

UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE GROUP MIND OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

THE INDIVIDUAL, THE GROUP AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Abstract

In this presentation, we put the basis for placing group psychotherapy within the psychoanalytic tradition. We show the common genesis and developmental thread of psychoanalytic and group-psychotherapeutic thinking derived from the understanding of the social nature of the human being. In so doing, we distinguish between psychotherapies based on the primacy of the 'individual' and those based on the primacy of the 'social' and demonstrate the 'fit' and complementarity of both modalities.

Introduction

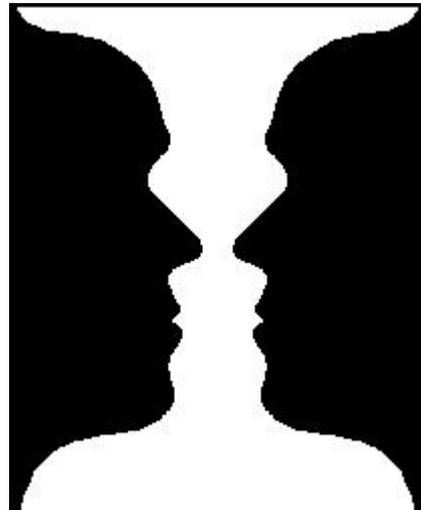
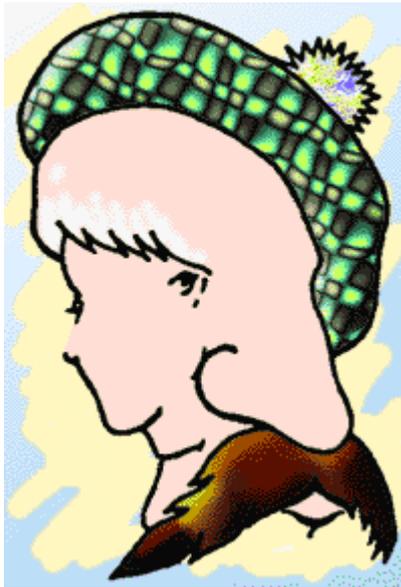
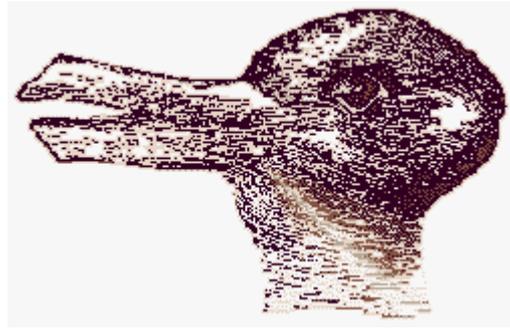
I acknowledge the thinking and vision that has gone into the conference theme. The implicit primary purpose of this inaugural meeting of this confederation is clearly to establish the ground for dialogue and exploration between the minds of our respective associations. I see my purpose in this as contributing to that task by presenting something of the group perspective. In this I acknowledge the contribution of other AAGP members whose opinion and criticism I have sought in preparing this paper.

I have to say, that I have been thinking about this paper for some years now and the occasion of this inaugural conference has provided an optimal circumstance for its writing. I also have to say that it is a work in progress and that it is a contribution to the development of dialogue and exploration amongst us and to what I hope might become a language that truly represents the group mind of this confederation.

It is fair to say that group psychotherapy has occupied at best a curious place in the psychoanalytic space and at worst viewed with suspicion, scepticism even disdain. Foulkes, for example, was said to have "breached faith" with the psychoanalytic community in London by virtue of his interest in the group. Even Bion was dissuaded. Today I hope we can begin to provide a common ground on which an arbitrary dichotomy is dissolved.

Having said that group people can be regarded as being a bit on the weird side, I don't want to disappoint, so I'm beginning with some pics.. and don't worry, this is not group experiment..

As you look at these, please notice your own perceptual processes..because..



as you do so, I'd like to make the following propositions....

1. You can only 'see' one image at a time. 'Seeing' one image inevitably means relinquishing 'seeing' the other.
2. It is possible that you may be only be able to see one image and that others elude you. (Thus you may think that there is only one image. This is important because you might then settle on that as sufficient evidence and develop a 'singular' view about the 'facts' and, importantly, may not seek further evidence.)
3. One image is absolutely embedded in the other and cannot exist without the other. This is gestalt psychology – figure-ground stuff (Wertheimer et al). This arguably holds true for all perceptions of reality, indeed knowledge – we see only what we can see, not what we don't see even though what we don't see may be there. I will be making the case that we cannot speak of the 'individual' without imputing the 'social' and vice-versa.
4. Once we know that 2 (or more) images exist, our perception of the whole subtly changes. We may only 'see' one image, but we cannot not know that the other exists, though 'unseen'.
5. As a corollary to 4, it is possible, with some effort, to see simultaneously both images, but only for a nano-second in transit between images. You may be able to train yourself to see both or, at least, the presence of the absent image.

This presentation will seek to demonstrate the duality of the individual/social embedded in the understanding of the human being. Our psychoanalytic training implicitly and historically pre-disposes us to see the illusion of the 'individual' and not the 'social/group' perspective. We easily accept the proposition that the group is comprised of individuals, but how easily do we recognise that the individual is comprised of the group?

We will try to give you the social/group perspective so that by seeing both images of the human being, we may begin to have a more wholistic grasp of the nature of the human being and therefore be able to consider modes of therapeutic treatment from that position.

Let me begin with a few words about psychoanalysis as focussed on the individual. Please understand that I have had to be highly selective here.

The Individual Perspective

Freud

Based on instinct theory and influenced by Darwin, Freud created an ego-psychology built around the 'individual' (singularity). Having said that, his view is more complex and nuanced, though he settles on the ontological priority of the individual, on the 'internal' over the 'external', the 'biological' over the 'social'. (You will understand from the optical illusions, that these polarities are embedded in each other).

Freud conceived of the group as an unfortunate necessity. He was greatly influenced by Le Bon (an enemy of the populace) into describing the 'primitivity' and 'regressive' nature of the group and its attendant mental state. In doing so he really refers to the mob, rather than the group. In a more considered reference, he notes that the group is a collection of individuals who have introduced the same person (the leader) into their superego and on this basis have identified themselves with one another. In this he comes close to asserting that, through that identification, the individual is internally comprised by/of the group, but he stays firm in asserting the priority of the individual.

Freud also gave us some invaluable mechanisms for understanding the intrapsychic world. Transference, projection, introjection, (later) projective identification are in fact transpersonal mechanisms and refer to social processes. These mechanisms are the valuable stuff of good group psychotherapy as much as individual.

Bion

Bion's position about the group is curious and worth more consideration than I shall give it here. It was he who said that "man (sic) is a group animal at war with his groupishness". In

his 1961 opus, the individual (as person) almost disappears and the group appears as a manifestation of proto-mental life emanating out of individual members. No wonder Klein was shocked - she was very clear that understanding individual personality was the foundation for understanding human life. She persuaded Bion to abandon his dalliance with the group.

Bion's thinking about group has informed group psychotherapy only insofar as we learn about structure, formation and process and this knowledge is useful in group psychotherapy, but more particularly so in the field of group relations study.

Object Relations

One sees a distinct movement in OR formulations towards a social conception of the human being. Take Winnicott's famous exclamation that there is no such thing as a baby, but only the nursing couple. Curiously, he did not take the logical extension and declare that there is no such thing as a mother. ('Mother' is a concept already mediated by the social.) In focussing on the mother-infant dyad, he was interested in the baby as an individual, as an as-yet undifferentiated psyche from the mother. (Note how close this comes here to introducing the group into the individual). Elsewhere, he concedes that cultural influences are important but the clue to their understanding is the individual.

Fairbairn (1935) who was arguably more social-aware than Winnicott, was also clear that sociological phenomena are ultimately reducible to the individual.

Conclusion

So in this necessarily brief overview, we can say that while OR and its subsequent developments introduced a dyadic foundation in psychoanalysis, it is fair to say that psychoanalysis has steadfastly adhered to the primacy of the individual perspective in its understanding of the human being/person.

The Social Perspective

Trigant Burrow

Trigant Burrow heard and met Freud and Jung when they spoke about psychoanalysis at Clark University in 1909. He immediately arranged to go to Zurich to be analysed by Jung and returned to America where in 1911, with Ernest Jones, he co-founded the American Psychoanalytic Association. He was president 1925/6. On his return to America, he began to write to Freud especially about his growing conviction that the 'Ich' was a manifestation of social forces, not just instinct and began experimenting with and advocating group psychotherapy. Freud, it seems, largely ignored his letters, whether because he had fallen out with Jung or he did not like Burrow's diverging views, or both. Burrow, influenced more by Einstein than Darwin, pursued his thinking and work and it was he who used for the first

time such terms as 'social unconscious', 'group analysis' and the 'group matrix' (terms later used by and accredited to Foulkes). He also concluded that without social interaction there would be no individual, no 'Ich'.

Burrow's views about the social nature of the human being led him to be expelled in 1932 from the APA and he has been largely forgotten by history until recently. His switch in perspective and rejection by APA marks a hardening between the individual and group perspective which has lasted down the decades.

Harry Stack Sullivan

We know that HS Sullivan knew, worked with and learnt from Burrow. Following Burrow, Sullivan wrote about the illusion of the individual and dared to posit that there is no such thing as the individual (shades of Bion). Importantly, Sullivan introduced a conception of human development based on language – a relational construct - into which the baby is born and which becomes the carrier of culture, thinking and knowledge. In so doing, language moves the expression of 'me' to 'I' as a social construct. For the human being, 'I am' only makes sense in a social context.

S.H. Foulkes

Foulkes, a German psychoanalyst, fled Germany in 1933. He worked at Northfield with Bion, Rickman, Moreno and others. It was there, especially after Bion left, that he developed his thinking and practice of group analysis, based principally on conceptions of communication, both conscious and unconscious and co-extensively with the social web of communication which he called the matrix. He had come from Frankfurt, where he was influenced in his thinking by the neurologist, Kurt Goldstein, the gestalt psychology of Wertheimer and the field theory of Kurt Lewin and also by the sociologist Norbert Elias who also fled Germany for England. For Foulkes, the neonate is born into social mechanisms and forces which he introjects modifying and structuring his personality. Thus the individual is embedded in and also permeated by the social and there are recent neuroscience findings supporting the notion that 'culture' permeates the instinctual. For him, the ontological problem was not to explain the group but the individual.

Foulkes in turn influenced a tradition of group analysts who became familiar with crossing the 'individual'/'group' perspective. It was Balint who was reputed to have said that a neurotic person who has undergone psychoanalysis is likely to be less neurotic but no more mature or socially integrated, but one who has had a group analysis may be no less neurotic but more socially integrated. This raises an important question about how we see psychological disturbance – as an idiosyncratic or a social phenomenon – and the implications for the aims of psychotherapy, but more of this later.

The Social Unconscious

Understanding the social unconscious is vital to approaching the social perspective.





Take these famous portraits. The eye is drawn to the light and the face. But what is in fact drawn (or painted) is the shadow. Rembrandt and Quilty 'create' the images (the light) by painting the shadow.

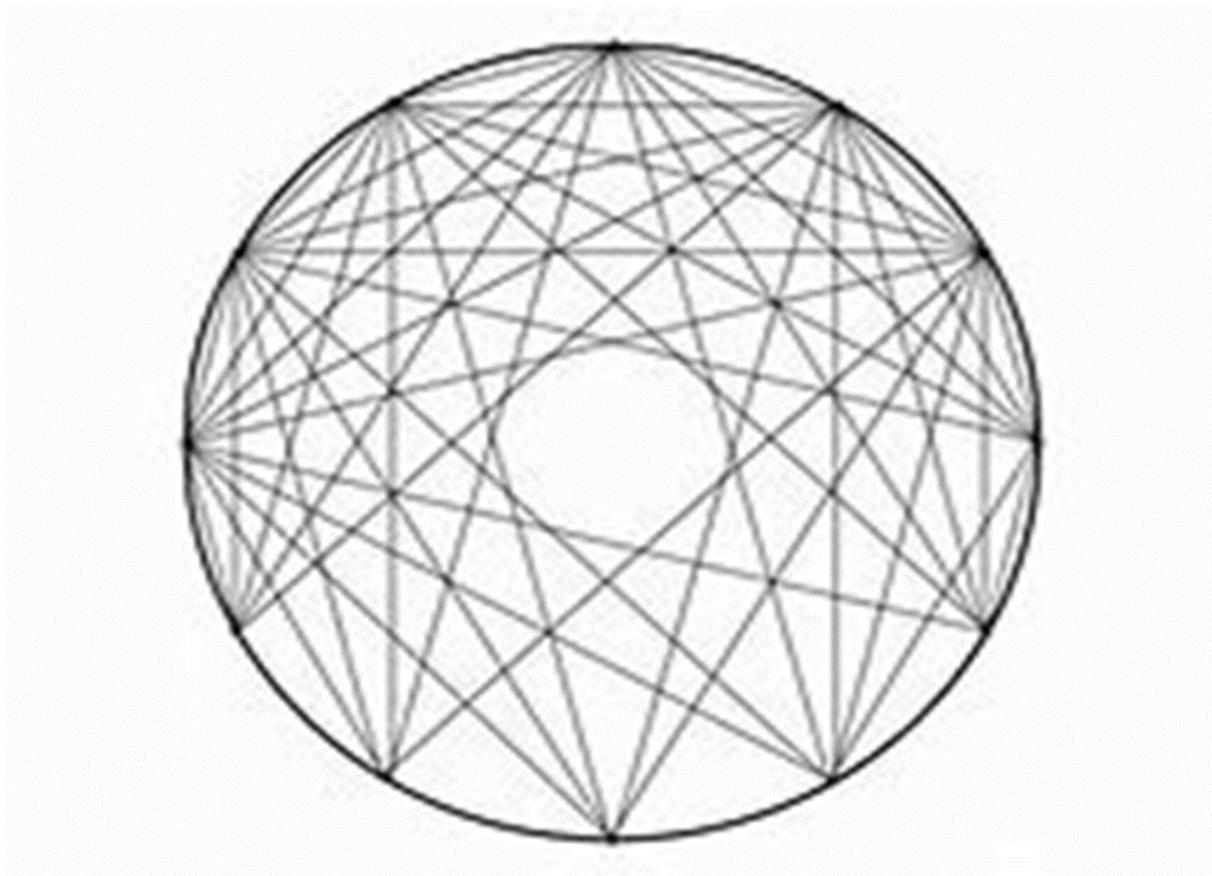
The social unconscious may be visualised as the shadow cast by the persons in a social/group context. It represents that which is unseen in the social context and contributed to by persons present (even not present). It is a dynamic phenomenon, not static. It is the medium in which we, as persons, live, move and have our being. It is also within us in a personalised way. It differs from Freud's notion of the personal unconscious because it is not repressed (in the classical sense) but, at its simplest, that which is just out

of awareness. As with the painting, the trained eye goes to the work of the artist in defining what we don't look at, the shadow, in order to appreciate and understand the whole.

For Foulkes, the social unconscious is evident in the medium of communication, manifest in the construct of matrix, or social web, in which any group is necessarily embedded. Foulkes most clearly described the meaning of matrix as "a common communication ground which is shared" (Foulkes & Anthony 1957). In this formulation, the group is a communicational field with individuals forming nodes in the network. This leads us to consider language in its generic sense, for as human beings, we cannot not communicate.

Maturana conceived of the human being as being a 'linguaging' being, living in linguaging which comes down to the activity of thinking, communicating and forming knowledge, all of which may be conceived of as social phenomena and activities. For Norbert Elias, the structure of language, of thinking and knowledge itself can be seen to be so wholly entwined as to be the same. Language is our living medium, both consciously and unconsciously. In every gesture, silence, word and sentence so much is said and unsaid

The Social Mind



Just as language, thinking and knowledge are understood to be social phenomena, a social mind must also be in evidence. I would like to think that such a phenomenon as the social mind is evident now, amongst us in this room. The depiction of the social/communication matrix is itself a visual analogue of the neural map of the brain. Understanding neural

functioning comes down to understanding the functioning of the brain as a whole. In Foulkes' depiction, the individual is but a nodal point of whole-of-group communication – an individual may speak what is on the mind of the group.

We don't have to look far for evidence of the social mind. I'm thinking of social conversation where one person says what another might be thinking, how social dreaming works, to name but a couple.

The Individual and the Group

So what does it mean to be a person, an individual, in this construction. Dalal (1998) argues that the uniqueness of each individual is constructed out of common material. The autonomy of any person does not make autonomy asocial or anti-social. Ormay (2012) would say that our biology is designed to be social. At some basic level, the personal is social. 'I' is the social personalised. In this conception, there is a sophisticated figure-ground phenomenon, for we can say that if we see the individual, we see the social.

Conclusion

Positing the ontological priority of the social establishes the fundamental 'we-ness' of the human being. It does not mean that what we understand by the individual or person disappears, rather, it becomes enriched and expanded by being situated within the social. In this way of thinking, the intrapsychic must be viewed as inseparable from the interpsychic. Note that in this formulation it is the group which is in the individual and the individual, including genetic dispositions, is an expression of the group personalised.

Implications for Psychotherapy

I want to briefly touch upon the theory and practice of group psychotherapy.

Psychopathology may be conceived of as a blockage, for example, as a developmental delay or diversion in a person caused by trauma or some other impediment. From the social perspective, a psychological disturbance is understood to be social and, indeed, it is hard to conceive of a psychological problem which is not social. In this view, the psychopathology is located in the social system or group as distinct from 'in' the individual. Here the individual is the nodal point or conduit of expression for the disturbance. In group therapy, the aim is provide the medium to help the disturbed 'individual' find social integration. Healing lies in the capacity to be socially membered-in in a way that de-fuses social disturbance.

The impetus for group therapy lies in the social instinct, in the natural impetus within human beings to belong and in the implicit pressure to find a way to work together. A group will naturally tend of itself to work together. Notice how this differs from what a lot of people fear, that groups will of themselves end in chaos, particularly when disturbed 'individuals' are involved. Working together is not inevitable or straightforward and needs

help, but the process of arriving at the point of working together, at a place of belonging, is itself the therapy.

Just as free association is encouraged in analysis, the task of the therapist or group conductor is to encourage free communication. To put things into words. Implicit patterns emerge. Transferences (conceived of as operating horizontally as well as vertically), projections, introjections, projective identifications develop. While the content of, say, transference, may be intensely personal, the mechanism itself is not and in group, if 'group' is taken seriously, participants will discover that the personal includes the non-personal personalised. This becomes the conscious stuff of belonging, and by this I mean not just social connectedness, but an in-dwelling, existential connectedness in and with the social domain. In this sense, it is the group which does the work of therapy.

If psychoanalysis is conceived of a methodology for exploration and uncovering (John Geddoe referred to psychoanalysis as an education in thinking), the use of its mechanisms in the group context should pose no impediment to accepting the therapy group as a legitimate application of psychoanalysis.

There is a legitimate question about when individual or group psychotherapy is indicated. There are no hard and fast rules here. Some argue for individual work to begin before referring on to a group, but if the social perspective is taken seriously, why would the therapy group not be considered as first option? What is important here is that the question should be asked about what is best for the presenting person. And this question can only be asked and properly considered once the social nature of the human being is grasped as fully as possible.

General Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that a wholistic examination of the social nature of the human being enriches psychoanalytic theory and thinking. It dissolves the arbitrary polarity between 'individual' and 'group', between internal and external conceptions of the human psyche and between intrapsychic and interpsychic. It liberates us to think of the practice of psychoanalytically-oriented group psychotherapy as more than a legitimate application of that thinking and praxis.

May I conclude by posing a question – do better individuals make for a better, healthier society, or does a better society make for better, healthier individuals?

In the light of this paper, of course, it is a bit of a trick question, but leads me to leaving to leaving you with this irresistible quote appearing in the Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark:

In a society we are mutually interdependent. Strengthening the spirit of the community, we improve society for all of us as a group but also provide each individual with better opportunities for realising his or her own potential.