

Reflection on Foulkes and basic assumptions, "Italianiter"

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Abstract

The group becomes a place where bygone lacerations are exhibited, and where in the meantime hopefully a remedy will be found. The scars are the concrete evidence of our tormented stories, that show us our limits and those of others, we are aware of the objective difficulties, but we are closer to finding an area where we can express our life project. To remember, and to be remembered by the group ascribes value to the memory, contributing to our being responsible for our present and future. A profound sense of continuity of the Self, makes it possible to face solitude with contentment, time and space become a potential area of creativity. The group constitutes the ideal family, where it is possible to learn to modulate time and the individual-group dialectic. Nucara, Menarini and Pontalti explain: "the family matrix should be a transitional space (or unsaturated family matrix), from which the child (or person) gives meaning to the precedent generations and culture and contemporaneously gives signification to the new, evolutive project that is unknown". This quotation for me assumes a fundamental model in my conclusion on Foulkes, Bion, the story and the time.

Today we can say a group culture is firmly established in the world thanks to the teachings of Foulkes and Bion. In Italy group analysis is extensively practised and taught, promoting personal and collective group research on a continuative and creative level.

Key words: group, matrix, potential area, creativity, individual-group dialectic

On introducing Foulkes' writings to my students, I was struck by the relevance his thought has on clinical practice and in particular on group therapy and its evolution in Italy up to the present day. The importance of Foulkes is widely recognized by Italian psychoanalysts today. It was 1967 when "Therapeutic Group Analysis" first appeared in Italian, ("Analisi Terapeutica di Gruppo" Boringhieri), even earlier than Bion's "Experiences in Groups" and other writings dealing with relational objects in psychoanalytical thought, which started to appear at the beginning of the 1970's. In 1963 the III International Congress of Group Psychotherapy was held and the opinion that emerged was, that group therapy could be considered a possibility of establishing with individuals a type of collective relation. This was a consequence of the social-therapeutic ideas that claimed if "the society is the cause of mental illness, it must find the means to heal it". This concept, according to Spaltro, is the basis of the definition of the method of working in groups, that Foulkes first denominated therapeutic analysis of the group, and in 1975 changed to group analysis, which he described as "a form of psychotherapy practiced by the group onto the group, and

includes the therapist. Hence the name group psychotherapy or group analysis". This term was first used by T. Burrow in 1923, (L. Ancona and E. Gatto Pertegato, 1994). Both T. Burrow and Foulkes claimed the specificity of group analysis, originating from psychoanalysis. Foulkes maintained from the very beginning that the concepts of traditional psychoanalysis could be used with benefit in the setting of the group to facilitate the group process, but the variability introduced by the presence of the group greatly changed the use of these concepts making them similar but not identical.

L. Ancona in his article "Psicoanalisi e Gruppo-analisi a Confronto" (1996) also claims the specificity of group analysis, confirms the fundamental contribution from psychoanalysis, but diverges, when he describes how group analysis has become independent through "a type of interaction that aims to involve the subject in his own dynamics..." In 1975 Foulkes also asserts that group analysis is a way of studying and bringing to the present evolutionary processes that in turn leave space for therapeutic processes, whereas in psychoanalysis the cause of pathological behaviour is treated in a chronological way. This affirmation however, does not deny the exchange of learning and mutual enrichment. Ancona even goes further and asserts that between the two therapies a particularly constructive bond has come about, thanks to the increasing importance given to object-relations, and the intensification of the dynamics of the social forces present (Gill, 1993).

Ancona sees the origin of this tendency in Ferenczi's opinion whereby the analyst is a necessary part of the technical sphere. "After his enlightening meeting with the American, Trigant Burrow, Ferenczi definitely had an innovative influence on Winnicott, Spitz, Kohut, Paula Heimann, Racker and Balint, and even more so on Sullivan and Fairbairn".

When Foulkes, in his first book claims that the social nature of the individual is a result of multiple interrelations, he opened new paths that facilitated Italian psychoanalysts to accept later theories on object-relations.

My approach to Foulkes' theory of object-relations when I was a young Psychology student, was of open-mindedness and interest, and I awaited with impatience the second book, "Group-Analytic Psychotherapy" that came out in Italian in 1976.

Equally influential was the reading of "E Zarathustra parlò ancora..." by D. Lopez, a student of Foulkes at the London Institute of Psychoanalysis. Group therapists, (among whom, Ancona, Fasolo, Nucara, Menarini e Pontalti, Sommaruga, Napoletani, Neri, LoVerso, Papa and myself,) all confirm the importance that the writings on object-relations and Self-psychology have had on our work.

The increasing attention given to the relational paradigm rather than the instinctual, within psychoanalytical thought, came about with the spreading of group therapy in Italy and the rest of the world.

In the therapeutic sphere, the importance of the centrality of relations have for the human person has become of prime importance. In fact, LoVerso and Papa stress that "subjectivity has plural origins, and the study of the group dimension represents an

indispensable model for the comprehension of subjectivity in all its depth and wealth". I'm not going into the foundation of group analysis here, which undoubtedly influenced clinical work in Italy starting with Fabrizio Napolitani, a pioneer in this field.

Rather I would like to deal with the different schools of group therapy existing today. Even though they don't all consider themselves group analysis,(see " Saggi di psicoterapia di gruppo" 1979 edited by Vanni) they recognize the importance of the theories of Foulkes and his concept of matrix, and the comprehension of the group seen as the complex situation in which different levels of interpersonal relations interact (net), with a dynamic integration between the intra and the inter-personal. In his accurate book "Group," Neri, who started group therapy above all with Bion's theories, acknowledges Foulkes as a founding father. Important concepts like network, matrix and plexus are consistently drawn upon by Neri.

He underlines the therapeutic group specificity of the mirror effect, in which an individual learns about himself through the action he exercises on others and the image they make of him.

He adopts Foulkes' concept of resonance that indicates the capacity of the members of a group to grasp the emotions of the other participants.

Diego Napolitani, sets forth his theories of group analysis, in "Individualità e gruppalità" (Individuality and Groupality), a bold and creative synthesis between the works of Foulkes and the writings of Bion.

He illustrates the concept of the collective foundation of the human mind through three relational universes or spheres, in which the protomental (P), the transferal (S) and the symbolic (R) are potentially present in the group setting, interacting among themselves.

When he speaks about the sphere characterized by the protomental aspects, he intends that each person is a "carrier" of these aspects, of this specific experience of being in relation, and that it persists for the length of a lifetime, and does not necessarily mean a return to the evolutive development.

Its not a regression to an archaic phase of childhood as Bion maintains, but is a specific condition that awakes in favourable situations, like the group setting for example. I believe it is undeniably a characteristic of an archaic phase of the experience.

Napolitani goes on to describe the modality of the structuring of the relational experience and how it is characterized: "the individual finds himself emerged in a preconscious state, in which the Self and the non-Self, the mental and the corporeal, the inside and the outside, one's self and the other, are all tangled up".

Napolitani also stresses that one of the characteristics of the protomental phenomena is that they move outside the "adult" time and space, (without possibility of development, a non-classified space seen as an interruption of continuity). In the same session, however, its possible to find elements belonging to all three relational

spheres; its only when one prevails over the others that the therapist can comprehend the stage the group is going through.

Furthermore, D. Napolitani regarding the relational sphere characterized by protomental aspects, shares Bion's concept of basic assumptions (1961). Basic assumptions are considered to be the expression of the "group mentality", they spring from the combining of desires and unconscious impulses that implicate the automatic association of collective mental states on an exclusively emotive and unelaborated basis, resulting in rigid schemes of groupal reaction and loss of individual identity. They are known as:

1) basic assumption of Pairing, which is an unconscious collective belief that an idealized pairing (or coupling) will give birth to a Messianic figure that in future will solve any problem the group may have.

2) basic assumption of Dependence, is characterized by the group's need to depend totally on someone who will solve any sort of problem, and who will fulfil needs and desires.

3) basic assumption of Fight-flight, is a phantasy that there is an enemy to attack or to flee from.

I agree with Napolitani when he declares the protomental sphere is a potentiality that the individual maintains for the length of his life, and not necessarily a regression to the most archaic level of childhood.

In fact in the light of Napolitani's observations, I find it is incorrect to speak of regression in the protomental stage, but rather it is more like a symbolic rehabilitating of that particular level of experience not only made possible, but facilitated by the group. D.Napolitani maintains that from his experience, the basic assumptions assume dot-like forms in the life of a group, and that their brief appearance along with the magical dawn-like atmosphere that they evoke, are qualities that are characteristic of an experience of birth, with its precarious impressiveness almost at the limits of ineffability.

I agree with the latter descriptions of basic assumptions, but after having supervised a group of cardiopaths I disagree with the concept whereby basic assumptions assume dot-like forms in the life of a group, even though they are the dominant subjects dealt with in groups.

(In small groups, I have observed that the aspects that appear more frequently determine a quantitative difference that in time become a qualitative difference. Depending on the aims the group has established, and the length of time in which the group takes place short-lived groups or open groups, the therapist observes the emergence of some aspects over others, and in the dialectics that ensue between fusion and individualization, will determine what dynamics are functional to the group).

Basic assumptions of Pairing occupy the centre of the protomental sphere, according to D.Napolitani: He writes: "the basic assumption of Pairing consists in a sort of general excitement shared by all the group, and brings a festive atmosphere to the

session: there is a promise in the air, not for anything in particular, but directed onto ourselves, like an echo repeating..."we are here, we are here for Us". The usual evening session is pervaded by an unusual sensation in which the environment, the objects in the room, the faces and gestures of the participants, their clothes, all seem to point to a single omen".

The assumption of Dependence and the assumption of Fight-flight derive from the assumption of Pairing, according to Napolitani, and they are like bridges reaching out to the other relational spheres. He differs from Bion when he claims that these two assumptions develop directly from the assumption of Pairing, he goes further when he declares, "they are the protomental foundation of the experience of development". He retains that the dependence is initially turned onto the group as a whole, declining to project the need for an omnipotent leader onto the therapist. He considers it to be a sort of discovery of dependence, like the declaring of a specific way of revealing the birth, seen as a possible intersubjective recognition.

"The assumption of Dependence is the birth of the experience of development in the sense of the historicity of existence through the awakening to a reassuring recognition of the world... From this, one could presume that the assumption of Dependence is at the origin of the experience of time, characteristically irreversible; time seen as anticipation of mortality, reveals in the intersubjective dependence its unique quality, that is, to be appropriated subjectively by man. The assumption of Dependence therefore is the assumption of Cronos".

On the contrary a sensation of uneasiness in the group precedes the appearance of the assumption of Fight-flight. The group is agitated, excited voices can be heard talking one on top of the other, gestures take on a different rhythm, no-one sits still, "everything seems to point to an impending disaster". The intense, emotive participation leads to a painful sensation of fragmented ideas, emotions and representations that involve the therapist as well. The protomental state in this perspective can be radically threatened by the reactivation of sub-groups, stimulated by aspects that to an outside observer would seem unimportant. Each member of the group feels a physical uneasiness indicated by D.Napolitani as a state of intense "need". The experience of "need" is not expressed though, (nor would it be possible), rather, a psychosomatic expression springs from the protomental relational modality, and is accompanied by a feeling of deep anger.

According to D.Napolitani, the assumption of Fight-flight is the declination of the assumption of Pairing towards independence, that can only result in solitude, without (inter)subjective recognition, without love, and with the anxiety of losing oneself in a senseless fragmentation. Napolitani stresses however, that the basic assumption of Fight-flight participates in the foundation of all the other assumptions, this is characterized by an extremely painful experience that is expressed in the separation from the origin, and in the origin of the separation in solitude. The author maintains that while the assumption of Dependence is the birth of the experience of development in the sense of the historicity of existence, through the awakening of a

reassuring recognition of the world, the assumption of Fight-flight is the birth of the experience of development in the sense of spatiality, (seen as solitude). The assumption of Flight-fight, therefore, is seen to be at the origin of the experience of a space that is diversified, once accepted as such, it does not have however, the same features of the drama of time: diversified space in fact, is reversible (inside-outside). This structural reversibility of diversified space does not justify the anxiety, linked to space, (the space that prototypically produces claustrophobia and agoraphobia), this anxiety probably refers to a protomental representation of space, by which the diversification of the spaces is a motivation for the reactivating of the assumption of Fight-flight. This is because the protomental space is unique, monadic, undifferentiated, and it is from this space that in the assumption of Fight-flight one undergoes the experience of being hurled out. Compared with the space of the origin (metaphorically a pre-natal space), the development towards the differentiated space is a catastrophic precipice.

It's the awakening recognition of one's own corporeity, as a closed limited space, irremediably solitary, that puts the individual in front of the unsupportable evidence of the loss of the monad space of the origin. In order to obtain the dimension of time, a process comes about gradually in the protomental, thanks to the reassuring experience of dependence. On the other hand to obtain the dimension of differentiated space an "independent" catastrophic crisis comes about. (According to the theory whereby the catastrophic process contrasts gradual changes.)

I have illustrated only briefly D. Napolitani's writings on the protomental sphere, starting from the basic assumptions of Bion; what I find valid is the author's approach in considering them an articulate process and I particularly appreciate his view of the experience of an archaic foundation of space and of time.

Other important and original contributions to the evolution of group research in Italy come from different contexts, and include, for example, family therapy, (Menarini and Pontalti), the institutional, (Correale, Fasolo, and Gaburri), social (Di Maria and Lavanco). These operators help to maintain a spirit of research, characterized by the writings of Foulkes and Bion, stimulating a constant dialectic between theory and practice. It is impossible for me to synthesize the numerous contributions to the evolvement of group research from the 1960's till today. Profita and Venza write: "the contributions to the evolvement of group analysis in Italy and abroad are innumerable and the debate is in continual expansion; besides, the continual cropping up of new ideas don't consent to draw up hasty conclusions". I now want to focus my attention on time and how it is depicted inside the group therapeutic process, without neglecting the importance of its archaic foundation.

In Ondarza Linares' "Il Tempo e le Clinica Gruppoanalitica" (Time and Group analytic Practice), the concept of time and net (or network) are closely connected. Ondarza stresses how the space-time structure in the group forms a container in which " a confrontation can come about between time experienced by the individual, and time as a representation renewed constantly by the group". The author analyses

the different applications of Foulkes' concept of net (or network), (the definition of which, network is a common system made up of individuals; each individual forms a nodal part and is in continual interaction among themselves). He particularly dwells upon " the fact that the network intrinsically deals with concepts of time, temporality, contemporaneity, the story of the individual, and family saga. The network is the link where different times meet: the here and now, the then and there, internal reality and external reality, etc. The spiral of time persists in its course, from the individual to the group and back again, searching in a fusional pole belonging and security, and in the opposite pole originality, differentiation, independence". He goes on to say: "...A resonance can be perceived, where the time of each person sets in motion the time of the other, resulting in a strong possibility of transformation". In my opinion, using explicit group-analytical terminology, Ondarza manages to convey how the personal events of individuals have a place in the story of the group and consequently become an integral part of it.

Now I will deal with the significance of the story in the group and how it is constructed in the future of the group time; I will stress its specific therapeutic importance in this type of setting.

Even in patients who are new, the story of the group stimulates optimism in facing and resolving problems. It also has the function of relieving the tension when necessary, providing comforting narratives corresponding to analogous conflicts in the "hic et nunc" of past sessions, that have already been resolved, resulting in a diminution of the depressive anxiety. The role of the "historic" story telling is usually played by a patient who was most involved on a previous occasion, and can tell the story with major detachment and awareness. Or else by a sub-group who had participated with ex-patients to a similar situation and are familiar with the process. Moreover the story has the function of conserving the memory of the path followed by patients who have terminated the cure but continue to be a valuable part of the groupal "net". The memories of these ex-patients serve as examples, 'specially for new patients who are constructing a therapeutic project to pursue. The function of the story in the community is an important therapeutic element that favours both the individual and the group, allowing to reach beyond the fragmentation and the episodic nature of the Self, towards the sharing of humane, universal experiences. Furthermore, it consents a positive synthesis between the synchronic and the diachronic perspective, producing an opposite movement that at the same time is complementary towards individuation. It supplies the bases that help to weaken fear of separation and solitude, connects the individual to the others and puts the past and the future in a perspective that is acceptable. The story in common gives the possibility to share moments of fusion at a high evolutive level, that make time, seen as the metaphor of the spiral, implicit in this process (The concept of the spiral of time is often present in Ondarza's writings). In fact the image of e spiral spinning round its axis conforms to the synthesizing of the plurality of dimensions and movements that go to make up the temporal experience in the group: one goes

forward but has the possibility to return to the same point, the same distance from the axis but at a different plane, illustrating how in the individual and in the session, coexisting multiple planes of reality are present. So when I speak of fusion in the group, I am not only referring to the reintroducing symbolically of the symbiosis with the primary object, (which is fundamental for the development, because it protects the individual from the exaltation of the Self, and is the basis for the development of the authentic Self), but to the possibility to share ulterior and more evolved moments of fusion, (with the use of the story, as already described above).

As I have already mentioned in other writings, the group setting has its own modality compared to individual analysis which allows it to move "freely" back and forth in time; past, present and future are potentially accessible and interactive, ("network seen as a link" Ondarza). In the group, its not only possible to bring to the surface the fusional archaic stage, but also follow the fundamental stages of the personal maturation that help to face unresolved problems in a constructive manner. This enables the individual to "experiment" new modalities, projecting himself into the future through the assuming of different roles, often accompanied by crises, opposition and desire to escape. This sensation of "moving freely" is rarely seen as a joyful fluctuating, but rather is felt as a loss of stability. Its comforting to read what Saint Augustine wrote in 397 when we anchor ourselves to the present, and the here and now in each session: "time is divided into three periods, past, present and future, it would be more exact to say: the present of the past, the present of the present, and the present of the future".

Temporality and its different levels are intrinsically connected to the fusion-dialectic individuation (that characterizes the group setting), described by Fraser (1981) as: the fusion and/or de-fusion of the Self. It is implicit that they describe different levels of knowledge of the objects, by which the temporal processes are linked to the learning processes, to knowledge precisely, and recognition. In fact, thanks to the differentiation movements that stem from the archaic fusion, (where there is no differentiated and integrated Self, and no distinct, differentiated objects), it is possible to conceive the experience of time and of space. Lo Verso e Profita (1994) defines "spazio senza" (literally space without) as the moving freely between past, present and future making possible the "bringing to the present" of a group. They claim that: "the "spazio senza" is represented by the point in which the mental axis of the past with its invisible but solid necessities, meets the axis of the present with its ineluctable ties, and its unexplored potentiality. This is when it is possible to unveil and recognize repetition and compulsive acting-out even though perceiving they are still deeply tied to it; the "spazio senza" therefore, is a point in which it is still not possible to construct or plan the future: the idea of the past with its confusion and failures leads to terror for the future". This "spazio senza" is present also in the individual analysis, but it is in the group analysis that it assumes its specificity, as all the components are not passing through it contemporaneously. Patients who have already faced this no-man's land in the group, act as guides for those newcomers who

find themselves in difficulty, helping to reduce fears and anxieties. Consequently the future becomes a project, and the past also is seen in a new context.

Ondarza refers to the specific modality of using time in the groupal story, and the importance it has in transforming the potential of the work of the group. It is along these lines that later I will describe a clinical example of the personal and group experience of the temporal dimension, with its potential of transformation, with reference to the transpersonal concept, (a concept that is fundamental for understanding what is going on in the group), and which connects straight back to the "net". Ondarza writes: "the net, seen as a transpersonal process, delineates the complex interrelated and transactional system that is contained in the human mind," and in which, (I would add,) past, present and future interact and are transformed. He goes on: "the group analytic mechanism reproduces in a groupal situation all the psychic functions of the Self", in an interpersonal and transpersonal constellation interdependent, that transforms the group into a new net with original and specific therapeutic properties. A new time appears in this net, "hic et nunc" in which the aspects of the Self confront and relate with the "other", an internal groupality with an external groupality. In this situation of relation and confrontation, time represents the central element in which the most significant aspects of the person are inscribed". I concord that transpersonal phenomena are inscribed precisely in this time. Transpersonal phenomena, (in the synchronic or in the diachronic sense), influence both the individual and the group temporal experience. Transpersonal phenomena (in the synchronic sense) are considered to be connected to archaic modalities of functioning of the Self, (pre-verbal), and are the necessary condition for the separation from the objects.

They appear in the group situation "hic et nunc", as a defence against the anxiety of fragmentation and separation and also as an evolutive potential in favour of the subject and of the group. Neri distinguishes them in the atmosphere, or background tone, that characterize the different sessions, in the medium, in the effects of the primitive mentality and of the basic assumptions. In diachronic transpersonal phenomena the function of the transpersonal is a sort of "precipitate" that contributes to the creation of the Self. Menarini claims that the transpersonal phenomenon is unconscious and is at the roots of interactive behaviour and is connected with the story of human groups, (namely the family of origin). According to Rouchy, (A.P.G.-C.O.I.R.A.G. Convention, Milan, May, 1996) the family culture is embodied unconsciously in the subject and is the foundation of the collective identity of the subject and the Self not individualized. This cultural embodiment is at the base of the relational space and time, and they are conditioned by it. It functions automatically and thanks to the work done in the group, can be brought to the light and understood, and ultimately, be integrated or rejected. The group I will describe after, was at a similar stage, called "fraternal community stage" by Neri. It means when the group becomes a collective subject, possessing the fundamental rights, (that belonged to the therapist), intending that each individual shares equal rights. The

participants become aware of their own involvement in the work of the group, and rivalry, envy and admiration emerge. Here we notice a preponderant sense of the Self and its specificity, (as opposed to the reproducing of the archaic stage of fusion).

Identification and projection processes appear, that in turn activate regressive movements (spiral of time); in adolescents we observe a de-structuring of previous identifications that partially become re-projected and re-personified. In the matrix of the group, it is possible to modify the system of pre-established roles, laws and necessities that condition the image of the Self and the world. For example inter and intrapsychic conflicts form and act-out in relation with objects, that can be objects of the past or even Self-objects. This comes about with the typical confusion and restlessness of adolescents. The conflicts emerge more than ever in the "hic et nunc" of the group situation, and often the relational modality acquired within the family (deeply embedded in the mature Self) emerges, and is acted-out in the groupal interaction by the reflecting, in, (or by) the group, resulting in its recognition and, according to each situation, eliminated or integrated. The patients are often aware of this situation, only recently, a patient in one of my groups said: "we behave like a group of teenagers!" It was during a similar situation, that a new patient arrived. Massimo exhibited provokingly the fact he was fat, dirty and unkempt. Marta, a very "respectable" and precise person found herself in great difficulty, even though she was close to the end of the cure. In the past she often assumed the role of the victim, but an intimidating one, who made her partners feel guilty. Firstly, she would highly idealize them, and after present them as sadists. When the group tried to make her face her responsibilities, she accused it of not understanding her. During a session where Massimo expressed his fragility, Marta changed roles, from the victim she became the persecutor, observing him with an expression of utmost disdain and contempt.

The whole group including myself were dumbfounded at the transformation of Marta, who accused Massimo of creating her problems and anxiety, right at the time when she wanted to finish up in the best way possible. In the silence that followed, I observed the hurt expression on Massimo's face, while Marta's outrage was expressed on her face. I asked her who behaves like that in the family. Marta then mirrored herself in the group and after a moment of bewilderment burst into tears. Later she was capable of recognizing her father's behaviour that she had projectively attributed onto her partners and onto the group. What I would like to draw attention to, is not the problem of Marta's family, but how Rouchy explains the "incorporated" transpersonal. Marta's modality of putting the blame on her partners and onto the group in an attempt to flee from the "incorporated" transpersonal, was the only way she could control her destructiveness (by projecting it onto others). It was the modality of defending herself from a profound sense of impotence and destructiveness that she felt possessed her, and enabled her to feel omnipotent and righteous. A complex and suffered elaboration of these events gave Marta the possibility to terminate her therapeutic course with success, assuming her

responsibilities towards herself and others, without fear of destroying and being destroyed. The work in the group enabled Massimo to face aggressiveness without being destroyed: accepting the fact that however terrifying the reality may be, it is preferable to phantasms. This experience consented the group to work on the significance of its past, and to understand the repressed and negated events. The past no longer seen as a mere "bombing" of images, nor imprisoned in a repetition compulsion.

It is possible to recognize one's own story and assume responsibility for one's memories, and appropriate the present and the future. Gabriele says: "being in a group helped me to perceive my time like in Perseus' mirror-shield: I was able to recognize and overcome the repetition compulsion that immobilizes and turns to stone like Medusa". This phrase pronounced by Gabriele became an important discovery and a valid contribution for the whole group. The group works around the theme of the "non pensabile" (what is not thought) and the "non detto" (what is not said), present in every family: for example, the natural curiosity of children that are scolded for their impertinence and therefore made to feel guilty. Nucara, Menarini and Pontalti write: "a mechanism of healthy individuation comes about, often hindered by realities that entrap the patient in a pathological net (family-transpersonal), impeding a complete individuation, (the development of a healthy personal matrix)".

I would like to underline the fact, that only after the recognition of the importance of the story, is it possible to proceed in an elaboration of the memories that emerge. When a group has a story that is shared by all and is seen also as a valid container, childhood memories are told in prevalence and in abundance. It is not rare to hear new patients claim they have only a vague recollection of childhood and express neutral feelings towards it.

During the course of the group the slow emerging of memories and the participation to this activity has a structuring value for the group and the single components. Reassured by this feeling of belonging, and the recuperating of the personal stories, the patients become more capable of distinguishing themselves from the others in the process of individuation.

The group becomes a place where bygone lacerations are exhibited, and where in the meantime hopefully a remedy will be found. The scars are the concrete evidence of our tormented stories, that show us our limits and those of others, we are aware of the objective difficulties, but we are closer to finding an area where we can express our life project. To remember, and to be remembered by the group ascribes value to the memory, contributing to our being responsible for our present and future. A profound sense of continuity of the Self, makes it possible to face solitude with contentment, time and space become a potential area of creativity. The group constitutes the ideal family, where it is possible to learn to modulate time and the individual-group dialectic. Nucara, Menarini and Pontalti explain: "the family matrix should be a transitional space (or unsaturated family matrix), from which the child (or person)

gives meaning to the precedent generations and culture and contemporaneously gives signification to the new, evolutive project that is unknown". This quotation for me assumes a fundamental model in my conclusion on Foulkes, Bion, the story and the time.

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