

Daydreams of an adolescents group and of its conductor

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Abstract

The author thinks that the group as well can sometimes be dreamed like the place were dreaming is not forbidden but instead it is accepted with wide open arms and were reality can go in the background.

The meaning of the word dream that the author would like to give is the one of "daydream" typical of those youngsters that have lost or that have a very low dreaming capability.

Key words: adolescent, group, daydream, myth, metaphor, sharing

"THE CHINESE SAGE CHUANG-TSU DREAMED TO BE A BUTTERFLY. WHEN HE WOKE UP HE DIDN'T KNOW IF HE WAS A MAN THAT DREAMED OF BEING A BUTTERFLY OR INSTEAD IF A BUTTERFLY DREAMED OF BEING A MAN"

I chose this Chinese tale's sentence because often adolescents are entrapped in between fantasy and reality, between omnipotence and impotence, even if they don't bring a serious symptomatology. Yet all their identity is played on this axis in the attempt of acceding towards a complete exploration of their fields.

The question that adolescents often ask themselves is: who am I, what can I become. During adolescence the rational capability is developed as well as ideality, idealizations and secret dreams that are kept like talismans which are used for representing themselves a possible future. Most of the times dreams which are told in the group are impossible, catastrophic but they are also the dream of a different future.

I think that the group as well can sometimes be dreamed like the place were dreaming is not forbidden but instead it is accepted with wide open arms and were reality can go in the background.

The meaning of the word dream that I would like to give is the one of "daydream" typical of those youngsters that have lost or that have a very low dreaming capability.

They have the necessity of feeling that their parents, or the adults which are for them important figures, dream something for them; in the absence of these figures which are able to support the realization of their wishes, this necessity is asked to the group and to its leader.

Freud contributed to sort out the specific nature of fantasy describing the modality of thought that characterizes it.

Fantasizing is a mental process and who practices it knows that it's an imagination act. (Freud, 1907-1908 p.178). Freud acknowledges that dreams also contain some guide lines for the future: prophecy dream. He understood that a dream which is

future oriented can have some potentialities of self-realization (Freud, 1911-1917 p. 526).

The shared fantasies will form the base for a strong link between the individuals in the group. (Freud, 1900 p. 364).

As Socrates says " he doesn't want the drink, but he wishes to be filled by the drink, that is a state change".

The fantasy's purpose is to arrive at a total change of state: a change in the way one feels.

The paper that I will present wants to mark-out a group's pathway through its accounts: "The stone soup" the dream "the French Revolution" and "The never ending story".

I will focus on the function of "daydreaming" about the group, in the group and how this has an influence on the birth of family and personal myths and vice versa.

As Slotkin suggests "mythology is a series of stories that dramatize the world's view and the history's sense of a population and of a culture, reducing centuries of experience to a constellation of constrictive metaphors" (1973, p.6) in *Regeneration through violence: the mythology of American frontier 1600-1860*. Wesleyan University Press Middletown.

In order to write my paper I took a sentence written by one of my patients as a hint, at the end of her group psychotherapy: "dear doctor I hope that you will realize your own wishes, just as you did with us". I began thinking on some questions: does the conductor dream the group? What does he dream? How does the group dream its conductor?

Reflecting on these themes I remembered about my first daydream about a group during a session. I remember very well that session in which I found myself living a prolonged and anxious silence in which I imagined to see a big rock in the center of the group, a real boulder.

This image, initially expression of a psychosomatic sensation, made me tell the story of the "Stone Soup" .

The story talks about a vagrant that knocked at the door of a poor family, sad and disconsolate, in the dark, in silence; the atmosphere was heavy, but the vagrant didn't loose heart and took out a stone from his pocket and asked for a pot, for water and fire. The family made every effort, although with surprise. The vagrant filled the pot with water and put it on the fire; he immersed the stone in it and then he put the soup in everyone's plate, the soup of stone. After this, he took the stone and said goodbye.

The family, astonished, asked the vagrant why he didn't stay and why he didn't leave them the stone, he replied: "it's not necessary, now you can also do without me!

At the end the group livens up and interrupting the long silence, through the free associations, gives voice to the intense representative deprivation content, till that moment not representable, that provided a narcissistic depressive retreat in the group itself, paralyzing the associations.

After the story some group members made the following comments:

- what does the doctor want to tell us, that we feel like that family so poor and deprived?

- But if I would talk what could happen? I can generate misunderstandings, and I can be judged.

- Is it worth saying what we think?

- What can you do if you are shy of your family? My mother says that I am stupid, etc. ect.

From the "Stone Soup" to the "French Revolution" to the "Never Ending Story" from one myth to the other, from a deep desolation to the hope of a different history able to interrupt an ineluctable destiny.

Now I will tell you Valentina's dream about the group:

"The French Revolution"

Valentina: The group was outside in a place surrounded by mountains and by the sea, the therapist was teaching them war strategies and guided them in the research of war-equipment for an efficient defense from eventual attacks from the enemy.

The associations led us to the meaning of the French Revolution. Remembering the three basic revolution's principles, all of us, as well as the therapist, remembered Brotherhood, Equality excluding Freedom.

I think we can say that both the conductor and the group were entrapped in the impossibility of feeling free because too engaged in maintaining a defensive position. We were so engaged in defending our territory, in regard of the Institution, that we couldn't work-through the internal anxiety of not being able to feel free. As Neri points out in his book "Group", in that moment, we found ourselves in the "stadium of the brothers' community" (Neri, p.189). So the group has been able to evacuate persecutive feelings in an institutional third through the projective identification and constitute itself like a "collective subject". The peers' group, in an intermediate area, the group, can experiment, mitigate, the dependence conflicts from the adult group conductor and re-find a positive mirroring, in the group itself, of the external world, which is a confirmation regarding to his useful value for a narcissistic supply. At the same time, the single conductor's presence guarantees the affiliation need satisfaction, of the belonging sense and the discovery of those suitable instruments for realizing developmental tasks.

The dream doesn't only represent the family story but, we could also assert that the dream presages the conductor's destiny, because the diffusion of the ideal of a good conductor, and so the reassessment of the conductor itself, fatally undermines the absolutistic foundations of his power. In fact if in the American revolution the "revolutionary sons of freedom" transferred their power on "the founding fathers", something very different happened in the French revolution were after the king's decapitation followed the rise of the "brothers' band".

In the group the anxiety of one's own identity's loss is represented by the following poem written by one of the group's members:

"Sometimes a small flower can feel fragile or useless and worthless, but he doesn't understand that his petals are a thousand rainbows that dart through the monotony of a green valley. My love, you are a bit like this flower, your humbleness is so that precious rivers and streams have birth without your knowledge. Your magic eyes

have the capability of changing deserts in forests and even if this is impossible for your consciousness it doesn't mean it isn't true."

I think that the poem can be a metaphor that shows the great ambivalence in regard of the self-perception of one's own capabilities and the attempt of outweighing through an idealization.

I shall take a session's fragment which has been characterized mostly by the family's negative influence on their sons:

The neverending story

Conductor: I am struck by the group's silence, every one seems absorbed by his own thoughts. It's difficult facing reality.

Ida: I also had a friend of which I had a very positive image in the beginning, but after I changed idea. Now I know that this girl's father is in the criminal mental hospital because he killed his brother in law for jealousy. Before I didn't realize that she also was paranoiac. But now I can understand some strange behaviors, I should of understood it : some things are hereditary, no?

Conductor: the paranoiac gene hasn't yet been discovered.

Davide : Ida, but she's your friend, a peer. We have idealized our parents because we were small and they were our reference points, but now we are growing up and we have to rely on ourselves.

Ida : just for this reason I think that I can't stay with Giordano (her boyfriend) anymore because he is good, intelligent, happy, and I feel inferior. Once, joking, he told me: "What do you go to the group for, they are all depressed, my presence is needed to liven them up".

Aida: talking about friends, then my friend came and also there another blow... because she moves, she travels she came to Rome just for me and nevertheless I've been impossible. I think I will never change. I changed, but on small things.

Conductor: it's not easy accepting that idealizations on friends, on the family disappear, but this can make you grow even if then we have to face envy towards people that feel themselves more capable and it happens that we feel like if we don't have a place, a project, anything.

Aida: yes, envy, yes, I have it because I think that I can do things like the others and even better than them. But then I don't do them: for example, that boy I liked... I know that he thought I was nice – because someone told me- but I don't do anything to see him again, I avoid him.

Conductor: Remembering about recurring situations, of this kind, of the group's members, I think of the movie "The Never-ending Story" have you seen it?

Aida: No.

Valerio: if you want I'll give you the tape: it's a very strange thing, I don't watch movies, I record them. I record everything. If you want something..

Ida: (looking at Valerio) Valerio you will make a video library for us...

Arianna: it's the movie that I most like.

Elettra: Yes I remember it very well.

Davide: no, I don't remember it.

Elettra: I remember that it started with a boy that went in an antiques shop and began reading a book. Then he identifies in the main character of the story. I don't remember what happened next

Davide: The boy had to be successful in a series of tests so that Fantasy's World wouldn't disintegrate for the Nothing that advanced. The most difficult tests were the ones at the beginning. In the last test the main character had to have faith in himself. At the end the boy has only one fleck of dust in his hand when the Nothing was winning.

Arianna: Instead the princess and him know that one fleck of dust will be enough because, making at least a wish, Fantasy's world will be re-built.

Valerio: I only remember the thing that someone robs the main character's memories. I was struck by this circumstance because I ask myself how is it possible living without dreams!

Arianna: I have anxiety in regard of this.

Conductor: I think that through this story you are saying that re-finding the capability of wishing is important even if, in some moments, we can feel poor and emptied.

The suicide fantasy, often ignored for many years can re-emerge during the adolescence as gestures, destructive behavior, nullifying and prohibiting themselves some opportunities. Like if in adolescents' the idea of an impossible self-realization for having interiorized a mythic image of potential suicide.

H. Sachs asserts that when some youngsters give each other their daydreams in pawn, it is the beginning of a solemn friendship. The fantasy's communication appears when the family's story is told, story that always contains the family mythology. The self-fantasy's structure, that is of one's proper personal myth, can form itself through the parental fantasy, like the aspiration, the fear that the child is destined to success, to crime or to ineptitude, that the child becomes tender, perfect in everything or needful, that the child is exactly the same or different from the parents or grandparents.

Naturally the parents' fantasies, sometimes ambitious, grand, don't have to become true.

I would like to bring some comments of the adolescents that dreamed the dreams before at the end of the group therapy.

Pedra: How will we do without the group? And I'm the one speaking, the one who though that I would never separate myself from my family and the one that only now begins to appreciate myself and have self-esteem in regard of my university successes and take care of my affective needs that for much time were only for my bossy and disastrous sister.

(the family myth was that Pedra, intelligent daughter had to be accommodating and rational towards the cure requests and she didn't have to give any problems to her parents in comparison to her sister that abandoned school, accepted to work as a clerk remaining aggressive and bossy at home.

Massimiliano: what shall I say about myself that finally I made it to matriculate in engineering, I did the first exams, that I always felt like if my parents, on one hand recognized me as high talented but practically they thought of me like a loser, like an immature child for supporting live events, while my cousin, oh yes he was particularly intelligent and capable just like his parents.

I was part of the family's deadwood, with modest and poor parents.

Laura: My high votes in medicine are a handicap because at home I am always the responsible daughter, the intelligent one not needful of compassion and of attention.

My brother can feel free from any kind of responsibility, he can avoid thinking about family problems, or rather we all have to think about his difficulties because he works, he didn't want to continue studying and his money aren't enough to satisfy his bad habits.

Emanuela: my father allowed me to live in our own apartment, but without any light, he thinks it's superfluous, a luxury that we can't be able to support. For him life is only sacrifices, you can't hope for a comfortable life, but you can only have a restrictive one, even if in reality this is a surmountable problem.

Mimma: I begin wearing light colored clothes, I was a dark girl for existing, for being interesting and soliciting some curiosity.

Davide: My trembling hand was a way to hide myself behind the idea of a handicapped son that could and should of remained a child.

Conclusions

I would like to make some theoretical considerations on the material I presented. The group, intended like a collective subject (see Neri, 1995) has been able to express creatively and so to work-through its peculiar matter.

It passed, from the initial phase of the "Stone Soup" representation of what seemed mostly inexpressible, the abandonment feelings, to the groupal illusion, in which the group is pervaded by a sense of optimistic omnipotence, expressed by the poem written by one of the group members (Sometimes a small flower can feel fragile or useless and worthless... Your magic eyes have the capability of changing deserts in forests) to the dream of the "French revolution" and the "Never-ending story".

This kind of group thinking has been able to constitute itself only because of the previous shared elaboration, to the group's gamma function, just like the child can learn to think thoughts only thanks to the alfa function that he gains starting from his mother's reverie.

In this perspective the conductor's role distances from the traditional one that supplies exclusively interpretations to single people. His function is the one of co-thinker: favouring the circularity of emotions in the group, giving them back in a usable way, making them thinkable. In the adolescents' group all this assumes a

crucial importance because of the identity crisis that they cross with the relative research of steady reference points.

The introduction of the “Never-ending Story” revealed itself to be particularly appropriate, supplying the group a shared image of hope for the future.

A basic point in the self-representation process (semiosfera) of this group has been the problem said by one of its members. The adolescent asked himself how it could be possible living without memories because they have been robbed. The therapist can then point out the importance of repossessing the capability of wishing, dreaming although we can feel poor and emptied. Concluding, the myth, the dream and the metaphor are, for saying it with Neri, effective stories, mediums for realizing commuting, or rather the oscillation process from the individual dimension to the groupal one and vice versa, indispensable in order to realize the necessary emotive sharing of contents, their elaboration and their expression in terms of group thinking.

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