

Despair, Dialogue and Desire: a neuroscientific approach.

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The 14th Symposium in Group Analysis has chosen to explore in theoretical and experiential ways the transformative power of the analytic group in the movement from despair to desire.

To quote Gerda Whinter: "Group Analysis with its focus on unconscious or conscious processes in groups can enhance our understanding of the journey from despair to desire"

In fact, the neurosciences have brought a new perspective in understanding the mechanisms, on which the therapeutic phenomena in groupanalysis are based.

Nowadays, we know that there are neuronal systems that are the neuro-anatomic-physiological base of our basic emotions. These systems are located in specific anatomical structures of the brain's base, and use specific neurotransmitters in specific neuronal circuits. I'm referring to the following emotional systems: seeking, lust, fear and panic.

Clearly these basic systems, cannot single-handedly explain the wealth of human emotional life. In fact, they're connected to other areas of the brain, namely the hippocampus and to different areas of the cortex, thus allowing our emotions, adorned by our memories, to be made conscious, transforming them into feelings, which can then be verbalized and understood in a perspective of knowledge.

In what measure can groupanalysis help us? As a therapeutic technique, groupanalysis employs mirroring phenomena and resonance that are able to amplify and bare our more basic emotions, which are engraved in implicit memories. Therefore, it's possible, with the groupanalyst's aid to, not only recover the patient's genetic-evolutive data, but also, through transferential phenomena, explain the patient's affective inter-relations models. Make explicit that which was implicit; make conscious that which was unconscious.

However, only this is certainly not enough. A change has to come about in attitudes, in behaviour and in relational, affective and emotional models. From the neurobiological point of view, new neuronal circuits have to be formed. That, our basic emotional circuits have been able to establish circuits with certain more evolved areas of the brain, which in an adapted and intelligent way, enable us to have a healthier relational life. In fact, it has currently been proven, through in vivo image

techniques that psychotherapies change neuronal circuits.

We also know, both from theory, as from clinical practice that, one of the factors on which change is based, is the new relationship established with the therapist. This obviously takes place in groupanalysis, but groupanalysis also adds a significant therapeutic factor namely, ego training in action, which is certainly a great aid in developing a healthier personality, with immediate evidence of its social impact on the mini-society, which is the group.

I believe that increasingly, these new lines of research are confirming and, in a way, potentializing this therapeutic technique that groupanalysis is and which is, without a doubt, a "journey from despair to desire".