

Psychoanalytic family therapies

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Abstract

This paper is an introduction to the psychoanalytic family therapies, in a period when the expression family therapy is mostly synonymous of systemic therapy. Departing from the history of the psychoanalytic work with the couples and the family, the most important "organizers" of the family psychic life appear to be the "phantasmatic resonance", the "family body" and "the consort's choice." The picture, that describes the psychoanalytic process of the family group, let emerge the theoretical-clinic forms in the field of the couple and the family and it allows to reflect on the indications of the typology of psychic care.

Keywords: psychoanalytic family therapy, family group, group, family myth, group transference.

History

If systemic family therapies had already been broadly practiced since a long time ago in Europe and in North America, the analytical family therapies (T.F.P.) made their first apparition in France and in Italy around the 1975.

Some students of Pichon Rivière (Berenstein and Puget) began therefore to work in South America in a psychoanalytic way with some couples. In France, some psychoanalytic papers were interested in the family (Laforgue and Leuba "the névrose familiale" in 1936 and Lacan and "the family complexes" in 1938, for instance), but, as it seems evident, the theoretical prerequisites of the group psychic functioning were so lacking that a real practice of the family psychoanalysis was not possible: the '70s allowed to produce some concepts about the group (Bion, Anzieu, Missernard, Kaës) with the clinical searches about the couple and the family clinic.

In the years from 1975 to 1985 it became evident that the individual psychoanalysis of some children, as that of some serious personality disorders, were rooted in psychic strengths that resulted insuperable if the family and the conjugal couple were not considered and, eventually, the social group as well. In the '70s, André Ruffiot in Grenoble, practised family therapies: he did not set the accent on the interactions anymore, as in the systemic therapies: on the contrary, he focused on the intra and the inter-psychic movements: his theory was clearly psychoanalytic (with reference to the transfer and the phantasmatic area drew by R. Kaës and D. Anzieu).

J.B. Pontalis as well described in 1968 a "group object." Caillot and Decherf have taken back the principles of "group objects" in the form of "couple object" and of "family object." Object, as in the "object relationship", means that family and couple are objects of particular investments both at conscious and unconscious level.

In the '80s the Apsygée (Association for the psychoanalysis of group) operates the grouping of people and theories that will create the analytical picture for the couple and the family and it starts to describe the objectives, the functioning and the limits of

the psychoanalytic work with the group. These jobs are published in "Group" magazine.

Many authors, that have the family and the couple as object of study, contributed to this collective work: P.C. Racamier and D. Anzieu, but also J.G. Lemaire, C. Pigott, A. Eiguer, S. Tisson, A. Carel, E. Granjeon, D. Houzel and G. Catoire, etc. This operation brought, in 2004, to the creation of the International association of Psychoanalysis of the Couple and the Family on initiative of A. Eiguer.

Definition of the fields and the general organizers

Freud in "Psychoanalysis of the masses and analysis of the self" (1921) had underlined that "the perceived signs of an affective state are such to automatically arouse the same affectivity in he who perceives them."

The description of the "phantasmatic resonance" of Ezriel (1950) is found as well in the family and in the couple. D. Anzieu (1975), in his work with the group, describes the growing of an "imaginary of group" and illustrates its organization. This term "group imaginary" is taken back by R. Kaës that elaborates the idea of a "family psychic apparatus of group" which is different from the individual psychic apparatus described by Freud, although the last one is contained and articulated with it. The unconscious becomes polytopic, it crosses both the individual and the group that contains him. In this way the family psychoanalysis unbalances the monistic and autonomous conception of the individual psyche.

The imaginary productions of the family group are not only exchanges of phantasmatic areas between members of a same family: they actually produce group theories, explanatory of the family phenomena as the birth, the castration, the sexual differentiation, the primitive scene that Freud defines "the native ghosts", but it also concerns theories that explain the small events of the daily life, a spot of blush, an accident, an illness. These theories are similar to the sexual ones of a child and they take the name of "family myths" among the family group. The family myths draw their material from the stories and from the social myths, that as well come from more ancient rites (which are expressions of an existing conflict among a desire and a belief that prevents it). These imaginary productions are organized in an "imagoical" way. The imaginary is a representation of the explanatory scenery and the imago is a representation of the person endowed with particular powers.

This possibility of letting the imaginary (scene) grow, will be more diversified between the couple and the family, depending on the distance from the conscience and from the actual reality: the couple is the place of the real practice of the adult sexuality while the family, which includes the couple, answers to the fundamental needs of the individuals: the need to be dressed, to be washed, to be fed, the protection of the weaker ones, the very intense affective exchanges.

At this regard, the family has the function of transmitting the knowledge of the "how to do and how to be" of the preceding generations.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the family has as well the function of containing and facilitating the psychic development of the individuals. Particularly, its structure and its imaginary operations are the matrix of the construction of the frontiers, beginning from the distinction among the self and the not-self, among the inside and the outside, between the sexualized and the not sexualized (the tenderness and the authority, for instance), up to the construction of the personal shells, of the couple and of the family group. Without these frontiers, it results impossible to sustain the creation and the development of the "Apparatus to Think the Thoughts" in the new-born (Bion) through the transformation of the feelings, affections and emotions in thoughts (normal projective identification).

Thus, for the child the incorporation of the various ways of thoughts, behaviour and language, with the particular coloration of that particular family, of its culture, modified on the base of the affective orientations in the family itself, will be the base to the construction of the personal identity of the individuals and the "feeling of affiliation" to the family.

The sharing of a common space, since the principle of one's own life, between the members of a same family, and the characteristics of this common space, force the members to face some specific exchanges at different levels, that result marked by the pre-existing structures in the psyche of their parents. The concrete aspects of this space, that realizes the habitat "become the support of the internal representations that preside to the construction of the family cohesion and the maintenance of its coherence" (Eiguer, 1990). This family habitat will be the container of the family group and its internal representations. These representations will be the object of the affective investments that concern this habitat, they will contribute to build the family psychic shell and they will compete to the representations of a "family body of group." ("the family is an individual without body" Anzieu said).

This way, the qualities of the pre-existing family structures in the psyche of the parents will be combined, confused or even opposed in the parent's couple, and they will contribute to the transmission of these same structures. These pre-existing structural qualities in the parents concern in particular the integration of the fundamental prohibitions, as that to kill and the one regarding the incest. It returns in mind the Freudian formula: the Super-Ego of the child is built on the model of the received education and through the identification with the Super-Ego of the parents.

Couple or family?

This pre-existing psyche of the future parents gives to the "the consort's choice", as it is described by Freud, a considerable importance. R. Kaës and E. Granjeons add inside this trial, the creation of "denial" pacts in the bond of alliance. These unconscious pacts among consorts try to do not take into account certain concrete or imaginary realities. When this "denial" pact, for different reasons (aleatory meetings with events of the social or family life: illness, births, new educational needs.) gets broken, they can put in danger the bond of alliance and bring them to a crisis or even

to a breakup. It must be underlined that the alliance bond is chosen, while the parent-child bond is a passive one that determines an assigned place. In the moment when these unconscious pacts are unconsciously transmitted or projected with strength in the child, their content become unknown and unknowable from the following generation. We can speak, in such a case, of the constitution of a crypt (phenomenon described by N. Abraham and M. Torock).

Therefore, even if the psychoanalytic studies of couple and family give place to separate developments and, consequently, to different indications, they still are particularly related. The consorts, if they are lovers, are not less children of their parents. La Tour underlines "that the conjugal relationship is built through the mourning of ancient objects. The prize of the pleasure related to the sexual satisfaction makes possible the elaboration or the re-elaboration of an unresolved mourning " (2004).

Through this perspective, the couple within the family is conceived as the place where the family is subscribed inside the generational order, where the sexual difference is recognized or confirmed, in which the exercise of the sexuality is concretely manifested, although in a hidden way theoretically, and in which the fundamental prohibitions are transmitted, but at the same time this is the place of transformation of inheritances and creativeness.

In the clinic, the problem of the indication is often set among the T.F.P. and the Therapy of Couple and the choice criterions appear complex. It is possible to clarify them through the recovery that Blassel (2003) has made of some relationships between the conjugal couple and the parenthood: he has distinguished families in which these functions are diversified and complementary (oedipal type), and families where these are trapped (neurotic type or in general where the parenthood absorbs the conjugal aspect). In the third typology, these bonds are indiscriminate (incestuous family) and in the fourth grade, the bonds are antagonists (a function excludes the other). There is another way to think about the couple and the family proposed by D. Houzel and G. Catoire (1994) in the form of three questions: who brings the psychic suffering, where the conflict is found, and with whom can we settle the job's alliance?

This way, the family group is set to the meeting point between the alliance and the parenthood, between the reality and the imaginations. In the intersection between the "in progress of writing" history and of that of the families of founder members, between the individual psyche and the family psyche.

The picture, the posture and the trial

In this way, provided with some theories and concepts, we can now proceed toward the clinical practice: it is about one or more psychoanalysts, formed and prepared about this kind of meeting, receiving, in a concrete setting, the members of a family that have expressed the question or that, at least, have manifested an accord about it. It often happens that not all of the members are interested or requesting from the first

meeting: the suffering or the conflict it is not equally divided and we can often observe "scapegoats" phenomena. This is the way in which the family ambivalence is manifested.

The job has the main purpose of reducing the suffering of the family. It is structured by some simple rules that have the function to extend toward the most elevated levels of symbolisation, through naming the groupal and individual experiences. With some young children it is often useful to allow the communication through sketches, writing or games. We cannot think that each of the members says everything, as in an individual therapy, but just that anybody could say what it is important to his eyes, regarding the family. The vis-à-vis and circular disposition allows a visual contact and a visual listening both from part of the therapists and of the family members, that shows the gestural forms of communication, them being in accord with the oral expression or not. Sometimes it becomes necessary to add to the rule of free association a prohibition to touch, and to distribute the word so that everybody can take part in the process. One of the first functions of the therapists regard the safeguard of the access to the word, sometimes even enunciating the rule of the prohibition of using what has been said in a session by a member of the family against another, even if it happened outside from the therapeutic space. In the same way it is often asked to repeat what has been said outside about the sessions and the therapist and, mostly, the therapists cannot meet any of the member of the family out the sessions.

To ensure that the whole family takes part to the process, it is necessary that at least two generations are present (not necessary for the couples) and, if it is possible, all the people that live under the same roof (in particular way in the cases of reconstructed families). But it frequently happens that in the session there are people of a same family that do not live together anymore.

Usually, the number of interested people does not allow to realize a bi-weekly frequency; the rhythm is often of one session per week, sometimes less.

The temporal and formal picture is more often co-created than imposed during the preliminary interviews with its temporal, spatial and economic formalities. Therefore, a certain adaptability of the picture to the needs and to the concrete possibilities of the family must be the rule, but it does not concern only the formal adaptation, it must testify the reached accord regarding the specific needs of every family. The organization that comes from it takes then the value of "speaking action" (form of acted interpretation that is used when the word is disqualified). This attention to the picture and its construction is very more necessary when the difficulties of the family concern its same structure. In this case, there is no investment on the verbal bargaining (it is called "attack of the picture"). It is more important what the therapists do or the way they are than what they say.

Anyway, in the aim of developing the analytic process, it is essential that the therapists remain in a very specific posture, which keeps in mind the group transference, the countertransference and inter transference of the therapists.

The transference of the family group is expressed on the picture, the therapists, the therapeutic group and the family-therapist group.

This posture starts with being sensitive to the different distribution of the enunciated among the discourse, the behaviour and the emergency of the affections. The vis-à-vis position allows to individualize the discordances, the ambivalences and to stay in touch with the psychic reality of the family.

In addition, the therapists are sensitive to the "job of the negative", which means that what has been produced in the session (creation) it is not more important of what has been excluded (denied or destroyed).

The attention to the family transference of group is primordial and it should not be confined in listening the individual transference (seduction from one of the members of the family for instance). What is listened is the primary process of group, the phantasmatic resonance with its specific modalities that represent the movements (displacements) and the condensations: we listen to the family as we listen to a dream. Nevertheless, in addition, it is necessary to listen to every member specific bond with the group object (fusion desire with the group object, separative desire, anguish of loss, etc.). Because of the importance of the analogical communications, is necessary to listen a lot with the eyes.

The therapists must be able of a presence with a particular temporality: most of the time, the therapists support or stimulate the thoughts of the participants and the thoughts that subsequently arrive clarify what is happened during the session. The session time is often divided among the childish life of the subjects, the mythical prehistory of the family, the infancy of the family that is often still actual, and the future, considered as arrived yet. For instance, the obsessive fear of a future accident can be the expression of a catastrophic divorce happened in the preceding generation. The job on the inter-transference (a mix of thoughts, emotions and experiences of the therapists between each other) is of such an importance that this explosion can distribute the elements in a very different way in the mind of the therapists: at its peak, the therapists do not receive the same family.

It is possible to see that the specific posture of the family therapists is not pre-acquired, and it is not a formality, on the contrary it resides on the constant and assiduous job of avoiding three principal barriers: to analyse a member of the family in front of the others, to agree with the family negation and to consider as "natural" an highly defensive phenomena, and finally, to obstruct the historizing job of the session.

Family transferences of group and indications

At the beginnings of the family therapy, the treated families were those of psychotic persons. Since then, the indications are extended out to every sort of pathology except for neurotic pathologies: these kind of pathologies need to treat the problems concerning the differentiation of the people, the construction of their psychic shells, but also the difficulties of constructing the abilities of thinking and the symbolizing,

the behavioural and interactive troubles of the perverse relationships as the psychosomatic troubles. In any case, the narcissism of the people is seriously shaky, and the family transference of group involves a paradoxicality that can be more or less deleterious and can arouse a paradoxical countertransference.

Instead, it is not paradoxical treating the problems of individualization-separation in the family therapy, since the psychic individualization itself is treated, not the behavioural demonstrations of independence, that are rather seen as "losses" in facing the family intra-relationships.

The indications of the T. F. P. do not have the function of psychiatric diagnosis in comparison to the value they have for the single individual. They mostly regard the ideas about the psychic functioning of the couple or of the family and the types of transference that can be tolerable: for example, the troubles concerning the individual or family limits (impossibility of constructions of the psychic shells, difficulty to individualize himself and to be separated, the impossibility to live together, or both in the meantime), draw a paradoxical transference job.

Nowadays, different searches seem to converge toward the verification of the possible absence of psychic traces in the extreme traumatic situations. Just think about the blind pulsion (Widlocher, 1984), the not-transformable object (Kaës, 1993), the brutal transmission (Ciccone, 1999). The matter of the psychic traces left by a trauma remains unsolved, but this approach allows to show that behind the tendencies emerged by the acting, very serious symbolization troubles are often hidden.

Another point of view consists in considering the assignment of the places according to the generations and the related troubles, tied up to serious confusions regarding the affectivity and the sexuality: it can be about the incest and, mostly, its equivalents that are very difficult to individualize (P. C. Racamier (2003) has brought a considerable theoretical-clinical development showing that the damages occasioned by the incestuous traumas could exist out from the same existence of the concrete bodily manoeuvres and he has named this field of incest without incest, "the incestual". It has equally shown some real manoeuvres and manipulations among the members of the family that had the value of incest and that remained out of the psychic world: he has defined this field "topical interactive"). These kind of operation infiltrates the relationship of the therapeutic couple and draw a "incestual.transference".

We could finally face the matter through the expedient of the communication between the contents and the containers of the thought in the family (matter of the secrets in family and of the limits among the right to the secret and the obligation of transparency) and of the transmission of the inheritances, (trans-generational transmission, crypts, etc.). These problems often draw an "enigmatic" transference in the therapeutic work.

Clearly, all these transference forms can emerge in the same therapy, in different moments in which the one or the other can prevail. The fact that the individual psychic operation of the majority of the members of a family is neurotic doesn't

prevent in any way that the family transference of group is of anti-oedipal kind, which is far away from the canons of neurotic operation.

Conclusions

The psychoanalytic family therapies are a demanding tool in the formation and in the realization, nevertheless they allow the psychic growth of the family, the people's retraining, the restoration of their lost narcissisms and the value of the verbal exchange as a way toward the symbolization. These trials necessarily meet on their run every sort of mourning. Racamier (2003) wrote that every avoided psychic job had ineluctably put to load of the others and that inside this trial, the sufferings of the daily life into non elaborate sufferings were turned for the descendants or for the social environment.

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