The Skinless Work Group: Facing the Uncertainty of "Resting on a Void"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the conflicts and resistances that contemporary organizations face in the effort of generating new and challenging work opportunities. Assuming the metaphoric and real character of the 'body of the organization', different dilemmas that work groups tackle in the generation of collaborative and productive spaces are described. Based on a socioanalytic consultancy carried out with a group of Reichian body psychotherapists, the study illustrates the complexities to delineate a common strategy and to overcome the threatening porosity and inconsistencies of the 'institutional skin'. The lack of a body support is particularly paradoxical for a group of psychotherapists that base their therapeutic method on body techniques, and which crystallizes as an institution the place of rejection and exclusion that Reich and the concern for the body have historically occupied. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: body, skin, organizational boundaries, Reich

INTRODUCTION: THE BODY OF ORGANIZATION

Organization theory has been greatly influenced by the use of the biological metaphor of the body. The notion of "organization" is actually derived from that of "organ", which represents a particular section of the body adapted to perform certain functions. Thus, organizations can be defined as "organized bodies" that are split into parts that operate in a structured and connected way, with an identifiable boundary and with a common goal. This way of understanding organizations is also guided by the "machine" metaphor, that implies that organizations can only operate correctly when their parts are connected in particular ways. This concept emphasizes the urge to structure, delineate, and define under the notion of rationality, which are the pillars of Cartesian Modernism. In this

context, emotions, differences, and contradictions are segregated and obscured by the predominance of an organizational functionalist perspective (Dale & Burrel, 2000).

Since Freud (1921) onwards, psychoanalysis has provided alternative views regarding the understanding of the functioning of groups and organizations. This perspective has explored and delved into aspects that not only explain the structures and functions of groups and organizations, but also the emotional and irrational side of them. This implies viewing these collectives as living organisms composed not only by anatomical structures but by "bodily fluids" as well (Carter, 1983). Such bodily fluids metaphorically represent the complexity (Stacey, 1995) that is difficult to integrate into more rational paradigms to understand organizational life. In a similar vein, socio-analysis (Bain, 1999), as a discipline developed at the confluence of psychoanalysis, social systems thinking, group relations, and organizational behavior, has also contributed to offer a wider and deeper picture of organizational life.[1] This attempt to understand the complexity of organizations is achieved by employing models that integrate bodily, mental, and social phenomena.

This paper examines the metaphor of the "body of the organization" (Morgan-Jones, 2010), in both the symbolic and material connections that can be established between the body as a "psychic envelope" (Anzieu, 1990; Houzel, 1990) and the organizational life. From the contributions of several psychoanalytic authors (Anzieu, 1999; Bion, 1961; Kaës, 1993), this text explores the relevance of this metaphor as a symbolic function that enables group members to contain psychic objects, to delineate working spaces, and to protect them in consistent and flexible containers. Failures in the capacity of performing these functions are described through a case study, which explores the negative effects on members' capacity to face uncertain contexts and to explore organizational challenges. The paper discusses in what manner the difficulty to deal with the task risks and conflicts are actualized by the dramatic failures to contain and think about them collectively. Moreover, it illustrates the application of socio-analytic consultancy methods to work with organizations that are experiencing turbulent and conflictive periods, because of their incapacity to take action.

GROUP AND ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Psychoanalysis has significantly contributed to clarifying and conceptualizing dynamics that regulate the fragile balance of the individual's mental and emotional experience. The entity in charge of keeping an adequate and stable balance is the Ego. Freud (1923, p. 26) defines the Ego as "a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface". This definition stresses the process of displacement by which the Ego is constituted in relation to the bodily and sensory structure that provides the basic materiality to the human experience. In this way, the body sets some limits to the Ego in its permanent struggle to find consistent supports to provide a certain degree of stability and continuity to the individual's existence. Nevertheless, such anatomic borders are

permanently overwhelmed as a result of the precariousness of the body as a reliable referent for the Ego, which is formed through a reflected image of the intersubjective relation with the Other.

Freud's conceptualization of sexual instincts is strongly anchored in the body. The source of the instincts represents the somatic moment from which the excitation arises enabling mental life to unfold. Each partial instinct has its own erotogenic zone that determines the specific properties and conditions of the instinctual aim (Freud, 1905, 1915). This model has insufficient results when the analysis attempts to adequately explain the links between group and body, since other elements must be considered. Nitsun (1996, p. 46) claims that the group as a concept is both "paradoxical" and "elusive". Groups not only differ according to their basic characteristics (size, form, purposes, duration, etc.), but also, for some authors, the very existence of the group as an entity is questioned. One of the principal reasons for this elusiveness resides in the fact that the group lacks a physical body that operates as a boundary for the mental and emotional life of the collective. The group's limits are in a permanent state of flux as a result of the multiplicity of interactions taking place in the here and now. From this perspective, there is no other material evidence of the group as a unit apart from being a collection of individuals gathered at the same place and time. Although such individuals can experience the impact of the group-as-a-whole – as something that acts beyond the single contribution of each member – this is something that inevitably operates in their minds.

In a similar vein, Kaës (1976) claims that unlike the individual psychic apparatus, which has a constant and continuous biological basis, the "group psychic apparatus"[2] has a mobile and discontinuous relation with their material substratum. The group psychic apparatus only has a phantasied body, and one of its main functions is to provide a bodily prosthesis, which emerges from the creative interaction between members. Kaës (1976) states that in order to "achieve a body", group members need to deny their singular bodies to incorporate an imaginary bodily unit. This creates a tense dialectic between the individual and collective poles, which increases unconscious pressures placed on group members taking up different group roles. Some of the pressures follow a tendency towards mental and emotional homogeneity with respect to the group's psychic apparatus, but others reinforce the individual differentiations of processes, meanings and roles.

According to Bion (1961), the illusory belief in the existence of the group implies a massive regression to primitive forms of mental functioning of a psychotic quality, in which members lose their "individual distinctiveness". The prototypes of these regressive group experiences are the basic assumptions. These phenomena are group mentalities that manifest powerful emotional drives. They do not need training, experience, or mental development, but on the contrary they are instantaneous, inevitable, and instinctive. They are expressive of the fact that the individual's contribution to the group life is unavoidable. Bion claims that these group mentalities arise from a proto-mental system that is described as a matrix in which physical and mental phenomena

are undifferentiated. Thereby, from this matrix basic-assumption emotions spring to strengthen, permeate, and sometimes dominate the group's mental life. He maintains that within the proto-mental system the prototype of every basic assumption is present, "each of which exists as a function of the individual's membership of the group" (Bion, 1961, p. 101). Consequently, proto-mental phenomena have to be understood in the group and never with sole reference to the individual.

Torres (2010, pp. 56–57) claims that, like the Freudian concept of the *id*, Bion's concept of proto-mental is a "*topographical metaphor*" that represents phenomena that operate in the interface between body and mind. Moreover, both concepts characterize "*soma-psychic undifferentiated processes*" from which affective and mental experiences originate, thus becoming overt behavior and mental awareness. Finally, the two concepts represent the "*bio-psychic*" bases of human motivation. Nevertheless, Torres considers that, unlike Freud, the idea of the proto-mental system is built upon a social foundation, which is essential in Bion's theory to understand the manifestation of any mental process. For Bion (1961, p. 133) the individual's gregarious tendencies are always in play, and consequently they are part of the individual's "equipment as a herd animal".

Bion (1961) conceptualizes the action of the basic assumptions in connection to what he describes as the work group mentality. According to him, the group always meets to "do" something in a cooperative way. He conceptualizes this cooperation as structured, voluntary, geared to a particular task, and whose methods are rational. However, the functioning of the work group can be obstructed and diverted by the basic assumptions. The predominance of the work group over basic assumptions depends on the existence within the group of clear boundaries and roles, adequate leadership, and achievable tasks.

Bion's (1961) model provides a view that integrates bodily, mental, and social processes for the understanding of many aspects of the human experience. Following that tradition, Morgan-Jones (2010) connects the notion of proto-mentality with other socio-analytic contributions to analyze the social and work place ailments. Through what he calls a socio-somatic level of analysis, he describes the socio-dynamics of different kinds of emotional containment within the context of several working organizations. He explores the way in which a group's containment responds to traumatic experiences of emotional overload, and how that is expressed by the breaching of the boundaries of the group's body. This implies focusing on "what happens across the boundary of the group that can be thought of as a skin" (p. 82).

The notions of boundary and/or skin[3] represent a function that mediates the exchange between the individual and the group, and accordingly the subjective and intersubjective experience of these contacts. In this process, members need to keep the balance between their internal and external boundaries.

According to Slater (1966) the maintenance of such boundaries is extremely "energy-consuming and tension-inducing". Consequently, he considers that boundaries are defined by this tension, and that all tension results from the individual's attempts to preserve the connection between different domains of experience. When the preservation of boundaries is threatened, the individual feels a "sense of envelopment". In these cases he or she becomes aware of the blurring of boundaries that keeps him or her separate from the group, by experiencing a sudden contact with unknown feelings and impulses. In such moments, the individual feels "swept away by forces that seem to come both from within and from without" (p. 179).

Turquet (1975) also employs the notion of skin to describe the mental life of large groups. From his perspective, as well as the baby in its first phases of development, the individual in the group must also achieve a skin that limits and defines him or her as a group member. This boundary is attained in the interplay between his or her inner internal features and those of the group. The establishment of both an external ("the-skin-of-my-neighbor") and internal skin allows the individual to get involved in the group life, thus obtaining a sense of continuity and the capacity to process his or her experiences.

The concept of skin also has a significant place in Anzieu's (1985) theoretical developments. He calls this frontier structure "psychic envelope", or, more broadly, "Skin Ego". According to Houzel (1990), a psychic envelope not only contains the elements of the psyche, but also tries to establish continuity that allows the individuals to define spaces and achieve communications between them. Houzel describes the concept of psychic envelope by comparing it with a field of force, like the one formed around a magnet that organizes any surrounding iron filings according to precise forms following lines of strength. From this perspective the psychic envelope may be considered an "attractor" (Houzel, 1990, p. 44); a form whereby the acting force is molded, accentuating its unifying and protective functions of psychic interchange.

The psychic envelope carries out five central functions. First, it contains and promotes the connection between internal objects, thus preventing its dispersal in a limitless space. Secondly, it protects the mind against an excess of stimulation from the external world. Thirdly, it demarcates a boundary between the internal and the external world. Fourthly, it connects the external face of the psychic envelope with its internal face. Fifthly, it differentiates the psychic envelope in its contacts with the external reality (Houzel, 1990).

Anzieu (1999) applies his concept of skin-ego to describe the group reality. In this sense, for him the group is "an individual body with an *esprit de corps* … [which is] enveloped by a group ego" (p. 319). He describes this envelope as a common place in which group phantasies and feelings are pooled and shared by the different individuals. These phantasies are circulated among them and point out spaces of interdependence between individuals and variables of the group's functioning. The disparity between each individual's unconscious phantasies may generate group disunity; however the convergence of them

may produce a common ideology that may be either defensive or constructive. These phantasied elaborations might have a brief or stable presence in the mental life of the group (Anzieu, 1975/1984).

Anzieu (1999) situates the main conflicts of group life at two levels. Firstly, they arise from the clash of antagonistic tendencies displayed by the individual and the group. At this level, the struggle is chiefly narcissistic: "the group tears away individual psychic skins and sews them on to a narcissistic group envelope" (p. 320). Secondly, the conflict is replicated in the relationships between group and society. Thus, each collective sphere attempts to place the other at the service of itself, from which a tense dynamic emerges. As a reaction, the group introjects an envelope of norms and regulations that allow its self-regulation. He calls this formation "muscular group envelope". Anzieu considers that between these narcissistic and muscular envelopes the group develops a psychic group skin, which operates as "an extension to the group of the individual ego-skin and constituted by a double support of individual ego-skins and the social 'body'" (1999, p. 321).

CONSULTANCY

Representing a group of Reichian body psychotherapists, Pedro[4] contacted me to help them solve a profound crisis that the group was going through. Five years ago, they had formed a small professional association of Reichian psychotherapists that sought to develop diverse training projects in psychotherapy and also in the consulting field. However, over the years, the small organization has been losing focus of its primary task[5] becoming virtually paralyzed. In fact, the members only officially met four times a year to receive supervision for their clinical work from internationally renowned experts that they flew in from abroad. Therefore, the group found itself facing a difficult dilemma, and as a consequence, needed to urgently resolve the viability of the project and its continuity as an organization.

The group consisted of seven members (five women and two men), all Reichian-oriented body psychotherapists whose ages ranged between 37 and 45 years old. Initially the organization consisted of 12 members; however, five of them had left the group, some under quite traumatic and disturbing circumstances. They had followed the same career path for more than 10 years, which had been clearly marked by a training process in body psychotherapy with distinguished members from a European Reich-oriented training school. This meant that for more than four years all of the members had placed a lot of effort into financing the periodical arrival of important representatives from this school to Chile, which enabled them to complete their training.

The consultation process was developed throughout eight group sessions, averaging three hours each, during a period of five months. In these sessions, I employed organizational role analysis (ORA) methods, whose theoretical and

technical principles are derived from psychoanalysis and systems theory (Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006). ORA is a particular kind of individual and group consultancy that seeks to analyze, understand, and clarify the person's role in the context of the system to which he or she belongs. Through a collaborative associative work between consultant and client(s), the role, conceived as "a mental regulating principle", is explored in depth with the purpose of improving both the client and the system's performance. The role is a psychic construct that mediates the link between the person and the system in which he or she takes up the role. ORA supports the client to *find* and *make* a role that adequately responds to the person and the organization's needs (Reed & Bazalgette, 2006). Taking a role is always a dynamic process that requires being aware of a multiplicity of factors which may hamper the person's capacity of managing adequately the system's primary task. The focus of this psychoanalytically oriented consultancy is the complex interplay between the individual's personal psychodynamics and the organization's psychosocial dynamics (Sievers & Beumer, 2006). In this particular consultancy, we carried out several sessions of role analysis, in many of which we examined the role drawing of each member within the context of the group (Nossal, 2010). The process of associative group exchange permitted them to delve into some of the psychodynamics that explained the difficult emotional reality of the work group, both at an interactional level as well as in terms of the group-as-a-whole.

Floating in a Sea of Emotions and "Resting on a Void"

In my first meeting with the group, what caught my attention the most was how the members unanimously referred to being primarily united by strong emotional bonds of a loving character. They described themselves as a group of brothers, "fellow travelers" with a common training. The group was thus established for support in terms of the theoretical Reichian paradigm, which essentially shaped their professional identities. They represented themselves as a collective space of emotional containment, where their loving bonds predominated at the expense of their ability to interact with each other more critically and divergently.

This lack of critical spirit was detrimental to the overall operation, since they found it extremely difficult to openly discuss their differences. This greatly affected their decision-making process and their capacity to define the fate of the organization. While everyone experienced a level of frustration and suffering, they all showed it in different ways; the situation created a great deal of stress for everyone. The members felt a deep sense of mistrust in the individual and collective means that they counted on to implement joint activities in the educational, clinical, and Reich-based prevention fields. The lack of commitment that each member perceived in the others increased their distrust in the available resources, as well as the uneasiness and anger that they had toward each other and toward the group as a whole. In this way, the group was lacking

a collective body that could sustain and articulate its abilities and individual motivations, which caused them to fluctuate ambivalently between the protection that they found in the loving group space, and what some defined as "resting on a void".

This "resting on a void" was sustained by massive denial mechanisms, and it resulted in acute symptoms that demonstrated the profound inconsistency and porosity of the institutional space. For example, no one wanted to assume responsibility for the group; the response to the collective emails was very deficient and at times non-existent; no one was in charge of updating the institute's web page; all of them had stopped paying the institute's fees. All of these symptoms were accompanied by deep fears relating to the possible extinction of the group, or its fragmentation through the traumatic loss of more members, as had happened before. They also had visions of infertility, in their inability to get results and to be able to train other Reichian body therapists. Some of them were ashamed to not be able to respond adequately to the interest that many people expressed in training in this field. Many of those who were interested kept anticipating the beginning of the psychotherapy training process, which they were never able to consolidate or implement. Finally, they felt the risk of atomizing themselves, fearing that the individual and collective knowledge that they possessed would be irretrievably lost and diluted in the absence of a binding body.

These symptoms of institutional paralysis were very contradictory with respect to the abilities and achievements that each one had gained outside of this collective space. Everyone had a private practice as a well-established psychotherapist, and many of them were actively teaching and consulting in other areas of work. Some belonged to or had developed other training institutions that had done very satisfactory work. But when they tried to create a common project – in what represented for them the greatest conceptual reference for their psychotherapeutic practice – they countermanded each other, losing all ability to harness their resources and abilities to serve the institution.

All the difficulties that the group was facing might be summarized in the generalized belief that they had to deeply reformulate their goals, or they would inevitably disappear as a work group. This precarious institutional situation led me to think about what Hirschhorn (1999, p. 9) calls the "primary risk". He defines it as "*the felt risk of choosing the wrong primary task, that is, a task that ultimately cannot be managed.*" The group was embedded in an extremely ambiguous state that prevented them from making any kind of decision concerning their future. Some of them wanted to implement the previously planned training institute. Others were in the position of initiating small educative projects, such as open seminars and short training activities. Others wanted to work in health prevention using Reichian techniques. Finally, others were very confused regarding their position and role within the group. This created a significant zone of "task ambiguity", where as Hirschhorn (1999) suggests, individual and collective vacillation and ambivalence play a key role.

The "Lost" Body and Organizational Disembodiment

During the first role analysis session, we worked with the drawings of three group members. One of the key dimensions that appeared in the analysis of these drawings was the experience of disembodiment that the members experienced when they visualized themselves inserted into the organization. In every case, individual embodiment had a tendency to be diluted in the space (Figure 1), or rather, it was represented through big heads lacking a body to support them (Figures 2 and 3). In this context, the mental dimension appeared hypertrophied at the expense of those body parts that permitted to integrate the distinct members (the body) and also mobilize themselves in the space (the extremities). For the group, it was very significant and distressing to identify with the feeling of being afloat in the air without a material support base, and without extremities that permitted them to mobilize themselves and to undertake actions in a definite sense.
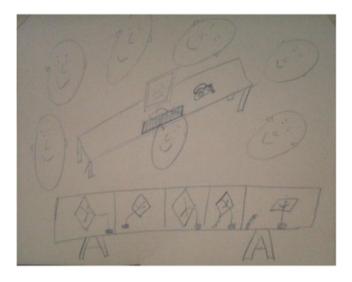

Figure 1: Flavia's role drawing.

Figure 2: Pedro's role drawing.

This experience of disembodiment that appeared in the distinct drawings connected them with a reality that was very difficult for them to integrate into, since it showed them exactly the blind spots and the gaps of the primary focus for a Reichian body therapist: to work with the patient in the integration of the stiffened segments of their corporality.[6] To identify with the image of the "lost body" was a threatening experience that demonstrated the intense anxieties of disembodiment that they experienced with their clinical work, which was expressed as much at the individual level as it was at the group level. In fact, the members constantly made reference to the difficulties that they had tackling the Reichian methods of practice individually, and that therefore, to be able to adequately implement projects in this field required the collaboration of the group as a whole. Nevertheless, all of their attempts to create such a framework for collective action had failed irreparably.

Bleger (1970/2002) claims that all organizations tend to defensively reproduce a structure similar to the problem that they have to face, and for which they have been designed, which can create high levels of dysfunction in completing the task. In this context, the group unknowingly generated a social defense system (Menzies, 1960/1989) to protect itself from the complexities that the completion of their shared primary task demanded. The "lost body" was an "emergent"[7] (Pichon-Rivière, 1970/2003) that demonstrated the precariousness of the group's operation. Therefore, it was at the level of the collective body in which the anxieties of disembodiment appeared in their most intense form, thus exacerbating the action of fragmentation dynamics that overruled the individual and collective group resources.

As shown in Fernanda's drawing (Figure 3), her organization-in-the-mind (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997) is represented by a circle marked by a precarious boundary that separated the interior from the exterior. Six heads that illustrated her group mates were in the interior expressing the emotional states

Figure 3: Fernanda's role drawing.

that each one had assumed over time. The drawing created a great deal of anxiety and a great sense of emptiness for the group members, who perceived themselves as "stunned", unable to move or interact with each other. The only movement possible was flight, which was represented as much by the members that had previously left the institution – who in the drawing appeared leaving in an airplane – as by the dubious position of Fernanda, who was torn between staying or leaving the group. Working through her hesitant position with respect to the group was very important in the consultancy last phases. The figures that were outside the group were depicted with complete bodies, but those who stayed within the group were disembodied.

Paradoxically, at the center of the drawing was a treasure of gold coins covered in dirt that represented the immense value that the group granted to the Reichian theory and practice. The treasure in the drawing stood out because its color was very alluring, but at the same time it was extremely ironic and contradictory, since it showed the inability of the group to divulge the knowledge that they highly valued. The anxiety, blame, and sadness that they exhibited in the face of the difficulties they experienced in disclosing such ideas were very significant.

"Antuco": The Risks of Being in Limbo

The next session was marked by the associations that emerged from the analysis of Miguel's drawing (Figure 4). According to its author, the drawing represented all the group members on an "excursion" in the midst of nature, trying to convey a pleasant and cheerful environment. According to Miguel, the rivers represented two important moments of crisis that the group had experienced in the past: first,

Figure 4: Miguel's role drawing.

the severing of ties with the members of the European Reichian School that had been in charge of their training as body psychotherapists; and secondly the painful and tragic loss of two highly valued group members. The larger size and volume of the second river was directly associated with the powerful emotional repercussions that the second crisis entailed for the group. The drawing demonstrated a temporal and spatial confusion, since the members were descending, but toward events that had already occurred in the past. This reinforced the feeling of timelessness, ambivalence, and a lack of clarity in the direction that the group was going at the time.

While Miguel did not accept these hypotheses altogether, it was relevant to note the associations that the analysis of the drawings awakened in the rest of the group. Furthermore, some members reaffirmed the uncomfortable sensation of perceiving the group in a state of constant back and forth, and therefore of great paralysis and ambivalence. The drawing also created a sense of instability and threat. This feeling of uncomfortableness was exacerbated by the remaining group members' contributions, who expressed their discomfort and anger at being a part of a group that identified with a path of pain and suffering. In the reflexive group process, Pedro associated the drawing with the tragedy of Antuco, as confirmation of the state of fear and confusion in which the group found itself. Antuco is a volcano located in southern Chile in a mountainous vicinity at 1500 m above sea level; where in May 2005 44 recruits died tragically, many of them teenagers that had been in the army for less than three months. In what was a routine training mission, the major in charge of the regiment ordered 474 recruits to march 28 km in extreme climate conditions and without the equipment and clothing necessary for such a setting. A snow storm battered and completely disoriented the group, causing 44 of them to die from hypothermia before they could reach their destination.

The members' associations regarding the tragedy and the painful implications of feeling lost and paralyzed as a group heightened the level of anxiety considerably during the session. The group's identification with the recruits totally lost and without sufficient equipment and preparation to face the storm, connected them to a deep sense of precariousness and lack of containment. Pedro, who in the drawing appeared ahead of the group in a clear position of leadership, angrily expressed his reticence to participate, let alone to lead, a project that produced this kind of negative emotions. Pedro was seen by the group as the natural leader. Nevertheless, the other members' passivity and strong dependence on him had worn him down and limited his will to lead an erratic and confused group. While he had never formally held a leadership role within the group, his personal abilities and his commitment to the project had lead him to assume a more active role, which he had no interest in continuing. The clarity of this statement had a powerful impact upon the rest of the members, since it set a clear boundary that left behind a very unfruitful and wearying type of leadership within the group.

The connection of the group's emotional state with the fallen recruits of Antuco in the freezing cold brought to the surface, in a displaced way, the strong

emotional impact that the loss of important members – who had suffered the risks and emotional costs of assuming leadership positions – had on the group. For example, Francisco, one of the most mourned group casualties, had left angrily after having tried to actively "conduct" the group toward the implementation of the training Reichian Institute. The hostility of his departure deepened the group crisis, emphasizing fears of fragmentation and instability, so that the emergent Antuco materialized crudely during the session. Tacitly, the group seemed to wonder about the source of the feeling of collective instability that they were experiencing. Individually, each one was a highly competent professional that nevertheless felt reduced to the status of a novice when they tried to set out on a common path. Inevitably, these questions led them to the figure of Wilhelm Reich and his intense and prolific life, full of significant accomplishments but also plagued by tragic conflicts and failures. Their identification with the marginality and stigmatization of Reich's ideas and methods was a heavy burden from which they found it difficult to liberate themselves.

The Reichian Bastard

One of the elements of analysis that emerged during the consulting process, and that could explain in part the difficulties of the group, was determined by a series of dynamics that resulted from the relationship that the members had with the Reichian theories. This group seemed to embody contradictory elements linked to the significance that its members – and what they perceived in their environment – attributed to the Reichian paradigm. On the one hand, for the group this knowledge represented a very sophisticated conceptual and technical treasure that they hoped to be able to communicate and pass on to others. On the other hand, they also felt very ambivalent about being able to articulate and teach these ideas that they felt were "too great", due to their revolutionary and counter-cultural character, as well as because of the almost-religious qualities that they attributed to the Reichian model. Moreover, their identification with this paradigm made them feel embarrassed with respect to the outside world. The members felt unqualified and socially isolated because they were bearers of the Reichian lineage.

This embarrassment was transmitted in all of its intensity through the emergent of the "Reichian bastard", which the members utilized throughout the sessions to refer to themselves, and which revealed them as representatives of a tradition that was embarrassing, discriminated against, and penalized. This emergent inevitably connected them with the vulnerability and stigma of the bastard experience of lacking the social acknowledgment that a paternal lineage provides. They felt hopelessly part of a tradition that connected them to the tragic life of Wilhelm Reich, the genius that heralded the pursuit of pleasure and the orgasmic experience, but who died a prisoner, with his ideas and books censored and burned, and surrounded by persecutors, both real and imagined (Sharaf, 1983/1994). Linked to the tragic fate of identification with this

paradigm, Pedro remembered that when they completed their training in psychotherapy, the Director of the Reichian Institute said to them: "Welcome to the club of fools". The weight of this irony in light of the group's problems became a cruel prophesy from which they desperately wanted to break free.

The group's identification with this phantasy of discrimination and madness did not only respond to elements that stem from the action of the members' individual and interactional dynamics, but also to how they embodied a powerful symbolic negative stigma linked with Reich's life and work. In this way, the group was trans-subjectively (Kaës, 1993) identified with this heavy collective burden. This kind of identification implies an unconscious alliance between the group and the conflictive link with Reich's legacy. This is an alliance that entails a shared psychic reality between individual members and the collectives that they belong to. This intersubjective psychic formation determines the quality of links between members, thus reinforcing in them certain functions and processes that become decisive for their mental life. Accordingly, this unconscious alliance had a particular structure, economy, and dynamic that heavily contributes to the stagnation of the group's collective functioning.

This also makes reference to what Anzieu (1999, p. 321), following Lacan, calls "symbolic group skin". This aspect of the group skin provides "signs of belonging to the group", such as uniforms, rituals, and professions of faith. Moreover, it mediates the conflictive relationship between group and society.[8] In the analyzed case, the group was symbolically identified with very ambivalent and contradictory aspects connected with Reich's life and theories. On the one hand, members had introjected very punitive and devalued aspects related to the critical and hostile social appreciation of Reich's theoretical and technical contributions. But on the other hand, they had idealized his ideas and methods as a matter of faith, feeling themselves incapable of using them in plenitude. These contradictions are at the core of Reich's life, which was mainly characterized by high achievements, but also by very painful falls.

Trapped in Mutual Distrust

Toward the end of the fifth session, in which we were concluding the analysis of the seven role drawings, a deep climate of mistrust began to intensify among the different members. In spite of the fact that the completed analysis up until this moment had allowed them to work through their difficulties, a collective dynamic of tension and resistance to change could still be sensed. My counter-transference to the group dynamic was very negative, which led me to convey the interpretation of feeling them "dragging a dead man", a heavy burden of mistrust that prevented them from moving forward or making decisions.

During the next session, we analyzed the particular way in which each of them envisioned himself contributing to the collective institute project. In this session, I observed a high level of understanding between them regarding the

desire to strengthen the existing collective structure, through which they could develop activities in the field of psychotherapy training, and also in the development of new projects in the area of early childhood prevention. Moreover, everyone was willing to contribute with a weekly time frame for meeting, developing, and consolidating those challenges that they were planning for.

This constructive dynamic was abruptly cut short by Fernanda, who announced her intention of leaving the group due to strong differences that she had had three years before with two other members of the group (Flavia and Teresa), on a project in which the three had worked conjointly. None of the four remaining members knew about this old conflict. Fernanda said that it would be very difficult for her to work with them again. The emotional impact of this declaration was very great for the group since everything they had built seemed to shatter into a million pieces. During several months the group had worked hard toward developing a common project, however this revelation showed how extremely fragile their support base was. The conflict that existed among the members gave shape and substance to my negative counter-transference from the previous session. A deep sense of unease overwhelmed the entire group. The end of the session required us to resume our analysis of the situation in the next session.

During the next meeting, the group explored in more detail the strong emotional repercussions that had caused the conflict experienced by Fernanda and her two colleagues years ago. The opening up of this conflict allowed Fernanda to face her hesitant position concerning the group's primary task and future, which was initially described in the analysis of her drawing (Figure 3). At this point, she tackled the group's difficulties to cope with their disagreements and disputes, as well as her tendency to remain in a secondary position, mainly in charge of the group's operative duties. The session was extremely intense in emotional terms, throughout which several women cried, expressing their sorrow over the possible breakup of the group. At one point, Pedro revealed his exhaustion with the group dynamic, which he described as "feminine", claiming that he greatly missed the group's ability to more proactively face the challenges that lay ahead, rather than to remain trapped in the circularity of emotions. This stirred the rest of the members considerably, who appeared surprised and challenged by Pedro's words. When we only had a few minutes left before the end of the session, I proposed to them that they should meet without me for the following sessions, and then resume work with me a month and a half later. The group agreed.

When we reconvened after the agreed time period, the collective dynamic seemed very different. Cecilia told me upon greeting me: "your intervention worked". The group had met independently three times, and they managed to find a common ground in the interests that everyone had. In that period, they created a framework for the coming months, distributing tasks and also dedicating their time and energy to future challenges. They decided to begin developing projects more closely related to the training of psychotherapists and to resume the work that they had proposed in the field of early childhood prevention. They

recounted feeling greater consistency in the group's resources, and also not fearing a potential failure in the new challenges that they were proposing. They also felt that they had broken free from the heavy burden that the members of the European Reichian School in charge of their training had passed on to them years ago. For many years, they had felt pressured to replicate in Chile the same training that they had had. Now they felt that they could inhabit a collective body that was more real, where they could better coexist with their own ideas, dreams, and challenges.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes some of the complexities that groups face in the effort of harnessing their resources to accomplish the primary task and to set common goals. The notions of "body of the organization" and "psychic envelope" are employed to illustrate and understand the value of exploring in depth the unconscious trends that determine the roles and interpersonal boundaries within the system. The case presented shows in detail the multiplicity of levels (individual, intersubjective, group-as-a-whole and transubjective) that is involved in the challenge of developing and preserving a healthy operation of these boundaries. From this perspective, the inconsistency and porosity of the psychic group skin, as well as the anxieties of fragmentation and organizational disembodiment that members experienced, were powerful symptoms of the lack of emotional containment that the institutional body provided. These unconscious collective dynamics were worked through combining an individual and group analysis. This psychoanalytic work set the basis for a much safer, containing, and protective psychic group skin, which enabled group members to face more realistically their interpersonal problems, as well as the heavy burden of a historical organizational legacy that impaired its functioning. This analysis is consistent with Anzieu's (1999) approach, who claims that the main conflicts of group mental life reside both in the antagonistic tendencies between the individual and the group, and in the tensions between group and society. In this context, members' interpersonal conflicts were exacerbated due to the conflictive implications of working under the legacy of Reich's shadow.

The psychodynamic role consultancy methods that guided the whole process of analysis were powerful tools to examine how members were taking up their roles concerning the group's difficulties. These methods allowed delving into the unconscious dynamics that sustained the conflicts of each individual with respect to the group tasks. This analysis was greatly strengthened by the in-depth examination of individual role drawings, which opened new perspectives to collectively explore and understand the main causes of obstacles to the group. As part of this exploration, Fernanda was able to face her ambivalent position regarding the group; Pedro openly stated his reluctance to lead the organization, and several female members changed their passive roles in the system. The

progress of this analysis lay in the generation of working hypotheses (Reed & Bazalgette, 2006) which were developed by the joint collaboration between the group and the consultant. Such hypotheses contributed to find new ways to examine the unconscious meanings and the emotional experience that operated "below the surface" of the organization (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004).

This paper stresses the relevance of applying the concepts and heuristic methods of psychoanalysis to study the unconscious mental dynamics of groups and organizations. Psychoanalysis provides very powerful interpretative means to examine, understand, and transform what is concealed under the main symptoms individuals experience as a result of working together. The employment of this psychodynamic approach entails looking at transferential phenomena and defensive mechanisms that offer essential information about the irrational aspects that remain covered by the apparent order and structure of organizational behavior. Moreover, through the detailed description provided by the case study, this report reveals the benefits of developing a "reflective practice" (Hinshelwood, 1996) within groups and organizations. This means to engage members' active participation in creation of dialogue and exchange spaces that enable them to disentangle their collective resistance to think and change.

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NOTES

1 Socio-analysis as theory and method of intervention and research is built on the seminal work done by Bion (1961) with groups and expanded by the Tavistock tradition (Trist & Murray, 1990) from the 1940s until the present. Socio-analysis focuses on the study of institutions and social systems thus including the emotional, social, cultural, and political side of them. This perspective regards that individuals' roles are socially induced by the organizational system and by the psychic and emotional reverberations that the wider environment has upon this system.

2 Kaës (1999, p. 74) defines the "group psychic apparatus" as a mental structure irreducible to the individual psychic apparatus. It is a linking and transformative system of mental elements, that operates as a result of members' contributions.

3 Esther Bick (1968) introduced the concept of "skin" in psychoanalytic literature as a result of her prolific work on infant observation. She describes the "skin of the baby" as a primitive boundary that has to be established in order to facilitate the "binding together of parts of the personality not as yet differentiated from parts of the body" (p. 484). She stresses that at the beginning,

these parts of the personality need to be "held together" in a passive way – with the skin working as a limit – because in its primal form they do not have the force to perform such a task by themselves. In this process, the baby is required to introject an external object that is able to carry out this function. Only by incorporating these containing functions into the self, the notion of internal space that holds things can emerge. Likewise, this introjection allows setting in motion the operation of primitive splitting and idealization of self and object. From the point of view of the author, this introjected containing object is "experienced concretely as a skin" (Bick, 1968, p. 484).

4   All the first names employed in this manuscript were invented to protect the identity of group members.

5   The primary task is fundamental heuristic concept in the Tavistock tradition that defines the main purpose of the organization, which is constituted from members' constant struggle with the need of survival as a collective. This task is directly related to the organization's capacity to be permanently adapting to internal and external changes (Rice, 1965).

6   According to Reich (1942/1973) physical stiffness is the most essential part of the repression process, and therefore, the clinical focus should change from the psychological and characterological exploration to the dissolution of the "muscular armor". Such dissolution not only liberates vegetative energy, but also allows bringing to memory the repressed remembrances and affects. Reich suggests penetrating directly towards the affects through the chronic muscular attitudes and tensions.

7   Pichon-Rivière (1970/2003) defines the emergent as one of the basic concepts in his theory on operative groups. The emergent is a representation or image that stems from the group process, and which has the capacity to explain and communicate what is implicit. When the emergent is correctly interpreted by the coordinator (analyst), the group is able to face what is unconsciously resisted.

8   Coming from a Lacanian theoretical framework, Arnaud (2002) emphasizes the relevance of analyzing organizations taking into account the symbolic order that regulates the operation of their dynamics. This symbolic order represents a "trans-subjective extraneous place" that pre-exists and is external to the individual subject (p. 700). The symbolic medium, that Lacan calls the "Other", can be embodied through intersubjective relations and discourses that "express, define, and sanction the conditions of possibility of the subject" (p. 695). According to Arnaud, the symbolic circulates and is shared within groups and organizations, thus impacting heavily upon their functioning and quality of performance.

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