CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The group as matrix of the individual's mental life

This article was requested by the editors for the first volume of a new annual series. The volume was dedicated to the memory of Asya Kadis, who had been Director of Group Therapy at the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health in New York. In the United States, apart from individual colleagues who had had close contact with group analysis in London, Mrs Kadis and some of her colleagues at the Postgraduate Center were probably nearest to Foulkes in their views.

Foulkes' last paper (see chapter twenty-eight) appeared in the volume for 1977 in the same series. The 1978 volume was dedicated to his memory, with articles on Foulkes by Martin Grotjahn, Malcolm Pines and Max Rosenbaum and a bibliography.

The concept of a group matrix has been the subject of considerable interest, and the present paper is Foulkes' most important and detailed presentation of it.

Chapter in L. R. Wolberg and E. K. Schwartz (eds.), *Group Therapy 1973—An Overview* (New York: Intercontinental Medical Book Corporation, 1973).

It may be worth adding that the title of this paper was originally 'The group as matrix of mental life'. When giving a paper in New York in 1958, Foulkes found that he had been misunderstood there regarding the importance that he gave to the individual. This apparently had to do with their misunderstanding of his use of the term 'group dynamics'. As the present article was for an American publication, he decided to forestall further possible misunderstandings and chose the longer title, to underline that his focus was—as it had always been—the liberation of the individual human being.

Defences against a comprehensive view

It seems difficult for many at the present time to accept the idea that what is called 'the mind' consists of interacting processes between a number of closely linked persons, commonly called a group. Already when two people form a relationship, they create a new phenomenon, just as when two people play chess with each other they create a new phenomenon, namely, the game of chess which they produce. When a group of people, by which for our purposes I mean a small number of persons, form intimate relationships, they create a new phenomenon, namely, the total field of mental happenings between them all. In this context I have spoken of 'transpersonal processes', that is mental processes which, like X-rays in the bodily sphere, go right through the individuals composing such a 'network'.

This totally new phenomenon which they create I usually refer to as the 'context of the group'. I do not talk of a group mind because this is a substantivation of what is meant and as unsatisfactory as speaking of an individual mind. The mind is not a *thing* which exists but a series of events, moving and proceeding all the time. The difficulty that people still have, in and outside the field of psychotherapy, in accepting my hypothesis as a basis for understanding and for action, can be partly explained as the usual inability and unwillingness to learn anything new. To learn some-

thing new entails changing one's whole attitude to a number of things, to oneself and to the world in which one lives. I believe, however, that there is quite a specific resistance against accepting mental processes as multipersonal phenomena, a resistance based on the very personal as well as general consequences if we accept this truth. These resistances appear to be comparable to those found by Freud against the recognition of unconscious mental processes in the individual.

The reasons for this personal bias will become clearer, I hope, in what I shall have to say later. However, I will at least indicate them at this point. We can best study these mental networks in psychopathology: what we know of them, we know mostly through our patients. If our patients are not seen to be in need of help entirely for their own sake, but are in fact part and parcel of a whole network of interacting individuals, it follows that in certain respects they are merely the victims or scapegoats, or otherwise symptoms of changes and upsets within the intimate network of their human relationships. It can be observed that when patients in treatment begin to change seriously, they will, as a rule, get into trouble with others in their network. The whole equilibrium and the psychopathology of the network had been based on our patients being just as they are, and therefore the others' own equilibrium is now threatened.

Any change in any individual part of such a network upsets the whole balance inside it. As this is as true for psychologists, doctors or psychoanalysts as for everybody else, there exists a built-in interest against its being uncovered, for this would entail taking far greater notice of what happens in their patients' networks, as well as the doctors' own. Ultimately it would mean that the whole community must take a far greater responsibility for outbreaks of disturbing psychopathology generally. There is therefore a very specific defensive interest at play in denying the fact of the interdependence which is here claimed; the cry 'but each is an individual' and 'surely the mind is a matter for the individual' means, in this sense, 'each for himself, I am not to blame for what happens to the other person, whether he is obviously near to me, or whether I am involved in concealed ways, or even quite unconsciously'.

Communication: psychoanalysis and group analysis

All phenomena in an analytic therapeutic group are considered as potential communications. This dynamic way of putting it eliminates the need for the usual concept of the repressed unconscious, defences, and so forth, which is necessitated in a psychoanalytic orientation. Needless to say that it in no way contradicts or denies these observations. It may be useful to compare and contrast briefly at least the view arising from the psychoanalytic two-person method regarding these processes and those arising from group-analytic observations. Ultimately they must belong to a consistent theory of the human being as seen in various situations.

In comparing the psychoanalytic and the group-analytic points of view of the individual and of individual processes, the analogy of a differentially magnifying microscope is useful. The psychoanalytical view takes the individual mind as the unit of observation and tries to understand all mental processes in terms of this individual mind. This makes it particularly useful for its special purposes, namely the vertical analysis of the individual in a chronological, historical sense. Seen from the psychoanalytical approach, new relationships are brought about essentially by transference, and counter-reactions by the transference of the other people concerned act as modifiers on these now different relationships. Ultimately this means that they can be understood as results of the original family relationships of each individual.

By contrast, the group-analytic view would claim that all these interactional processes play in a unified mental field of which the individuals composing it are a part. It is therefore the method of choice for the observation and for gaining effective influence in the horizontal sense—this means in view of the present participants' different characters and reactions, and in the here and now of present life. The point I wish to stress is that this network is a psychic system as a whole network, and not a superimposed social interaction system in which individual minds interact with each other. This is the value of thinking in terms of a concept which does not confine mind, by definition, to an individual.

As group analysts we do not share the psychoanalytical juxtaposition of an 'internal' psychological reality and an 'external',

physical or social reality which, for psychoanalysis, makes good sense. What is inside is outside, the 'social' is not external but very much internal too and penetrates the innermost being of the individual personality. The 'objective' external 'reality' is inseparable from the being, animal or human, and indeed the individual whose world it is and therefore is part of the 'psychological' reality as well. It can be in full harmony with the latter, or compensatory or contradictory—for example, by such polarizing processes as projection—but is never unaffected by it. On the other hand, the psychoanalytical point of view should also be seen as a deliberate abstraction, the individual being deliberately abstracted and considered isolated from his context. (Instead, it is very often considered as an absolute truth, as a simple, true account of observation that each individual has a mind to himself.) The two considerations are therefore not incompatible with each other; they are, on the contrary, complementary. Which is the preferred one depends on circumstances or on the purpose of the observation and the indication for the action required. Personally I believe that the multipersonal hypothesis of mind is nearer to the true nature of events.

Just as I do not doubt the phenomenon of mind, I do not doubt the existence of the individual person. The individual person not only exists in his mind and in our own experience, but his body is undoubtedly an individual coherent entity. In this way in our groups, too, the individuals react to each other, show their individuality, develop their own ideas and phantasies about the group, about the therapist, about certain co-members and so forth. Nevertheless, my own studies and experiences in group-analytic groups led me to see the existence of a suprapersonal mental matrix, and to speculate and theorize about this. I can put this quite simply: I thought to myself, 'What an enormous complexity of processes and actions and interactions play between even two or three of these people, or these people and myself, or between two in relation to another three, and so on. What enormous complexity, quite impossible to perceive and disentangle even theoretically all at the same time. How is it they can nevertheless understand each other, that they can to some extent refer to a shared and common sense of what is going on? They move in a meaningful way from point A to point B. And the same applies to me myself.'

So I thought: 'What is really happening here, what am I really doing?' I found that the old theory of perceiving this in terms of individuals and their interaction as individual minds enclosed in each skull, interacting in the most complicated fashion with the others, that this theory acted as a great barrier to my understanding. Moreover, it set up many pseudo-problems to which there are therefore no satisfactory answers. Instead, I have accepted from the beginning that even this group of total strangers, being of the same species and more narrowly of the same culture, share a fundamental, mental matrix (*foundation matrix*). To this their closer acquaintance and their intimate exchanges add consistently, so that they also form a current, ever-moving, ever-developing *dynamic matrix*.

I do not want to enlarge on the concept of matrix here, except as a construct useful for seeing all the different processes I have described—as, for instance, location or figure–ground formation—as they operate in this interactional communicational network, the matrix. This enabled me to say that it is mental processes, not persons, that interact. I want to say a few words in order not to be misunderstood about this. Mental processes *per se* cannot interact, but no one would doubt that—to use a simple example—one homosexual recognizes the other before they know anything of each other, instinctively, as we say; nor that a sadist and masochist interact, complement each other and respond to each other in a certain affinity, before they know it themselves. This still does not mean, except in theory, that one can abstract these processes or forces (and they are far more complex than the ones indicated), as independent entities with actions of their own. It is ultimately always whole persons who interact with whole persons.

What I mean by saying that mental processes interact is the selective interaction that goes on impersonally, instinctively, intuitively, basically unconsciously, in accordance with the inner constellation and predispositions of those concerned and which determine their interaction. The highly interesting and important specificity, the interlocking of these processes, which in fact contain the whole of psychopathology in living action, I refer to as 'resonance'. Sometimes this is consciously acknowledged by the individual. The total interactions of the individuals are in fact the

result of affinities or disaffinities of individual instincts, emotions, reactions of all sorts, character predispositions, for example. There is at the same time an unconscious interpretation of these reactions on this same basis. Essentially this gives the group coherence and meaning for each of the participants, even if each is far from conscious of this, or from understanding it in any way intellectually.

Group context

To understand and describe further what I am doing, and what are the thoughts and ideas that guide my actions, I speak of the group context. It is important to note that in the usual, standard group-analytic group, the individuals are the foreground, and the group context is the background on which we base our interventions and interpretations; the individual is in the centre of this procedure. Looking in this way at the total goings-on in the group leads to frequent misunderstandings concerning the neglect of the individual. The concept of group context holds no such threat. The truest account of what I do is that I analyse in the interest of each individual, but in the group context. For this purpose I use not only the processes as they reach me but as they reach everyone, that is to say, the total processes operating in the group. To do justice to the fact that this mental field of operation very much includes the individual but also transgresses him, I have used the term 'transpersonal processes'. These processes pass through the individual, though each individual elaborates them and contributes to them and modifies them in his own way. Nevertheless, they go through all the individuals—similar to X-rays in the physical sphere.

Perhaps it may not be inappropriate to illustrate this view with a simile from biology. Cells do exist. Cellular pathology is meaningful, and we can look at the goings-on from the point of view of this cellular pathology. If the cell in our case represents the individual, then the way I am looking at it would correspond more to molecular biology which transgresses each individual cell, which is not to say that the individual cell does not behave receptively and creatively in the total process.

Psychology is thus neither 'individual' nor 'group', except by abstraction. We cannot speak about the individual without reference to the group, nor about a human group that does not consist of individuals. Both are, therefore, abstractions as far as the psychology of the total person is concerned.

In order to see something whole we have, I believe, to see it in relation to a greater whole, so that we can step outside of that which we want to see. For instance, a larger group can be seen only in reference to still larger communities, or perhaps in reference to its leaders or its task. Smaller groups can be seen whole only in relation to other groups. This is what I have in mind when I say that in our therapeutic groups, the group itself is the horizon. The group as such can only be understood from inside itself. Insofar as we also are included, we cannot strictly speaking see it as a whole either, except in relation to ourselves, nor should we habitually address it as a whole. A situation in which it is meaningful to address the group as a whole is, for example, when the conductor, the analyst, wishes to point out some response to his function or any shared responses in relation to himself or to some other member. The therapeutic group on the small scale, optimally of seven to nine persons, is the situation of choice to see the *individuals* composing this group really as a whole, in the round. However, as pointed out, this group situation highlights the internal interaction, transgresses the boundaries of the individual, of what is usually considered internal, intrapsychic, and shows it to be shared by all.

When speaking of psychology or psychopathology we would do better to have in mind the composite total which embraces and contains all psychological processes in any given situation of study. We can focus on the group as a whole or on any one individual or individuals in their specific interactions: all that happens is meaningful from any point of view, and the different meanings dovetail. It is not the case that the one viewpoint is right and the other wrong. It is rather as if we took photographs from various positions. One picture may be better for certain purposes and the others less good, but all of them show what is true from the position from which they are taken. However, the total process must always be defined from the total field. The relationship appears to be best understood in terms of figure and ground, as already

mentioned. Figure is that which we choose particularly to observe, that on which we focus, or what in impartial observation forces itself into the foreground.

Group-network theory

I have spoken of the intercommunicational, interactional network in which the individual is embedded, and of the group network theory of neurosis. I do not identify this concept entirely with that of the family for reasons I will presently explain, though I operated with and studied family networks before family therapy as such existed. The original family is indeed the primary network in which the personality of the future individual is decisively formed; the whole of psychoanalysis has borne that out beyond reasonable doubt. This family network, seen as a group, acts as a whole complicated formulation. It has as it were a vertical axis pointing to the past, to the parents, to the parents' own childhood, to the parents' relationship to their own parents, all of which enter into the innermost core of the forming child.

We know that these events are covered by infantile amnesia and are in that sense dynamically unconscious, especially in regard to the instincts concerning infantile sexuality. However, the core of the ego and superego thus formed—formed in my view from the very beginning—are also in their essential parts equally unconscious, although not repressed. They are unconscious because the values imbued, the whole relationship to the world, and to objects, the whole way of expressing oneself, of breathing, of sleeping, of waking, of being amused, of speaking, the individual's total behaviour has been decisively shaped by the original family group. The individual is unconscious of this in that he is normally convinced that his way of feeling, of thinking, is the natural and right one, that his language *is* the language one speaks. I would like to remind you of a passage from Mark Twain. 'Are the French human?' one of his characters asks another. The other replies: 'Oh, yes, they are human.' 'Then why don't they speak like humans?'

Thus it is one of the great advances in an analytic approach to individuals in groups that they begin to see for themselves that other people laugh about different things, feel different, are dif-

ferent—and yet that there is no reason to judge one kind of behaviour as better or more normal than the other, except again for reasons valid in the greater community of the total culture in which these people live. In what people differ, therein lies their true individuality.

As to the way in which the human person thus developed behaves later in life, we know that his early influences continue quite normally, as I have just explained, but also as disturbances, insofar as there are unresolved longings or traumas expressed respectively in transference and repetition-compulsion. This is true and remains true whether people lie on a couch, sit on a chair opposite you or sit around in a circle. Later, we find the individual's life in our type of Western culture lived in small as well as somewhat larger groups corresponding in size very much to the old tribal community of a few hundred people. These life—or current—networks of people prove significant for each individual. When one approaches these living current groups, as they operate, they will be found to overlap with the family, though they are not necessarily identical with it. They will include friends, rivals, superiors, inferiors, animals and even inanimate objects.

In one of my groups, after the mother's death, the cat she had left to the daughter, my patient, became an extraordinarily important object.

When examining such life groups, the people with whom the patient currently lives—and we all live our immediate life in such groups—we find that only a relatively limited number of persons are more or less persistently significant, and a limited number, perhaps not quite the same ones, are selectively significant for particular conflicts. If we examine these as they stand, either in our consulting room or in life itself, we treat them as a group in a particular way into which I cannot enter here in detail.

Essentially such a family or group network treatment of the natural group itself is extremely powerful and can be very successful. On the whole I have found, however, that it is only too often obvious that such a group as a whole cannot be sanitated. The conflicts and the complications are too great. The limitations lie in the resistance which the various members of such significant networks offer to change in any one of them, particularly in the designated patient, consciously and unconsciously. More often

than not they are quite disinclined to being frank and open with each other and to revealing their secrets. In short, therefore, this natural life group, important as it is, is perhaps of the greatest value as a diagnostic and prognostic instrument as regards psychotherapy of an analytical kind.

Such a group is by definition treated as a group even if seen diagnostically a few times. So is a functioning group of people, a group with a task, if they are to be treated as a group for their group function's sake. Such examples of the group becoming the foreground are a football team or a group of managers in an industrial concern. Yet it is true that, though the individuals become the background under these conditions, if we are successful in improving the total life and atmosphere in such a group, the individuals composing it change and benefit too, often surprisingly so.

However, the third type of group, the group-analytic group in the specific sense, is the one of choice if we wish to apply an intensive form—and a very effective form it is—of an analytic approach to the individuals in the round and through each other. This group is composed of strangers with no reality relationships whatsoever, totally abstaining from forming such relationships, and altogether under analytic conditions.

To mention at least two of the most interesting results of my investigations in this field: (1) I am satisfied that, as one would expect, the network theory holds good for any individual whatsoever, for any of our patients, if we take the trouble to take note of it. (2) The three group situations or group networks mentioned seem best to be studied in their interaction in the group-analytic group. Of especial interest is their intertwining and particularly also the way in which the current network enters into the treatment process, while we go along.