

Temi ed eventi

“12 Angry Men”. The Group and the Individual: From Objectiveness to Subjectiveness

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Abstract Screened fiction stirs people’s psyches through emotions, which refer to a virtual world and therefore have the potential to help the individual grow in self-awareness while feeling relatively “safe”. An innovative method to work on movies for education and training purposes was developed by Eugenio Torre, and is proposed here for the film *12 Angry Men*. This movie may be used in training settings focused on helping relationships to reflect upon the meaning of being an individual in a group, being a group, responsibility and choice. A key to the reading of the movie is proposed at two different but complementary levels. From an “extra-psychical” standpoint, movie characters may represent a working group of 12 very different people sharing a task, while from an “intra-psychical” one, each character may represent an embodiment or symbol of an individual’s part and/or complex. According to the movie suggestion, we describe a path from objectiveness to subjectiveness and the final accomplishment of an ethical choice.

KEYWORDS: Cinema; Collectivism; Group Psychotherapy; Training; Ethical Choice.

Riassunto “*La parola ai giurati*”. *Il gruppo e l’individuo: dall’oggettività alla soggettività* - Il cinema sollecita la psiche delle persone attraverso le emozioni, che, essendo riferite ad un mondo virtuale, hanno la potenzialità di favorire la crescita dell’auto-consapevolezza dell’individuo, facendolo sentire relativamente “al sicuro”. Eugenio Torre ha sviluppato un metodo innovativo che impiega i film per la formazione e l’educazione, metodo che qui viene proposto per il film *La Parola ai Giurati*. Questo film può essere utilizzato per la formazione alla relazione di aiuto, per riflettere sul significato di essere un individuo in un gruppo, di essere un gruppo, della responsabilità e della scelta. Vengono proposte due chiavi di lettura complementari del film. Da un punto di vista “extra-psichico”, i personaggi del film possono rappresentare un gruppo di 12 persone molto diverse tra loro, che si trovano a condividere un compito; da un punto di vista “intra-psichico”, ogni personaggio può rappresentare una personificazione o simbolo di una parte e/o di un complesso dell’individuo stesso. Sulla base delle suggestioni offerte dal film, descriviamo un percorso che va dall’oggettività alla soggettività, e il raggiungimento, infine, di una scelta etica.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Cinema; Collettivo; Psicoterapia di Gruppo; Formazione; Scelta Etica.

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Background

Arts-based therapy can be used as an alternative means of expression and exploration of feelings, to enhance personal growth and change. For instance, “cinematherapy”¹ has been described as a «therapeutic technique that involves having the therapist select commercial films for the client to view alone or with specified others», with the aim of having «a direct therapeutic effect», being «a stimulus for further interventions within a session»² or being a metaphorical intervention.³

It is through emotion and its equilibrium-disturbing power that screened fiction stirs people’s psyches.⁴ Watching a movie projects the viewer into a condition where reality is temporarily suspended and identification with the movie characters can happen,⁵ thus having an impact on the individual which is more on an emotional level than an intellectual one.⁶ Indeed, the outstanding trait of the emotions aroused by cinema is that they refer to a virtual world and so have the potential to help the individual grow in self-awareness while feeling relatively “safe”.⁷

These features of cinema and movies may therefore be helpful from a therapeutic point of view, as described in the theory and practice of cinematherapy; but we believe that they can be precious, as well, as far as education and training are concerned. In this paper our aim is to describe the use of movies in education and training focused on helping relationships; we will describe the example of the reflections raised by the movie *12 Angry Men* (directed by Sidney Lumet, written by Reginald Rose).

This can be suggested for viewing in training settings in order to reflect upon relationships, the meaning of being an individual in a group, being a group, responsibility and choice, and it may be useful as well in all those settings where a reflection on group dynamics is warranted (for instance, supervision or consultancy to a team or group of co-workers, etc...).

An innovative approach to the use of movies in education and training for helping relationships

A premise

Training and education for helping relationships require specific teaching/learning approaches. The communication and acquisition of emotional experience need to follow a pathway which is different from the one typical for communication and acquisition of technical skills. Bion argued that, in contrast to technical issues, which are easy to share and teach, only limited methods exist to communicate emotional experiences, and the existing ones have a limited range of influence. In the field of emotional experience, according to Bion, a mimetic approach is not only worthless, but it is even dangerous because it might resemble a spurious growth and education.⁸

In the attempt to find a possible answer to the unresolved question raised by Bion, Eugenio Torre developed a method which, through art, proposes a pathway for teaching and educating about relationships.⁹ This approach integrates theoretical and technical issues together with the experience of working in a group (which is usually a training group) and specifically uses dynamic images (full length movies or scenes) from cinematic fiction as educational incitements.

Archetypes

According to the aim, which is to teach and to educate about relationships, the focus is on movies, characters and scenes cross-referring to archetypes which might constellate the problems related to helping relationships (for instance, *The Shadow*, *The Hero*, *The Wounded Healer*, see Table 1 for details). We should remember that Jung proposed two approaches to the understanding of archetypes, the phenomenological and the mythological ones. The latter, which was later developed by Neumann and Hillman, is

the one we use in our approach to movies. We propose a work on images, together with what they represent and call to mind, which cross-refer to archetypal situations in the psychological dimension of relationships.

As Hillman suggests, psychical contents may be activated in interpersonal situations with a strong affective content, as helping relationships may be; someone who is involved in the relationship may bring archetypes into the relationship itself, while being more or less conscious of that.¹⁰ Archetypal images may impact relationships at several levels: the individual; the individual and others; the collective unconscious. The mythological approach offers a useful trace to approach the

understanding and interpretation of the complex “world” of relationships. Moreover, a connection exists between archetypal experience and learning (both from a cognitive and an emotional standpoint), and the myth which brings the archetypal polarities back together allows us to understand and eventually avoid unilaterality.¹¹

■ The method

According to Torre’s approach, full-length movies or scenes and characters from movies are discussed and elaborated in a group context, through a group work which may include the following: choice of movie scenes experi-

Table 1

Archetype

In Jungian psychology, these are universal and archaic patterns and images deriving from the collective unconscious, which can be detected indirectly from images, dreams, behaviours, art and mythology. Archetypes are inherited as potentials which are actualized when they enter consciousness, and, only after that, they can be transformed. Archetypes have polarities (for instance, doctor/patient, parent/child...), and both polarities can be found in each of us. When one of these is activated in the outer world, the other is activated in the inner one. When one becomes too consciously identified with one polarity, he/she is likely to deny the other one and to project it onto Others.

Complex

According to Jung’s theory, which he originally called “Complex psychology”, a “complex” is a “node” of unconscious feelings and beliefs which can be detected in an indirect way (for instance, through puzzling behaviours, which are difficult to understand from a rational viewpoint). Complexes may be either positive or negative, and they can be conscious, partly conscious or unconscious. What lies at the core of each complex is a universal pattern of experience or archetype.

The Wounded Healer

It is intuitive that the wounded healer archetype has to do with helping relationships. Those who take care of others cannot do so disregarding their own wounds, because, as Chiron’s myth teaches us, it is in this wound that lies the possibility of healing others. See Guggenbuhl-Craig for a detailed discussion on this point.¹²

The Shadow

The Shadow can emerge in helping relationships, for instance when the relationship is dominated by the wish to gain control on the other person or to have him/her do what the caregiver believes is better. We should remember what Jung wrote about love: «Where love rules, there is no will to power, and where power predominates, love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other».¹³

The Hero

The Hero shows up in helping relationships, for instance, when one person, with his armour and white cloak, decides to “save” another, without really caring about his protégé’s wishes and needs.

enced as more emotionally involving and closely related to the problem the group is dealing with; their representation through dramatization, psychodrama and role play with role reversal; and sharing of group members' experiences. The emotional experience gets structured by working through the movie characters, and reflection on and processing of the images emerging from the group work, while the group leader supports and facilitates the integration of contents.

When we talk about psychodrama techniques, we do not mean that movies should be used as a basis for actual psychodrama sessions but rather that some psychodrama techniques have been found to be a helpful tool in the context of the method developed by Eugenio Torre (indeed, we should always keep in mind that this approach has been conceived for the training and education of people involved in helping relationships and that people working on movies according to the method we are describing are not doing so within an actual psychotherapy group).

Used in the context we are describing, these psychodrama techniques may be, but are not necessarily, used to work on specific scenes or characters. For instance, participants are invited to play a scene identified by the group as particularly meaningful; the scene can be played more than once and roles may be reversed; eventually, the group is encouraged to discuss the feelings aroused either by playing or watching the scene. This allows the emotional impact of fiction to be further strengthened.

Moreover, it should be underscored that the movie is not meant to be like a sort of projective test; it is something different. Specifically, having already seen the movie or having some members of the group who have seen it while others have not, are not problems per se, and do not compromise the efficacy and effectiveness of the approach we are describing. Every time we watch a movie (as every time we read a book or recall a memory), it "tastes" and means something different to us according to our current con-

dition and experience, and we may notice, appreciate, dislike or seize different issues than we did in previous visions, accordingly. Anyway, whatever the condition of the watcher with respect to the movie (having already seen it/having not), all that emerges from the work on the movie is significant for that individual in that specific moment of his/her life. In our experience we have never found this situation either to hinder the work on movies or to be used as a resistance to avoid talking about one's point of view; if anything, it makes the process more complex, but in no way more complicated. Last, having seen a movie such as the one we are describing, which has a specific focus on prejudice, may allow the viewer to experience exactly what is described by the movie, i.e. that prejudice should be dropped in order to achieve a larger-scale vision of what we are currently facing.

Two ways of "reading" the movie

Movies or movie scenes offer multifaceted possibilities for confrontation and mirroring with the relation between the individual and his/her own profession, from several perspectives: of the individual, of the group with its dynamics and relationships, of motivation, destiny and chronicity.¹⁴ Also, «the psyche speaks in metaphors, in analogues, in images, that's its primary language» as Hillman wrote,¹⁵ and psyche can deal with the world or with itself and its own functioning. Images from a movie, like a dream or a fantasy, can be read at two different levels, which somehow complete each other: the "outer world" ("extra-psychical") and the "inner world" ("intra-psychical").

In the movie *12 Angry Men*, 12 men who do not know each other find themselves locked into a jury room. According to what may be called an "extra-psychical" or "objective" standpoint, the characters may represent a working group, a microcosm consisting of 12 very different people, who did not choose to be together but nonetheless share a task they have to accomplish.

According to an “intra-psychical” standpoint, the same movie can be read and interpreted subjectively. As in a dream, each character represents an embodiment or symbol of an individual’s part and/or complex. The dream is a theatre and the dreamer is scene, actor, promoter, director, author, public and critic at the same time.¹⁶

The group may focus either on the first or the second perspective, i.e. the group may work and reflect on the group dynamics which are explicitly depicted in the movie or instead reflect on how one’s own inner parts interact when a personal decision has to be taken. Since these are just two ways of approaching the same “stimulus”, there is no need to choose between the two; they are not mutually exclusive.

■ The movie, in short

The defendant is an 18-year-old black boy from the slums, charged with first degree murder for killing his father. The 12 jurymen must reach a unanimous verdict, coming to a decision of whether a reasonable doubt remains or not.

At the beginning, “not guilty” is suggested only by the architect played by Henry Fonda, who is not sure of the defendant’s innocence but nonetheless believes that his case deserves to be discussed and should not be dismissed with shallowness. Discussion begins and unfolds; every jurymen’s character and personal history play a meaningful role in how they see and judge the case. Everyone is charged with thinking things over and taking his duty as a jurymen seriously; in the end, a very different verdict is returned.

■ At the beginning: Collectivism

At the beginning, 11 out of the 12 people of the jury agree on a guilty judgement for the defendant. There is a clear lack of ethical behaviour. Their agreement is fictitious – there is nothing to agree upon when dialogue and confrontation are lacking. All the jurymen but

one (the architect) clearly intend to get out of the duty they have been called to accomplish. They are apparently disinterested, irrespective of their responsibility, which is initially trivialized: some of them have “more important” things to do (for example, seeing a ballgame), and all but one believe there is nothing to discuss, because everything already stands absolutely plain and unequivocal.

The jurymen’s haste to return a verdict has to do neither with their wish to perform well, nor with their interest in the victim, the defendant and justice. Instead, it has to do with the fact that the sooner they agree upon the verdict, the sooner they can go elsewhere. Consequently, doubt is excluded a priori. The reality of the facts, the explanations and interpretations they heard in the courtroom, seem to be and must be persuasive; everything matches their prejudice. There is no attempt to try to consider the facts from another standpoint. Because (almost) everybody is of the same mind, there is nothing the jurymen can or should talk about.

Dialogue, debate and discussion are lacking. In such a condition, it requires courage to take a different stand and legitimate one’s own role. This early situation does not represent a real agreement. It is instead a state of collectivism, no place for individual differentiation. This archaic identity is a feature of the primitive mind-set and mirrors the original condition of the individual, unaware of separation and differentiation between self and other-than-self, between subject and object. Identity consists in an unconscious equality with objects, and this conception has not even ever entered the domain of conscience.

■ Prejudice

The judgment of absolute guilt formulated by the jury seems at least in part based on the naïve prejudice that the evidence presented by the prosecuting attorney is inherently true and that this truth is plain and obvious to everybody in the same way. The movie-watcher now faces several prejudices: that the same

things are clear and obvious to everyone; that all individuals share the same patterns of thought and functioning; that what seems true to somebody should correspond to the truth for everybody. From a certain point of view these prejudices may seem reassuring: no place for doubt, difference, conflict, and more importantly, for the burden of responsibility. But, unfortunately, this means there is not even place for life and growth.

"It's like that, everybody heard it" the character played by Lee J. Cobb (the disappointed father) shouts, exasperated. Nothing is called into question; the boy's guilt seems established.

■ Projections

Here we refer to the psychological mechanism of projection, tout court, i.e. to the misattribution of a person's undesired thoughts, feelings or impulses onto another person, usually because those thoughts, feelings or impulses are unacceptable for the person to express or make him/her feel bad and uncomfortable for having them.¹⁷

All jurymen but one seem to believe in an absolute, ontic truth: the evidence is true because it is the evidence; it is true as such. There is no awareness that this so called "truth" is in the eyes of those who want to see it, and that every cognitive act is inevitably influenced by the knowing subject, as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle reminds us.¹⁸

In this situation, the mechanism of projection is clear, not only as far as "things" (the evidence, for example) are concerned but also with regard to how the jurymen see and feel the defendant and his overall story. For the disappointed father the figure of the defendant vanishes behind that of the rebel son. "Bad boys, you do so much for them and this is how they repay you!" he says, desperate, tearing his son's photograph in one of the movie's dramatic scenes. The young man from the slums, at least at the beginning, projects onto the defendant all the unpleasant memories of his past. The garage owner

judges the defendant according to his xenophobic attitude...

The psychological mechanism of projection, through which the psychical contents of an individual are attributed to another, is based on the archaic identity. As Jung describes, we boldly and candidly project onto our neighbours our personal psychology.¹⁹ Therefore, everyone creates a series of relationships, which are more or less fictitious, being essentially based on these projections. All the contents of our unconscious are constantly projected onto the surrounding world. Only as far as we understand certain features of the objects as our projections, we can distinguish them from the real qualities of the objects themselves. But when we are unaware of the projective nature of a quality of the object, we can do nothing but be ingenuously persuaded that it really belongs to the object.

■ One's world

The non-conflicting and non-problematic condition of quiet seems rooted in the fantasy that happiness consists in the fulfilment of every need and desire, in the answer to all questions. The fantasy of a situation free of tension does not consider that conflict can turn into a creative transformation and hence gives meaning to life.²⁰

The 11 jurymen who agree on a guilty judgment remind us of a state of gregarious uniformity, such as Heidegger's *one's world* – one says, one does.²¹ In this condition the individual does not take any personal responsibility, instead he disperses and counters his own authenticity, because projects, attitudes, behaviours are already adjusted and encoded. As Kierkegaard says, men sell their soul to the world; there is no place for possibility and choice, because everything is brought forward by conformism.²²

The condition of archaic identity does not envisage either conflict or the distress deriving from conflict; similarly, the state of gregarious uniformity, protecting from choice, keeps safe from the anguish derived from the

exclusion of possible. In a state of identity, the lack of separation among individuals does not allow them to be in a relationship and, as a consequence, does not allow either dialogue or debate.

■ The dialogic principle

There is a real dialogue if the interlocutors keep facing each other, despite the essential fact that they did not choose each other. The dialogic principle is similar to a sacrificial ritual, and the “object” undergoing sacrifice is the absoluteness of the participants. This is a painful psychological acquisition and allows the individual to experience and hence to describe somebody/something as a part and no longer as a whole.

The dialectic process sets forth slowly and is preceded by a chaotic moment of conflict and unrest. Dialogue can then be achieved through discussion and debate, acknowledging one’s own difference and, eventually, the Other one’s difference. The individual really discovers himself as existing when in a relationship.²³

As far as he does not accept the Other, a man does not acknowledge the right of the “other” to exist inside himself.²⁴ Only after that, one can confront one’s own mutual standpoints. In the movie, the old man confronts his attitude – very typical of an old man – to the old man he heard as witness; similarly, the jurymen who lived in the slums recalls the street “rules” he had experienced.

■ The architect

At the beginning the architect is the only one to contrast with the excessive unilateralism of opinions. It is through him that the duty of the jurymen as a burdensome one begins to become clear. On the other hand, issues dealing with the lives of men (the victim, the defendant, in a broader sense, each jurymen) cannot be but burdensome.

The architect is the one who consents to bring something new to the group, to defy

the gregarious mind-set, to take the risk of being disapproved or overtly attacked and menaced. Although he lacks any certainty about reason or truth, the architect has the courage to oppose the group’s fictitiously shared opinion and to tolerate other possibilities beyond the fast and somehow reassuring prejudices.

As Jung reminds us, anyone who does not have a great reflexive skill is tied to the surrounding world by a system of unconscious projections.²⁵ One person among the jurymen stands out and reflects: the architect takes the duty he has been assigned seriously and compels the other ones to dialogue, allowing an act of reflection to happen.

Through reflection, a dialectical dimension can be achieved, allowing the non-synthetic arrangement of opposites. The dialectical process can keep the singular and the general together and lead to the understanding of the individual’s singularity/uniqueness, which refuses to be absorbed into generality.

■ The jurymen’s evolution

At the beginning the jurymen group is only formally such, but throughout the movie it experiences growth and eventually becomes a real group made up of individuals who cooperate to achieve a shared goal. True dialogue can start when every member of the jury gives up his certainties, accepts his own and the others’ fallibility, and faces his own prejudices, acknowledging and at last withdrawing his projections. Although the jurymen’s change through the story is different for each of them, the more they were blinded by personal experience (about which we know from the movie) and driven by prejudices and projections, the more this change is entangled with pain and anguish.

On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that the more each jurymen’s contribution is linked to his “wound”, the richer it is. Those who lived in the slums, who are old, who have difficulty with their eyesight, can use their own experience in a creative way

and bring an original contribution enriching the group. The man who has a wound in the relationship with his son, as the disappointed father, needs to identify this wound inside himself and stop projecting it onto the trial situation. Only through this acknowledgment he can be engaged in the group and cooperate to reach the common aim. Only after acknowledging that he is inhabited by frustration, destructive rage and hatred too, the disappointed father can reach understanding and sympathy for the accused boy, and he can cease to judge what he firstly believed to exist only in the Other.

■ Suggestions for an intra-psychical interpretation

Every movie character can be considered as the embodiment of a part, a psychic instance, an individual's complex. Initially, the various parts are unavailable to communication and dialogue, all aligned with a denying attitude towards the world, and unwilling for knowledge. The individual is satisfied with the most straightforward and immediate way of seeing things: no doubt about what comes from his sensorial faculties. What the individual knows, or believes to know, is enough; he does not want to discover anything new or, worse, different. All is assimilated, i.e. learnt and made similar to what is already known.²⁶ Every discovery, every new piece of learning – both for science and conscience – is a hard and painful act and rises up like a “revolution”, a break with the past and the previous order.²⁷

Initially, with regard to his own growth progress, the individual is still. He eludes his duties, first of all those towards himself. He does not want to know, and this attitude does not allow self-understanding, which can only happen through dialogue, reflection and the withdrawal of projections. At the beginning, the only aim is to punish the one who killed the father, i.e. the old system. In this complete stagnation, light does not turn on, air does not circulate, energy is stuck.

Both from the extra-psychical and the intra-psychical perspective, the architect is the one who allows dialogue – among the jurymen group, according to the first point of view, and among different parts of the psyche, according to the latter. He also allows the unmasking of shadow sides; these are the unconscious, and usually the least desirable, aspects of the personality which the conscious ego does not recognize in itself. Slowly, with difficulty and sometimes painfully, the individual gets in touch with, and at last discovers, the various characters inhabiting him. Through acknowledgment, confrontation, reflection and dialogue, he can assume a new position, and the evidence is not taken as a certainty but as a possibility. At last, an ethical choice is attainable.

■ A call for the group to reflect

Even though almost the entire story takes place inside the narrow space of a jury room, the spectator does not feel isolated and can easily identify with the characters' microcosm, which is strongly representative of the world and reality (both inner and external). The “extra-psychical” standpoint is easier to grasp, and the training group will mirror the movie situation: like the 12 jurymen, group members will be very different from one another, did not choose each other, yet share a task which is to reflect on helping relationships, their meaning and dynamics. On a deeper, “intra-psychical” level, group participants will reflect on the parts and complexes inhabiting them and on how these interact when they have to make a decision.

The lack of communication and dialogue at the beginning of the movie allows for reflection on being a group, which does not mean that individuals should always think/act/feel the same, but instead that everyone should tolerate his own difference and uniqueness in order to keep the group truly alive. Situations in which group members seem to think the same, easily agree, and in which there is no place for doubt or opposing

standpoints should be carefully addressed. This is likely to hide, under a fake agreement, an attempt to escape from the burden of individuality, responsibility and choice.

Within a group, training groups such as those we are describing or groups of co-workers or psychotherapy groups as well, the temptation to agree in order to avoid conflict, both with other members and with oneself, lies in ambush. The attempt to consider things from another standpoint and to always leave room for doubt is actually burdensome. In order to reach authentic answers, questions should be asked and questions can only arise from doubts. Everyone has an inner Architect and should address him in order to bring something new to the group and to himself. A kind of fake paradise, where a non-conflicting condition of apparently shared answers is interpreted as happiness – careless of the lack of tension leading to a deadly static situation – should be abandoned and lost.

Notes

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