

Fig. 1 Escher M.C. "Meeting"

The lounge of restless.

The experience of UNITRE¹ in Vico Equense (Naples)

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Abstract

A psychotherapist has been leading an open group for seven years. It lasts one hour monthly and it is composed of elderly men and women. This initiative is part of UNITRE local programme: a cultural association placed in a lot of Italian towns.

It starts its work as a discussion group about preordained subjects or themes, but recently it has become an interactive group based on communication and interaction among the members of the group. These features with the number of components of the group (15-30 units) and the involvement in the time and in the space have allowed to shape a setting of the *median group*.

The communication requirement marks out this group: it is difficult for elderly people

to communicate, because they are often considered, together disabled people and children, the weak class.

The themes, expressed in terms of opposition, youth/old age, health/illness, life/death, were discussed by the group giving them new meanings, thanks to the group's work based on communication and *koinonia*. In this way people have managed to overcome the sense of isolation and to exorcise the fear: together they can experiment a force that alone doesn't exist. It seems that the group has allowed them to feel themselves in a compact and strong entity, in opposition to their old, sometimes ill body with the possibility to live this phase of life not as a sad waiting of death but in a horizon of sense.

Keywords: Elderly, median group, Koinonia, Opposites, Senex/Puer, Present/Past/Future

The Lounge of Restless

The experience of "*The Lounge of Restless*" began in our territory in 1997: UNITRE of Vico Equense (third age University), a small town in Sorrentina peninsula, takes in heritage this kind of laboratory and its social reason from the Turin section (where it has been active for 25 years). It starts its work reflecting about established themes, but during the years the group develops a style based on communication and interaction at different levels. The cultural aspect no longer has the dominant role, in fact the peculiar objective of the group is directed towards the possibility of a common, human and psychological, growth. Group members can talk about their experiences, can show their emotions, can learn to communicate for better living with themselves and the others.

Another turning-point is the introduction of a new conductor that, for her theoretical-clinical formation and for the particular features of the group, thinks to have a setting of the *median group*, as inspired by P. de Marè. For this Author, the *intermediate group* is a microcommunity and so a microculture created for therapeutic purposes: it is rather *large* to represent the society and rather *small* to permit its members to express themselves, supporting identification. It is a transitional space among family and society.

The members of the group live in our town and they are usually the most active members in this association, but also in the social structure of Commune. They made UNITRE and they contributed to the growth of the town with their jobs: engineers, workers in local companies, local politics, but also housewives, teachers that made the history of their community, so they don't want to be out of politics as "common speech". These features of our group seem to reflect the same of the *median group* by de Marè: the number of members considers the group as a median space between the *small group* and the *large* a one and it proposes as object of therapy not only the single but the social-historical background too, thus the culture and the social myths can be understood and discussed in a situation similar in community life.

Maybe the group aim is the achievement of *koinonia*, that for de Marè is “humanization of social background”. It is able to change *hate* in involvement, sharing and communion.

“*The Lounge of Restless*”, for its structural features and work formality, has changed from initial group of discussion in self-mutual-help group and finally in *median group*, that in the theory and the practise studied by de Marè, represents an interesting development of Faulkes ideas applied to wider sphere of groups.

The theoretic frame

Now it is necessary, to understand our speech, using parameters that Rocco Pisani has identified to study specific features of *median group*:

1. *structure*: the same group context and organizational formality.
2. *process*: the passage through it the speech as such the presence of members in this context.
3. *content*: subjects, themes and topics.
4. *metastructure*: the change of cultural models.

Structure, process and content give metastructure: this becomes culture when the structure has new meanings.

In de Marè opinion, there are some important common aspects to the therapeutic groups as analytical group:

- attention about “hic and nunc”, in particular the reflection, Ego training in action, the resonance, the emotional and corrective experience;
- non transference aspects;
- transference is shifted on the whole group, where Super Ego is projected, and not only on the conductor, that supports more the role of the individuals at Ego level, encouraging freedom of dialogue and interpreting nature of cultural and social pressure (de Marè, 1991).

We will discuss separately about de Marè ideas on primary reciprocal hate that, in his experience, is very common in the Large Group, but in the Median Group this is under the best conditions to be changed gradually through the dialogue in sharing and communion (*koinonia*). In this sense the *hate*, that is created in the *median group* from comparison among different cultures that first provokes exclusion and so frustration, would represent a good variable as communication motor and basis to dialogue.

In practise primary the *hate* is usually observed in the first stage of the group and when a new member enters into the group, that is a particular situation in which there is not a reciprocal knowledge. When new member starts interacting, expressing an own personal opinion about a particular topic or about themselves, he is an unrelated to the others and ends up to provoke different kinds of emotions and fancies of persecution caused especially by experience of diversity and the fear to be judged not only by the others, but also by themselves.

The *hate* is defined by de Marè (de Marè et al., 1991) as an endopsychological energy, it isn't instinctual but anti-instinctual.

Fasolo (2008) considers it as Ego energy, it anticipates fear and fault, but not *Eros*. It isn't creative or destructive for itself, you must not submit or deny it, but recognize, cultivate and change it. It's the *Ananke* against the frustration imposed by the reality. In *median group* process the instrument to do changes is the dialogue. And so we could think about Martin Buber's words, when he affirmed: "*I know three sorts of dialogue: authentic dialogue -either talked or silent- where all members refer to one or different interlocutors that are going to use a real reciprocity to arrive at a real comprehension of different forms of human experience; technician dialogue referred only to need of objective understanding, and the monologue described as a dialogue, where two or more persons talk only with themselves*"

Dialogue is the *median group* essence and, if it advances, the identity and Self, come from koinonika atmosphere of social interaction. This permits, and will do it, the individual narcissistic barriers overcoming through external world.

In de Marè opinion, there are fewer difficulties to pursue these aims in the *median group*, than in the *large group*, where paranoiac anxieties and fear to be conformed seem important aspects of this kind of group. Previous, Turquet (1975) noticed as the large non-structural group experience produces fear of aggressiveness, loss of control and own identity: in these conditions the group is perceived uncertain, threatening and potentially violent. In this impact with the collective, that is the source of great anxiety, the *median group* is more reassuring, because its structure allows to keep a certain level of mental logical-rational functioning, secondary mind, having a presence of asymmetric next to symmetric with a reasonable control of the first on the second. In the *median group* there is an undeniable and extremely powerful balance, that furnishes an interpretation of reality -and its frustrations -as entity that can't be avoided, but it is open to negotiation. Negotiation, comparison and dialogue with the others become important for de Marè, because it is their absence to cause isolation, incomprehension, conflicts and troubles in individual or among individuals. "All the neurosis, derived from personal infrastructures in conflict with social structure, can have sovrastructure or cultural ramifications that produce more problems of the same neurosis".

The structure, the process and the content of "The Lounge of Restless"

The group is composed of UNITRE members and, also if the association can have every age members, the participants mean age is 70 years old.

It's an open group, all members can attend the laboratory, but in the time they are about 20 units and the members are quite the same; only in some cases, for example at the beginning of the year, you could note the retreat of someone and the participation of new members. The meetings take place once a month, it lasts one hour, from September to May, following the Academic Calendar of the Association. They meet in a room, in round position included the observer. The conductor and a participant observer conduct the group. Fasolo (2006) supports, although in the *median group* the conductor represents only the meeting organizer and the dialogue activator, the presence of the participant observer is very important, because it draws

to the sharing with the systematic reference to current differences: for example parents-children relationship in a mind familiar field, or gender differences when the couple conductor-observer is composed of individuals of different sex conductor. Fasolo introduces the term “*gilania*” to show a social equality, but not only. Among women and men, this represents a specific relation, that could be very helpful to reconstruct important aspects of individual identity.

You can't disregard reciprocal support that couple conduction permits, required for constructive and non defensive use of contro-transference (best defined in the *median group* with the term “mirroring”) through the members and their role. In this context it was very useful a comparison to internal image that at first was in the mind field of the conduction couple, with reference to the mythical configuration of Enea, who carries on his shoulders Anchise. This is a very important argument to free this field from saturating aspects and to listen to without a generational prejudice.

In the first meeting of new year the conductor, after the presentation, explains the aim of the group, that is repeated for every new member, and this is known as the “group intention”. Formally it represents a brief initial speech that illustrates rules and work instructions but its principal aim is to promote the dialogue: you could declare that the conductor transmits, in a conscious or unconscious way, intentions, the aim and the way to achieve the dialogue in a conscious or unconscious way conductor, the comparison, that the group knows and owns.

The group doesn't start with a particular theme, in fact the discussions are free and all the members could start to talk, without problems.

The group uses “*The Lounge of Restless*” to analyse social, political and existential themes. These discussions, as established by de Marè, represent, rewrite and relive town history, where the group is active. They take part in the activities with passion but also with desire of understanding how things were or are and what everyone can do now, old. Maybe they doesn't represent active population but they still have a role in the society: they're citizens, fathers, mothers, grandparents that want to be active in their home, loved, towns.

In the group there is always someone that starts a speech and someone that continues it, they often discuss about something that creates conflict among members (subcultures conflict) and subgroups frustration. The parts in conflict are two, rarely more than two. The spokesmen are always the same, except when the speech becomes more incited, in that case, the silent members are often the bearers of new ideas that are received and assimilated in the process of the group. A real integration is difficult, sometimes it doesn't happen, but it is always possible expressing own opinion inside the group, so all the members could know it. Their idea can change or not, but it is enriched by new perspectives.

At the beginning of this experience it was very difficult to control the group. We had people that, also if they were friends, entered in conflict just because the frustration, they sometimes weren't able to talk or someone though in a different way, compared with others.

Repeating the meetings, energy under frustration has been expressed and made a

dialogue and a communion of aims. Thus it has been reached the awareness that the *Koinonia* is the constant aim of a community, it's love for community, as Greek thought and for this reason it's never finished and we always search for it. It is a final destination and a dynamic equilibrium.

The favourite matters are usually local or national news or everyday life events that affect one or more members: youth unemployment, the problem of rubbish, immigration, but also personal problems as bad parents-children relationship, interacting problems in social context of their town, in which they don't have power to take part into decision, their own health or their relatives health.

Speeches are important to have a confrontation between oppositions, roles and different situations and between different subgroups. In a group, there are usually generations (young and old) differences, gender differences (wives and husbands), religious or political differences. This elder people group is constantly worried about the past-future relation, it defends itself highlighting the differences between past and present but they feel responsible of what is going on. The positions are often so formed that it's difficult to find a common point, in this case the conductor must take part into dialogue to allow it to continue also through new information that may change interpretation of phenomena.

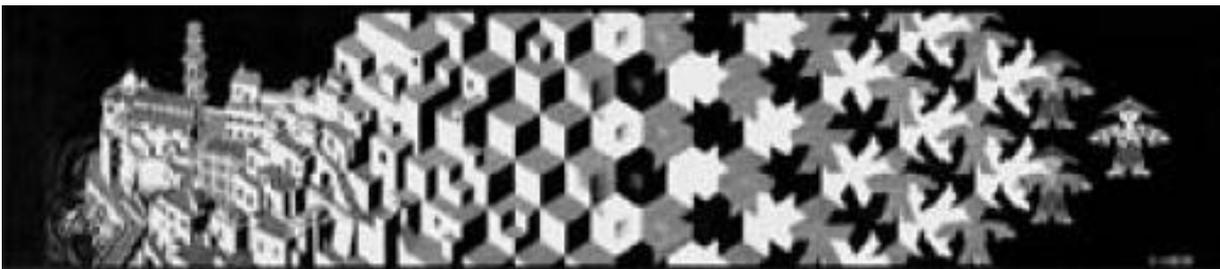


Fig. 2 Escher M.C. - Metamorphosis

The Metastructure: the group as a body that changes²

The dialogue, the constant comparison about some themes as the difference between generations and roles, with a new position in the society allows or helps every members to reflect about himself and about group experience.

The aim of the *median group*, in de Marè opinion, is the creation of a new culture, a new way to think and to live in this world, opened through social with a large view, a new identity that embraces also, and in particular, the present experience of life in its totality.

“*The Lounge of Restless*” maybe aims to learn to be elderly in a new representation of past and in a revisitation of future as every person of this age lives (Scocco et al., 2001), the group purpose seems to be the attempting to understand themselves and their own experience in the way it places itself in a social and existential continuum of individual.

Fasolo and Napolitani (2008) argue that growing old means especially to become old after gaining these mental, typically middle-aged, skills.

We weren't born old, but we get old against our own will to change physically and

psychologically and to take a new role in the family and society.

Fasolo (2008) supports the most suitable setting for this circumstance is the group setting: “the old people grow-up in the group, at least as much the adolescents in community”.

The group, in fact, allows people to develop a new identity, precisely because of the fact that we get old and it is very difficult to enter in a new dimension, that is imposed by life and community, where we often don't recognize ourselves.

Inevitably the body, probably more clearly than other stages of the life, transmits strong messages. The body talks inevitably through the physical decay, often visible unmercifully in few weeks for different reasons, frequently because of an illness or one more ailment.

The group is considered like a help for old person, that looks for the sense of what he is feeling and the marks of this condition shows on body, that isn't only a biological body. “Every group is a metaphor or metonymy of the body”. The definition of Kaes (1993) seems appropriate to explain the case of “The Lounge of Restless”, that has a special meaning for the members. For our author body and group have the same functions, features, essence and behaviour: as a group of children have priority to learn all its capacities as a single individual, a group of old people would ponder over assign themselves a new sense, based on their own experience and their current resources.

Kaes (1993): “the group psychic apparatus gives to members an image of body constituted by all its projections”. Thus the body would have the same functions or essence of the group in operating modes and mostly in members' personal experiences.

The group psychic apparatus presented by “the Lounge” represents an old person with its distinctive features: from the social point of view, although an old body has traditions, values, history, and life experiences, it doesn't catch the same interest as a young body do, because it is no more pleasant, it is ill, next to its end. This contrast of experiences and meanings is frequently found in the group, expressed in conflict with young people, belonging to a different society and culture. In fact in the life experience the opposition young, attractive and healthy body/old, ill and bad-looking body is very strong so as the conflict with new generations in relation to totally different values and the guilt of committing too many errors or being wrong in education of their own children. *“If you look outside one more time you can see: there isn't group among new and old generations, there isn't family, there isn't sharing, for example nowadays at dinner time you eat watching television, while once it was a time to share, that makes to emerge the image of com-union of the Last Dinner”.*

“In the past you're used to grow up because of basic needs and it was impossible to achieve something before having reached some aims, while now all things are allowed. Satisfaction of needs before the demand has been posed, denied every future projects, now all is present. There isn't a space for reflection or realisation, that needs time and always suggests presence of past, present and future.”

The ill body feeling is realized when there is disappointment because few people want to enter in the association. There aren't young people interested in taking part in a laboratory as "*The Lounge of Restless*", visible mark of a body that isn't able to revive itself and to generate interest.

"There is a poor frequency in UNITRE" and this fact is worrying. "As children do, we tend to withdraw, and we become as much introvert as much we get older, I wouldn't follow adults' example": in this way a member comments on the absence of a lot of friends and continues: "We must involve young people, not elderly, because they have more interest about communication", another participant answers: "Attending the UNITRE and "The Lounge of Restless" is a need! At the beginning every year is the same situation, maybe we are just becoming more depressed, but the group still exists and with it there is the fear to lose ourselves".

When the group loses a member or someone is ill: the physical pathology represents the evident mark that image of immortal and omnipotent body that group gives, sometimes it can't be contained and the sense of impotence is so strong that is difficult to talk about it. The group is different, it is stronger, because also if there are losses, the group lives and survives the single.

"The first thought of meeting is directed to Marco, died last month. This tragic event makes the group more joined, it talks about aggregation and turning the association into a private club..."

The real death of a member allows the others to realize in a stronger way the group unity as indissoluble entity and so immortal: outside, all alone, everything seems destruction and disunion, while inside you can stay, because you are safe.

"...You can talk about being cohesive, being together, being joined to consider emergency as the law of the group, meanwhile someone talks about the defence methods against the attack from outside, an unforeseen event: Testudo is the image in conductor's mind, this moves as the group do. Testudo, form and instrument of war, can go on and defend, it permits you not to be invaded by enemies, it seems to be the best way to continue after an important loss".

This is the group experience as healthy body, capable to defend itself because made up of many people and everyone can use his own resources and experiences that are still a value for himself, for the group and for the community. *"Nowadays the elderly are weak class, before they used to be considered the survivors and experience keepers. Meanwhile I think about the present, the elderly argue that they haven't been able to communicate to their children the sense of responsibility, maybe they wanted to defend them, but now they complain about who will govern the country: "it's time for 40-year-old people to get interested in politics".*

Young people don't have enthusiasm and in particular continuity. It's necessary more involvement. We talk about generations as if they were in different rooms.

It isn't just a group illusion: the group is strong also when it takes a final responsibility on own life, you face up to yours and other men limits and you try to make up for a central sense of your own existence. This is clearly visible when the group thinks about possibility to transmit its own knowledge to new generations and

support identity of its members, sometimes fragile because of different nature problems. The group allows to tell and remember, that represents the main reparative experience.

“What’s responsibility?”, this is the meeting subject and the problem of members. Everyone expresses his opinion: “responsibility is will to know for being critical. Conscience is responsibility, unconsciousness is irresponsibility. Each one's conscience is aware of others”

“Responsibility is sharing”: with this sentence the meeting finishes, drawing the function of the group, the aim that maybe every members has for his association and for the society too, and in particular for his own family...

The theme switches from loneliness to sharing, *“there are moments where you want to stay alone...loneliness is made of precious moments, when you are good with yourself”* but also *“the saddest thing is feeling alone when you are in company...staying alone means thinking and this makes you feel bad: you think about the past, but death thought is prevalent (dispersion feeling)”*.

The negative or positive perception of the group is perceived also and especially in relation to the outside:

“Even in others countries, northern and good ones, rubbish is a resource, it produces richness, because they know how to exploit it, while for us it’s a problem...”

In relation to religious and faith differences between Muslims and Christians, the answer of group is: *“...We would prefer Old Testament, there is too much thoughtlessness around...”*

“You can understand the youth group only returning to their past, nowadays young people doesn’t live in group, they are lonely and dazed daydreamers”.

This experience can be easily compared to one of the meetings of Roman Senate, where wise old men are used to meet to decide how to act towards society and for the society, what they can do or they haven’t done yet, with the perspective to surpass the *Laudatio Temporis Acti*.

The tale of old man has an *“heroic”* aspect, it shows the youngest the best way to remember and to get life experience during his life: for this reason the members recently have established a writing workshop with the aim of rediscovering their *“histories”*, that have been collected in a autobiographical book.

As Kaes (1993) argues the group psychic apparatus just has got a ghost body and one of its functions is to provide a prosthesis, a simulacrum, an imaginary undivided entity representing the healthy part of each members. We can assert that *“the Lounge”* is this prosthesis and provides support to individuals. It can be compared to a skeleton holding a body that can hardly stand: skeleton as body organizer, as the group is a psychical and social organizer.

“The group looks for a common feeling, but also a commune language...The sign is always the same, the symbol gets changed, the metaphor represents the sense of this speech, because it says something for sharing another message. When words and images don’t overlap, you lose your Identity..., the youth have lost their Identity, because of adults inability to give them words able to overlap with images they’ve

probably never had.

The Future should have brought small-bodied men with big heads, a head full of ready images and with few symbols to communicate. Someone says that in the past there were few images and lots of words. We are looking for our fitting image, that represents us as a group, that doesn't look like a small-bodied man with a big head".
As usual at the end of meeting the field is left unsaturated: and so the group is going to continue for another, new Academic years.

The conductors

We have decided to show in this paper two images: they seem to be a sharing body between the group and the reader. The first(Fig.1), even if is disturbing, is dynamically optimistic in relation to possibility to unify opposite parts like black and white are. The first isn't always white and the other isn't always black, too.

This behaviour allows the transitions, the "metamorphosis", that in *median group* represents the changing of individuals to the *Koinonia* of social group in their own belonging community (Fig.2).

When we started working at UNITRE, we didn't know exactly why, probably our motivation was incidental in the request. When we wrote this paper, also incited by our work-group questions, where we discuss, we thought not only about motivation but also about this professional and human experience. We would elaborate on these considerations, but here we will consider only the comparison aspects with body.

In our work we describe the group that moves and meets differences acting like a single body, as Kaes clearly explains, in a psychic transformation well explicable by protocols fragments where there is the passage from a conformist and simple dialogue to the symbolic searching of its identification image. During these years together we, as conductors, have witnessed the change of the members, even somatic: their faces age, their hands start trembling, they hardly moves , everything reveals the flow of the time, that seems to be stopped by the joy and the active participation in the group work, "as if" in the moments spent together benefited from a magic interruption of the time.

The time, known as Kronos, could be replaced with Kairos in here and now of the group. Kairos, is described in Greek mythology as a young with a hair forelock used to stop him. Archetypal Senex image has influenced group life with its positive and negative features, in opposition to Puer polarity as it happens in all transition moments among past and future, old and new.

Senex presence is not only due to the age of the members, it's also due to the strictness, sterility and whimpering, that in some moment are used to stop the group, and also to the presence of Old Wise Man, that is interested in harvesting, that gets many experiences, that has got a useful relationship with his Puer side, featured by dynamic, curious and constant planning. In his essay "Present and future" Jung (1956) says: "We live according to Kairos, waiting for the *metamorphosis of Gods*, or rather of the main concepts and symbols. We haven't chosen consciously this temporal need.

This is expression of interior and unconscious changing. In this essay he describes the psychic situation of transition among one millennium to another, where polarity Senex-Puer is represented by historical context, compared to Christ arrival, passage from the Father (Old King) to the Son (Messiah), that has opened the first millennium. With the dynamic relation among senex and puer we understand the link between past and future and the sense of this transition. The “*Carpe diem*” that we shared together allowed us to be mirrored in a not upsetting way to live the oldness. This way created desire and need to live all the time available. In the last year the observer was pregnant and with her body she expressed the changing and the birth of new also in relation to the conductor and the possibility to mark a past, a present and a future in the group life.

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Notes

¹⁾ UNITRE was born in Italy in 1975. Its first seat is in Torino. The association aims to contribute to cultural and social promotion of its members (students) through activation of courses and workshops about specific topics and realization of different activities, preparation of concrete initiatives, promotion, support to studies, researches and cultural initiatives to development of permanent and recurring education and through comparison among cultures

²⁾ Shown in *italics* we report, as the observer registered them, parts of some sessions of the group, that are in our opinion explanatory and rich of meaning.

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