

“I have a recurring dream...”

Experiencing or imagining? Reclusion, proto-depression, peer group

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Abstract

Adolescence is considered a specific stage of human beings, well distinct from childhood and adulthood. Not a middle way, but a condition in itself, with specific characteristics, anguishes, and defense modalities. After a brief introduction on the hypothesis developed by psychoanalyst Armando B. Ferrari in *The Eclipse of the Body*, who considers the body as a unique object of the mind, which is produced by the body itself, Adolescence is described as one of the first moments in which the body emerges from the eclipse. Short clinical vignettes show anxieties and defenses, and focus on the use made at this age of resources such as literature, poetry, movies, the imaginary world, social networks, and the peer group. Special attention is paid to depressive tendencies that can manifest themselves at this delicate stage, and are defined as Proto-depression. In conclusion, technical aspects specific to this age are described.

Key words: adolescence, eclipse of the body, onefold and twofold, do to know, delusion/disappointment, seclusion, proto-depression, social networks, peer group

“I have a recurring dream: a dazzling light hits my eyes... I know that there’s the rest of the dream around me and I would like to open my eyes... but I can’t... I can half-close but not open them... I can’t distinguish the details until I wake up and realize that it was a dream, a nightmare... I wake up full of distress. This dreamlike picture emerged during the analytic work of a twelve-year-old girl expresses the relationship between corporeality and psyche at the dawn of adolescence: the emergence of the corporeal dimension from the condition that in the hypothesis of Concrete Original Object (C.O.O. Ferrari 1992) is defined as the *eclipse of the body*.

The preadolescent/adolescent is unprepared because he is inexperienced in dealing with the significant amount of intense and unknown sensations and perceptions originating from his body and dazzling his mind, like an intense and sudden light hitting an eye.

The hypothesis of C.O.O.: the first challenge

The clinical and theoretical assumption to which I am referring is contained in the psychoanalytic thought that, from Freud to Klein and Bion, focuses on the corporeal dimension in relation to the birth of thought, which Armando B. Ferrari formulated as a result of his collaboration with W. R. Bion (1), and developed through a rigorous theoretical and clinical research to which he has devoted his entire life.

Indeed, from 1973 to 1976, the year in which he returned to Italy, he had an intense and significant collaboration with Wilfred R. Bion, whom he called his “teacher”,

showing his deep respect for him. His teachers could also be considered the years he spent fighting, his political imprisonment, the long period among Indian tribes, and the meeting and collaboration with Bion that helped him shape the ideas that were growing inside him. In this regard, an article published in the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Journal in 1975, entitled “Contribuição ao estudo de uma função: a função beta”/ “Contribution to the study of a function: the Beta function,” is particularly significant. In this article, by referring to Bion, who identified the existence of an alpha function able to filter and process beta elements from the corporeal dimension, Ferrari assumes the presence of a beta function. This function, located on the border between corporeity and psychism, between the animality always present in the human being and the man intended as a social being, would transform feelings, perceptions and emotions coming from corporeity into *Beta Elements* and then activate the *Alfa Function*. A *Beta function* preceding the *Alpha Function* and intended to activate it. In his hypothesis, in cases in which the *Beta Function* fails to reach its purpose, the sensations not transformed into Beta Elements continue to operate in the corporeal dimension, thus generating somatic phenomena, which are incomprehensible to the person that hosts them. In the article, he claims to have submitted the matter to Bion, who would not have refuted this formulation. In fact, from this moment, Ferrari’s thought differs from that of his teacher and begins to formulate the basic elements of what, approximately twenty years later, will be defined the Concrete Original Object (AB Ferrari, 1992). Inverting the perspective of Felix Deutsch, who studied psychosomatic phenomena and the way in which the *mysterious leap from the mind to the body* occurs, Ferrari starts a long clinical and theoretical research on the ways in which that *mysterious leap from body to mind* can be assumed to occur. In reality, the two directions (from the body to the mind and from the mind to the body) are considered closely interrelated in a circular and often syncretic process, so that they relate to each other in a more or less harmonious way from the birth to the death of an individual.

The first difference from Bion is, therefore, considering *Beta as an integral part of the thought processes, as matrix and origin of the alpha functioning*. The second important difference from the thought of his teacher is that *the object is moved from the outside to the inside of the individual: his mother or her breast are no longer the object the newborn has to deal with, but it is his own hunger. It is through his hunger and body that the infant offers himself to himself*.

If during intra-uterine life the fetus grows to be able to face that "impressive caesura" that is his coming into the world, it is from the moment of birth, when he identifies himself as a being differentiated from the body that hosted him until then, that he must begin to take care of himself. From the moment of birth, a complex system of relationships activates within the newborn. His sensations are perceived, recorded (the psychic annotation function, mentioned by Freud) and grouped into a system of differentiated feelings by sense organs (defined by Ferrari “Physical Organizers”), among which one generally plays a central and prevailing function towards the successive activation of functions of thought. This sense is hence called *Psychic Coordinator* (Ferrari 1992).

From the instant of birth, bodily functions (confused, intense, magmatic and undifferentiated sensations) and mental functions (perception and recording of sensations) are triggered and become immediately interrelated. The function of the mother (or of anyone acting on her behalf) is to accompany and respond to the needs of the newborn, so that the above-described system can activate as soon and as best as possible. The function of the mother is thus similar to that of a catalyst, because she is capable, with her attention to the infant's needs, of catalyzing the resources already present in him: the system of the newborn is the place of the possible meanings and the mother's function is to favor their emergence and development.

The psychological functions of perception and registration of sensations – to which representation and symbolization are added gradually due to the continuous pressure exerted by the sensations generated by corporeality – aim to mitigate their intensity and to allow the whole system to organize itself in accordance with its internal needs and with external needs, and to activate thinking processes.

"The beneficial shadow of mental activity projects itself on the corporeal dimension, allowing for its survival": the eclipse of the body. Thus, the corporeal dimension generates the psychic function (as stated, in Ferrari's first formulation, the *beta function* generates and activates the *alpha function*, and the *alpha function* protects the life of the corporeal dimension).

The complex set of functions of the corporeal dimension is defined by Ferrari Onefold, and the complex set of psychic functions generated by and interrelated with the Onefold is defined Twofold. Twofold in that it is produced by and must primarily deal with the Onefold. By using these terms, Ferrari intends to express the complexity of a system where uniqueness and otherness coexist, and to abandon the linear terms body and mind, which he considered saturated with multiple meanings and unable to reflect the complexity of their functions.

At the moment of birth, two primary relationships originate from the Onefold: the *vertical* relationship, a circular relationship between Onefold and Twofold, between feelings that insist to be recorded and represented and functions of recording, representation and symbolization (and vice versa); the *horizontal* relationship, which is the individual's ability to represent himself in relation to the Other and to the world, which relies on interpersonal interactions, but does not coincide with them. Therefore, the individual is seen as a complex system whose aspects are continuously and mutually related, and primarily as a complex set of Uniqueness and Otherness. Uniqueness, because the body, the Onefold, is the originality of an individual, and gives origin to the functions of thought; Otherness, because we need to relate to ourselves to be able to relate to the world. Simultaneously *we are our body* and *we have a body*, i.e. we observe our body, we relate to our body, in a more or less harmonic way.

At birth, with the deployment of these complex relationships between Onefold and Twofold, what may be considered the *First challenge* begins, whereby from the corporeal dimension, from the Onefold, the mental function, the Twofold, develops in an increasingly complex way. The relationship between Onefold and Twofold is and will always be conflicting, since the functioning of the Onefold will never

coincide with that of the Twofold (and vice versa). Said conflict constitutes a sort of differential of potential able to generate continuous emotions and thought processes; it is from the relationship between similarity and difference that knowledge and thinking originate (Bateson G., 1977; H. Maturana, F. Varela, 1987).

During life, the Onefold will tend to come out repeatedly from the eclipse in which the Twofold places it, and the Twofold will have to build new balances less discordant with its own Onefold. One of the moments in which the Onefold emerges from the eclipse in a macroscopic way is precisely *adolescence*, or rather the transition from childhood to adolescence, with its first and obvious corporeal changes. Thus, the *Second challenge* begins:

- from birth to latency and adolescence, the psychic functions were forming from the corporeal dimension; at the time of adolescence this process can be defined as complete. At this first stage, phylogenetic forces, aimed to ensure survival, prevail: possessiveness and jealousy are the feelings prevailing in the Oedipal scenario, through which the child attempts to compensate for his perceived permanent loss of security;
- with the corporeal transformations of adolescence, it is a new and alien body that appears suddenly to a mind unprepared to receive it, which remains helpless and surprised. All the misleading expectations about oneself face the reality of a new body, unexpected and unknown, in relation to which nothing of what had been known and built is usable. A body to know in the sense of experiencing.

In this phase, the phylogenetic forces must give way to an ontogenetic task: *"Who am I? How can I become myself? In which way can I be what I am?"*

However, of course, phylogenetic needs can never completely disappear, and remain in the background until death, just like ontogenetic aspects that are present also at the time of childhood and latency.

Adolescence: the second challenge

The transition from childhood to adolescence is marked by radical and rapid changes, mainly involving the corporeal dimension. Adolescence can be seen as a catastrophic change: radical, sudden and virtually full of potential. Those who have seen a cactus blossom remain astonished by the speed at which this rosy, fleshy and delicate flower unfolds in the space of one night: this is the condition of the adolescent mind that observes the emergence of a new body from its childhood body, while being completely unable to decide its fate.

If the newborn has no awareness of himself while his Twofold is forming and specializing from its corporeality, the adolescent has a mind, a functioning Twofold, which has built theories about itself and the world, but none of them appears functional and usable in relation to the new rising body. It is therefore necessary that the Twofold transform itself according to the changed Onefold. It is a new caesura, a hiatus; only the adolescent heroic thrust, curiosity and energy allow to face this unknown.

Due to these characteristics, adolescence is also a huge potential and an opportunity to establish who you are, even if childhood was full of difficulties. In this sense, it is possible to break free from a deterministic vision that childhood events will determine the fate of the adolescent and adult. This critical time of transition carries a second significant opportunity to build one's own balance and identity and to negotiate a new relationship between corporeality and psychic function: *adolescence is, therefore, the second challenge.*

Due to the above circumstances that will not reoccur during life in the same radical way, adolescence has its own features:

- its own anxieties;
- its own defense modalities;
- its own potential;

that do not overlap either with those of childhood or with those of adulthood.

Prevailing anxieties:

-claustrophobia: the Twofold feels imprisoned in an uncontrollable, unknown, cumbersome body, which calls to mind *The Prisoners*, the exciting sculpture by Michelangelo representing bodies of slaves twisted in the effort to break free from the marble stone that, unformed, still imprisons them;

-agoraphobia: the sudden opening of an immense horizon of unknown possibilities;

-*uncontrollability* of time, suddenly perceived as still or accelerated, however irreversible: the arrow of time (Hawking S.);

-one's limitations perceived as *impotence*;

-to remain *isolated and misunderstood*;

-irreversibility: the past cannot return and the present is unknown.

Two possible ways of defense:

-*refuge in the past*: avoiding taking responsibility for oneself and maintaining a childish behavior. Adults tend to contribute to this way of defense by providing models and behavioral rules and punishments, which help take refuge in childish manners;

-*flight forward*: adapting to adult models to be blameless and good. Exasperated academic success, hyper-appropriateness in relationships, passive conformity to expectations, to avoid the anxiety connected to the ontogenetic research and building of one's being.

In both cases, the question of being willing to know oneself and to take responsibility for one's way of being, feeling, thinking and acting and its consequences, far from being shelved, will reappear in adulthood, when some choices will have been already made with uncomfortable and sometimes even devastating effects on one's life. This time of life cannot be eluded: it is a necessary step, a kind of Pillars of Hercules we all have to cross if we want to become part of our own lives.

Hence, the only possibility a teenager has is to accompany his own transformations, to find the way to take this step, which is so disturbing on the one hand and so exciting on the other, and which provides the opportunity to undertake a journey into

himself and the world, which is the most exciting adventure for human beings. He must endure that special and paradoxical condition of having to do to know himself, and to build new and more flexible and functional theories about himself and the world.

Modesty thus arises as a need to close the door to an outside world full of expectations, proposals and models to follow, and to experiment with one's new possibilities and characteristics, – starting from the new body, which will be from now on one's own body for a lifetime – with new sensations, emotions, perceptions, and with the new being that one is becoming. *Doing* should be accompanied by *observing* as much as possible, so that it can build *experience*.

Thus, loneliness is not confused with isolation; acting begins to mean construction and no longer impulsive and unconscious action, i.e. *acting out*. In this critical transition, arising psychic abilities appear disharmonious, but they protect the mind from the emotional overload that the emergence of the body from the eclipse can generate. Obsessive rituals emerge for protection and reassurance against the perception of irreversibility, to slow down the feeling of sudden acceleration, to stop time and things, to get reassurance against the fear of losing one's past and memories, the memory of how one was only yesterday. Transitory phenomena occur, such as depersonalization caused by corporeal changes, looking in the mirror and not recognizing oneself, or feeling sucked into a vortex that opens behind oneself.

In the presence of this *catastrophic* change adolescents search for more or less functional solutions to reduce the upset and dismay that may ensue. Under certain critical conditions, the solutions chosen, instead of favoring the return of the beneficial shadow of the mind on corporeality, may generate dysfunctional postures and additional sources of anxiety; thus begins a process of construction that in a self-perpetuating circuit interferes with the ontogenetic process that should begin in adolescence.

The war between the Twofold and its Onefold. Anorexia, Bulimia, Self-cutting and Tattoos. Sculpting the body

Disharmonious forms of behavior may occur in an attempt to re-establish control over the body and the lost world, over the perception of change and differentiation processes. Anorexic and bulimic behaviors, tattoos, self-cutting, sculpting one's body through diets and exercise, up to, in certain cases, taking chemical and anabolic substances, may be an indication of a desire of the mind to establish a tyrannical and omnipotent power over one's body: "I am in command here, you will look like what I want you to."

Typical behaviors are: eating and vomiting; being terrified by the feeling of having a body and eliminating all the dangerous perceptions such as hunger, taste, fullness; removing from the body all traces of differentiation and the passage of time by maintaining a thin and flat body, without menstruation by girls who proudly declare "I can wear the clothes of when I was 9!" while they are 16, 17 or 18.

An exasperated control over food seems to express the failure of a desperate attempt to exert control over time and space, over anxiety for the unknown and over the hate

for one's limits. A childlike and tyrannical mind stands as the controller and judge of a body expected to be submissive and silent, frozen in time, ("I always wear the same size of clothes"; "I saw on television a girl that had very thin legs, especially here, on thighs ... that's how I want my legs!", etc ...) until it defies the extreme limit of death. The instrument of this illusory control over anxiety consists in erasing the traces of all sensory perceptions, which could put one in communication with a corporeal sentience, but at the same time, with a vehicle of needs. In these cases, the adolescent cannot accept to be in need and to depend on her needs and on the outside world, and obsessively ensures that nothing enters her body and transforms it into what her mind refuses to see, i.e. a defined being, with potential and limits, set in a time of no return, capable of transforming itself in its own way and expressing tendencies and potential. Thus, any perceived sensation becomes a source of anxiety and accentuates the need to re-establish control (throwing up what has been ingested in time to not be digested, melting ice in one's mouth to quench one's thirst and avoid the feeling of a "bloated belly" that would appear if she drank, compulsively washing her body after having sex to "wash away" all the traces of what she felt, etc.). The result is the delusion of a *clear mind*, free from the traces of experience, suspended in a timeless space, and in a time outside space. All the experiences that teach something about oneself are forbidden.

Self-cutting consists in short and thin cuts also in parts of the body not visible to an external eye, which seem to be a meticulous, obsessive and desperate control over the body and the anxiety of not being able to monitor its changes and manifestations. It appears as a form of control over the hate that comes from perceiving oneself as powerless and frustrated because of unexpected and unwanted changes in their bodies and over the hate towards their own limits and inability to satisfy the expectations of others. It is an overbearing affirmation that "this body is mine, I know it because I feel the pain that I provoke to myself, and I do what I want with it!"

Cutting one's arms or legs to feel something, since splitting is able to erase every emotion and perception. Hence, the blood or the pain testify to the presence of life or cause to feel that body as their own body. The same applies to tattoos sometimes, which may act as a sign of appropriation of what no longer seems to be one's own body.

To dream and to imagine in order to not feel

With reference to the twelve-year-old girl's recurring dream mentioned at the beginning, it can be assumed that it expresses her anxiety about feeling inundated with intense and unknown sensations that nothing inside her can filter, hide or overshadow. Her mind still projected toward infancy is unable to reform itself around the new corporeal condition that emerges from the eclipse as a blinding light and prevents her from focusing on the details of her nascent corporeal dimension, images or thoughts. She continues to use a dreamlike language register (Ferrari, 1998) for daydream or night dreams, as a system to resolve unpleasant, threatening or dangerous situations. By dreaming of reality, she creates other realities, so that it could be said it is not her who dreams, but "the dream dreams of her".

Indeed, it is the dream that strongly indicates her unconscious area, without her doing it consciously. Thus, a potential dialogue in the vertical dimension is obstructed between the Onefold, which is taking its adult form, and the Twofold, which does not find the space to accept the Onefold, being saturated with anxiety and unknown corporeality: it is a Twofold that makes use of the magical childish thought. Communication between Onefold and Twofold, in the vertical dimension, unfolds through the dreamlike language register (Ferrari, 1998), which is cryptic; a preference for fantasizing tends to build a desired reality and gradually replaces the opportunity to learn from experience. In her mind, facts are mixed with fantasies, constructed more or less consciously to protect her from anxiety, fear and pain.

However, this way of protecting herself ends up exposing her to tangible risks. The harassment by a man on the bus, for example, becomes in her imagination "only an impression" until someone intervenes to help her, and she realizes the truth as if waking up from a dream. Fantasies created by her imagination complicate true events of her life, so that she can no longer distinguish reality from imagination. Imagination replaces experience, hindering the learning process and knowledge of herself. In her words, like in many teenagers', she feels a sense of deep solitude due to unknown and irrepressible sensorial perceptions, the impossibility to share with others what she is feeling and cannot describe, the bewilderment caused by the irreversibility of transformations and time.

The adolescent's mind, exposed to new and intense sensations by a kind of corporeality deeply and suddenly different to a few months or days before, is dazzled, almost blinded and unable to find its bearings and interpret what is happening. Sensory organs play a key role in the transition from purely physical sensations to a process of organization and mental coordination. They select and protect the individual from the confusion of stimuli that would arise generating chaos, if they could not be differentiated (Carignani, unpublished).

Our brain is able to build forecasts and preconceptions to anticipate and deal with the world. It constantly creates simulations of reality to be able to choose the most functional solution. However, said process requires a comparison with the information coming from the sensory organs for the brain to confirm or disconfirm its forecasts (Cerami, 2010, 2014). "I was able to enjoy the astonishment and disbelief that the venture into the study of the matter of the mind has brought. The solution that it is able to give to many problems regarding the interpretation of the data that it processes is a miracle of complexity and, at the same time, of simplicity and elegance. It is a true recapitulation of phylogeny because all kinds of neuronal organization that preceded it in the evolution of living beings are stratified in its structure. Its salient feature, like the nervous system of all other animals, is its ability to transform sensory data into perceptions that leave a trace in memory, and when we think about the early stages of development, we talk about implicit memory for human beings too." (Cerami, 2010, p. 365)

However, in some cases – such as the rapid and radical changes of corporeality – excessively intense feelings can be traumatic for the perceiving subject, given that the organs of sense can filter external or internal stimuli up to a certain point. In

newborns, the mother (or someone on her behalf) performs the function of mitigating intensity, protecting them from a sensory overexposure; but a teenager, more precisely his mind, is exposed to such a sensory and perceptual intensity that he has to develop solutions not always functional and constructive to protect himself from the risk of fragmentation.

We might wonder if, in the case of the twelve-year-old girl's recurring dream, the use of a dreamlike language register provides the opportunity to show the relationship between the bodily and the psychic dimensions, between Onefold and Twofold. However, the foregoing could only be the case if the dreamlike register were not elected as hegemonic language register, thus prevailing over the possibility of learning from experience. Other solutions can be implemented with the aim of protecting oneself from the invasion of a new and unknown corporeality, sometimes perceived as alien and causing distress.

"I do not see why I should stop imagining. It is for me much more beautiful, much more interesting to imagine the world, things, myself... The rest does not make sense; it does not interest me at all". Sofia, 17 years old, cultured and book lover, always immersed in reading and intent on writing a novel. At first glance, she may appear more capable than others of using intellectual resources, but her retreat into imagination is so intense and attractive that in some moments she finds herself immersed in the anguish of nonsense. Nothing makes sense or has importance in her flat and colorless perspective where white is the only color; she is unable to find her bearings in reality. She cries, but her tears are like water coming out of her eyes, as they have lost all connection with emotions and with external or internal events.

"When I was a child, when something scared me or I did not like it, I could simply close my eyes and the monster was gone: I found myself in a kaleidoscope of colors as known and reassuring as I wanted them... and I was safe!" says Sofia, showing undoubted intellectual ability since her childhood. The problem is that during adolescence this exasperated use of imagination that takes refuge in reading instead of experiencing relationships with peers and with the external world becomes a way *to learn* about life *without entering* into life.

In particularly disharmonious situations, feeling is perceived as a menace to the adolescent mind, which tries to get away from it, and ends up with increased anxiety. The persistence in childhood modalities through a pervasive use of magical thinking offers, indeed, an apparent solution through the retreat into a world of imagination and fantasies, drastically reducing the relationship with reality. The result is a progressive distance from one's sensory perceptions and a state of confusion and disorientation when for some reason the appeal of reality is unavoidable; "I don't know what I'm feeling," says Sofia, who could be considered unable to embrace adolescence because it is too painful for her.

"I don't know if I like that boy or not... sometimes I no longer know what I feel... in truth, I do not feel anything anymore... about the previous guy I liked the smell... this guy interests me, but now I don't know... I do not feel." Also Alessia, 18 years old, taking refuge in an imaginary world, seems to lose track of the sensory perceptions that can help her organize experience and knowledge; but, unlike Sofia, an organ of

sense appears: the sense of smell. It could perhaps be a feeble chance to organize her perceptions and include new representations as well as thought, but it is necessary to stay connected to what might emerge from experience, without feeling invaded by it. Other times the unresolved embarrassment for an emerging corporeality, not tolerated by a Twofold too anchored to a magical and almighty childhood, gives rise to dangerous and self-damaging behaviors, in order to establish control over one's Onefold. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a relationship of knowledge and experience between the Twofold and his Onefold.

...in the Internet Era

Another questionable solution to protect oneself from the sensory chaos is an all-encompassing use of movies, videos and social networks. Teenagers often spend hours on end locked in their rooms, even late into the night or until dawn, watching one movie after another, immersing themselves in fiction from which it becomes increasingly difficult to get out, eluding both school and relationships with peers. The same happens with social networks, which provide them with a virtual instrument – potential but not unreal – through which teenagers can feel in touch with the rest of the world, postponing their impact with their bodily and sensory reality in the encounter with others to a time and condition of greater tranquility.

In some cases, the spread of social networks in today's world can be regarded as a facilitator in speeding up communication with the group of peers, "the others", since it allows for real time contacts, without involving the participation of the sensory dimension in the context of interpersonal relationships. "If they know me as I am, in person, they will not like me, but if I make myself known for what I say first and I show myself later, my appearance will no longer be so important"; "Through Facebook I can show what I want about me, photos taken as I want, where I show myself how and with whom I want." It seems a way to protect oneself from the expectations of others and especially from one's own expectations towards oneself, and to bypass the insecurity for one's unknown side.

As pointed out by Tisseron (2014) the organs of sense are involved in the virtual construction of the brain, but a limited use is made of them: sight, hearing, touch, proprioception are activated in relation to vocal or visual communications. I do not wish to demonize the existence of media such as smartphones, social-networks, etc., which are only a medium significantly expanding the potential of human beings. Rather, I wish to emphasize that the most delicate issue is the use one makes of them. One might wonder what the differences are between those who, like Sophia, abuse their intellect, imagination and reading instead of gaining experience with themselves, and those who use almost exclusively social-networks to communicate with others and with the world, but "we must distinguish the virtual from the perceptive and imaginary" (Tisseron, 2014, in this issue).

The exasperated appeal to fantasy and imagination, no matter if it occurs through movies, books, or social networks, can be an attempt to circumvent the impact with the bodily dimension (one's appearance, for example, and a sensorial dimension perceived as overly disturbing) and with the outside world through a marked isolation

from the world of relationships. Closely connected with this isolation is an insidious depressive state that in the hypothesis of the C.O.O. is called proto-depression.

Proto-depression

This situation requires special attention, since it could reveal a depressive tendency that teenagers attempt to solve resorting to a retreat, which could appear as "not worrying" to a distracted eye. Ferrari calls it "Proto-depression" in adolescents (Ferrari A.B., 1994), and considers it different to depression in adulthood. Unlike adult depression, proto-depression in adolescence is not permeated by feelings of death but by a sense of distrust in one's possibilities and a tendency to withdraw for fear of failing the challenge of change and of life, and of dashing one's expectations towards oneself and the world. It is isolation that avoids loneliness, and attempts to turn off the intensity of sensory perceptions experienced as threatening and uncontrollable, and can take arrogant and omnipotent shades.

"The emerging conflict in adolescents is caused by expectations that are judged a priori as impossible to satisfy, as a result of an inadequate analysis of their own resources considered necessary to survive the challenge of the environment and of adults. Isolation, which can be an expression of excessive narcissistic sensitivity, has to do with the conflicts posed by the knowledge, the use and the testing of one's resources. Proto-depression was defined as the psychic configuration linked to the experiences that flow from it and that may have different motivations and characteristics. It is an important warning signal, because, over time, it may develop into a manic-depressive syndrome." (Ferrari, 1994, p. 51, 52)

Proto-depression is, therefore, another protection mode from excessive sensations and sensory perceptions, and from the ensuing pressure and oppression. Withdrawal is a necessity, not a symptom to eliminate through new stimulations. The necessity is, on the contrary, reducing the amount of new stimuli in the hope of finding a more effective way to manage them.

"I lost the future," "I'm not interesting; no-one is interested in the things I say," "I am invisible, I am transparent, no-one notices me, no-one sees me." Words that express a deep and desperate desire for life and an equally deep and desperate fear of not succeeding. It is essential to identify these forms and to support adolescents in replacing illusory expectations with curiosity and courage to test themselves for the pleasure of finding themselves.

The pleasure of discovering the man or woman emerging in them by taking up a challenge and learning from experience can replace illusory and magical pretensions towards themselves and the world, and break a potential vicious circle of delusion-disappointment. Indeed, if this circuit is not interrupted, it tends to feed itself, in that only a new illusory belief can free the adolescent from the bottled-up hate generated by disappointed illusory expectations, which, in turn, leads to new disappointments, in a dangerous alternation of impotence and omnipotence causing discouragement possibly resulting in self-aggression and even suicide (Ferrari, 1994).

"Often the teenager is ambivalent with regard to experience. If the experience is negative, he is pushed towards isolation that causes an immediate need to belong to a

group or institution. If this need is disregarded, for identity reasons the result is an exaggerated increase of self-esteem that, albeit necessary for his development, if excessive, creates a disdainful state of isolation attributed to the incomprehension of adults.

Isolation intended as an inadequate analysis of one's own resources in relation to what one regards as necessary to survive the challenge of the environment that is thus rejected. I call this psychic configuration *proto-depression*, to distinguish it from the depression that occurs in adulthood and with which it shares many expressions and forms. While adolescent *proto-depression* maintains vital functions, classic depression developed in adult life is usually a state of death.

Despite the extreme difficulty of a technical and clinical approach, we should try to recognize what I have called *proto-depression* to be able to decide if the adolescent we are encountering is affected by it, and to help him overcome it in order to get vaccinated for the adult period." (Ferrari, Clinical Seminars, unpublished).

The group of peers

Being able to preserve, at any age, the ability to imagine, dream and fantasize is a key resource for thinking and transforming reality, and to enable thought to spread its wings to accept and transform reality, cooling with its beneficent shadow the perceived sensations, emotions and feelings coming from the corporeal dimension. Without this basic function, there would be neither art nor science; there would be nothing of what human beings, by emerging from their animality, were and are still able to build.

However, special attention should be paid to all situations, as in the case of some adolescents, in which these dimensions take over and claim a powerful domination over reality. Within the analytic relationship, the only way to handle said situations is by carefully listening to the anguish that the adolescent in question is trying to solve with this system, to help him respond to life in a more harmonious and functional manner and gradually reduce his isolation from his feelings and consequently from others.

It is possible to encourage the teenager to establish a new contact with his group of peers by ceasing to use it only as a parameter to confirm his inadequacy, and to consider it a reference point and a constructive means to return to himself and gradually build the individual that he is. No human being can indeed think about himself as isolated and detached from the social context in which he is born as in a kind of cultural amniotic fluid. The feeling of belonging contains the possibility of building themselves as individuals. Over the course of time, the group, through the sense of belonging that it is able to provide, can act as the background and foundations for the construction and the emergence of one's individuality.

In Diego's case, for example, the group of others is both a prison and an essential support: "I hate WhatsApp", he says one day entering into his psychoanalytic treatment room. "Everybody knows everything about everyone; for example, everyone knows if I receive messages and I am forced to answer... I would like to

shut it down, get out of it, stop using it... but if I do, I remain alone, isolated, because the whole group uses it and I would be the only one who does not. "

For Davide, his peer group is a safe place, where he can avoid thinking and questioning himself. He goes where they go, do what they do, start a war with them against a group from another neighborhood. He postpones to another time the moment when he will realize that he could feel fine even alone, by choosing, feeling and thinking independently and not necessarily in agreement or disagreement with what he calls "the others, those of the group."

Resorting to a peer group can function as a tool to temporarily avoid the loneliness and incommunicability caused by one's own new and unknown body. "The rest of my group" is a partially reassuring container for phylogenetic claims such as possessiveness, jealousy, envy, which are still active as a residue of childhood, floating on the border with the new world.

A need for reassurance, in the form of possessiveness, defense of one's own territory, etc., remains and may manifest itself through a pervasive and undifferentiated sense of belonging to the peer group. Indeed, the group acts as a container sufficiently cohesive on one side and sufficiently undifferentiated on the other, where the need for identification, originating from the pressure of new bodily perceptions, can be fulfilled in a discontinuous and attenuated way, and where refuge can be found from one's own unsustainable expectations with regard to the adult world. In said container teenagers can hide, pushed by their inevitable sense of decency and by the tension due to the individual they are becoming, sheltered from looks, expectations and imposed models attributed to the adult group.

Similarly to books, movies and social networks, and differently at the same time, adolescents resort to their peer group and turn it into an obstacle or a resource in the relationship with themselves. Indeed, also the group can provide teenagers with a social place to hide, vanish, get lost, or, on the contrary, it can work as an incubator for their identification, where they can learn new ways to manage the impressive vital charge typical of adolescence.

Aspects of technique in the analysis with adolescents

If we accept the hypothesis that adolescence is a particular moment in human life, with specific characteristics, anxieties and defense modalities, also the clinical approach should be specific and different to that used with children, adults, and the elderly (Ferrari, 2005).

In a general sense, in the hypothesis of the C.O.O., also the understanding of the analytic relationship is transformed (Ferrari, 1979, 1983, 1986, 1987). Analyst and patient are considered equally responsible for themselves. The analyst has been trained to *go back to himself*, to his own feelings, perceptions and thoughts that will form the cornerstone of his analytic statements, while the patient goes towards himself for the first time. Like a mother, who is a catalyst of meanings and resources already present in an infant, the analyst acts as a catalyst for the patient, who is thought to know everything about himself, but does not know it. In other words, the

analyst does not use his prior knowledge to build his interpretations, but uses what the patient's words evoke and awaken in him to build the interpretation that he *will propose* to the patient, and then wait for the patient to accept, refute or modify it. The underlying assumption is that meanings are implicit in the patient's system, and that the analytic relationship must create the conditions to ensure that the patient knows what already exists in him and he did not know to know: "turn the conscious into conscious." (Camara, 2010)

The above especially applies when the patient is a teenager, in which case the analyst's attention is primarily intended to "teach" him to think, to encourage him to express his opinions about what he says, does and feels, by building the analytic statements mainly in the form of questions. For example, even when the analyst wants to suggest new points of view, he asks the patient what he thinks about them, what he believes is better. In general, the function of the analyst is to remain on the background, refraining from providing answers, patterns and directions, always letting the young patient experiment and test himself as much as possible.

It is not necessary to explain his troubles to the teenager, as he is immersed in them and has not had time to build his defense against them. He is like living flesh with no skin. It is, therefore, more functional to look for him where he is present, i.e. in the things he likes most (books, movies, fictional or real characters, friends or enemies, objects, animals, etc.), or that he likes to do or is good at. His profile, his essence, his way of being are right there, in all these things of his world. Consequently, he will feel reassured by this strange adult who, unlike the other adults in his world, is interested in him and has neither models to provide him with, nor pre-formed behavioral rules or punishments to impose. He leaves him alone, but does not make him feel isolated or abandoned.

The analyst considers the teenager a person virtually able to know and to tell about himself. Using the polite forms even with a 12 or 13-year-old patient, if he can stand it, transmits to him the idea of being considered no longer a child but an individual evolving towards the time of adolescence.

Similarly, during the first interview, speaking with him first and then with the adults who accompanied him shows him and his parents that he is considered able to introduce and to tell about himself, and that he is not seen as a package brought by adults, devoid of will and self-determination. Indeed, he is considered an individual, who may not yet know who he is and what he is like, but who *is*. In addition, the analyst is thus able to build a profile of the patient from an external perspective and before having heard his parents' opinion on him. At the same time, opening the analytic space to parents afterwards is equally important, as the patient comes from his family and to his family will return. It is, therefore, very useful to know his cultural, emotional and relational world of origin.

Talking to the teenager first, and to his parents afterwards, and finally with the three together enables the analyst to build a complete picture of the situation and to define a specific therapeutic project. He can decide to either work with the family, if a separation of the settings is premature due to the level of non-differentiation of the family, or to work with the parents or with one of them, whom was found particularly

problematic, or with the teenager, if the analytic experience is considered particularly useful precisely for him. If the therapeutic project only involves the adolescent, parents will not be excluded from it, and it may be useful, once they have given their – not only formal – consent to the analytic path of their child, to direct them to a similar path with another analyst. The reason is that the changes that will be determined in a subject will most likely impact his relationships, especially in the case of a child or adolescent, and it is important to contain his parents' fears and concerns, which can interfere with the analytic work with the teenager.

Conclusion

The content of this article is a simple proposal that can be reconsidered, discussed, transformed according to individual experiences, in a continuous effort to reflect on experience, which is the prerequisite to continue the research in the still rather unknown field of mental functioning.

I also wish to emphasize the great value I attribute to this age of man, defined adolescence, which is a time of transformation and creation of the individual that each of us becomes in the course of his own existence.

It is important that adults guide these transformations, respecting adolescents' decency and ability to learn from their own experience, building a large enclosure around them to stimulate their self-reflection, responsibility for themselves and ability to activate thought processes.

Notes

- 1) Since 1973, Bion began an intense activity of conferences, seminars and clinical supervisions at the Psychoanalytic Society of São Paulo and in the emerging Brasilia Study Group, founded by Virginia Bicudo and affiliated to IPA, which became a Psychoanalytic Society in the nineties. In those years, Armando B. Ferrari was a psychoanalysis teacher at the Psychoanalytic Society of São Paulo and Bion's innovative ideas introduced by Frank Philips immediately aroused his interest and curiosity, leading him to even request Bion to conduct his personal analysis (Romano, 2016, in Ciocca, Ginzburg, Cataldi, Chiarelli, 2016).
- 2) Based on the hypothesis of C.O.O., this term describes confused and chaotic feelings and unfiltered, intense and undifferentiated emotions, which rise in the relationship between the One and Twofold at some critical moments of life: birth, adolescence, more or less serious diseases, etc. In general, it indicates the vehement emergence of the Onefold from the eclipse.

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