

From the “no-place” to the myth of the “common-us”: the experience of a basis group (health and not health providers, patients) in a severe pathologies rehabilitation centre as admittance in a story of a “in common”

Francesco Pomelli

Key-words: social dreaming, team work, group therapy

This experience begins in a rehabilitation centre located in a large north-italian town, which includes 13 patients with severe psychotic pathologies. This centre is not a rehabilitative structure but a “common flat: so both providers and patients keep cleaned and ordered the flat, having their eventual rehabilitative activities outside. There are 10 educators, a cook, 2 conscientious objectors (students of the University) beside myself, as psychiatrist and psychoterapist, and also a post-graduated Psychiatric student.

First I will present a synthesis of its birth and later I will introduce you to a group session.

As I arrived, more than one year and a half ago, I felt with distress:

- 1- the sensation of being in a “seaport”, due to the continuous turning of health providers and patients: too many open doors, leading to an unembracing feeling of coldness. The educators seemed don't to have a their own subjectivity, as they depended by the psychiatrists of the health: only the pedagogic-educational code prevailed, with a strong accent on rules;
- 2- the uneasiness of entering in contact with the health providers, due to the bad past expericence with the former psychiatrist;
- 3- the need of giving more importance to the clinic tought of the single patient, to the contribution of the non-psychiatric operator (i.e. the cook), as they were always living there and furthermore involving patients' parents. Team meetings looked as a continuous and quarreling labour disputes: the individual suffering of the single educatori seemed what Kaes calls an istitutional disease (1). What the team and I tried to imagine about remedies were: first of all a group for parents, then a clinical deeping of the team meetings, a more continuous supervision with a external pscologist and the chaging of the morning meeting among providers and patients in a common breakfast and later a new post-graduated student admittance.

In order to represent this situation I thought about the “no-place” introduced by Marc Augé (2) and later also by Marco Sarno (3), intending a anonymous busy transit

place, as stations or airports, where people do not stop. A place where historical elements do not exist, although the passage of subjects with different lives and stories. Also in this centre there were no important subjective or common: some health providers changed job domicile, some patients were transferred, the psychiatrist gone, and parents did not attend the centre. I gaze that many things happened without being pointed out or spoken as these facts had not a place in which they could get visible or readable in a common story. There was an atmosphere of unknowness, which sounded very strange to myself as the close common.

The intermediate group

I structured an intermediate group, in which everybody could speak and participate freely, even the cook, the conscientious objectors and the accountant (when in).

I wish to say that I never thought about this group as substitute of a therapeutic group or as a psychotic treatment. Especially in British literature, similar groups are described (4), based on the involvement of all the members of the rehabilitation centre.

The group takes place once a week, for less than 2 hours, composed usually by 22 persons: the beginning was prepared during and thanks to the the team meetings wishing to give a place in which thoughts could be expressed.

The providers gave this moment the name of the “us-place”: this name grew fast.

The participation of the not healthy providers is joined to their intermediate position, between qualified providers and patients, often out from equipe decisional moments. These lived in places-spaces – called storeroom of the rehabilitation centres which – as described by Roussillon, seem to be, in institutions, a regulation system, as a somatic interstitium (5).

Thinking about the actual myth of technology and profit management of the personnel, a cook would not be considered as part of the specialized team: this experience turns to give importance to whom, working a therapeutic centre, give their own proper contributions to a common goal.

Session

I present now one of the session, two months after its beginning.

11 patients, 8 operators, one law student (conscientious objector), the cook and myself (Gianni, a patients, comes and goes continuously) .

Sandro: (to the cook) ... "So Maria, do not treat me so badly furthermore; you have always something on me."

Maria answers, trying to justify, referring to Sandro: "He always comes near the saucepan in order to steel food for everybody. It is not possible to go further on."

Pietro (ed): "We want to speak about this series of thefts, from food till the facts of the last night, don't we?"

Guido: "Ok, there was a night meeting ... " (the patient refers to a midnight counter-meeting, in which 3 patients would steel the cash.)

Rinaldo: "What ..."

Guido: "Davide, Lorenzo and I met: as many meetings now take place, we organized another one". (feeling of disbelief)

Fabrizio (ed): "A secret meeting, a counter-meeting?"

Guido: "Yes, we met in order to steel the cash ... now I can tell everything ... I tell everything."

Davide: "Speak about you, I feel no guilty."

Lorenzo: "I wouldn't ..."

Davide: "... and now no guilties ... it is always my fault! Shits: that's what you are."

Guido: "I was scared because of Davide's friends."

Sara (Ed): "We know his friends: they are skinheads, good friends you have got, ... this helps you ..."

Davide: "What about my friends now?, they are good friends... they do not love juwes and sickes ... that's all. I am going, I do not want to stay, I do not feel."

Myself: "If you could be back later ... if you want of course ..."

Guido: "I did not want to do it but Davide pushed me, we have few money as we have no jobs. Yesterday night I came down; in the past days we took the key of the room (in which the cash is located) and also the fridge key."

Pietro (Ed): "Everyday day we are speaking about trust ... and then ... what happens ..."

Guido: "Davide told me to go as he would protect me but a panic attack hurted, just close to the room; anxiety: I did not know who I was, so I called for help and the provider arrived I told him all and took the medicins and I grew ."

Pietro (Ed): " I am disappointed at you, tha cash contains our money."

Myself: "I think that it is useful to discuss about something concerning us, as this problem of theft: it seems related to the night group; a group without the doctor and the educators, maybe as these present meetings create fright".

Rinaldo: "That's right: in jail there are not educators or doctors; maybe the jail is better ... no freedon but it is better ..."

Pietro 2 (ed): "Would you like to be as in a jail?"

Guido: "I dislike, but what am I doing here? Okay, it is not a jail, there are no punishments but if we speak which meaning words have?"

Lorenzo, in a soft tone: “Words are the same, but this is a therapy. Words can condemn you or not ... listen, my mother is German and forced me to speak German with her while I would like to speak Italian; German is cold.”

Sandro: “Words can hurt: in my family there were no words. My father was a veterinarian and a Latin lover, he said me to do whatever I wanted while at school the nun obliged me to do a cube, or ... you will have an injection ... then my mother was strict and later got ill and then my story, which I told to the gone educator (Sandro refers to his attempted suicide: his mother proposed to fall together and he made it, breaking his bones, while the mother did not do it). It is not right to be as that nun or as psychiatrists who says that if you do not take your medicines, you will be admitted at the hospital. There were, guess, a family of doctors who met every Friday to discuss, parents and children to speak about their problems.”

Franco: “I speak Italian with my family but I would like to speak my dialect.”

Guido: “me too ... in Milan I feel bad, even if here I don't know if it is Milan or Rome: it is not a jail, nor the doss house ... I feel awkward... I often go away because I need more heart ...”

Guido keeps on: “In Milan words do not have value, people are on a hurry; in Rome it is different, people are more kind. You know what happened in my town, don't you? I stole ... but there it was different: once I stole with three friends of mine. I was the palo; to think about it I feel scared ... then I came through, nobody was in, we took 600,000 liras. Then I rode my bicycle till home and the policemen stopped me and I did confess. I gave back the money and made peace with that poor and good family ... I stole as my father was always drunk and there was no money at all; my mother worked and I had to help her: I was desperate ... My mother died and my father, more and more drunk, fired the flat! I escaped to Milan, in order to find good luck: I slept at the doss house, then in other places but no more than 2 months.”

Rinaldo: “I was never naughty but however I was in jail.”

Gianni (ed): “Sometimes desperation brings to jail ... not only when naughty.”

Rinaldo: “When I was a child, at home there was no a family; I cannot complain, I lived with my uncle in Emilia and my parents were in Milan to work.”

Gianni (Ed): “It looks awful ... even Comelli, with a missing or drunk father or mother, would be a patient, wouldn't he? (gazing at me)

Myself: “My life would be different, we would not be us, our actual us, it would be another us, maybe with other persons. Surely I would have suffered.”

Sandro: “My father did not drink but he hazarded me without teaching ...”

Anna: “Perhaps he judged you if you were not able ...” (Sandro subscribes)

Pietro 2 (ed): “My father drank; he expected good things from me, I did not realize he hurted me, I could not understand his frailties, on the contrary now I will appreciate him, I miss him.”

Guido: “I drink, not so much, but I drink. I am alone: I go out and drink.”

Rinaldo: “Drinking in disco is common: I go to dance for women: in the world there are people who fuck and those who don't fuck . I miss a woman; once I went to dance

to meet women, soon I tried to meet them, I did not waste my time as women immediately decide if they want or not.”

Renata: “This is a male point of view: I go to dance and fun.”

Guido: “I do not manage with women, but I am looking for feeling and not for sex.”

Rinaldo: “A healthy build ... according to me, you drink or you steal because you miss a woman.”

Paola: “What silly male chats ... I agree with Barbara, here women too are present.”

Franco: “Drinking is due to desperation.”

Myself: “Someone says that women, with which make love, run out and somebody else was speaking about feeling.”

Guido: “That’s it: I miss affection; not sex.”

Angelo: “I dreamed: a dream I used to have when I was a child: I was very small with a friend of mine upon small clouds, in paradise: there was a ramp, leading to earth, I could not slip, I stayed above.”

Lorenzo: “I go for prostitute; here there is one, but later it is worst: maybe it is affection that misses; you can practise sex but then it is like falling in a bottomless pit ... “

Sandro: “Ah, me too, I had a dream: I was with Guido, Patrizia, Lorenzo and Angelo smoking cigarettes: we blew strongly the smoke in a room, too much, but luckily there were some tubes which linked the other rooms, as in a spaceship, but there were also the handles we have (anti panic doors). From our blowing a smoky cloud grew passing through the rooms and shaping: I remember a triangle; in another room it shaped as a circle, as in a kaleidoscope, with brilliant colours.”

Sara (Ed): “This suggests to me a sensation of warm feeling, as in smoke pubs: it is a thing that everybody breaths.”

Myself: “There is something common that takes shape, but there are many shapes for these common smoke: some of these shapes seem to give relief: the family which was met, the wish that fathers teach to children how to do, as being together should need a shape, in order to let children be born and slip from clouds to earth.”

Sandro: “Myself, for instance, I feel better here than in my family.”

Franco: “Being together, as in family there is no good care.”

Guido: “Listen, it is incredible, never happened to me: I never stayed such a long time in the same place.”

Rinaldo: “I don’t believe at all.”

Franco: “Always the same: you cynic; on the contrary I would like to go out all together.”

Renata: “I dance latino-american dances but I would that Pietro could teach me.”

NOTES

I thought to begin this group because I found problems which were linked not to the absence of stories or common facts but to the absence of visibility (of these

problems). According to Bruni (6), the problem was not a lack of history among people who do not know, but a situation where people is out from a common history , who proceeded in any case.

A low feeling of being together was present: experiences were not synchronic and not contemporary , which led to a sense of abandon , expressed in long polemical meetings, missing a clinical thought on single subjects and with feeling of being persecuted.

We know by Corrao (7) that to follow any single individual history during a group, decreases the attention for the in-common: this last concept defines an intermediate and stable relation between things and ideas and between things and people.

This concept seems to open the relation to the polisemic multiplicity, considered as a stable process.

Furthermore, close to the real group, a mass of missing groups exists (8) (i.e. families and social groups of patients).

, ma come il gruppo-comunità, ovvero come un contenitore non dei soli pazienti, ma dell' intera comunità. In altre parole uno strumento rilevativo dei diversi aspetti che attraversano il campo istituzionale (9).

In this experience, the missing group was that of the group of people living in the rehabilitation centre, at least in the sense of a lack of a so called, in bionian meaning, work group: that's why I thought to begin this intermediate group, not as a group composed by patients, but as a community-group, that holds not only patients , but the whole community. A measuring instrument of the different aspects which cross the institutional field (9).

So the object of this group is the interest into the concept of an "institutional us", among all the people related to the rehabilitation centre, instead of being the group of patients in its therapeutic path. So transformations and all facts of this intermediate group have value not only for the patients but for all of us.

According to Bleger, in every institutional experience the subject puts non verbal, mute aspects, not linked to words and judgments: he treats this phenomenon comparing it with the queue at the bus stop: these people have something in common (10).

They can refer to a common and collective sharing, trusting to the group as a whole which is able to stay in those shape called queue: if they would not be able, they could act individually, in a chaotic way.

In a train, passengers of a coach express an high index of a collective deposit : for example , going down of the train, they trust to the abilities of the group to organize itself. These examples refers to anonymous deposits in transitory groups: in other words beside individuals , there is a trust to the group , without the use of representational or developed functions.

My job has been to close the no-place, a place of crossing, leading it to a place which produces an history of experience.

Il problema che ha richiamato la mia attenzione è su quanto di ciò che è un deposito collettivo di base, venga vissuto o rappresentato nei suoi termini storici , come un romanzo vivente.

We can argue that a common experience can exist in a train journey from Milan to Rome: in the coach can happen a number of facts . At ten o' clock a.m. (11) Proust asked to his friends to tell him their former morning facts: at the beginning they told shortly but then the writer demanded more, about their feelings, thoughts ... The problem who claimed my attention is if a collective anonymous basic deposit can be experienced, lived, or represented in its historical terms, as a living novel.

Differently to the therapeutic group, which works upon people living disagio of the specilizeed structure; the intermediate group would give a visibility to sincretic aspects, not yet represented of the whole institutional group. This process concerns both the caring and the cared subjects. For instance, it is possible that in an intermediate group the presence of the missing of one people can be lived like a possibly useful element for the gamma (and alfa) function of the group. This kind of group can make a snapshot or give a visible shape of a deposit which risks to stay anonymous and not subjected to the attività of the gamma (alfa) function.

Bybliography

R. Kaes et al., L' Istituzione e le Istituzioni, Borla ed., Roma 1991

M. Augé , Nonluoghi, Eleuthera ed.,1993

M. Sarno, Conferenza ABA Milano del 11/4/02

R.D. Hinshelwood, Cosa accade nei gruppi - L'individuo nella comunità, Raffaello Cortina ed., Milano 1989

R. Roussillon, "Spazi e Pratiche istituzionali. Il ripostiglio e l'interstizio", in: L'istituzione e le Istituzioni, Borla ed., Roma 1991

A. Bruni, Seminari Clinici dell'Istituto Italiano Psicoanalisi di Gruppo - Anno 1998/99

F. Corrao, Orme - vol. secondo - Ti koinon: per una metafora generale del gruppo a funzione analitica (1955b) - Raffaello Cortina ed., Milano 1998.

R. Romano,

A. Correale, Il Campo Istituzionale, Borla ed., Roma 1991

J. Bleger, "Il gruppo come istituzione e il gruppo nelle istituzioni", in: L'istituzione e le Istituzioni, Borla ed. Roma 1991

A. De Bottom, Come Proust può cambiarvi la vita, Guanda ed. 1997

Francesco Comelli

Psychiatrist, (graduated 1984, board certified psychiatry 1988 University of Milano, Psychoanalyst, associate member Società Psicoanalitica Italiana (SPI) and IPA

Funzione Gamma, scientific online magazine University "Sapienza" of Rome, registered with the Court Rome Civil (n. 426 of 28/10/2004)– www.funzionegamma.it

(International Psychoanalytic Association), didactic functions in Italian Institute Group Psychoanalysis (IIPG), work as individual and group psychoanalyst , private and institutional settings. He worked in Psychiatric Hospitals and communities. He is at the present Scientific Director of ABA (Associazione Studio e Ricerca Anoressia e Bulimia) , Professor of Ethnopsychopathology in University “Carlo Bo” of Urbino and of Group dynamics in Specialization School of Clinical Psychology in Medicine Faculty , University of Milano.