

THINKING LAB ITALIA

Between interpretation and relationship: exploring transformative factors in psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT:

This research explores the double track of the current practice of psychoanalysis: the one that tends to decode the unconscious meanings towards the archaeological reconstruction of the past and the one that looks at the processes of construction of new experiences that allow the development of potential states of the Self, through the relationship between patient and analyst. The study group, made up of nine participants from different psychoanalytic societies, works on clinical material with the Weaving Thoughts method and explores issues such as the setting, the analyst's interventions, the patient's response and psychic functioning. The continuation of the work involves the in-depth study of these thematic areas, comparing the transformative factors in cases with different treatment frequencies (five and two weekly sessions).

KEYWORDS:

Transformations; Psychoanalytic process; Setting; Interpretation; Constructions; Analytic relationship; Transference/countertransference; Emotional experience; Unrepresented states of mind; Analyst's affective response.

Psychoanalysis today moves more and more along a double track: the one that tends to decode unconscious meanings and therefore goes towards the archaeological reconstruction of the past, and another track that looks at the processes of construction of new experiences which can allow for the development of potential states of the Self through the relationship between patient and analyst.

What produces change in psychoanalysis? Free associations and free-floating attention still remain the current tools for coming into contact with forms of suffering linked to the subject's pre-history (i.e., those areas of experience or suffering that the subject experiences - in a non-verbal way - within his early relationships)? Can the analyst's defences be a resistance to the patient's transformative process? What is it in common and what intersections can be found between “relationship” and “interpretation” in working with our patients? How can interpretations be used in a relational way, that is, to arrive at the right time and with words that touch the patient? The aim of this study group is to reflect on the relevance of the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, starting from the discussion of clinical material.

The group includes 9 participants (3 ordinary members, 4 associate members and 2 candidates) of which 4 belong to the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), 4 to the Italian Association of Psychoanalysis (AIPSI) and 1 to the British Psychoanalytical Society (BPaS).

This has allowed us to work amongst colleagues with different backgrounds (also from a geographical point of view) and who therefore come from training institutes with peculiar theoretical-clinical reference models, although they all belong to the common "matrix" of the IPA .

Between mid-September and early December 2023, we held 6 remote meetings on the Zoom platform.

The first meeting was dedicated to participants' introductions, to the sharing of some theoretical premises on the factors of change in psychoanalysis and to the identification of a working method to be used to conduct our study: the Weaving Thoughts method of Norman and Salomonsson.

During each of the following 4 meetings, a participant volunteered to present some clinical material transcribed from their sessions with patients - in the absence of anamnestic information or presentation of the treatment - on which the other participants worked in free association. A scribe (always in turn and voluntarily) took note of the group's free associations which, at the beginning of the next meeting, were presented by the moderator. The moderator also had the task of maintaining the timing of the meeting.

The group focused on the following cases: 2 adolescent and young adult patients (15 and 21 years old), undergoing treatment with two weekly sessions, and 2 adult patients (35 and 50 years old) undergoing treatment with five weekly sessions.

The minutes of the free associations of each meeting were elaborated in groupings in the following thematic areas: setting, interventions of the analyst (with sub-specific thematic areas: mental functioning of the analyst, transference/countertransference), response of the patient to interventions

and treatment, psychic functioning of the patient.

The last meeting of the group was dedicated to a meta-reflection on the free association material collected and to the connections with aspects of psychoanalytic theory.

With regard to the transformative factors, the group began to advance initial hypotheses on the role of the setting, of the transference-countertransference interplays, as well as on the empathy and humanity of the analyst.

Among the possible hypotheses to be explored further, the group also discussed how the relevance of more specifically relational rather than interpretative factors - elements which are constantly interconnected - also finds correspondence with the level of mental organization in play and therefore the type of memory or unconscious matching – dynamic or not repressed. All this underlies that relational and totally unconscious aspect of the patient and the analyst of "copying" each other's mental functioning to reach each other in the consulting room.

The continuation of the study and research work in 2024 involves maintaining the Weaving Thoughts method during our group meetings to continue to freely associate on other sessions of 2 cases chosen from those treated so far (1 patient with high treatment frequency and 1 patient low frequency of treatment), to compare the different transformative factors that may emerge from the different treatment settings.

The results of our study will be proposed to the next IPA Congress in 2025.

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