

## Reality and fiction for the therapeutic couple

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### Abstract

The necessity to have a precise time and a limited place where the group processes could take place, is a fundamental requirement for the survival of the group. This is to say that a stable setting with clear limited space must to be respected and offered to the group and to the therapeutic couple's mind.

The group allows some important dynamic movements for the adolescent, allowing the displacement of the infantile unsolved dependence conflicts in regard to their parents on the group of peers. This permits the working-through of the object-relationships in function with the relationships connected with actual experiences and unsolved conflicts with parental figures. The experience permits, thanks to the peers' presence, the re-elaboration and a way towards a groupal and individual identity.

**Key words:** children, adolescents, identity, individual, group, therapeutic couple

I pray thee, god Mercutio let's retire:  
The day is hot, the Capulet's abroad,  
And, if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl;  
For now, these hot days, is mad blood stirring.  
( Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet III, 1, 1-4)

When the Capulet's servants meet the Montague's ones, there is like a silent conviction that a fight will take place; it seems indeed that the encounter's purpose will be the one of fighting. Since from this act's first scene, that shows the contention between the rival families, a world associated with the puberal age and the beginning of adolescence is brilliantly evoked (Copley, 1992). Juliet is thirteen years old and Romeo is seventeen. The one-sided dialogue of their mates, gathered in two groups, beyond the serious sexual allusions, the meaning of some plays on words refers to genitility, linked with the aggraggerressive power, that tries to possess rather than to love.

We owe to the psychoanalysts M. Rustin (1991) and B. Copley the analysis of thought difficulties and of the relational dynamics' meanings between the main characters of Shakespeare's drama.

Without really taking cognizance of the hate that is extended outside their belonging groups, the scene of the trussle creates a space for the Capulets and the Montagues, scene where ideas of warfare or flight, instead of the risk of facing it, can be symbolically changed in order to permit that love is able to rise from a deformed chaos.

The exchanges suggest the presence of what Bion has called “group in the basic assumption fight-flight” representing a common mental level according to which one of the purposes of staying together in the group could be the one of fighting with someone or of escaping from him. In this kind of situation the rival points of view are strenuously fought, often with the coming out of defeated and winners whereas the capability of thinking often seems lost.

A governing body, in the sense of the setting’s presence, of a contained space and of a leader, could avoid this task, of tussle or flight, giving the impression to it (Bion, 1970). It’s a leadership’s hypothesis with a bonding function for a serie of individuals, whose emotions can be thought and whose anxieties can be contained. The external events are constructively introduced in the group, worked-through and connected to the events that are in it’s entity, with the risk of using them as flight modalities from the actual groupal emotions at the given moment.

The group mentality (culture) that begins narrating its own history could start from here.

## **Introduction to the group dynamics**

In the group’s dynamic’s approach the central problem which Freud tried to answer to was the one of the link keeping more individuals together.

Bion sustains that each group is driven by apparently obscure emotional impulses, that bring it to act according to prearranged tendencies, defined ‘basic assumptions’. One assumption is the fight-flight, the other is the dependence one, that involves the expectation to be supported by a leader and the pairing one based on the conviction that a group purpose is the one of producing a “saviour”. A group in basic assumption is not able to develop thoughts, whereas, as a way of action, it uses the already existing predetermined language. Bion distinguishes similar groups that are in basic assumptions from the “work group” whose function essentially consists in the translation of thoughts and emotions in a certain behavior that suits reality with characteristics similar to the ones that Freud assigned to the Ego (Bion idem).

The group therapy with psychoanalytical orientation developed with many similarities to Bion’s theories.

According to the Foulkes’s approach all kinds of communications and relationships can be seen as part of a total interaction field: the group’s matrix (Foulkes-Anthony, 1957).

According to Kaes (1982 b) the group analyst is defined by the double capacity of being alone and of being at the same time in the group, whereas each individual participant uses the group as a way of forming himself. Everything which occurs during the group session belongs to the group which is being stimulated by a gradual passage from the inter-subjective to the intra-psychic.

According to this approach the group members' contributions and the therapists' interpretations on the dynamic of the "hic et nunc" of the group situation must both be taken in consideration as a whole (Sutherland, 1985).

The function of the adult as a facilitator in the group constituting phase.

According to metaphorical language the therapist's role, in the first phases of the group constitution, is one of a spider that spins a web. The group experience gives the opportunity to participants to perceive different threads, connections, crossovers which correspond to different ways of thinking, to different kinds of mental functioning and to different emotions. The spider-therapist spins the web together with other members who with their contribution extend the web, support it or weaken it. This image underlines the idea that the group is not only defined by the phenomena of gathering some people in a certain space, but it represents a gradual and difficult challenge.

When a therapist begins thinking of a group, the potential members "concretize themselves" in his mind. In the preparation phase he will ask himself these questions concerning the subjects' character, their age bracket, the quality of their relationships. If they are adolescents, he will readily ask himself if they are individuals incapable of participating actively to the normal adolescence's social groups or young people who actively participate in social life, 'natural' candidates to become members of a group. If we take children under consideration, group therapy is able to figure out the infantile need to possess "a small space not far from the adult world, but protected by the adult presence. This creates a peculiar space where children can relate with adults in a very particular way (Baruzzi,1990). For the children, this means recreating a world for adults, offering an original and exclusive set that can function as long as their anxieties are contained in this space. In latency years, the group of children constitutes itself with the adult's presence: one can say that, in order for children to grow, they always need a watchful eye of other individuals that function as a mirror similar to the one of a loving and responsible mother.

In the uncertainty of the new situation children and adolescents easily recognize other participants, clinging to their interiorized relationships, whereas, in therapeutic groups, adults assume the function of facilitating the communication between members. This deals with new figures, for them not necessarily related to the roles played in every-day life by family members or by their teachers, which favour new representations.

The beginning of a group for its members can symbolize the anxiety of losing their individuality. In the case of adolescents, this can be particularly meaningful. The unconscious mind of a group is the result and the container of the single members' contributions, which implies the tendency of giving answers to the solicitations according to an emotional base, not filtered by the Ego. The more the group functions according to a primitive mentality, the most it can limit people's freedom, demanding them to adhere to a common groupal working. An adaptation requested both in the thought and in the emotions of the participants.

The containment of anxieties can be obtained through the setting, the conductors' attitudes and their states of mind. It's a movement that can be activated through the interpretative intervention, which is rare in the children's group. Here, there is more space for playing and for describing of what occurs. The conductor will have to be in resonance with the participants' interiorized objects and will have to be able to distance himself, developing thoughts linked to everybody's mind. This process the activation of a basic symbolization area for the group's process constitution and shape.

Bion has driven us to individuate the ways in which emotions can pass through the group members in a clinical setting and can be redistributed between them. The description of what happens, the underlining of the most meaningful passages or of silence phases creates a sort of oscillatory movement. This flexibility puts the therapist in the condition of alternatively being outside and inside the unconscious group's mind according to the movement that is taking place (Chapelier, 1985). He is in this way able to assume both a maternal function of looking after and a paternal function that limits and contains.

In this paper we present the situation created by two "weavers" with the function of couple conducting groups of subjects in years of growth according to the psychoanalytical psychodrama model.

### **Why co-therapy?**

Contrary to the one leader conduction model, in the co-therapy group there are more possibilities of playing different aspects. This is what I have been able to perceive through my different experiences as a child and adolescent group conductor.

It dealt with short term groups taking place in a hospital, with children and adolescents affected by chronic diseases. They have been experiences of solitary leadership, for homogeneous groups with focal aims. The idea of facing a no-term therapeutic group frightened me. When the conduction of children's therapeutic groups was coming closer to being a reality, I was able to recognize my fear of entering a new dimension, while emphasizing its obstacles and failures'. The availability of a young colleague who had less formative experience and his interest of a group shared leadership seemed to me an opportunity to make use of. I was able to collect information on this kind of asymmetry in the two leaders' training is considered an ideal situation to put a co-therapy into effect. Some group therapists, particularly Slavson, expressed many reserves on this model of conduction, considering it too complicated for the working-through of the reciprocal projections inside the therapeutic couple.

In the consultation phase we were able to share our pledge for the interviews: one of us saw the parents and the other the children and then we joined our information together. In the first group sessions we always had to remember and consider the link of the group members who had a previous relationship of different nature with one of

us. The need of an exclusive relationship and the unease for feeling confused amongst the others were often unveiled through the research of a major closeness or of a physical contact with a leader. Someone had major difficulty to fit to the peer's group, for a sort of prearranged dependence with the already known therapist.

The choice of working side by side in the group also drew its origin from our consciousness children and adolescents are subjects with a big tendency to acting out. We could foresee that being in two could answer the need of locking up inside the group those subjects that could do dangerous things or get hurt, acting with aggressiveness or violence. With the children we have been able to experience that, being in resonance with their emotions, didn't exclude, in the most difficult situations, even our passage towards acting, thanks to the occasional interventions working as a physical containment. We found necessary even with adolescents setting ourselves like a couple towards which they would of 'acted' typical age instances inside the group. It depended on the young lads choosing the to them suited distance to better individuate and separate themselves from us, taken as adult models. According to the ones that experienced co-therapy for long the couple is able to present to its group members a representation sounding as a modality of family functioning and setting itself as a base of further identifications. (Privat, Quelin Soulignoux, 2000).

With the children we have been able to perceive on our skin their desire of separating the therapeutic couple, intended as a parental one, whereas with the adolescents their tendency of setting themselves as a whole or as a subgroup opposed to us adults was often evident (we can say that the adolescents' group constitutes itself against the adults).

Afterwards, in the midst of the experience, I had the chance to reflect how the necessity of having a partner has surely been linked to my anxieties aroused from the group itself. It sounded to me impossible to imagine myself as an exclusive witness and leader with a protective function against phantasms of fragmentation and annihilation so often associated to the representation of the group's existing process. The idea of being supported by a partner in the difficult or no-go phases seemed inalienable to me.

For some time we worked with children and adolescents in two different private Psychological Guidance Centers, experimenting in this way the different meanings of being in couple with people of a different age bracket.

With adolescents the group-work method is particularly successful in facing fragmentation and projection processes in others' and of one's proper instinctual instances; a reunification of these parts is favoured by the regression phase that permits the members to perceive themselves as a whole. Some group psychotherapists define the adolescent like a clinging individual between family and social identity. He represents a lot of work for one person to develop his own identity and for it to emerge. He has important moments but not exclusive ones between himself and others. One tends himself and comes closer to understanding his

relationship with other individuals in the group (Munelli, 1999). Their fears of being unbearably close to the two therapists evoking the parental couple, from which they begin to detach, and their feeling of a fusion with the whole's groupal mind, both can stimulate the formation of an alliance between peers. According to this view it can be assumed that this treatment model has a containment function of both thinking and collecting their projections, as well as supplying those interpretations that will result useful to the groupal process (Sacco, 1993).

The ambitious objective we looked forward to was the one of helping the group members become more conscious of themselves and of their own needs. Through the different interventions underlining their gestures, attitudes, movements and observations or comments on the tones or on the words used we tried to collect and transmit each message in a significant way for all the people present at the session. We avoided a focalized individualized attention, with the consciousness of the circular function of the experience and of its temporal dimension in the session's 'hic et nunc'.

It has so been possible showing how each member's contribution could be useful to transmit the emotion expressed in the group perceived as a whole.

The presence of a couple of therapists not only represents the possibility of a protective screen in the oedipal conflict area but a link between two individuals connected by reciprocal unconscious interactions that draws to a life experience hardly removable in that it exists in reality. The couple's unconscious psychic activity absorbs a great part of their energy but it greatly risks to be the evocation point of archaic defences for the therapists and the group members. These defences are aimed to protect from the intense instinctual activities that can relapse to the group's behaviour. It concerns particular defences in the function of the different phantasmatic levels (archaic or oedipal) that exist in a phase of the group's process.

We can ask ourselves what the couple's mind is occupied by. I have been able to perceive that between our minds existed a communicative exchange, as a meeting ground whose deep structure was organized through specular projective identifications. This implied the constitution of a third space, common field of emotional energies to be explored, like in an individual session can occur that "mental extension that favours new thoughts" (Bezoari, 1991).

The counter-transference's analysis is a permanent necessity to value the different group movements and the impact of the multiple transference that are active in the group. In the couple's case, we can easily see the great difficulties of analyzing the counter-reactions, the counter-transference and the inter-transference. Often the block of the group's processes refers to the blind spot of the inter-transference analysis.

Decobert and Soulé underline how a therapeutic co-leadership can be wrecked by a too detailed analysis of the unconscious implications that link the two therapists together (1984). As partners we had to face the possibility of evoking, in a dimension that was external to the group, our relationship in the supervision's context, that was strictly groupal, in the spaces hardly gained for an exchange of the emotional

experiences that could have been arrived at the consciousness. In the event our exchanges allowed us to define ourselves as subjects that belonged to an external group in regard to the one of our young lads and ladies. Being able to work-through together, after the sessions, in a defined space and time, a clinical and theoretical reflection represented to us a not unimportant resource. To us it has been an exchange of emotional experiences on the possibility of theorizing, starting from the session's concrete experience. When we have not been able to maintain this space our work clearly suffered of it. We became mysterious figures, reciprocally impermeable enacting in the group scene, like entrapped aliens in a sort of shuttle whose functioning was mysterious.

The containing function in a group of adolescents: the game of parts

The place occupied by the members of a group in the therapists' mind is very important since the beginning for the group experience that will be activated. The therapists, in the expression of anxieties that are present inside the group and using their counter-transference, offer a reflecting containment and a chance for elaboration. It's easy to perceive the girls' and boys' fear that the therapists cannot keep their common thoughts in mind. It's a fear often disguised by their changing attitude between the showing and the hiding through some play on words, based on emotions, memories, thoughts, gestures defining their condition of being inside and outside the group. The group experience functions as a common container that is able to collect "aspects that are for each participant different from the individual identity, in a game of reflections and specular returns..." (De Polo, 1996). It still works, for the adolescents and also for the group leaders, even when they are outside the room, meeting one time a week, that is in their every-day environment.

The psychodrama experience gives the opportunity to play with true/not true things (true for the unconscious, not true for the consciousness) and in the group participants it the development of defensive functions. "Psychodrama is not theatre, at the most it's the representation of a private theatre: like a place in which social rules are suspended and everyone puts himself in the condition to re-discover his own desire" (Gerbaudo, 1988). At a symbolic level playing the psychodrama experience the transformation of psychic movements in images (Sacco, 1995).

Therapists are asked by participants to become the audience of "feats", stories, representations, communications, to become depositaries of a cultural groupal memory, to function as container and mirror of the most intense and less manageable emotions. The couple's energies are used in succeeding to comprehend the message and to supply a sense of the shared experience (Sacco, 1993).

Even in our co-therapy experience, on many occasions words seemed to fall into an abyss, overwhelmed by screams, by the racket or by the apparent disinterest while the group in time showed how precisely it caught the sense of the most successful comments, during the session apparently unheeded.

Clinical examples taken from the experience with groups of boys and girls at the beginning of adolescence led according to the psychoanalytical psychodrama model are presented like a couple's reflection. In this communication the attention is focalized on the stories' contents, in regard to aspects representing an observation view-point of the group's dynamics.

- the anxiety activated at the beginning of a group's constitution
- the groupal dynamic solicited by the generation gap
- the anxiety for the risk of the group's disgregation
- the relapse on the group of the leader couple's relationship with the institution

Anxiety activated at the beginning of a group's constitution \*

First session. Group of boys and girls of age 13-14 years old; 4 of them are present (3 girls – Clara, Silvia, Maria and 1 boy- Sergio), missing Manuela e Salvatore.

They enter and sit down one beside the other, they initially put the chairs in a circle, they seem assembled in order to face a new situation and the presence of the therapists' couple. After the consignments and our proposal to tell a story and play it together, a girl suggests as an immaginary place the beach where some teenagers make friends, another one suggests that the encounter between the boys and girls could be favoured by their parents' friendship. Their 'real parents' are in a group in a room on the lower floor, led according to a method borrowed from Balint's model, where they can face and discuss different aspects of their parental function.

The story: A girl, daughter of the beach manager and barman, spends her school holiday with her parents. At the bar she meets another girl whom she makes friends with. Then together they go dancing in a discotheque and they meet two other boys. They spend the summer together, they say goodbye to each other and at the end they exchange their addresses. The main character's father is described like a 'pain in the neck' who struggles for giving freedom to his daughter, whereas her mother tends to mediate between the daughter's desire, her husband's strictness and her control exigency.

The characters. 1st girl: Clara, mother, beach owner: woman therapist, barman father: man therapist, 2nd girl: Maria, 1st boy: Serena, 2nd boy: Sergio.

Enactment of the play: The initial encounter takes place on the beach: the two girls started representing a misunderstanding between them due to the fact of a mistake on the appointment place.

\* The clinical material, presented in this communication, has been registered and worked-through together with the co-therapist Piergiorgio Tagliani.

We had to stop the game and observe that this misunderstanding that they invent during the enactment, has not been 'told' in the initial phase. The rule, in fact, consists in 'playing' our parts with fidelity in regard to the sequences and the themes

of the story. The play's reprise doesn't improve their attitudes: Clara and Maria examine themselves a part from one another, blocked, stiffened, and they don't seem able to find any motivation for wanting to get to know each other and make friends.

My colleague portrays well the difficult father figure, repeating many times that he doesn't agree on his daughter's going out; in the discotheque two same age boys get close to the girls to meet them, but they seem a bit awkward.

Afterwards, in order to protect themselves from the hot day, Clara proposes to "move to the shade", they all move to the corner of the room in the play's scene, the furthest possible from us. We try to do our best, like as if we were a couple of 'real parents', while asking ourselves, like as if we were really worried, what our daughter was doing at the moment.

After an outing at the discotheque, the boys and girls form a circle creating an intimacy which we are clearly excluded from.

The boys and girls, in the fiction made possible by the played scene, are able to be themselves while in the new group dimension they felt inhibited: they introduce themselves to each other, communicating their ages, their school level, their interests: it's a fiction that reflects reality, that is the desire of knowing each other and facing one another.

Comment: the boys and girls, through the detachment made possible by the enactment, looked for a contact. The distance as 'parents' that are included in the game but in a separated space, offers them the opportunity to represent an intimate secret space where they are able to find a tolerable distance.

In the enactment it has been possible 'faking' to be parents with different roles, representing differentiated parental functions, like the ones of a tolerant and mediator mother and the one of a rigid and limiting father.

Groupal dynamic solicited from the generation gap

Session number 7, 4 members present. The proposed topic today is a school trip. The discussion on the trip's destination, the event's sequelae and the characters' choice takes a large part of the period. We arrange to play the trip's scene and the arrival at the hotel. The characters are assigned to and described accurately: there's the 'swotter' who during the trip runs through the vocabulary looking for some words, the 'fat one' who eats chips all the time, the 'hyper-socialized' who continuously gets up and disturbs his mates with his chats. The boys and girls would like to award us specific roles chosen by them, in this way acting against the rules known from all the group members. They think more of how us therapists 'should be' in the scene rather than of assigning themselves their roles; at the end the character of a teacher-guide remains vacant: the one more easy-going. The other character of the teacher is played by the narrator.

In the enactment, playing the role of the more permissive teacher, I feel that I have to help the 'fat' student played by the colleague who, according to the story, gets stuck in bus doors. The strict teacher, played by the narrator girl, gets angry and scolds him

without mercy. While my proposal to the others is the one of helping, the kids laugh at my embarrassed attempts of stimulating their solidarity.

Comment – Playing that role that day, I believed I could give an answer to the group need of a maternal function of cures and a taking care of the weakest part of the group. I could realize that my play produced, in the whole group, maniacal defenses (the kids' laugh) and, as mocking my attitude on the scene, their incapability of moving and helping the damaged person...

In this session we feel our parental function has weakened: in the scene the weak role has been impersonated by the colleague, since my request to the kids of a sort of 'alliance on the same terms' makes them react negatively. It seems as movement aimed at modifying the equilibrium balanced between different subgroups, the peers and the couple of adults. Today's message transmitted by the group seems to communicate:

“Who do you take us for? We surely don't need help!” In a developmental phase in which they would tend to not recognize an adult dimension, given the difference of age and experience they seem not be able to play with spontaneity.

Anxiety activated by the risk of the group's disgregation

The anxieties of the group's members about the capability of us therapists of a real containing can sometimes be linked to particular emotions. The real members' absence at the sessions or the fear of absences provoked by a member's delay, can be interpreted by everyone like as a sign of the expressive potential which lacks in the group. This could bring us towards desperation and towards a shared fear the group itself will disintegrate. This deals with a true anxiety for the survival and the fear the couple won't be able to contain their bad feelings.

10th session in the same group of 6 adolescents of 13/14 years; it takes place in the second week of December.

Manuela, the most driven girl of the group and as well as the most advanced with somatic characteristics and apparently mature and uninhibited attitudes, is absent. Today she doesn't want to participate and she is clinging outside the room waiting for her mother. At the session beginning we perceive everyone's embarrassment and unease and a shared emotion that we attribute to her absence or better to her refusal of joining to the group session. She showed everyone her refusal to participate with her presence “outside” the room. Claudia, who has always set herself as her rival, laughs and nibbles at her nails. Salvatore is strained, he explores his pockets, overturning them as if he is looking for a mysterious object he isn't able to find. I observe that my colleague seems to participate in a threatening sense which drifts through the group and maybe he doesn't perceive as intensively as I do the exigency to look for help. I feel myself driven to fill the emptiness with an intervention that seems useful in the initial phase of the session, but, after having discussed with him, I

recognize it like as my own defensive movement. I remind the group members we will only have one more session before Christmas. What I said was not only solicited by the embarrassing silence and by the sense of emptiness created by the absence of the leading girl, but also by my difficulty in facing a feeling of inadequacy. Thanks to the intervention of a narrator showing a unaware agreement to my implicit stimulus, the group activates itself and ‘spins a web’ that is in harmony with the pre-Christmas period.

The first story. Some teenagers sleep while Santa Claus and the ‘Befana’ try to enter the house through the chimney. After hearing strange noises through the night, they get up in order to catch them, but with no success. Santa Clause is a bit fat and the ‘Befana’, in order to help him, must push him up with a broomstick. The children’s parents get up later and go towards the Christmas tree where there are gifts, already unwrapped by the kids who, because of their curiosity, were kept from waiting until morning.

The second story made up in this session takes place on the mountains where a clumsy boy, while skiing, falls in a hole, where there are two frozen monsters. Nevertheless, after this fall, he is able to exit and tell the adventure to his friends; at the second fall the two monsters melting away, they come back to life and begin running after him while he runs away along a subterranean.

After this story and its enactment a deep silence hits the group, which seems express a sense of depression. At this point we feel the connection to Manuela’s absence: the group members look at the time on their watches and make them play various kinds of music. We don’t understand what is happening, because of the fact that now we are excluded from their rituals. This is confirmed when the two girls start talking to each other with a mute gesture language.

Comment. Reflecting back on the first story, it seems that the characters of Santa Claus and the ‘Befana’, take forth on a mysterious plan to which the others don’t have any access. The fact that they are not caught by the children, represents their need for their own separate space. This need is symbolized by the chimney where the children are not allowed to enter. We could recognize a very envious climate towards the expected dinner between the therapists without the patients. A feeling of jealousy can be seen in the children towards Santa Claus and the ‘Befana’ who will leave and give gifts to other children.

A metaphorical language that underlines both infantile needs (for i. the Christmas tree and packages under the tree) and adolescent ones, for the tendency to act on their own as if they were adults while opening their presents beforehand.

All of this occurs in a context of a protected childhood which reflects the loneliness of ancient times. In the second story the two frozen monsters staying close together in the caverns seem to represent a symbolic couple that must be devitalized or frozen in order to stop them from damaging anyone or anything.

We cross glances which tend to give a reciprocal sense of failure and inadequacy because we were not able to keep Manuela in the group. She was the girl who seemed

to express the most mature part of the group. We feel guilty and try to compensate our failure of not having kept the disintegrating attack in the group. In the representation of the scene we spend a lot of energy that allows us to forget during the period of the fiction the weight of the responsibility towards the survival of the group.

### **Interactive processes with Institutional settings**

Therapists are not only in contact with the group emotions as a whole but also with the interactive processes between the group and the institutional setting which it takes place in. The link with the institution is always present, indispensable as 'third' allowing the creative process. It's on the outside of the group and represents the work-team we use, and the structure that offers us a space, in times of supervision.

It's possible to live in a hard way the ambivalence of the institution, that for the exigency of events that are not controllable which tend to attack the group. This creates an obstacle for the sessions, not allowing the promised space.

In different centers, we have lived this frustrating experience. In particular, I remember this one.

Third session of the same group, 5 members present.

The encounters take place at a general practice: with a lot of effort and determination we have been able to obtain a room in order to out our psychodrama group. The administration's functionaries assured us that they would readapt that space each Wednesday for our work. At the third session we find the room not prepared, full of tables and computers desks on them and small tables for the health center patients who in the morning coped with a check-up. We are limited to a cramped space, obtained at the last moment thanks to our speedy handling of the situation. It's half of the space that we used during our previous sessions. We begin the session nervous, disappointed by the lack of respect in regard to our work, embarrassed by the attack from which we have not been able to protect the group. We are consumed by a feeling of inadequacy. After making the group members enter, at the minimum noise heard 'outside', from the adjacent office, we feel an imminent danger. My colleague springs up impetuously going to see what is going on, I observe him: he twists his brows, with his determined glance he wants to eliminate any administration person that he finds on his way. I feel that his rage can be transferred on all of us and I try to assume a reassuring and faithful attitude. I ask myself how I will be able to contain all this anxiety for the loss of the vital space for our psychodrama.

The story – The plot, that today narrates of a group of teenagers' trip to Paris, is changed many times by the narrator and the characters have to move continuously during their trip, at the arrival moment, at the staying in the city. The kids aren't able to choose 'the place' where the scene has to take place. The just constituted group seems fragmented and disintegrated. The group members seem to ask themselves: "have we left? (it's the second session from the beginning), are we on our way or have we already arrived at our destination?"

Even the characters' invention demands the group energies, with attempts of constructing roles fitted for us, actors waiting for the character we should interpret. It seems that the day's accident, on a phantasmatic level, evokes the difficulty of finding a definite space; in the group control exigencies activated themselves reducing our freedom of expression in the scene. Today the group doesn't seem able to take further surprises. We therapists felt a threat towards the session's course and, as a therapeutic couple, we had many difficulties to distance ourselves, during the scene, from the real worried couple. As operators of the host structure we were a couple claiming the right to act within an arranged space. We feel invested in the function of group defenders. In the scene's fiction, that at the end takes place in a train, we struggle to interpret happy-go-lucky characters, for the sense of danger that invades our mind.

## **Conclusion**

In the alternating of the group's activity and of the observations and interventions of the therapists, the adolescent can gain an apprehension from experience, that leads to a differentiation of maximum importance in it's developmental phase.

In our experiences of co-therapy of these groups, in some cases it has been possible to recognize the group anxieties and to activate our capability of containing them. Playing the psychodrama scenes with the teenagers we perceived their anxieties and, in some cases, we interpreted them, in connection with the characters and the different modalities of representation in the scene. It has been a gradual research and elaboration that allowed us to grow in the sharing of the couple experience, both the couple of therapists and the entire group.

The group members, in a variable level between one adolescent and the other, were helped to enter in contact with their psychic reality; particularly to extend the knowledge of themselves and of their relationships.

The group has functioned by working to compensate for the lack of emotional experiences in the adolescent's life. The participants were missing significant social experiences, and so the group worked as a source of containment for unease and despair, as well as from the knowledge of trying to escape from their feelings. Emotions like hostility, jealousy, envy and avidity in some cases received some kind of mental configuration. As the end arrived we tried to undertake an elaborating work of the most persecutory mourning aspects, accompanied by the gradual recognition of loss and of the emerging of more depressive emotions of some members.

Some members of the group have managed to reach the recognition of the end the treatment which served as a meaningful emotional experience. This in itself a piece of emotional growth and could be of use as a secure base in order to build a further interiorization of their developmental experiences.

As a therapeutic couple, in which the asymmetric relationship in the sense of formation sense doesn't exist anymore, we could now start with a new work project which implies a larger work space and emotional elaboration. Being more capable

today in containing anxiety, that led us in the past to choose the co-therapy model, we could separately face the adventure of a solitary leadership.

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