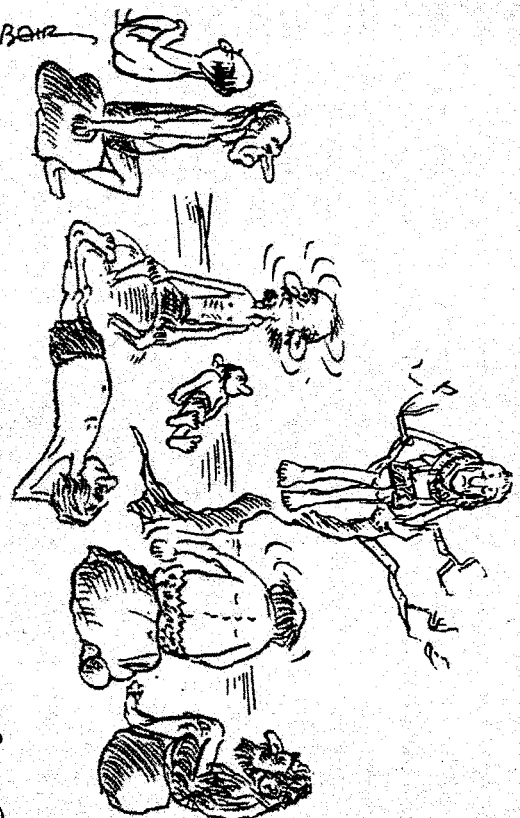


CHAPTER ONE

The social and cultural basis of group analysis



At the end of the nineteenth century the great pillars which supported the edifice of scientific learning – medicine, philosophy and the natural sciences – stood in splendid isolation from one another. The science of mind was in its infancy, but showing all the signs of an early identity crisis as it hovered uncertainly between the natural sciences and another newly emerging discipline, that of the social sciences. The Freudian revolution came like an earthquake to shake this edifice. Man stood revealed as a creature subject to irrational forces coming from the depth of his own mind, just when he was beginning to think of himself as a supremely rational being, liberated from the dark ages of mystical and magical thinking. Like Darwin, with his infuriating demonstrations of man's link with lower life

forms, Freud disturbed the world of science with his alarming theories of infantile sexuality and incestuous longings.

Despite challenges from the orthodox scientists of the day, the Freudian view gained ground. Neurologists and psychiatrists, perplexed by the bizarre and manifold presentations of their patients, turned for explanations to the new Freudian postulates on the nature of mind. The period up to the beginning of the First World War saw a proliferation of ideas based on Freud's premises and their application in clinical practice. A new form of treatment for mental disorder called psychoanalysis came into existence and caught the popular imagination. The science of psychodynamic psychotherapy had been born.

The old scientific order was crumbling, but so too was the old political order. The First World War saw the collapse of the great Austro-Hungarian, Tsarist and Ottoman Empires together with many of the kingdoms, duchies and principalities that had made up the jigsaw puzzle of Europe in 1914. In their place rose new monolithic ideologies: communism and fascism, each determined to dominate the world, if not by persuasion then by force. All eyes turned anxiously to Germany. The nation had been destroyed by the war but now, ominously, it began to rise from the ashes as the centre of a fresh conflict, this time between these forces of communism and fascism.

The Frankfurt School

The scientific community of Western Europe found itself propelled into the political arena. Those who looked aghast upon the menace of fascism and its ugliest manifestation, Nazism, worked assiduously towards the development of an antidote based on socialist principles and informed by professional insights. Many of them gathered in Frankfurt in Germany, where they established a network which became known collectively as the Frankfurt School. This was in effect a gigantic think-tank, devoted to the study and integration of different branches of the social sciences, psychoanalysis, psychology and neurology, and their application to the political and social issues of the day.

Many influential figures of twentieth-century social and political thought came from the Frankfurt School, as did some of the founders of the newly emergent disciplines of interpersonal psychotherapy and

social psychology. Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and T.W. Adorno were among a group of left-wing intellectuals at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research who elaborated a new approach to Marxist social theory, the 'critical theory' of societal phenomena, which emphasized the importance of cultural and psychological factors in what had until then been a purely economic theory.

The inter-disciplinary culture of the Frankfurt School's network allowed ideas to flow across boundaries traditionally separated from one another, while the unifying ethos was an ideological one based on radical socialist principles. Their intention was to create a community of scientists and intellectuals as a step towards the achievement of a better society, but events overtook them. The rise of Nazism led to the dismemberment of the network and the dispersal of its members, some escaping to the United States and England, where they continued their work.

Foulkes, holism and gestalt psychology

S.H. Foulkes, the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who gave group analysis its theoretical justification and developed it as a method of treatment, practised in Frankfurt between 1921 and 1933. It was here that he encountered the leading figures of the Frankfurt School and became intellectually and emotionally influenced by them. Foulkes was particularly influenced by the holistic approach of the neurologist Kurt Goldstein and by the ideas of gestalt psychology, whose leading proponent was Max Wertheimer. In the wake of the First World War, Goldstein had worked with brain-injured soldiers and had shown that they could develop remarkable powers of adaptation and recovery, contradicting the prevailing view that damage to the central nervous system inevitably resulted in irreversible loss of function. He postulated a holistic model of neural functioning, based on the premise that the organism as a whole could contribute resources which allowed new nerve pathways to open up and bypass traumatic lesions. From this model Foulkes developed his most creative metaphor, that of the group as a network of communication analogous to the neuronal network of the brain.

For Goldstein, the guiding principle of gestalt psychology was the concept of the whole organism as a 'gestalt' (literally an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts). The

healthy gestalt represents the whole organism coming to terms with the demands of the environment in which it exists. The observer has to consider all the phenomena represented by the organism and not give preference to the description of any special one. The system functions as a whole, therefore any given stimulus must produce changes in the whole organism.

Goldstein was thinking of the biological organism, particularly the brain. Foulkes incorporated these ideas into his conceptualization of the individuals in a group. He saw them as forming a network, analogous to the network of the nervous system. The group is seen to interact and react as a whole, and each individual contribution is understood in the context of this network. The group therefore influences and is influenced by each individual group member. The process has been graphically expressed by Gregory van der Kleij: 'It is as if the members of a group are the words of a sentence, none of which can express their meaning - except as objects - unless belonging to each other' (van der Kleij, 1982).

The concept Foulkes chose to express this process was that of a matrix, a dynamic network of interpersonal and transpersonal communication in which the individuals featured as nodal points, comparable to the neurones traversed by the interconnecting fibres of the neuronal network. The group itself represents this transpersonal network: it reacts and responds as a whole, and in the psychoanalytic sense, associates as a whole. All verbal and nonverbal communications occur within the developing group matrix, which is the operational basis of intrapsychic and interpersonal relationships. These two models, holistic and gestalt, came together in the Foulkesian conception of the group as an interactive and reactive organism within which there was a constantly changing constellation of figure-ground configurations.

The psychoanalytic contribution to group analysis

The third strand in Foulkes's model of group therapy came from psychoanalysis. Having trained as a psychoanalyst in the Freudian tradition, he believed that therapeutic techniques derived from psychoanalysis could be applied to groups, and that the main dynamic concepts of psychoanalysis were essentially compatible with a model of group function based on communication.

Foulkes began to develop his innovative ideas at a time when psychoanalysis was moving increasingly from the perception of mind as a mental apparatus made up of goal-directed instinctual drives and their vicissitudes, to mind as a dynamic system of object and part object relations, a system in perpetual flux. A wind of change was blowing through psychoanalytic thinking: Bion's container-contained model, Fairbairn's libido as object seeking, Winnicott's mother-child unit, Lacan's discourse between the subject and the self, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Kohut's psychology of the self. Foulkes did not refer directly to any of these developments in the exposition of his own theoretical position. Asked once whether he did not think that object relations theory was especially applicable to group analysis, he replied, after a moment's thought: 'I don't need it' (Foulkes, personal communication). However, these new strands of thought in psychoanalysis later beckoned a number of group analysts and led to efforts at integrating them with group analysis. Dennis Brown and Colin James developed models of therapy which integrated the central concepts of Foulkes, Winnicott and Bion. Attachment theory and group analysis came together in the work of Mario Marone, while the integration of self psychology with group analysis captured the imagination of a number of therapists including Irene Harwood, Malcolm Pines and Sigmund Karterud.

Foulkes considered himself a true Freudian, yet what he produced was a radical, almost revolutionary departure from what he had been taught and experienced in his training analysis in Vienna with Helene Deutsch and his supervision with Nunberg, a member of the *Kinderseminar*, the famous meeting place of young analysts which included Wilhelm Reich. Nor did his theoretical stance change after his emigration to England, during the course of his psychoanalytic practice as a training analyst with the London Psychoanalytic Institute.

Foulkes's dismissal of object relations theory sounded arrogant at the time. Yet he was saying something which is true of group analysis. He was pointing to the difference between the dyadic situation of psychoanalysis and the group-analytic situation in which a new therapy takes place. 'I don't need it' translates into 'I need different concepts to apply to this different situation'. Foulkes was referring to a situation in which the group itself becomes the frame of reference. All that goes on in it gets its meaning from this frame of reference, and within it. The term 'group situation' has a specific connotation.

It refers to all the people in the room, including the therapist, sitting together face-to-face in a circle. The circle encompasses both physical and psychological space and is bounded by the members of the group, who in the Foulkesian conception all share the same space (Pines, 1981).

While the group itself can be conceptualized in holistic and gestalt terms, it is also a psychoanalytic therapy. The individual benefits from an atmosphere in which reality and immediacy heighten transference experiences, and the perceptions arising from these experiences are held by the group, eventually to be modified, revised and used as reality-adapted new experiences of the self in relation to the others. In this way the analytic group can provide what Winnicott called 'the environmental essentials' of healthy development.

The role of culture in group analysis

The sociologist Norbert Elias is now being belatedly recognized for his seminal contribution to our thinking about groups. Belatedness seems to have dogged Elias. Most of his prolific writings were the product of his post-retirement years, and his earliest and best-known work, *The Civilizing Process*, though published in 1939, lay on the shelves for another 30 years before attracting the attention of scholars and group-analytic therapists. However, as his friend and chief exponent Stephen Mennell has put it, 'That was not the most propitious year for the publication of a large, two-volume work in German, by a Jew, on, of all things, civilisation' (Mennell, 1992).

Elias provides an element which is missing in Foulkes's psychoanalytic and quasi-systemic conception of group analysis: the importance of historical and cultural continuity to the interactions of people who meet face-to-face in a group. For Elias, the concept of interdependence was important: the notion that people are interdependent with others whom they have never met face-to-face. In his fascinating study of manners and the minutiae of human behaviour down the ages, Elias has shown how our psychological make-up has been shaped by a discernible evolutionary process in society. It is this process that has made us more aware of the effect that we have on others and of our identification with others, as expressed for example through advances in our threshold of shame and embarrassment and our ability to predict how others might react towards us.

Elias's spotlight on the socio-genesis and psycho-genesis of our behaviour – the chain of cultural events which links us to the past – inevitably raises questions about reversals and breakdowns in the process, and the part played in these by social trauma. This theme has been developed by Earl Hopper, a sociologist and group analyst, who has advanced a model of social regression in the face of massive trauma, and by Yamik Volkan, whose writings emphasize the importance of historical traumata in the perpetuation of inter-group conflict. Another group analyst, Farhad Dalal, has taken up Elias's theme of social relatedness and his concept of figuration, a notion intended to describe the inter-connectedness of human existence without having to cast people as either primarily individuals or primarily groups. Dalal points to the constraining effect of figurations on our thoughts and actions in groups, and links these to what he sees as a missing element in Foulkes's thinking about groups: the question of power relationships in groups and how this applies to the therapeutic process, for example through the imposition of racial and cultural stereotypes.

Leadership in group-analytic terms

Foulkes favoured the term 'conductor' to describe the group-analytic therapist, rather than 'leader', a term which did not sit comfortably with the socialist-minded fraternity of the Frankfurt School. The term 'conductor' was coined by T.W. Adorno, a leading social theorist whose later work on prejudice and the authoritarian personality earned him a place in the forefront of social psychology. Adorno's interest in the cultural superstructure of Marxism had led him to investigate the aesthetic and social functions of music and the relationship between conductor and orchestra.

The fluctuating location of authority between conductor and orchestra appealed to Foulkes as a model of leadership for his groups. He accepted that group members would initially turn to the conductor as the source of wisdom and insight, but saw these early projections of authority as based on omnipotent fantasies from which the group had to be gradually weaned. Only then could they discover their own collective authority and take responsibility for the therapeutic process. The conductor never relinquishes his own therapeutic authority, but remains largely in the background.

allowing the different configurations and interactions to take their own course. From time to time, the conductor might have to 'nudge' the group, in Foulkes's word, when it seems to be stranded or veering in un-therapeutic directions; in other words, when communication is temporarily blocked. But for the most part the group as a whole is capable of moving the analytic process forward with little direction.

The group interacts as a whole, each individual contribution having to be understood in the context of the entire interpersonal network of the group - a network which both influences and is influenced by each person in the group. The Foulkesian view is therefore not one of eight individuals receiving psychoanalytic treatment in a group, nor is it the group conceptualized as 'the patient' in relation to the analyst. In other words, it is not a new psychoanalytic dyad. Psychoanalytic concepts such as the unconscious, defence mechanisms, repression, transference and counter-transference, projection and projective identification, do apply, however. But they are expressed and evaluated in the new context of the analytic group. To differentiate his approach from psychoanalysis, Foulkes arrived at the somewhat inelegant name of 'group-analytic psychotherapy'.

The group as a system

Foulkes's philosophy of groups accords well with a systemic view of groups, although he never overtly declared the affinity. The essential similarities between group analysis and systemic therapy lie in the importance attached by both to communication as the main agent of change, and the relegation of the individual to a less prominent role in the process than the interrelationship between individuals. There are, however, significant differences. In its attempt to bring human groups and biological processes into alignment with wider and larger phenomena, systems theory has played down the unique properties which make up the individual and his or her groups. The concept of an unconscious does not feature in systems theory, while it occupies a prominent place in group analysis, which moves fluently between the individual, in the depth of his or her unconscious, and the interpersonal field of the group with its social unconscious. Systems therapists have constructed models of therapy in which interventions tend to be confined to the immedia-

cy of the present, the 'here and now'. The uncovering of individual histories is not seen as a therapeutic device in its own right, and the exercise is only justified if it can serve the purpose of changing the pattern of communication within the system of which it is a part.

These polarized views of systemic and psychoanalytic therapies have been reconciled through the efforts of group analysts such as Yvonne Agazarian, Helen Durkin and Robin Skynner, who developed models of group analysis which embody a synthesis of the two approaches. An integrated model of systemic and analytic methods is especially applicable to therapeutic work with families and organizations, both groups which face the therapist with a dense structure and well-established patterns of communication from the outset.

Meeting as a way of maintaining a group's identity

A group can be defined as a number of people united by a common attribute or outlook. The word 'group' can be used in an abstract sense, implying a category of people, whether or not they have assembled in the same physical space. Alternatively it can refer to a gathering of individuals for a specific purpose. Whenever a group meets it reinforces its identity, while a group which never meets, or meets only seldom, retains its identity as much through the attributions of others as through its own collective self-perception and is therefore prone to the vicissitudes and projections of the outside world in the shaping of its identity, and by extension, its destiny.

Groups which are specially constituted for therapeutic purposes have to provide enough time and space to allow for the emergence and repair of longstanding relationships through the process of communication and analysis. The conditions in which these groups take place are carefully designed to provide the atmosphere of safety which is necessary for the unfolding of such processes. In group-analytic psychotherapy, we expect people to entrust to the group their most personal thoughts at a time in their lives when they may feel least like doing so. The techniques of group analysis therefore have to ensure, as far as possible, that the people who choose to enter a therapeutic group will find it a safe and rewarding experience. Meetings have to take place frequently enough and over a sufficiently long period of time for meaningful change to occur.

The therapeutic group as a microcosm of society

Foulkes maintained that each individual is crucially determined by the world in which he or she lives. He challenged the dichotomies of 'individual and society', 'constitution and environment', and 'inside and outside world', maintaining that the only way these could be separated from each other was by artificial isolation, such as that occurring when a psychotherapeutic situation is set up, or by the construction of neurotic barriers. The task of therapy, therefore, was to allow these concepts to flow into each other through the process of communication, which has to become wider and deeper with the passage of time. When a therapeutic group meets, its members collectively represent the society in which the group is held and proceed to re-create it in microcosmic form through the formation of the group.

The group members, however, also bring with them into the group pockets of isolation, which represent their own unique areas of disturbance. This juxtapositioning of the collective normality which is the societal microcosm, with the different areas of individual disturbance, sets the stage for the process of therapy. The therapeutic value of the group is summed up in Foulkes's maxim: 'collectively they [the group members] constitute the very norm from which, individually, they deviate' (Foulkes, 1948).

Isolation as the basis of disturbance, and communication as its antidote

Within the wider society in which we live, we are born into a group. Throughout life we migrate through many groups. At any one time we occupy membership of several groups and each of these groups forms a psychological unit which contributes to the shaping of our identity. Neurosis, according to Foulkes, is a state of mind which develops when, as individuals, we get to be at odds with our group and become, to a varying degree, isolated from ourselves and others.

The neurotic position is by definition highly individualistic, and therefore works against the group. It acts as an irritant to both the individual and the group, and leads, if unchecked, to the isolation of the individual from the group. The individual's so-called neurotic symptoms are in fact an aspect of him- or herself which cannot be

communicated in words, and which can therefore only gain expression in symptomatic form. For symptoms to become suitable for sharing, they must be translated into communicable language.

Communication is therefore a central concept in group analysis. Therapy proceeds by the translation of neurotic phenomena into shared communication, and this comes about through the verbal exchanges which form the currency of the group. An ever-widening and deepening pool of communication within the analytic group is the essence of the therapy itself. The group analyst's task is to facilitate this process by joining in, sometimes with his therapeutic authority, at other times more like another member. The analytic group is created as the space within which this communication can develop.

To sum up, body, mind and society come together in Foulkes's conception of therapy. The individual is seen as the basic biological unit, the group as the basic psychological unit and society as the unit which encompasses them both. The essence of man is social, and wherever possible, individual disturbance should be treated in its social context. This is created through the analytic group, a carefully designed therapeutic situation aimed at introducing society into the group, setting up a network of communication and making use of analytic techniques to reach areas of isolation which have become a focus of disturbance for the individual in his or her relationship with society.