

Primary narcissism and the group

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Abstract

Beginning with the question : how it turns to become the imaginary "group" unit? the author compares and brings into discussion some postulations derived by the same question in S. Freud, W. Bion, J. Bleger, D. Anzieu, A. Missenard, R. Kaes.

She proposes that between *narcissistic primary groupality* – this means the psychological unit formed by the mother and the baby – and the Ego, object found-created by anaclisis in that other, exists a link in several ways. On one hand, both structures are indistinguishable in the point where they converge and confuse, on the other hand the first one is revealed metaphorically inside the Ego that modulates over it. Finally, narcissistic primary groupality is the negative of the Ego, that what the Ego had to lose-leave to be. From there it is taken that the group is for the Ego what it will never stop to intend recovering and that "make group" or "make one group" is first in the desire of each one, *to be a group* and to make coincidence borders from the Ego and the group without interstitions or fractures.

Finally she analyzes in the different bonds events between secondary and primary narcissism, between the Ego and the first moments of the group organization taking into account the aim of the group devices that is taken.

Keywords: group, primary narcissism, secondary narcissism, ego, dilution anguish.

<<On a cold winter's day a group of hedgehogs huddled up together in order to keep warm and not die of cold. It wasn't long though, before they were forced to separate on account of their spines. When the need to get warm again forced them to get close to one another, the same thing happened, thus finding themselves in the middle of a seemingly insoluble dilemma. Finally they managed to find the right distance that allowed them to be as warm and comfortable as possible>>.

Schopenhauer, 1851

Our aim is to show that a gathering of people unknown to each other can be defined as a "group" and will be seen by its members and anyone that observes it as being a union: a union insofar as its aspiration is to "perform" as one, and that it tries to do its utmost to do so.

1-Previous history

In 'Group Analysis and Analysis of Ego' Freud developing these two notions is the first to touch on a question that has continued to be a problem in psychoanalysis, i.e.

the conflictual relationship that exists between the group and individual narcissism, typical in every human being who finds him/herself <<*in the middle of a seemingly insoluble dilemma*>>.

Freud maintains that the group exists as such, thanks to the idealization of an intermediary: a person or thought that assumes a role and is placed at a different hierarchic level compared to that in which the other members of the group are in. Thanks to the state of communion created as a consequence of this idealization, the members can identify themselves with each other. From this starting point, Freud proceeds to deal with the relationships in which the mechanisms of identification and idealization are found and that contain the “resolution” to the conflict Ego/group, otherwise impossible to resolve.

In the beginning, Freud considers identification and idealization as opposite mechanisms, if seen from the point of view of enrichment or impoverishment of the ego, concerning the flow of the libido. In identification, the ego, after the invested object is abandoned, has its destination in the ego; in idealization, the ego is abandoned and the object becomes overvalued, at the cost of narcissistic investment. Freud says that the opposition in reality is only an expedient. The two mechanisms can coexist, but only if it is possible to distinguish them, and only if <<*the object takes the place of the ego or the ego-ideal*>>. In this case the object-loss that represents the condition for identification, will be sure to be conserved in the idealization, in that it is an idealized object. Now we can see how, what seemed to be a conflict between the investment of the ego and investment of something external to it i.e. the object, becomes a conflict between two psychic demands. This “solution” with which Freud enunciates the concepts that will bring him to formulate his second topic, indicate an area that he particularly favoured in his studies: the analysis of the ego rather than the group in its specificity as an object.

When W.R. Bion (1948) began his research his viewpoints were very different from Freud's: his object of analysis was the group, -he wanted to comprehend the group- . When he examined an <<*aggregation*>> of people, he observed that their mode of behaviour was <<*as if they had reached an agreement*>>. This led him to believe that the members unanimously, anonymously and involuntarily put different unconscious parts of themselves in a container that he called “group mentality”. This “group mentality” entering in conflict with the “individual” reaches a sort of compromise called the “group culture”. At this point it is necessary to stress that this fantastical form made up of the basic assumptions, in turn a derivation of a fantasy of a very primitive primary scene would result in fact, -for its very capacity to administer the relationships between the discriminated individual and the non-discriminated group- to be an intermediary form.

The fact that Freud put emphasis on the object, and Bion on the group, led to very different results. Bion's starting point was “the group” and he contributed to its comprehension with decisive ideas. Besides defining the unity of a group as a fantasy, he explained the constitution of the group's psychic reality is a result of the action of very specific formations, that couldn't produce the same effects outside the

material reality of the group. In short, this is to explain that leadership is a phenomenon produced by the group.

In spite of the differences that divide them, both Freud and Bion recognise the conflict existing in the relationship individual/group and the necessity of an intermediary to overcome this.

Didier Anzieu (1978) refers in his own writings to Bion's idea of a fantasy as an intermediary in the individual/group relationship, developing the valid hypothesis of an analogy between group and dream. He analyses the links existing between group and ego seen from the point of view of different forms of regression that both situations (the group or the dream) provoke. He develops the concept of regression in reference to primary and secondary narcissism, specially to the latter (cit. p.83). For this reason he has no doubts when he sustains that the group is contemporaneously a primary threat for the ego that wants to be seen as an independent unity and declares its existence, and that human beings enter the group in the same way the sleeping person starts dreaming. The first statement clearly indicates conflict, but what can we say about the second? When we experience or perceive the anxiety that a new group produces we cannot not honestly declare that starting to dream disturbs us in the same way: indeed, we want to sleep and we want to dream, it's when it doesn't happen that we feel disturbed. Consequently, even though we recognise the noteworthy contribution given by these analogies, there must be a substantial difference between "starting a group" and "starting to dream".

2-The first type of narcissism

As far as the conflict individual/group is concerned, it is extremely difficult to consider this relationship non-conflictual if only the narcissism that invests the ego as an object is taken into account. If, however, we go back to the different stages of development and dwell upon the very beginning of mental life, it is evident that group and ego cannot enter into conflict until they both become part of a single psychic reality.

Starting from Freud (1914), who considers the origins of narcissism in the infant as being a perpetration of the narcissism in the parents, Piera Aulagnier (1975) formalizes this idea in her concept of the narcissistic contract where it is clear that the first form of narcissism is implied by the sharing in a sentiment of reciprocity, but at the same time in a sentiment of non-differentiation, assuming that the combined investment as much in the mother (or parents) as in the child, derives from the continuity of this mother/child union from which, only later on, will the ego and the object be born.

The creation/discovery of the Ego. The non-Ego

Its place is precisely in the primitive being where the new psychic act will find its place, and where the ego seen as differentiation is formed, a new unity. At this point the narcissism can consolidate itself as "individual". The individual narcissism is secondary to the primary where the narcissism invests the mother/child union and in

which it lays down roots, granted that the new psychic act, thanks to which the ego becomes object, is produced by a creation/discovery that necessarily must come from something else, which could be from one's own body or psyche, or from the maternal body or psyche, or the group or the culture. The ego is a 'discovered' object because it has been anticipated and made possible in the minds of others, as if it already existed in a psychic space prior to its discovery, "a space in which the ego can be born". However, this anticipation isn't enough to guarantee its future, because when the moment arrives, it will have to be created by a new psychic act. The anticipation is none other than a significant device. However, the significant being needs to be appropriated, psychic work has to re-appropriate whatever there is to be taken.

In order that the ego finds its roots in the primary narcissism, three elements identified by R.Kaës (1984) in this mechanism must be present during its constitution. There is a complex relationship between what is functioning as the base and what is leaning on it. In the first place we have a support: in a precise spot, a point and a sharp object go to form a body, meaning that in that spot we cannot distinguish one from the other (the corporeal from the psychic, for example). In a second moment, the sharp object models itself over whatever functions as the point (for example, when we choose for a support an object that has as a model the maternal object). In a third moment, the point and the sharp object start to separate, this occurs where the point is absent. It is exactly in the spot of the separation between point and sharp object, (that determines the place of the absence of the point) that a process of transformation should come about, even though no-one can guarantee it, a sort of creative transcription of something new. The absence of the point creates the ideal condition for allowing (but not always guaranteeing) the transition from one level to another, or from one object to another. During this action, the point becomes a non-object (having been an object up to that moment), and becomes the grounds for the new object created. Hence, the constitution of the object-ego by means of anaclisis, indicates that the secondary, individual narcissism that invests it, (apart from having been supported by and modelled on primary narcissism), has to "lose it" in part, in order to construct the ego, or more precisely, the object, the creation of which derives from the work and the elaboration of the loss of that non-differentiated unity. On the other hand this structure that functioned as a point of support, will assume the state as a non-object, in this case, non-ego. From this point of view the primary narcissistic groupality, metaphorically reconstructed in the ego, is its negative.

Narcissism and Anaclisis.

From this perspective, it is obvious that the relationship between narcissism and anaclisis cannot be defined only as an opposing one, as it seems to appear from the distinction Freud proposes regarding the two modes of object choice. The opposition between narcissism and anaclisis could be described as a tension between two different tendencies. The first regarding the narcissistic dimension seen as tendency to preserve the mode and the objects of satisfaction already achieved, refusing loss,

absence and prohibition. While the tendency of anaclisis recognises when something is lacking and replaces it with a multiplication of the modes and the objects that are able to produce satisfaction in its stead, endeavouring to reach the unico. If we observe the point of view by which the finality for all the work of dismantling and constructing is the perpetuation and the broadening of the unity, we can say the two tendencies are complementary: all this creation has to do with the extension and affirmation of the ego. Lastly, it is this narcissistic research of recouping everything that has been and that could return to be the entirety, functioning as an incentive for psychic work. It is precisely this research that stimulates the elaboration of the loss, aware that this elaboration is manifested in a new identification or in the creation-encounter of a new love-object.

3-Primary narcissism and the group

What is the significance when the ego regresses to a state of primary narcissism? The superiority that the primary narcissism can have over the ego doesn't come about by means of an act but rather a potentiality, like an anticipation in the mind of another signifying an involvement for the ego. The ego is seen as something "that doesn't owe anything to anyone", this is equal to saying that, besides being like the individual "who is out for himself and his own personal ends" it is also, quoting Freud, *<<out for itself and it's own origins>>*. It's responsible for its own transitional construction and from that point of view, in order to exist, the paradox between its existence and its origins has to be taken into account.

At this point if we take a look at Freud's definition of primary mass, *<<after it could not acquire the properties of an individual because of an excess of organization>>*. (1921, p.109), we can see that at this level there should be no difficulties as long as identification and idealization function contemporaneously.

On this level, what Freud describes as the primary identification (1921, p.109)) comes about in the primary narcissism, indissoluble from the primary investiture as object, and therefore from idealization. Here the investitures of the identification and idealization object are just as convergent and coinciding as their recipients –the ego and the object.

Consequently, to bring about a process of differentiation it is necessary first to verify the experience of separation and desire, that follow the primary unity. Nevertheless, this is only the beginning of this process that later on will bring about the reconstruction of the ego as an object.

At this point, we can sustain that the anxiety felt by the ego in the impact of the first meeting with others that want to form a group corresponds to the breaking down of the secondary narcissism caused by the activation of the primary narcissism. This primary groupality that precedes the ego doesn't necessarily determine it, unless it doesn't come about in the mind of an other, the psychic representation of which will depend on the ego to be able to exist. What often characterizes best this situation is not anxiety, but rather a breaking down.

For this reason there is a crucial difference between “entering a group” and “entering a dream”: in the dream as far as the ego is concerned, we have the same impact that comes about in the encounter with others to form a group, because in the dream the ego’s existence is not at risk, because it dreams of internal objects, whether they are tranquillizing or terrorizing they exist within it.

The ego determines the individual dream and within it it finds ideal conditions for realizing it’s desire and the most primordial of all it’s aspirations: to be the group and possess it at the same time, which is equal to obtaining simultaneously unity and separation. Except in some pathologies, the primary groupality’s presence is stable in the dream, where it is possible that the representation of the manifest contents will take place. The group’s project, on the other hand includes the ego, and even if only temporarily, in a massive way, in which, not only it is not the ego, - a distinction made possible only by the secondary narcissism- but that it is there, where it is not, and where sometimes it’s not possible for it to be. In other words, the ego’s encounter with the primary groupality, isn’t an encounter with the opposite but an encounter with disintegration. The same sensation can be manifested with the silence that comes about when, during a discourse, time is given to questions from the public. As far as the group analytic mechanism is concerned, and in particular in psychoanalytic reflection groups, where the task is more ambiguous compared to therapeutic groups, this mechanism is particularly capable of evidencing the activation of this primary formation and hence its analysis. In these moments, preceding the organization, the bewilderment of the ego is manifested very dramatically.

The breaking down is expressed by silence.

Urgency identifications arise to attempt to recoup, writes André Missenard (1982), he goes on to explain that they are manifested for example, in the proposal of individual presentations or other demands/offers of identification references. At the same time, what we call the urgency boundaries arise, that correspond to attempts to determine the margins of the assembly. Frequently these boundaries are searched for in requests for explanations of the rules or of the consignment of work, in requests for debates, in the analysis of positive redefinition of what unites the group, or in the request for psychoanalytical theoretical conceptualisations etc. It is interesting to note how the resources put forward urgently to specify the boundaries of the ego and those of the group, -while they support each other reciprocally- often in these initial moments are hard to diversify: specific relationships are requested/offered to mark out the boundaries of the group, implying a request for aspects that are individualizing in that moment. For instance questions like: “Is someone missing?” or “Shall we close the door?” inevitably lead to: “Who are we?”, or “Why are we meeting here?” or “Who asked that we should meet?” On the other hand, in already established groups it can occur that the urgency boundaries appear more differentiated than the urgency identifications. For example when a crisis occurs in a group because a particularly significant member has left, or more members contemporaneously, or a too brief lapse of time didn’t consent a cautious and careful elaboration of the loss, the delimiting urgency seems to dominate over the identification urgency. When new

members are admitted, usually the delimiting urgency appears to be controlled by the identification urgency above all by entrusting to the “one” or “more” new members the anxiety of non-assignment.

The anticipation in the mind of the other.

The beginning of the process of organization coincides with the process of reorganization of the ego. An institution has offered its services to the group, one or more analysts have anticipated its existence, and each participant has been admitted, having been prepared to do anything to be part of it. Starting from this participation, this “representation “in the mind of the other” that presupposes the desire of the other to “form a group”, those egos are reunited in order to realize their desire and in particular that original desire. Hence they are (he is) the “group”, they form it (he forms it) and they managed to reunite it with (omni)potence; the different answers to these demands will force the process in course between the unions and the separations, the fusions and the discriminations, and if “everything works out”, the group will become a common, intermediary object in course.

From the “oceanic sentiment” to the group illusion.

When René Kaës (1993) states that the regression of the single ego in a group is unique, he is rejecting Bion’s definition of the group as <<*an assembly of individuals in the same state of regression*>>. We prefer to consider these different approaches as referring to different levels of analysis and not in antithesis as they seem to appear.

From Bion’s stand point, the most primitive, psychic formation exists, preceding chronologically and structurally the differentiation as much of the ego as of any other object, including the group as an object, and seeing we are referring to the primary narcissism, the regression would be identical in all the subjects in the activation of the primary groupality. Although we compare this state to an oceanic sentiment, perhaps it would be better to describe it as an oceanic illusion insofar as the expression that accompanies it is not universally constant: it varies in every single subject specially in the area concerning the pleasure-pain polarity. In the interplay between these expressions and the singular reactions that are provoked, strength and a capability of starting to take steps towards the organization of the group appear.

The necessity and the possibility of achieving this organization leads to potential, affective and ideational differences that belong to every subjectivity, these are provoked internally and from meeting different people. If we observe from this point of view, it is impossible to speak of regression that is the same for everyone.

So what does the beginning of the “group” mean for each person? The “group” is an expression of what the ego has lost in order to exist and will never stop trying to recoup: it’s a primary point of reference, constant, and paradoxically indispensable in order to exist. Hence to create or form a group for every ego is, in the first place to be a group and to make sure the boundaries of the ego and the group match up totally. Even though in the imaginary realisation of this aspiration, different changes are

recognised in the different groupings a phenomenon exists that Didier Anzieu (op. cit.) described as a “particular psychic state” that is expressed in phrases like: “We feel so good all together”, or “We’ve formed a very good group”. He calls this groupal illusion its mode of functioning is analogous to that of the ideal ego.

This phenomenon produces an euphoric, triumphal illusion, that the ego and the group can coexist without conflicts: being at the same time one, or more than one, depending on the convergence of desires that are “unanimous” and not focused on the individual anymore. Every ego, and not only, not like in the dream, but now together with “others”, becomes a group without producing conflict, because various egos “united” for this purpose, have allowed their boundaries to coexist with the group that they self-created. Here we are dealing exactly with the conditions of the groupal illusion: on one hand an alliance suspends the distances and the differences that could hinder the unification, while on the other it’s this alliance that generates a group that stands on its own. The euphoria celebrates the creation of the group object (narcissistic), where the separation of this object created as regards to the mind that anticipated it is present in the group; the destruction of a new psychic act, creator of that object comes about, in favour of an appropriation that transforms it.

The collective, conflict and the object

The primary ‘groupality’ makes up that part of the collective that is available. It’s actualisation with an other ego is not always tolerated, but when it is, its different for every ego involved in this actualisation. The uniqueness of each ego, that in the first place is disclosed by the absence or the presence of this tolerance, expresses itself accordingly thanks to the resources that the ego possesses to face this undifferentiated state, (as we already mentioned previously), it doesn’t determine it, unless only potentially, or as an anticipation in the mind of an other.

Generally, the ego/group conflict only comes about in the primary narcissism/secondary narcissism conflict, because it is in this process that the ego encounters/invents at the cost of having to keep on encountering/inventing the intermediary each time it is united or separated by it.

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