

Oneiric constellations and group field

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Abstract

The new thoughts, not yet thought of, can become accessible through the creation, experience and discovery of what the author has called the constellation dream produced by re-dreamed by the group. The dreamer performs the function of "observation outpost" which on the whole, from his vertex, and with his autobiographical language, offers the group clues suitable to pinpointing an emerging and as yet unknown constellation of meaning. In addition, the author puts emphasis on the responsibility of the analyst in this context. The function of the analyst is certain to develop a narrative that gives meaning to the experience of place, but also to be able to keep alive a particular "attention" (in Bion's sense) that promotes development through affective interaction of the components of embryonic connections between the split parts (double) in the group. According to the 'author' s analyst must often refrain from saturating the dream narratives being an impediment to the development of affective interactions that will configure the constellation dream group.

Key-words: oneiric constellations, group, narration

The group has been a dream of mine for over twenty years, a dream that I share with many other researchers who, like me, explore the enigmatic phenomena of human aggregations. As I prepare myself to give this speech, for which I am grateful to the organizers of this meeting, I realize that my ideas and theories are tiled with those of many others, many of whom are present here today.

As C. Neri (1) states, ideas, like plants, need to adapt and take on the characteristics of the place where they have been transplanted; I will try to expose the thoughts which I have "given hospitality to" in my mind, in the hope that a place, a mental space, suitable to exchange, can develop here between us.

I will use, in large part, a metaphoric language, knowing that this language leaves a slight shadow that blurs the precise definition of concepts, but which favors, as I believe, thought.

The dream can be taken on as a function of the small therapeutic group, a function whose specificity is enhanced using the perspective presented by the emotional field model.

As we know, the field model doesn't have a precise place in psychoanalytic theory. arising from the observations of group dynamics, the field model was developed in Italy essentially by F. Corrao who, in part, derived it from the thinking of Bion, and who in part re-elaborates it and transforms it always within the bionian theoretical matrix. Other authors, for example A. Correale, use it to explore psychotic thinking

and institutional problems; others use it to broaden the perspective of dual psychoanalysis. N. Ferro, for example, leans on the model of the Barangers, of 'Biopersonal field', and develops audacious, innovative, turning points in the technical theory of dual analysis.

The field is understood by me as a function of the group.

This function now presents itself as the medium which allows, modulating it, the effective interaction between the components, (the group dynamic), and now expresses itself as the atmosphere or emotional climate that permeates and kneads the group, imposing its own curve on the interaction itself.

The function of the field forms the group as a "togetherness"(2), in which therapist and patients are equally involved, even if with different roles. This leads to a precise differentiation between the psychic phenomena connected to affectivity and those connected to emotional movements, more archaic and not written into interactive dynamics.

For these reasons the field model has led to the reformulation of a few metapsychological assumptions: the concept of counter-transfer, the neutrality of the analyst, of sublimation, of interpretation, etc..

For the purpose of the present work I will refer to the field as a dimension in which "thoughts not yet thought" are produced that, even though they remain outside of thought, direct the mentality of the group.

With this hypothesis I am radicalizing Bion's assumption whereby thoughts, as opposed to lies, benefit from an existence independent from the thinkers. Whereas lies need to be "constructed" by thinkers true thoughts can only "accepted" , once a terrain favorable to their seeding has been prepared.

I will use a metaphor which associates the emotional field configuration with a group of celestial bodies that make up a galaxy.

In the galaxy thoughts that are not thought co-inhabit, as they do in the subconscious, in a space/time which is different from that of our conscious experience, even if not necessarily amorphous, as Freud believed.

The galactic whole has a glutinous and sincretic character, to use J. Bleger's terminology, thoughts not thought, in fact, make up an emotional state without the possibility that any of them be evidenced.

Step by step, the oneiric narration, through the function of group elaboration, can allow one to grasp and cut out, from the whole of the galaxy, "constellations" of meaning, pertinent to the emotional events that are crossing the entire group and the individual-group relationship, at that moment.

The elaboration of the oneiric narrations, and the affective interaction that colors them, allows one to establish a space/time harmony which makes the evolution in "O" possible and the introjection of new thoughts, which transform the emotional state.

As in a social context (3) (4) myths are alternated, signaling the changes in the circumstances, in the culture and in the mentality of the group, the alternation of

oneiric stories, in therapeutic groups, shows the events (5) which produce new meanings.

The oneiric narration contains a first approximation of meaning, it creates, modifies or destroys, connections and boundaries which were used as a frame in the precedent mentality.

When the function of the analyst is adequately abstinent but effectively in contact with the emotional field, starting from the event, affective interactions capable of hybridizing old thoughts are activated. From these hybridizations emotions agglutinated in the mentality of the group are liberated, the dispersed emotions can come together again freely, and evolve into "O".

Through these movements, the event of a dream told by one of the components, is a potential matrix of new areas of thinkability for the whole of the group.

Dreams, therefore, constitute a primary trace of the exploration path of the galaxy of thoughts not thought.

From the labor of the group, activated by the singular peak of the oneiric narration of a member, a more ample constellation of functional meanings to accept new thoughts present in the field of the galaxy and beforehand invisible because not observed emerges.

Analogously to the astral constellations, the oneiric dreams allow us to pinpoint our subjective position in space/time, and to carry out a function of orientation that guides the change of the psychic path.

As in astronomic science there exists an unavoidable remainder between the constellation and the name that is given it, in the work of the group there persists a similar remainder between the oneiric configuration and its "interpretation".

The need to attribute a name to something is the fruit of the need to know intrinsic in human nature. From the name man obtains his own position, his own orientation in the space/time, elements which are indispensable for the transmission of knowledge to future generations.

Therefore in the first pre-Colombian civilizations, through a representative knowledge more or less precise in the movements of celestial bodies, the social life was organized and, parallelly, the myths that supported it.

But the name, the shared interpretation, limits itself in "indicating", and doesn't pretend to equate itself with the sensitive object.

If we believe that the gamma elements (6), as Corrao defines them, by analogy with the alfa elements, contribute to the development of group elaboration, the reply of the group to the narration of a dream activates in the space/time of the group the gamma function.

The dream will have to cross the group field as if it were a "ghost" which allows the protosymbolic paths that are most advantageous as regards the transformation in "O" to filter through; while the group will use the dream as an "exploratory outpost" to try out the most usable paths towards the thought not thought and to prepare itself to contain them.

The dream will activate in the group a dynamic of congruent exchanges.

Therefore, as Corrao already noted, if the group is considered as a field of energies that tends to propagate itself through expansion, the dynamics that take place represent the epiphenomenon; to found primarily on these dynamics our approach to the dream in the group, even if it allows the growth of "K", can transform itself into an obstacle to the evolution into "O".

The dynamics and the relations seem to work like sherpas, laborious means of transporting thoughts that await to be thought.

Now we need to ask ourselves which function do we give to subjectivity in this way of understanding the groups.

Once deposed the antithetical dialectic that for Freud describes the relationships between individual and group, don't we expose ourselves to the risk of dispersing the boundary of subjectivity and the valence of treatment?

I presume that in the individual/group dialectic the other is, for the subject, interlocutor and double together, foreigner and integral part of the Self.

The group scenario is animated and characterized by the intertwining of a dual process:

- in one case a kind of process will establish itself where the "other" is considered an object of ambivalent affective investment, that is, as a communicative interlocutor;

- in another case, the individual mind, though phenomena of duality and depersonalization, in the group scenario has the opportunity to rediscover the connections with a series of un-elaborated and marginalized parts of the Self, residues of fusional experiences, proto-Oedipus, traumatic, etc.(7).

This complex process shades in ambiguity the space where relationships between subject and group take place.

Conceiving the other alternatively as double and as interlocutor generates a remainder in the organization of the world and of the self, and from this remainder a discomfort, relative to the compactness of one's own identity, (the "name" with which everyone discerns his own diversity), together, producing rich openings for a possible, creative, transformation. (Gaburri, 1982; Gaburri, 1999) (8).

The oscillation between these poles indicates an area of potential individual growth and development.

Furthermore, as we know, in the past few years, the notion of subject has been changing under the push of clinical findings, of group studies, and of serious pathologies.

Next to the classical spatial metaphor to describe the Self, today we find a temporal metaphor, placing the subject in his experiences, along the arch of a whole existence (Steven Mitchel); recently J. Puget has reposed the notion of "situational Ego", understood not as a separate entity, but as a pole of a continuing dialectic with the environment, the interpersonal, the social context. The contributions of Pichon

Riviere and of Bleger are re-used to describe the mind as being composed of different areas, of which a syncretic and agglutinate is always present and ready to reactivate itself in particular internal or external circumstances. The notion of pluripsychic apparatus of R. Kaës, the studies on transgenerational phenomena (R. Kaës, H. Faimberg, etc., in Italy, for example, F. and A. Meotti); the ghosts of Selma Freiburg's nursery, in another way, and with other conceptualizations, reach analogous problemizations.

To hold that the group has an impact on the individual which, for meaningfulness, Bion associated with that of a newborn to its mother's breast, signifies conceiving that the notion of subject is tiled with spaces, of various kinds, transitional, according to the definition of Winnicott, that obscure the border zones between individual and group.

I consider that the group has the power to support subjectivity recognizing in the single the pertinence that his communications, dreams/messages, have with the events and with the thoughts of the group whole, that is, recognizing the single member as competent to gather the ambiguity that crosses the field and furthers the common elaboration.

In fact, the member of the group who talks about a dream proposes a singular and principle observational summit on the emotional qualities of the group field, he locates some reference points that can allow the exploration of a constellation of meaning that involves the whole group.

Only when the group ignores the communicative summit of the dream and transforms both the dream and the dreamer in "no thing" (Gaburri, 1998), positioning itself, for the moment, in a psychotic state of the group mind, the subject is exposed to the disavowal of his communicative competence and, therefore, of the self.

In the inevitable oscillatory movement between these positions, the group can, now enrich itself, making subjects and different points of view live together (9), now block the differentiation, in favor of an ideological and delinquent integralism.

In order to give narrative coherence to my arguments I will use a clinical sequence of some dreams proposed in the course of the three sessions of a week of analysis conducted in an open group made up at the moment of five members. I will only very summarily note the elements of the sessions.

The first session, (Monday), begins in a convivial climate punctuated by a euphoric line of Maria's: "now we could even play cards". but this climate is erased when Rocco recounts two week-end dreams: the first dream, coming close after the last session of the preceding week, shows a room in an orphanage where the patient is, lying on an iron cot, there are many other empty cots, the surroundings are desolate, a woman arrives to say hello to the patient and, when she goes, forgets a knapsack-like bag. Upon awakening the dreamer connects the shape of this bag to that of a scrotum. The night before the session Rocco dreamed that he'd gone to the lake with his girlfriend, in a very strange situation, he and the woman flow into each other in to one person, indistinct, progressively a separation occurs, Rocco's body pulls apart

from his girlfriend's and requires its individuality. The act of separating seems to happen through mitosis, like the splitting of a unicellular being.

In the dream Rocco is mortified, seriously upset because his girlfriend, instead of appearing relieved, seems not to have noticed anything, irritated he decides to take refuge in the mountain alone.

Immediately after this story there is an embarrassed silence in the group, that continues for a while. The group displays a rejection reaction, everyone seems to look for an excuse to change the topic, glances are made in the direction of the analyst, almost delegating to him a nice interpretation that will get rid of the hot potato.

I start to think that the telling of these dreams, and the brusque way in which they were presented, can contain elements of mental pain intolerable for the group, orienting it to deny the event and to transform it into "no thing" (10), which could bring about a collapse of the field.

I intervene then observing that: "If the group at first seemed willing to play cards, it now seems that everyone is passing, Rocco's cards are still on the table, but no-one's asked to see them."

Nicola quickly answers: "The house in the mountain impressed me..." There follows a vivid discussion about the mountain, in which everyone participates. Quickly the discussion organizes itself in a dilemmatic form between supporters of a protective isolation and supporters of an anguished and degrading isolation.

Between these two opposing themes the idea of a place where one can pleasantly collaborate gains momentum, a place where everyone dedicates themselves to different tasks, without having to talk about it. Filippo intervenes: "Rocco breaks away in the dream of the countryside, but at the same time creates a bridge with her". Rocco sarcastically answers: "Filippo you forgot the scrotal bag".

The session ends with my comment on the fact that the anguish of the emptiness of the orphanage wasn't compensated by the scrotal bag, just as the anguish evoked by Rocco's dreams is not placated by the prospect of filling the solitude of the mountain with collaboration.

The second session (Tuesday), Maria isn't there just as she'd announced she wouldn't be. It is Emma who opens the session recounting a dream: "she was in a dream with four people, two of them are the mother and the grandmother, who, however, are her age and two are men of a different age, there is a debate amongst these people to resolve the problem of whether or not to allow a potentially dangerous stranger in, who's knocking at the door. At a certain point the dreamer "takes charge of the situation" and goes personally to open the door: she finds herself in front of a person who has a threatening face but who is not at all dangerous."

At this point Rocco answers right away identifying himself with the stranger: "but he didn't want to kill you".

It seems that the experience of the precedent session might have allowed Emma to "take charge of the situation" and to propose a possible solution to the dilemma between isolation and depersonalizing aggregation.

During the session the emerging constellation is tiled with intergenerational motifs: in the dream Emma lives with the grandmother, a hated person, "I could have killed her" she says; Rocco manages to tolerate the old head clerk, "the other day I answered him kindly, while usually I'd kick him", etc..

To reconcile oneself with past generations, or to give in to the impulse to overtake them, leaving them behind you? Filippo asks himself.

Nicola reacts to this calmed atmosphere recounting a dream: "I am on a narrow road, I angrily overtake a truck that's blocking my way, I end up in a ditch. the truck drivers get out and I beg them not to talk about the overtaking, I would be too ashamed if my children found out about it". This oneiric narration, certainly activated by the atmosphere that had impregnated the session at that moment, is explained by the precedent session where Nicola found himself in check-mate compared to the group being the supporter of the negativeness of the solitude of the mountain. But the dream also has the function of checking the group that had let itself be excessively absorbed by the atmosphere of Emma's dream, risking a polarized crystallization on the vertex of one of the members.

I intervene saying that it seems to me that Nicola has tried, in his dream, to use in an exaggerated way the "scrotal bag" of Rocco to overcome the truck group, but that, then, even he needed to reconcile his image with that of his children and that of the truck drivers, through proportionalized differentiations.

The session, after a series of interactions, concludes with the satisfaction of Nicola who reaffirms the togetherness, saying that he, up to then very tight, had started to give money to those who played in the Underground.

III session (Thursday), like Monday the prologue is convivial with comments on the pleasantness of a flower vase there in the studio.

Maria recounts being able to help her little boy in the solution of a math problem only in virtue of the presence of her husband who had arrived at that moment; the husband had, however, proposed a more complex solution, Maria gets angry with him, "My husband picked up on this and felt bad, I felt sorry for him...for the first time in my life I felt stronger than him...".

After a brief silence Rocco recounts a dream: "I found myself on the edge of a mountain ridge in a boat, no maybe it was a barrel cut in half. I was very frightened, the slightest movement and I would have fallen down in to the valley, where the war between the Germans and the Allies was still going on. I see a blond lady under a cantilever roof on the mountain peak, I ask her for help and that way I manage to get back down on to the ground and I calm down. Then I found myself in Naples in a restaurant with my girlfriend and other people. I and my girlfriend take the 500 to get to my town, coming across a truck the 500 overturns, I get out and easily manage to

turn it right side up, I see that it's hardly damaged, and I finally arrive home where I find my relatives who are waiting for me."

A complex interaction with rich and varied associations follows: the truck overtaken by Nicola, Diogenes alone in the barrel, Maria alone in front of problems, who gets emotional at the attention of her husband, the help of the blond lady on the mountain (Maria is blond), etc.

At the end of the session Emma recalls the suffering of a past separation that still causes her pain, but in a less bitter way, "it's not pleasing to remember it, but now I feel 'stronger'".

With a quip, the barrel is associated with Noah's arc, which permits the group to imagine an environment capable of tolerating the differences of everyone, an arc that can contain even the small, but valorous, 500 of Rocco which turned over without any excessive damage.

Commentary

I will try to offer a synthetic commentary on the clinical material relative to the three sessions.

Unfortunately the transformative passage of the dream recounted to the oneiric constellation produced by the group interaction is too rich, and often draws support from small details, which was impossible for me to relate.

I hope that the commentary offers a greater clarity, notwithstanding the omissions of the related clinical material.

The first dreams seem to signal to the group complex and painful thoughts that circulate in the group, these bring to the forefront clues of a possible constellation of meanings, barely identified in a few points, and initially, confronted in a dilemmatic mode.

The dilemmatic approach seems to me to represent a first way, simplified, of exploring the proposed area.

The group appears to test the terrain to find a common note of approach.

The dreams of Rocco (from the orphanage, the Karyokinesis, and the escape into the mountains), if observed individually, propose a condition of "psychosis of abandonment", stimulated by the week-end, and refer to impotence and escape.

The group seems, at first sight, to react in a mirror fashion: personifying this condition reaffirms it, and ratifies it with the refusal to recognize the pertinence of Rocco's dreams with respect to the emotional group field, and "not realizing", just like the girlfriend of Rocco in the dream, the change in progress.

In my experience, it is usual, either in the group or in the dual situation, to observe this kind of answer as a kind of reaction to the feeling of impotence created by the unbearable mental suffering present in a dream. The group that transforms in "no thing" dream and dreamer succeeds in ridding itself of the surplus of suffering, but "doesn't realize" that it gets rid of the baby along with the dirty water.

I believe that the "active and selective" abstinence of the analyst can favor the evolution in "O", rather than the transformation in "K" of the group. An interpretive intervention on the dreams, however declined, could have occluded the free expansion of thought, impeding the development of an emotional experience in the group.

The analyst, in this circumstance, must not allow himself to be hook by the invitation to "overtake the truck", interpreting the dream as an individual product, ratifying, that is, the non pertinence to the group. Perhaps for these reason a light intervention is sufficient to bring out the desire of the group to embrace the emotions of the field. The intervention of the analyst, in the proposed clinical case, is limited to noting a change in the emotional state of the field; connecting the convivial atmosphere of the beginning to the successive atmosphere of emotional closure, the intervention helps the group to "become aware" of a change which is possible to explore.

This particular interpretive abstinence produces a deflation of the mental suffering present in the group, making the atmosphere tolerable. Furthermore it permits "the replacing" of the subject (Rocco) in the field, not as an individual in need of "support", but as "member" of the group with a function of explorative outpost.

Our group picks up this occasion and starts the interaction, and, using the "tail" of Rocco's dreams (the escape to the mountains), evidences the dilemmatic configuration between "differentiation and isolation".

This configuration appears to belong to a symptomatic nucleus, in this moment central for the group that seems to ask itself: how to succeed in "participating" without emerging oneself in a syncretic sociality? how to succeed in differentiating oneself without feeling dissolved (or sequestered) in isolation?

The beginning of the interaction unconsciously expresses the recognition of the competence of the dreamer and, together, the pertinence of his observational vertex: the two dreams, hypersaturated with meaning, are allowed to decant, while a few "signs" are gathered, that allow the group to re-dream them, elaborating a new oneiric constellation.

If, initially, the talk opens articulating itself around the dilemma between "good isolation" - "bad isolation", subsequently expands like the delta of a river.

It is from the complex, "from the togetherness" of this experiencing movement that the possibility of an evolution in "O" is prepared.

This direction is confirmed at the beginning of the following session: Emma takes the initiative, this time with a dream of her own, to let foreign and disturbing thoughts enter into her home, which thus are put in to the center of the affective exchanges and of the common elaboration.

The dream of the third session seems to present itself as a possibility of escape from the pincers of dilemmatic thought, between isolation and syncretic sociality, between participation and interpersonal conflicts (Germans against Allies), between environment and intergenerational conflicts (the grandmother and the head clerk, the relatives).

The environment-group seems capable of evolving from a precarious "barrel on the edge" to a wider and more reliable "Arc".

I consider the group to be exploring the field like an environment, in ecological terms, to understand to what degree this permits a collaborative work not adaptable to the single member, and how much this itself is modifiable in function of the mental growth and of the specific independence of each subject.

Conclusions

As I start to conclude my intervention I would like to underline certain aspects that I consider fundamental in treating the oneiric dimension of small therapeutic groups.

-The first assumption regards the responsibility of the analyst in this context. The function of the analyst is certainly that of developing a narration that gives meaning to the experience at hand.

But, it's necessary to be aware that the analyst is strongly involved in the common field and silently distracted by the emotional currents of the group, which exposes him to unconscious collusions with the pathological and defensive aspects that can obstruct the exploration. The "cognitive" enticement to saturate with meaning the material is strong, especially when one finds oneself in the presence of oneiric constructs apparently of easy construction.

The consideration of the field as (communicative) "medium" favors the interpretive abstinence, the toleration of a waiting pause that permits an emotional-cognitive reorganization to spring forth from the field itself.

-The second assumption is that new thoughts, not yet thought, can become accessible through what I have called the oneiric constellation produced by the re-dreamed dream of the group.

The dreamer absolves the a function that I have defined as "observational outpost" which on the whole, from his vertex, and with his autobiographical language, offers the group clues suitable to pinpointing an emerging and as yet unknown constellation of meaning. The constellation, which the common elaboration renders thinkable, always partial and full of doubt, acts as a point of reference in the emotional story of the group, from the myths that will characterize it.

-The third assumption regards the oscillation, always present in groups, between the need to belong, that borders on the syncretic sociality, and the desire of a differentiated participation.

This oscillation, declined in antithetical terms, as being all in one or condemning oneself to isolation, substantiates an exploration of the group as an environment in ecological terms, to verify the availability that it is capable of developing for the subjectivity and the individual points of view.

-The fourth assumption regards the contribution that the group supplies to the restructuring of the subjectivity, which is seen through "the other", together mirror double and interlocutor.

The contribution of the group to the organization of the subjectivity doesn't regard the autobiographical valences that the single proposes, but the possibility of recognizing or not the pertinence of his observational vertexes as compared to the togetherness.

The group can, therefore, welcome the contribution of the single as a communication that concerns it, to use an expression of Winnicott, the common field and the questions that torment it.

-The fifth assumption refers to the hypothesis that the evolution in "O", therefore the change, is realized through processes of interjection on the part of single members not only of objects, imago, ghosts, thoughts, but of an environment, a group field, that which the subject interiorizes is an environment with its specific capacity to contain and with the specific tonality of the bonds that cross it.

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