

Psycho-Dynamism of dramatisation in groups

Marcos Bernard

Abstract

The author relates the dream to a production typical of the group, the dramatic representation and tries to show the similarities and differences between the two. The author takes into consideration the thought of Anzieu (1963), who pointed out the equivalence between the small group and the dream. A group would be, in a sense, a dream dreamed by various dreamy. If we give the dream a function beyond that of satisfaction of desires processing, its reflection can get even closer comparison of the dream with the actions of a small group of psychoanalysts. The author suggests that dreams, in a group, have one of the main functions in this formalization: its function is to provide models of work and thought the group, as well as matrices for identifying its components. Spaces in which to adapt, or with whom you can establish oppositions. The dreams performing among other functions, to mediate between the production of an individual and the group. Allow it to develop models of reflection and action that can go from one form to the next myth, relatively polysemous to one that is as close to a narrow ideological system.

Key-words: dream, group, narration, patterns, language

1.- Introduction

Group psychoanalysis has certain distinctive characteristics compared to classic treatment implying a remarkable difference in theory and technique.

The patient stretched out on the sofa, with the hysterogenic effect of the group suspended (Kaës, 1985), is obliged to "direct his gaze inwards", to tell the story of the vicissitudes of his internal group, the world of his phantasms, all of which will have to pass through the gorge of the word, be translated into a code expressing it and, in a certain sense, distorting it. This question is developed in a time sequence in which transfert will provide the analyst with the successive roles in which the characters of the patient's internal group appear.

We will never see his dream: but will hear his account of it. In a certain sense, we may say that individual analysis is like reading plays. This is not a criticism, but rather a specification of its conditions and its possibilities.

In the analytical context of a group, the phantasm spreads out in space. The whole content of the scene is encompassed by the geography of the framing, sustained by the concrete presence of the companions in the group, a sort of pretending (at times), the final beneficiary of which is the therapist.

The obvious sense of what the patient says will be ratified or rectified by what is dramatised in the transfert scene, in a more spectacular way than in the course of classic treatment.

The greater quantity of nuances observed in this dramatisation means that at every moment the interpretation is complex and fraught with difficulties. Various elements that may be appreciated do not lend themselves to be expressed in words. What is ineffable cannot be interpreted by the verbal code.

Even the therapist's interpretation produces a dramatic effect. Its content attempts to express the concept, to translate into the language of a secondary process what the patients are doing, but the mere fact of being pronounced, the where, when, how etc. produces yet another modification of the context which should be borne in mind.

I will attempt in this work to base myself on clinical material in order to make certain considerations on the dialectic relationship between the material expressed and the material dramatised, such as it may be observed in a small therapy group led by adopting a psycho-analytical approach.

I have no intention to use the material as proof of what has been affirmed in commentaries; it should, rather, be taken as an example.

2.- Fragment of a group session (summary)

Jorge speaks of his birthday. His mother declined to take part in the reunion he has organised to celebrate it. She refuses to accept his new marriage. Rather, she has invited him to lunch. He has rejected the offer, in annoyance.

Maria says that her children have already settled into the new workshop. "We are very pleased," she says.

Renata objects to the "we are". She considers that Maria fails to differentiate herself from her children. She goes on to speak of the piano which her mother has sent her from her family home in the provinces. Her mother has phoned to ask her if the piano has arrived, offering her the scores and exercise books which Renata had used to study with. But she refused them flatly.

Cecilia tells how her mother did not understand her, when she was a child. Coming back from a party one day, she was sick. Now she thinks that there must have been some psychological reasons behind her sickness, but her mother ascribed it to something she had eaten at the party.

Maria protests quite strongly at what her companions have said to her. She declares that her joy at the change in her children is adequate and legitimate.

Renata and Cecilia try to point out to her what they consider as an attitude of overprotection on her part. In addition, they draw her attention to the difficulty she has in accepting what they are in fact saying to her.

A first approach

When Jorge starts up the session by speaking of his birthday, he situates us in his feeling of adaptation to a new epoch. He wants to convey to his mother the changes in his life. He has just got married again, and more than once has said that he feels wonderful sharing experiences with his wife. His sexual life too is satisfactory. However he thinks that his mother, who is very conservative in her ideas, is not prepared to accept his divorce and his new marriage. She is proposing a return to the old habits, in the form of a meal in his mother's home. Jorge realises that this represents an attempt to sabotage everything he has achieved, and refuses crossly. His telling these facts to the group signifies, among other things, his desire to share all of this with her, as if to offset the affront to his mother.

The mother-son relationship is no matter of indifference to Maria. She takes up the subject, from a different point of view. Her children have had to leave the family home. Although they were quite old enough (both are about thirty years of age), it is only at present, as a result of a series of to some extent external conditions, that they have managed to put a certain distance, even if only a geographical one, between them. She denies this fact: she shares in their joy, helping with the move. She has identified herself with the mother in Jorge's story, feels some vexation, but chooses not to recognise it by giving in to "the young people". In this way she denies the lack of articulation between the generations. In fact, by taking the structure of roles proposed by Jorge in his role of rebellious son, she adapts it to her own idea: this son is completed by an "indulgent" mother.

The situation, posed in these terms is as ambiguous as it is disconcerting. A mother of this kind threatens to "assimilate to the system" (to use a political metaphor) any attempt at revolt.

Renata, who on other occasions defined herself as a daughter attempting (with quite scant results to date) to become affectively independent of her mother, listens to the proposals with an attentive ear. As a daughter, she would like to go away. Her mother however prevents her from doing so. Her intention, here, is to clearly comprehend what Maria has just said. If what Maria has said were true, she should accept that the difficulties in achieving independence are suffered by the children, and not by the parents. The gift that her mother has made her of the old piano on which she used to study without pleasure, for so long, is the symbol of this relationship. Perhaps it cost her even more to have this instrument sent from her province, than to buy another one here.

The replacement of the keys for her represents proof of her desire for updating, which is however denied by the very fact of doing it on this outdated instrument. She feels no attachment for this object from her childhood, for affective reasons; it does not constitute a souvenir for her. She only lays claims to it as something that her mother owed her, basing her claim on its asserted material value. The changed keys likewise represent her difficulty in conceiving of an enrichment outside of her family home. The original ivory has been replaced by a less noble material. The old music scores

pushed on one side finally, are yet another affirmation of her mother's apparently possessive attitude.

Renata proposes reverting to Jorge's model. But, in her version, the emancipated son becomes a rebel son, tied to a whole series of vindications which, by their very nature, are destined to failure.

Maria, as she passes, is "put in her place". She admits no nuances or half terms, obliging her to assume a role of overprotective and obsessive mother.

Cecilia who has struggled all her life with problems of putting on weight, remembers her old conflict regarding food. Her confusion between attachments, feelings and food continues without interruption. Her fatness is a monument to the indiscrimination with her mother.

As she has done already on other occasions, Maria exercises pressure by an attitude of evident violence. In other sessions this mechanism gave her a good result. In order to maintain a pleasant atmosphere, her companions gave in to her arguments and to her demands. The fact is not that they are afraid of her directly, but they do not want to assume the responsibility for a violent, distressing scene, continually occurring in their relations with her. Her message becomes perhaps more contradictory: if they do not admit that she is understanding, she will become very angry.

Renata and Cecilia draw her attention to her overprotective attitude very gently and cautiously. They themselves appear to be treating her in a tone that an observer would most likely qualify, quite rightly, as overprotective.

Maria's lack of self-control and her impulsive nature, more characteristic of a child than of a woman of 50 or so, however would seem to justify the 'soft' approach adopted by her daughters. Once more the model of overprotective mother-overprotected children emerges, but the other way round compared to the original characters.

3.- Structure of the drama

Two triangular structures alternate in this fragment of session. One in which the protagonist roles are those of Jorge and of Maria, with the third vertex represented by the independence of Jorge and his new companion; while the other is represented by Maria, Cecilia and Renata, in which the third term tends to disappear.

Up to this point we have failed to situate a key element: the place of the therapist in this series of dramatisations. This means that the analysis has been shifted towards the manifest material provided by the patients, in the first analysis.

As a rule Maria has functioned as monopolist in the group. She has clearly offered herself to her companions as a *primum inter pares*, a position concealing a potential but fierce rivalry with the analyst. Often she has criticised the latter's "hardness" in his interpretations or his "lack of caring" for some companion in difficulties.

She keeps up with former companions, now cured, and has visited her present companions on the occasion of their birthdays and other events, which is not the case for the other members of the group. What has assumed an institutional character,

outside of the framework in which they meet, is that she has come to command this type of "social" operations. Furthermore, now and then she has let it be understood that her personal problems are indeed serious. It is not unusual that some member of the group undergoes situations of crisis, however hers are incomparably worse. In these last cases, the mechanism described as threatening a decompensation becomes even stronger, although the therapy work has reduced these episodes to manageable levels.

And now we will describe a third triangle containing the previous ones, formed by Maria, the therapist and the rest of the group.

This configuration, which we would define as a monopoly, corresponds to the one that Béjarano (1973) called "leadership". It constitutes a frequent structure in therapy groups, where a triangular bond is dramatised in which the third person (in this particular case, the therapist) tends to be excluded, with the other two remaining joined in an achievement of idealisation.

A few facts regarding Maria's family constellation will help clarify this point. Maria's husband is a commercial traveller: He is away from home for long periods of time, giving the priority, according to Maria, to his professional rather than to his family occupations. She is left to take care of the children's upbringing and education, stressing in her accounts the father's absence at vital junctures such as illnesses, crises, etc. In the light of Maria's way of behaving in the here and now of the group, it is easy to understand her history, as that of her exclusion of the father figure. By dramatising her family group (which is the reflection of her internal group) in the context of a transfert, she appears as clearly putting herself between the therapist-father and her companions of the group-children.

This enables her to interpret Jorge's situation as establishing an alliance with the therapist and thereby implicitly affronting her. This also explains her condescending attitude of disqualification when Jorge passed through the vicissitudes of his separation from his first wife. She perceived this process as a confrontation of the latter with his pre-genital mother, with whom she unconsciously identified herself.

Technically speaking, Maria's monopoly was envisaged by fixing the axis of the task of interpretation on the reasons which her group companions could have for submitting to it, a tactic applied in a work specially developed by us on this subject (Puget, Bernard, Games Chaves, Romano, 1982).

The accounts given by the patients - including Maria - in respect of which at the outset we made some considerations regarding them from the historico-genetic viewpoint, as a result of this deployment in the group dramatisation, assume a new dimension.

As we have said earlier on other occasions, the therapy group is first and foremost a primary group (Bernard, 1982). Within it a group of individuals, the patients, narrate and comment on a series of events from their past and present lives, and their plans. They think and think of themselves, exchange experiences and points of view. They make judgements and ways of living relative.

The account is developed within the time in which the session takes place, encompassed and limited by this framework. At this level, participation is oral and has points of contact with the classic treatment. The discourses complement and cross one another; we might be tempted to consider them as a sequence in common: an ensemble speaking of its subject. The therapist is merely one of the interlocutors, privileged insofar as he is ascribed with possessing specialised knowledge on the work to be carried out: to reflect on the psychological causes of their personal problems.

In the dramatic environment of the transfert, the situation changes as regards its qualitative content.

4.- Internal group and external group

In the course of the session the patients and the therapist form a circle. Not only do they hear, observe and see one another; the presence of the others reinforces its signification on account of this circumstance.

In Maria's account, her husband is referred to as a fleeting presence, serving to stress his absence. She says that he is not there, that he has never been there, and finds that that is the cause of her view of the family constellation.

This account is a metaphor by means of which she becomes aware of the composition of her internal group. But in the dramatisation in which she takes part, when the time comes to try and reproduce this model (making her internal group external, by confusing it with the role structure that she is proposing, and in which she finds her identity) (Bernard, 1979), she finds the concrete presence of the therapist, facing her companions, or of the latter facing the therapist.

What in her spoken story took place in a time sequence, "my husband went away and came back, and went off again," becomes here a drama in space: the third person ready to step in, to break her fusion with the object of her desire, is present here. The subject which was developing in time, is now deployed in space.

The absence there should be transformed into lack of effectiveness here. So that the disqualification "is there, but may not be effective".

Renata and Cecilia are in the game, their overprotection is a reversed reproduction of that of Maria. The latter, however, complains of being wrongly interpreted; not only does she claim the protector protected structure, but she aspires to a specific place within it.

What for her companions is viewed as a repetition, is for her an invasion. If they assume the role of therapist, they will follow his destiny.

For Maria, her group companions should have joined in her joy at her children's moving home, which would clearly appear as a nullification of the whole process: "I give you my permission to do what you like". Renata and Cecilia clearly react against Maria, but insofar as her attitude so requires, they yield, since for Maria there are only two options possible: "either you are with me or against me". What she could

not bear would be autonomy, that she would experience, from this point of view, as an abandonment.

These considerations lead us to underline a key characteristic in this kind of dramatisation. When the code has ceased to be oral (close to the digital, tending to taxative, if not mimic, and more precisely analogic differentiation) the same scene could be used for developing several subjects at one and the same time .

For Jorge, the situation shared has a sense of farewell. He takes no part in the discussion after having his say. However, his presence places him in any case on the scene, with the implications that we have commented on for each main actor.

The therapist's interpretation, enunciated at this moment, describes this situation, shapes it from the group and the participation of each and every one of its members.

This creates a twofold effect. The level of primary group (Bernard, 1978), lost insofar as the dramatic level interfered with the oral communication, is resumed as the latter is recovered. In addition, his presence as a third party, representing in this case the law, is dramatised.

It is inevitable that the therapist takes part in the level of dramatisation, by the fact of his presence in the circuit of things visible. There he occupies a place, or rather, several places, bearing in mind the simultaneousness of the overlapping unconscious dramatisations on the group scene. Accordingly he is redeemed through the interpretation of transfert.

Summary

Certain particularities of group psychoanalysis are envisaged, which relate them to individual psychoanalysis.

Starting off from the presentation of clinical material, we analyse the vicissitudes of the dramatisation - in the here and now of the session - of the conflicts emanating from the manifest account of patients.

Relations are established between the composition of the internal group of patients and the manner acquired by the dramatisation, so that it may be considered as an image notably distorted by each patient, of the role structure of the therapy group, as a primary group.

Bibliography

Anzieu D. (1963). *Analogia tra il gruppo e il sogno: il gruppo, realizzazione immaginaria di desideri e minacce. Il gruppo e l'inconscio*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1986.

Anzieu, D. (1971). L'illusione gruppale. Un io ideale comune. *Il gruppo e l'inconscio*. Paris: Dunod.

Bernard, M (1987). I gruppi burocratizzati. *Rivista di Psicologia e Psicoterapia di Gruppo*. Tomo X Nro. 1, 1987.

Bernard, M. (1994). Structure du fantasme et du transfert. En R. Kaës (comp). *Les voies de la Psyché Jomage* Didier Anzieu. Paris : Dunod, 1994.

Bernard, M (1996). Riflessioni sul concetto di trasferimento nella psicoanalisi vincolari. *Rivista dell'Associazione Argentina di Psicologia e Psicoterapia di Gruppo*, T. XIX N1. 1996.

Bernard, M. (1999). Gli organizzatori del vincolo. Della pulsione all'altro. *Rivista dell'Associazione di Psicologia e Psicoterapia di Gruppo*, T.XXII, Nro. 1 , 1999.

Barnard, M (1999 b). Uno sguardo verso la storia. Primo incontro di Psicoanalisti di Famiglia e Coppia. Associazione Argentina di Psicoterapia per Laureati. Buenos Aires, Mayo 1999.

Bleger, J. (1971). Le groupe comme institution et le groupe dans les institutions. Dans R. Kaës et al. *L'institution et les institutions*. Paris : Dunod, 1996.

Freud, S. (1914). *Ricordare, ripetere, elaborare*. O.C., T. XII, Buenos Aires: Amorrortu editori, 1986.

Green, A. (1972). Notes sur les processus tertiaires. *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse*. T. XXXVI, Nro. 3, mai 1972. Pp 407- 410.

Kaës, R. (1986-87). Les organisateurs psychiques du groupe. *Gruppo* 2, 1986;117_125 y 2, 1987, 113-124.

Laplanche, J. e Pontalis, J B., *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*. Paris : PUF, 1967.

Major, R. (1973). La isteria: sogno e rivoluzione. En I. De Krell (comp.) *L'audizione, la steria*, Buenos Aires: Paidos, 1991.

Missenard, A. (1982). Du narcissisme dans les groupes. En R. Kais et al. *Le travail psychanalytique dans les groupes*. Paris : Dunod, 1982.

Neri. C. (1995). *Le groupe. Manuel de psychanalyse de groupe*. Paris : Dunod, 1997.

Pontalis, J B (1972). *Reves dans un groupe*. En D. Anzieu et al *Le travail psychoanalytique dans les goupes*, Paris : Dunod, 1972.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Realtà e gioco*. Barcellona: GEDISA, 1979

Marcos Bernard is a Training Psychoanalyst of the Argentin Society and International Psychoanalytical association. Author of many publications specially in the research on the familiar boundaries.