, and the couple of therapists remains principally "the support of the parental imago". In a dispositive that contemplates the couple of therapists, being all alike assumes the meaning of "being loved all in the same way from this couple of idealized parents." On the other hand the clinical pushes us indeed to say that if, in one way for the couple of therapists it isn't possible doing or experiencing what is instead possible for a therapist that works by him self with the children's group, on the other way the opposite is also true.

The couple's reality and the group of children

It's at this point that we discover the other face of Janus, the mythological face of Racamier's creative ambiguity.

In the reciprocal and pleasant game of the discussion and comparison that the reflections on this theme inspired us, we discovered that to each thought corresponded another one that was opposite. When we gave shape to a creative aspect of mono-therapy, we would straightaway find a thought that pointed out a limit of this operative modality in order to bring upon the issue again the creative potential of co-therapy, and so on in a hide-and-seek movement that didn't ever seem to end. In order to exit from the logic of "it's better this or it's better that" in a lifeless choice, we propose some reflections of Janus' other face; in other words what the co-therapy can offer us as a conduction technical. Even in this case we chose to retrace only one aspect on which concentrating our considerations, leaving intentionally on one side other variables of great interest, that we recommend ourselves to investigate afterwards.

The object on which we have turned our attention is on the impact that the couple's reality has on the children in a group therapy and so on the groupal phenomena.

We think that the real presence of the pair of therapists in the groupal setting represents a particular "suggestion". We underline the suggestive aspect of this technical element because we think it "puts under" (it. metta sotto from Latin sub gerere), that is, instigates, in the group's members, particular intra-psychoic and inter-subjective processes.

We are conscious that each setting element (the couch rather than the chair, the session's frequency, etc.) represents a specific suggestion, but we also strongly think that the heterosexual couple is a particularly intense and above all activating suggestion.

According to our view point the real presence of the therapeutic couple solicits the groupal phenomena on two levels:

- a specific one that sends back to the phantasmic and real dynamics that develop between adults and children
- a more general one that interests the activation of some defensive mechanisms, already present both in children's and in adult's groups.

In regard to the first aspect we can say that the couple introduces a double difference, the one linked to the sexes' difference and the one that sends back to difference of generation. The sum of the differences contribute to assign an identity to the couple with particularly meaningful boundaries, connoting it as a sub-group well distinguished from the one of the children.

The problem of the distance, as it has been faced previously, finds a braking factor in the interference of the couple's relationship that connects the therapists, making them, both at the same time, more distant from the children. For the children they don't only represent a generation specific Object, meaning with this the agglomeration of thoughts, fantasies in regard to generation boundaries and passages, but they also represent a double conjugal and parental Object.

To these elements we can add that the presence of the couple not only mobilizes the interiorizations that have to do with Objects but reactivates the interiorizations of the relationships between Objects. The attention's widening towards the quality of the Objects permits us to assert that in the children's therapeutic groups are solicited two kinds of relationships: the attachment one and the one of the couple.

For the first one we refer the reader to the broad literature produced in these last years in regard to the importance that this motivation has on the Self development in the child (see Bowlby, Ainsworth, Main, Lichtenberg, Fonagy, Target) proposing a centring mostly on the role played by the parent as an activating or inhibiting factor of the reflecting Self function.

For the second one we sketch to the double valence of the conjugal couple both as an Object that reactivates fantasies of the primal scene and as in the meaning pointed out by Britton, that we share, for which the relationship in between parents lived by the child in terms of love and hate supplies the prototype of an objectual relationship in which the child is a witness and not a joint consultant. The co-therapy proposes with strength the primary family constellation with all its vicissitudes and movements.

To these aspects we add that, according to us, other factors exist that make the couple's reality particularly meaningful for the children.

One is in regard to the typical cognitive modalities with which the latency child lives and reads the events of reality given from the stadium of concrete operations (Piaget) which is active till the adolescent hypothetical-deductive stadium.

At last another influencing element is given by a mental lack, that usually characterizes the psychic functioning of children followed in the groupal therapy and that makes us face children that externalize in their behavior and "inject" in concrete things elevated quantities of psychic experiences and meanings rendering the

concrete exterior world at the same time container and also solicitor of psychic phenomena. For this we think that sensibility towards concrete things is particularly strong.

Intended in this broad way, we assert that the groupal setting of co-therapy is a meaningful and a strong activator of themes in regard of:

- internal operative models that are in regard to precocious relational attachment experiences with the primary figures, that often have a traumatic valence;
- vicissitudes of the triangular relationships with the parental pre-oedipal and oedipal couple;
- affiliation and competition relationships.

We intend undervaluing the exciting importance of the corporeal presence of the therapists' couple and we share the reflections of F.Sacco when he asserts that "the psychodramatists are in the situation of seducing children, nevertheless the complexity of their perceptible presence through their bodies can be the occasion of the appearance of an internal space of symbolization.

An inter-couple analysis is recommended, because the instinctual couple voyeurism-exhibitionist is connatural in this situation. Therefore the couple of psychoanalysts establishes a situation which is very close to the traumatic situation, nevertheless we can mark how this situation sparks some mutative changes that are witness of a reprise in the symbolization's processes, of recognition of the other, of the tolerance towards separation (P.Israel)." We think that Sacco's words are shareable for the specific link with the instinctual aspect of sexuality, but also because it's applicable even on the other motivational systems that we just sketched.

These considerations send us back to processes that interest in a specific way children's groups, we now desire underlining other actuations, that the co-therapy's setting proposes and that are in regard to the use of some defensive mechanisms. At this regard we shall borrow an image of two American authors R. H. Klein and H. S. Bernard that talk about co-therapy as "a model ready for use for the use of splitting, as well as of a selective deployment of projective forced processes."

The presence of two therapists that unavoidably express different qualities both on the temperamental level, of personality or technical (modality and frequency of interventions, sensibility towards infra-verbal communications, etc.) favours in the patients their use as a target of defences of the splitting type and of the projective identification type. The single patients and the group in general will unavoidably tend to draw the therapeutic couple to collude with their internal drama that, if it sends back to primitive problematic areas connected to the separation-individuation (either from the primary figure that the primary family nucleus), they could do nothing else than re-propose themes of abandonment, of rage, of a narcissistic attack towards a still incomplete Self and of a reparative need that won't be maniacal.

It's evident that if these are the solicitations (primitive defences) and these are the affects mobilized (anxiety and destructive rage) the therapeutic couple can only sail through rough waters if not tempestuous. In our clinical work we have more and

more times verified that a function the group tries to test, with insistence and sometimes with violence, is the couple's holding, intended like survival. How much does the couple resist to the group's attacks? How much is it able to express a mental and emotional functioning although the group's projections cling to the real differences of the therapists, in order to promote projective identifications from the therapists themselves? How much does the couple manage to maintain active the integration function of the split parts?

At this regard we assert that the couple becomes at the same time facilitator and activator of particular transference movements, but also a possible resource able to contain and work-through such primitive themes.

This puts a new space of knowledge, the inter-transference, first. So not only the attention is towards the transference's and counter-transference's dimension in the (real and phantasmic) relationships patients-therapist, but also, and maybe principally, towards what happens in the therapeutic couple. In the couple is played what the group is living, for this it has to be recognized, controlled and used in the therapeutic interventions. In this last case the inter-transference represents a powerful cognitive instrument of the groupal dynamics, when instead it's scotomized or simply not listened to it drags the therapeutic couple in a dangerous collusive process, because it confirms to the patients the "truth" of their projections and the "reality" of their destructive potential. The function of a containing thought, the one that gives sense to the groupal movements, that resists to the splitting processes and so of the therapeutic couple's breaking, that gives shape to the acting-outs and to very anxious and destructive emotions and mostly that maintains the group's boundaries, is a function that develops and maintains itself in the inter-transference's analysis.

Our experience at this regard has been very clear and significant.

Till now we talked about two aspects that the real presence of the couple makes particularly evident; the therapeutic couple as a parental couple that facilitates a phantasmatic linked to themes of abandonment and of separation-individuation and the therapeutic couple as a projective target of primitive defensive mechanisms with particular mention to splitting, everything in the transference's involucrum strongly acted-out.

This combination presents itself blended, according to our experience, when we treat children in group psychotherapy with problematic areas of abandonment type, of separation and often of traumatic experiences suffered.

We shall propose a clinical example

This is an open group of children in latency age composed by four boys. (Riccardo, Alessandro, Stefano and Andrea), their age is between seven and ten years.

The dispositive used is the one of the psychoanalytical psychodrama as we have learned it from Doctor Françoise Sacco with which we formed ourselves. The group is conducted by two therapists that both participate at the psychodramatic game, assuming the roles that are refused by the children. The experience dates back to

three years ago and the first signal of a thought's block to which the therapeutic couple has been brought to by the group, we understood it in the difficulty we had remembering all the group's members and their previous history.

At the beginning we have respected the basic rules of group's composition so there were also some girls and the psychological problematic areas represented were differentiated, within the bounds of reason. The group's episodes, which were real and concrete- we refer ourselves to the problem of the when someone sends a patient to a therapist, of the children that were effectively ready for a group's treatment, etc. – brought this group to have a male identity, a part from the co-therapist's presence and in particular to contain problematic areas mostly of abandonment type.

In the autumn at the reprise after the summer holidays the group was therefore composed by:

Riccardo, Alessandro, Stefano and Andrea.

In the first two months the group proposes mostly defensive stories, with classical themes... Slowly the children begin to express the boredom to “always make stories” and give voice, with modalities more and more noisy, to the complaint for a setting too stiff for them. We maintain ourselves steady in re-proposing the rules, although the shared emotion that the representational level which they had to follow, was a level not much containing for them, grew. The narrative involucrum that has to respect the rules of the before, during and after appeared inadequate to contain the pressures that staying together with a couple of “parents” aroused in the children. The first group's reaction has been the respect of the rule, because the children continued to make stories, but these stories became always more loaded of destructive and above all sarcastic and derisive material that brought the children to a level of excitement not containable. The stories proposed episodes loaded of anal aggressivity (mountains, trucks, broad areas of pooh) in a reiterated way and with characteristics which were always the same and with which the therapists were covered. For the stories' contents and the roles that they made the therapists play, they alternatively found themselves covered by enormous quantities of faecal material that nourished in the children maniacal laughs, that went on beyond the sessions.

At an initial couple's undifferentiation, that expressed itself through the fact that both therapists were a target of the faeces produced in the stories, a phase in which the male therapist was preferred in these attacks followed. On the counter-transference's level we assisted of an increase of anxiety and aggressivity mostly felt by the male therapist that was more and more pushed to assume a normative and super-egoic role.

The intersect of the projective and introjective identifications, that for Ruggi already represent a direct expression of destructiveness, became so massive that it rendered the children's group always more homogeneous and coherent in it's internal: Alessandro, Riccardo, etc. weren't there anymore separated in their individual

differences, but they were a composite subject, “the children” that opposed themselves to the other composite subject represented by the therapeutic couple.

We quickly passed to the next phase in which the children refused to construct stories and in the therapists grew the frustration for an interpretative space that got thinner and thinner till it’s disappearance. There wasn’t a word that was “heard”, the setting’s rules failed, the physical and sonorous space was filled by primitive emotions and acting outs that could only have a containing function given by the therapists’ vigilance on the length of time and on the control of the physical expressions of aggressivity, but not a “structuring and vertebral”(Rugi) function of containment.

For the therapists this frustrating and depressive situation found a connection with some reality elements (the therapists were facing, each independently from the other one, some professional and personal changes that re-proposed the theme of change and of separation) the enactment in the inter-transfert of the splitting and the breaking-off of the relations projected by the children’s group. The therapists didn’t find the time to reflect anymore, after a fast non worked-through and projective release of frustration they always had something else to do; we reached to the evident acting-in of the couple’s breaking-off in occasion of some absences of one of the couple’s members (alternatively the woman therapist and the male therapist) that abandoned the other one in the group’s mercy.

The clinical example clearly shows like the pair of therapists has not initially been able to protect itself from the children’s powerful projective identification and how, because of this they have been brought to behave “really” like the children’s parents had behaved, that is with a thought’s block, the massive of the acting out, the non containing of aggressivity, the emotion of ineluctability and not change and most of all the breaking-off.

When the therapists have been able to recognize their collusion with the role that the children had them assigned in a projective way, they have been able to re-establish their capability to think, thing that permitted them to reconstruct themselves as a couple and so to take some common decisions with their purpose of opening a space of welcome more adequate to the children’s problems. The most significant measure brought by the therapists has so been the one of introducing a change in the psychodrama’s dispositive, till then used with too much rigidity. Catching an indication that the children were trying to give from time, they introduced the possibility of using drawing material. The thing has been accepted by the children with relief and they began drawing by themselves. At this phase followed another one in which the children addressed themselves to the two therapists individually to show their drawings. At this point the therapist had an intuition that will turn out to be decisive proposing to the children the squiggle game, technical invented by Winnicott and defined like “a medium to come in contact with the child.” For this purpose it’s been also useful for us drawing with the children, in order to re-construct an area of

contact with them, a way to feel oneself in a banal way more good, and finally not stuck anymore in the children's projections.

In this phase we didn't give any interpretation on the drawing's contents that were just being produced for avoiding the danger of disturbing the emotional climate of the new encounter so necessary for all of us, till the day in which the children proposed what we could call the group's squiggle game that brought children and therapists to the common production of a drawing that was a great basket which contained six different fruits. In that occasion we told the children that after many attempts made by all to try and stay together, to feel near to one another without being afraid and feeling rage and after thinking we could of never made it, finally we could feel able to share a nearness not anymore dangerous just like the fruits in the basket that we drew.

Reflecting on the basket's meaning starting from the fact that we were all contained by it, we can think that the basket, more than the therapists, represents the common effort in order to find a container in which we could reach to an aggressivity's redevelopment that we all had experimented in a such intense way.

We can't say anything more on the effects of this change because we were getting close to the summer vacations and in September, at the reprise, unfortunately only one of them could continue the work.

We are sure that in the processes that took place inside this group, just like we have described them, an important role has been assumed by the real presence of the therapeutic couple that initially has been an activator of interiorized attachment relationships with the emotional connections of abandonment, rage and need of control. We think that the couple's presence has empowered the expression of emotions and fantasies connected to the relational dynamics parents-children, but at the same time we think that the couple itself could represent an important resource, in order to work-through, in its internal, the splitting and projective movements, in order to re-propose them to the group with re-developmental and moderated modalities.

We are also conscious to have touched only some of the other numerous aspects that the different technical conduction modalities can activate. In between all we have asked ourselves the role that the couple has as a possible parental identificatory model, the meaning for the children to relationship with a couple that "likes" to play, with all that playing can represent either in terms of figuration of fantasies (Sacco) that of development of the reflective function of the Self. (Fonagy).

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²⁰Comunicazione fatta alla Giornata seminariale organizzata dal G^{pa}Ca^IIvano - prv.m. da di Trento, 1993.

²¹P. Fonagy, M.Target *Giocare con la realtà II*, *Setting* n. 7 Moretti Vitali, 1999.

²³ Ibidem, p. 146.