On Making A Home Amongst Strangers: The Paradox of Group Psychotherapy

John R. Schlapobersky

This lecture explores how the ambient network amongst group analysts has grown from Foulkes’ own biography through figurations of home in group psychotherapy where members’ attunement and alignment transpose longing into belonging. The three underlying dimensions of group analytic psychotherapy—the relational, reflective and reparative—are described and illustrated with clinical vignettes and music. These dimensions are found working in the current, transference, projective and primordial domains of small therapeutic groups and in the large group dynamics of the lecture’s audience.

Key words: Longing and belonging, mother as object and environment, strangers, attunement, alignment, home, network, figuration, a group’s domains (current, projective, primordial), psychotherapy’s dimensions (relational, reflective, reparative)

Introduction: What is a Foulkes Lecture?
Mr. President, family and friends, ladies and gentlemen: I am honoured to be standing before you now. This lecture is important both for its content and sense of occasion. It is an institutional ritual, the celebration of a collective, cherished memory marking the passage of time. Foulkes’ life honoured by the occasion saw the publication of four major texts and the founding of a Society and Training Institute.
to promote group analysis—our approach to groups (Schlapobersky in Skynner, 1989: 189).

I wrote this introduction in 1989 to introduce Robin Skynner’s Foulkes Lecture, *Institutes and How To Survive Them* (1989) when I put his selected articles together. This is Skynner speaking:

To remember Foulkes and thank him for the gift of his liberating influence one of us is privileged each year to share with others what we have made of what we received from him, and I am happy that the honour has this year fallen upon me. (Skynner, 1989: 191)

Speaking for myself now, I too am happy that the honour has come to me and I thank those responsible—the Management Committee of the Society. My lecture is opened with four key questions and I trust that by its conclusion the territory for exploration will be marked out so we can continue the enquiry together through the weekend. I also want to express thanks and appreciation to Gwen Adshead, the evening’s respondent, and to Thomas Mies and Linde Wotton who will lead the Study Day tomorrow. I acknowledge the contributions all three of you have made in the field and set much store by the guidance you have already given, both in the drafting of this lecture and in my forthcoming book that the lecture draws from that is due for publication shortly, *From The Couch To The Circle: Group-Analytic Psychotherapy In Practice* (Schlapobersky, 2015). I also wish to acknowledge the guidance I have had from Robi Friedman and Claudia Arlo. These are the four questions this lecture sets out to address. You will find them on the first page of your handout.

**Four Questions**

1. *What* does it mean to be a group analyst?
2. *How* do groups work with questions of attunement and alignment?
3. *Why* are groups fruitful on issues of identity, longing and belonging?
4. *Can* group analysis meet the challenge of equipping people to free their destiny from their history?

The title will be looked at it in terms of outside development that includes Foulkes’ biography and what Anthony called the ‘ambient
network’, the international frame of reference Foulkes spawned, fostered through the work of this Society and the training institutes that now flourish on a world-wide basis. The same question, how we make a home amongst strangers, will then be considered through inside development in the work of small group psychotherapy for which I have developed a three-dimensional model to guide our practice—the relational, reflective and reparative. The lecture will be illustrated by four brief musical pieces, one of which was playing when you came in which I will say more about shortly, and by four clinical vignettes. First though, here is Skynner again:

The forces of light usually stimulate a reaction from (those of) of darkness . . . a method of pursuing knowledge, health and happiness as powerful as the one Foulkes taught us arouses in response powerful forces of resistance . . . The outward form of the event is designed as a kind of ritual, a magical ceremony designed to ward off the main dangers threatening our group analytic ethos. To lull these opposing forces into a false sense of victory we set aside one evening each year during which, as a paradoxical prescription of the behaviour to be avoided, we do the exact opposite of everything we believe in . . . Seated in orderly rows, in a crowded lecture theatre and all facing the same way, the audience listens silently to a long monologue following which even questions, let alone . . . discussion are most strictly avoided . . . the audience departs feeling understandably virtuous at patiently sitting through a painful ordeal so alien to anything they believe in or are used to . . . (Skynner 1989: 191)

We responded to Skynner’s challenge in the year following so the Foulkes Lecture by Murray Cox had a respondent with question time afterwards. And we linked it to a Study Day concluded by a party and created what has been known since as the May Weekend. At its opening I want to ask why you—the audience—should have to wait for an hour and a half before any one else speaks tonight? I propose we start the discussion before you get to the doors—in fact let us begin right now. Without getting up and in groups of two, three or four, whatever you find most comfortable, let me invite you to spend a few minutes talking to each other. Let us have some free-floating discussion. I will interrupt you in a few minutes by returning to the music.

**Strangers, Groups and Terminology**

**Stranger Groups**

Foulkes introduced us to the term ‘stranger group’. What does it mean today? The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber says all real
living is meeting (Buber, 1958: 26). The Buddhists have another fine precept that can guide us when they say there is no such thing as a stranger, only a person we have yet to know. The art of composition when we put our groups together rests on the recognition that we are all strangers and whilst everyone is from elsewhere we all have the potential to be good companions for one another on the way to self-discovery.

Making a Home in Four Domains
On the subject of making a home we might ask ourselves, is this person at home in their body, with themselves, their history, circumstances or career? Are they at home with their family? Children in play have a safe place to go called ‘home’ where you cannot be put ‘on’. Refugees in flight have no such place of safety and, as we hear daily in the news, when their homes turn into graveyards they embark on fearful journeys. When the land itself swallows its own people in earthquake countries like Nepal, home itself becomes a place of danger. Wotton explains in her account of musicality that when music is composed it begins from or works towards a home key (Wotton, 2012). This sense of being at home in a key to which all the members of a group can resonate, gives us the framework for attunement out of which a group’s sense of meaning is built.

The word ‘home’ has meaning in the real world that Foulkes called the current level. I prefer to describe it as the current domain. This is where we find refugees in camps, home cooking or an island like Ithaca—Odysseus’ destination on his long way back from the Trojan Wars. ‘Home’ also has meaning in the representational domain. We talk about a home key, home cooking in a therapy group or the Ithaca of Cavafy’s famous poem where it is no longer a real place but a metaphor that furnishes ultimate reasons of purpose (Cavafy, 2008). Foulkes devised his simple categorization of a group’s four levels—levels that I suggest we rename domains—by differentiating between the real and the represented. This is further explored in Chapter 13 of my forthcoming book which describes how he showed us further that the world as represented has three different regions: the transference, projective and primordial (Schlapobersky, 2015).

In this lecture I am exploring ‘home’ as a figuration running through the life of my groups in each of these domains to extract moments of significance from the lives of its members so we can see how they help us make a home amongst strangers. Whilst a group
has four domains of meaning I will give an account of psychotherapy in three dimensions that provide milestones on the journey towards ‘home’. I will also talk about myself—my arrival in this country as a political refugee from South Africa via Israel—and about other migrants faced with the challenge of making a home amongst strangers. Foulkes and his family arrived in the UK as émigrés who, in flight from fascism in Germany, were given support by the British Psychoanalytic Society that helped many such people settle here.

**Figurations**

We owe the term ‘figuration’ to Foulkes and Anthony who drew it from the sociologist Norbert Elias (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957). Figurations capture moments in which a subject like home gains significance through the way its thematic content is interwoven with process dynamics amongst those who generate it. As a figuration home is not only a theme or subject. It colours relations amongst those who express it. As people in a group construct the picture of a home that was once safe but now lost, they can generate a sense of safety or one of loss and in the group they come to inhabit the very subject of our theme—safety or grief—through a process of enactment or recreation. In my groups some remember home as the sanctuary of childhood whilst others—people who could not wait to get away—remember precarious attachments in homes confused or left insecure by injury, abuse or claustrophobia. Others remember home as both of these, a location that was both loved and resented leaving in its wake a confusing residue of ambivalence that is later found to underlie other adversities. For some, home references are lost in the unremembered world, and for others home itself was missing as the family lived an itinerant life. Some find home outside the group when they return to loved ones in the evenings whilst for others home has yet to be found anywhere. Some find themselves at home inside the group as it becomes the only safe place they have ever known whilst others find it an arena of anxiety, persecution or confusion. In the content of a group’s associations we find an emerging theme or subject that has bearing on the dynamics of its process. In the triangle between the past—there and then—the present—here and now—and the present world outside the group, process dynamics recreate the originating subject under discussion. These are the figurations of group analysis.
Questions 1 and 2:

What Is a Group Analyst?

How Do Groups Work with Attunement and Alignment?

Foulkes, Anthony and Groucho Marx guide us in addressing these questions. Foulkes’ view was that ‘the role of a conductor . . . (was) similar to that of a poet or writer . . . receptive to the current problems of his time and creative in expressing them…’ (Foulkes, 1975 [1986]: 157). Anthony believed ‘group analytic psychotherapy offers an incomparable instrument’ though still in need of a theoretical superstructure (Anthony, 1978: 10). Groucho Marx’s saying—that he would not want to belong to any club that would have people like him as a member—stands above the door of every consulting room in which group therapy is practised (Marx, 1994: 321). Most of us when troubled would expect to feel a lot worse amongst others with similar problems. A hospital psychiatric ward is not an encouraging place to go when in despair. In a prison setting we know that criminals often reinforce each other’s worst attributes. But we also know that therapeutic groups—even for those in prison—can work in just the opposite direction and equip people to bring each other healing and change. How and why is this possible? Gwen Adshead will have more to say about this later.

The Language and Music of the Group

I first wrote about the language of the group in 1994. Wotton has extended this to describe the music we find in every group and we will be hearing more from her about this tomorrow. For now I will call on her account to describe how ‘human communication rests on our innate musicality . . . only by aligning ourselves alongside another—through being in time and in tune . . . (can we) make sense of what Mead calls the conversation of gesture and response . . . ’ (Wotton, 2012: 49). Our shared frame of reference is made up of figurations that link the dynamics of a group to its language. Along with the three language forms—monologue, dialogue and discourse—music can be taken as one more language form or as a language embracing all the others giving tone and colour to issues of attunement and alignment.

In Tune 1: Home Is Where the Music Is

The brief musical pieces that illustrate this lecture are selected to capture and illustrate mood and tone. In all groups—even as large as
this—we can align ourselves with each other by being in tune and in time. The music playing when you came in is by the South African jazz musician Hugh Masekela called ‘Home Is Where The Music Is’. It is performed by a group of South African political exiles in London in the early 1970s and gave spirit and solace to many of us excluded from our homes by a violent political process, as Foulkes was in his own time. In 1933 he and his wife left Germany overnight with their three children to avoid the surrender of passports required of Jews under new Nazi statutes (Foulkes, E., 1990). Most of those who surrendered their passports were trapped and later perished.

**Outside Development**

**Foulkes’ Biography**

The definitive account of Foulkes’ life is provided by his widow, Elisabeth (Foulkes, E. 1990); and that of his contribution to group analysis is provided by Malcolm Pines (Pines, M. 1983). Articles by Bledin (2004), Lavie (2005), Mies (2012) and Nitzgen (2008) provide more biography including valuable discussion about his name and identity. What do we know from Foulkes himself of his feelings about his homeland—Germany—and about its language? And what about the city of his upbringing, Karlsruhe, and about the cities in which he studied—Heidelberg and Vienna? And what about the city of Frankfurt in which he settled, married, had his children and established his practice? What do we know of the family that perished? So far as I can make out, the answers amount to very little. Thomas Mies will share with us tomorrow the fruits of his own investigations that shed valuable light on these questions. There are indirect and oblique references to his love of German culture in his writing through which we can see that some of its landmark figures—Goethe, Schiller and Heine—never left him. But throughout his oeuvre home is a missing figuration—there is no home music. It is as radically absent in his writing as it appears to have been amongst the majority of German Jews who came to this country as refugee psychoanalysts. At the end of James Anthony’s own life this is how he remembered Foulkes who, he told me:

Lost so much that had been his own in the Holocaust; he came to the UK to live and take up a professional life in an alien language; established a war-time service that matured to become a way of understanding people and relationships (and) generated a therapy that opened up for us a whole new field of endeavour . . . (whilst he) lived through a world war in an adopted country and alien language, through a divorce with his first wife and the untimely death by cancer of his much
loved second wife, Kilmeny. He was the man, (said Anthony) whose resilience helped me find my own. (Anthony, 2015)

The price that Foulkes appears to have paid for this extraordinary resilience is the loss of a personal history that could be passed on to others. The collective tragedy that was the Holocaust left many of its survivors shocked into this kind of silence.

The Ambient Network
The influences that later shaped our Society’s international frame of reference are neither circumstantial nor accidental. The gifts of cultivation were not self-germinating. They begin with the man whose life we celebrate and then—thanks to the training initiatives and programmes extended by many of you here tonight—group analysis is now rooted in the professional life of many countries. Those who followed Foulkes most immediately extended ‘the ambient network’ along different pathways including the journal Group Analysis; the programme of Foulkes Lectures by which I am honoured tonight, and the International Library. We owe all three of these pathways to Malcolm Pines’ initiatives as we do the international training programmes in which he, Liesel Hearst and others made early and significant contributions.

Here is just one story about the ambient network and its growth. At the Amsterdam Congress of the IAGP in 1989 we met Russians who were free to travel for the first time. One of them explained that though he spoke Russian he was Lithuanian and, curious as I was—as that is where our name and grandparents originate and I told him so—I avoided him. The records we have describe the key role Lithuanians played collaborating with the Nazi Einsatzgruppen in the mass murder of all but two of our large family in 1941. I had never met a Lithuanian before and despite my curiosity I kept my distance. As I left the congress during our free afternoon he saw me going out and proposed joining me. I explained there was something personal I wanted to do. When he asked what it was and I told him he replied that was exactly what he wanted to do.

So we went to the Anne Frank house together. When we came to that point in the memorial where you see, in an upstairs attic room, the height of the children marked on the door post in pencil with their names, dates and ages—as the children in hiding get older—you see the point in time at which the marks stop. We both became silent. On coming out we were both tearful and I told him my daughter was now
the same age as Anne Frank had been when she was killed. Through his tears he told me in turn of his own daughters of a similar age. We embraced and Eugenijus Laurinaitis and I have been friends ever since. He has come to stay in my home and I have been to stay with him in the home of one of his daughters who, like my own, is now a mature adult with children of their own. I am honoured to say that my own daughter Hannah and her husband Martin are here tonight and Martin has played a key role securing the musical recordings that illustrate this lecture. Down the years my Lithuanian colleagues introduced us to the Jewish State Museum of Lithuania and went on to play their own part in helping us find drivers, translators and guides to find our ancestors’ earlier grave sites and the massacre sites where those living in 1941 are buried in the killing fields of Europe.

So here is a story of two strangers who—recognizing we are part of the same human family—made accord across a terrible divide and took steps together on the long process of reparation. There are now group analytic training institutes in different countries of the Former Soviet Union including Russia and Lithuania that members of this audience have played a key part in establishing. And they in turn have hosted us as speakers on many occasions.

**In Tune: 2: Vilna**

We can better understand the significance of a secure base—get a purchase on what it means to be at home—by appreciating the life-situation of people facing the threat of its loss. In Vilnius, now the capital of Lithuania, there was a Jewish population in the city and its area approaching some 80,000 people when the city was over-run in 1941. Few of them survived. The song that follows is sung in Yiddish, our grandparents’ language and it celebrates the home city of its composer, known in Yiddish as Vilna. This vernacular language is based on medieval German from the Upper Rhinelands with an additional Hebrew vocabulary. It was the language spoken by most of the six million and survives today in fragmentary communities. In our home it was the language our parents spoke to one another and to our grandparents when they did not want us to understand. So I learnt it to make sure this did not happen. This song was composed in the ghetto that the Nazis created. Its occupants were turned into a workforce to service industrial activity supporting the German war effort. Those redundant to purpose were taken out for execution on a regular basis and, when it was finally ‘liquidated’ in 1943, only a handful of partisan fighters survived but their doomed uprising sparked a turn in Jewish life.
Schlapobersky: 39th Annual Foulkes Lecture

Vilna

Vilna, city of spirit and innocence
Vilna, steeped in Jewish life
Where voices are raised in quiet prayer
Silent secrets of the night.
Often I see you in my dreams
My beloved, dearly beloved Vilna
And the old Vilna ghetto in a strange and cloudy haze.
Vilna, Vilna, our home city
Our longing and desire
Whenever your name is spoken
My eyes fill with tears.
Vilna alleys, Vilna rivers, Vilna woods, Vilna mountains and valleys.
Something haunts me
Something fills me with a longing for days gone by.
I see the woods of Zakreter
Wrapped in its hidden shadows
Our thirst for knowledge was secretly satisfied by our teachers
Vilna wove the first threads of freedom’s flag
And animated her beloved children with a spirit of strength.

Question 3:

Why Are Groups Fruitful on Issues of Identity, Longing and Belonging?

Inside Development: Small Group Psychotherapy

The Common Zone

Foulkes defined

the common zone in which all members can participate and learn to understand one another. The zone of communication must include the experience of every member in such a way that it can be shared and understood by the others, on whatever level it is first conveyed. (Foulkes, 1964: 112; Schlapobersky, 1995: 216; 223)
Before embarking upon the series of four vignettes I wish to make clear those described have all given their written consent where it is recognizable, in line with the code of practice of the IGA and IPA.

Vignette 1: On Making A Home Amongst Strangers
Two new members joined a small group. Sandra was a health professional in her 50s with adult children. Grant was in his 30s with a promising career but lonely personal life. His presenting difficulty was a depressive reaction to his widowed father’s disability and ensuing heavy drinking. Sandra’s presenting problems included the challenge of finding love in the second half of life—she hoped for a relationship with a man but there was a problem with every one of them! Grant was an only child loved by his mother but neglected by the father who now needed him. They survived the loss of the family’s mother five years earlier but he could no longer deal with his father’s Parkinson’s disease. Sandra’s history included an aggressive, volatile father who was cruel towards his children and especially her brother who became alcoholic.

During the first sessions Grant revealed his reliance on drinking to help him with the misery of his father’s illness. The following discourse was led by Sandra who recounted their father’s cruelty, mother’s inability to protect them, ruinous consequences in the brother’s drinking and the family’s distress. In later sessions Grant was subdued and reported how troubled he was to hear his future in the story of Sandra’s brother. ‘Coming here’, he said, ‘is a trigger that makes me drink more, not less!’ Sandra invited him to tell the group about his missing mother and eventually he became tearful as he did so. She responded with tears of her own and there was a lot of unexpected crying.

In later sessions Sandra described how she wanted to protect her brother when their mother failed but, being so little, was helpless. Now, we understood, she is a strong and successful mother and though new to the group she led the others in reaching out to Grant and became a surrogate for his mother. He later brought memories of his childhood and was overwhelmed when his narrative reached the account of her death. Now we addressed the unresolved grief-work. Sandra told us of how moving she found it to see him unfold as a man maturing through his tears and coined a phrase that still lives in the group. If you can weep you will not drink—release the water and you will not need to take it in as poisonous milk.

Commentary
As aliens became allies in the intermediate territory—the transference domain—in which she ‘found’ her lost brother across the room
and he ‘found’ his lost mother. Behind these discoveries was the continuing presence of the conductor as the good father neither of them had known. But this was not their family. They both made a home amongst strangers and from their shared unconscious she found where he was hurting by re-visiting the injury she carried and he found feminine qualities that mother’s death foreclosed on. Sandra keeps Grant with us in the group’s relational dimension which plays a part in his tentative development outside. As she bears witness this helps begin shifting her own deep despondency about men. All three of psychotherapy’s dimensions—the relational, reflective and reparative—arise in a synchronous way through the locational contribution of one member’s reactive concern in the current domain about the lost woman in Grant’s life. Sandra leads the way in filling this gap and, when she projects her brother’s history onto him, she draws a metaphor from the primordial domain to assure Grant that water released will not have to be found in poisonous milk.

**Paying Love Forward**

Arlo provides the promising notion of *paying love forward* to explore stories in group therapy where gratitude is transposed into generosity. In her account of reparation between siblings when one of them has the benefit of group therapy, she describes how the group itself becomes a reparative arena in which ‘you don’t pay love back. You pay love forward’. It goes out to the people around you in the group who have helped to bring you to a new threshold of development (Arlo, 2015: 349). All seven of us in the circle became witnesses to a *reparative dialogue* between these two based on empathic mirroring which turned into *discourse* round the circle as people resonated to the sense both of injury and resolution with other stories of their own.

**In Tune 3: Homeless**

This music comes from the album Graceland that Paul Simon put together with a South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and is sung in Zulu and English. The lyrics speak to the subject of tonight’s lecture. The two songs *Vilna* and *Homeless* can be taken together as musical idioms that capture some of the essentials of what people seek in groups.

**Homeless**

Sing

Homeless, homeless, moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake
Homeless, homeless, moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake
We are
Homeless, homeless, moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake
Homeless, homeless, moonlight sleeping on the midnight lake
Siyoyami, siyoya
Siyoya, siyoyami
Angbulela makaza (We are hurt by the cold)
Strong winds, strong winds, destroy our homes,
Many dead tonight it could be you
Strong winds, strong winds, destroy our homes,
Many dead tonight it could be you
Somebody sing
Somebody sing hello hello hello
Somebody sing
Somebody cry why why why
Somebody sing

Commentary
*Vilna* and *Homeless* are musical analogues for the difficulties that bring people to therapy. In the discomfort of the homeless mind there is a longing for home, grief over its loss, false hope in its idealization and real hope in its restoration.

**Question Four: Can Group Analytic Psychotherapy Help People Free Destiny from History?**

**The Three Dimensions of Psychotherapy: Relational, Reflective, Reparative**

Psychotherapy provides a therapeutic *relationship* to help a person develop a *reflective* understanding of themselves and others through which *reparation* can promote healing, growth and change. The three primary dimensions of psychotherapy can guide our practice and the three ‘Rs’ provide a conceptual framework, a kind of tripod that supports the work.

I devised this account because of a growing sense of unease that in our field’s developing literature there is a tendency to mistake the vehicle for the journey. A group is a therapeutic vehicle but is not the therapy itself. Group methods are set apart from individual psychotherapy by the fact that here you gain not only by what you get but also by what
Table 1. Basic Principles In Group-Analytic Psychotherapy.

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Any one joining a group goes on a journey. In <em>journey literature</em> — writing on group and personal development — we find that what the group can do for the individual is bound up with what the individual does, in and for the group. Growth and change work in both directions (Schlapobersky, 2015, Chapter 3).</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The three basic dimensions of a group are its <em>structure</em>, <em>process</em> and <em>content</em> (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957).</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The conductor leads the group in three ways. The conductor is a <em>member</em> of the group and is also its <em>convenor</em> and <em>therapist</em>. The convening role involves <em>dynamic administration</em> (use of structural principles) and the member role allows the active use of <em>counter-transference</em>, so equipping the conductor to work from outside and inside the group at the same time (Behr and Hearst, 2005).</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>In their <em>therapeutic role</em> the conductor’s methodology is guided by the considered use of <em>time, depth and mutuality</em> (Cox, 1978).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td><em>Process dynamics</em> (group-specific factors) include resonance, reciprocity, mirroring, valency, condensation and amplification that can generate insight and outsight (Foulkes and Anthony, 1984; de Maré, 1972; Pines, 1998; Schlapobersky, 2015, Chapter 10).</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The language of the group — <em>its content</em> — moves through free-floating discussion between <em>monologue, dialogue and discourse</em> generating different kinds of exchange (Schlapobersky, 2015, Chapter 4). There is also a ‘meta-language’ of speech, silence and the non-verbal that generates attunement and alignment (Wotton, 2012). The conductor works by accepting monologue and helping to turn it into dialogue; and by accepting dialogue and helping to turn it into discourse.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>The group is an arena for <em>the bearing of witness</em> generated by process dynamics (Foulkes, 1964; Barwick, 2004; von Fraunhofer, 2004; Nitsun, 2006; Kleinot, 2011; Berger, 2012; Berman, 2012; Ofer, 2014).</td>
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you give to the experience of others. In group therapy you are conveyed by the vehicle you help to create. This construction of three concepts ‘nesting’ inside one another stands as the last principle documented in Table 1, *Basic Principles In Group-Analytic Psychotherapy.*

The conductor’s challenge is to set a course that allows a group to develop reflective moments out of relational ones and reparative moments out of the reflective. The relational dimension is the first and most fundamental. It generates *relational moments* in which bonds and conflicts arise through attachment and friction. They are

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**Table 1. (Continued)**

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<td>8</td>
<td>In a group’s <em>common zone</em> communication includes all (Foulkes, 1964). The group’s domains of meaning grow out of it. These emerging domains — the current, transference, projective and primordial — are like holograms so you can look through one and in the others discover new and different facets of yourself and the people around you (Foulkes and Anthony, 1984; Schlapobersky, 2015, Chapter 13).</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Through peoples’ exchange the group becomes an <em>auxiliary ego</em> (group-as-a-whole) for each member (Neeld, 1995). A new normative context is created in this auxiliary ego (Tucker, 2004) that fosters ‘<em>ego training in action</em>’ enacted through play (Foulkes, 1964; Brown, 1995).</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Play arises in the relational field fostering affect and engendering <em>cohesion</em>. It arises in the semantic field — the field of meaning — to engender <em>coherence</em>. The development of cohesion and coherence involve subjective interaction (Brown, 1995; Pines, 1998;).</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Subjective interaction matures to become intersubjective validation (Brown, 1995).</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Intersubjective validation progresses through three dimensions in group therapy — three ‘Rs’. It begins with the <em>Relational</em> dimension and evolves into the <em>Reflective</em> dimension out of which the <em>Reparative</em> dimension emerges. The conductor works to help the group turn relational moments into reflective ones and reflective moments into reparative ones (Schlapobersky, 2015, Chapter 2).</td>
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not only benign or affirmative. Some of the most profound relational moments involve conflict, hostile opposition or malignant mirroring. They lay down the substrate of a group’s experience generating the sense of an auxiliary ego first described in group analysis by Rebecca Neeld that is conventionally known as the group-as-a-whole or matrix (Neeld, 1999). It becomes the container or the fabric for every one present providing a foundation for both the other dimensions.

At the next level—and arising out of a group’s relational work—is the reflective dimension generating *reflective moments* that can be defined in both of two ways. The first involves self-consciousness, a sense of critical enquiry implied by the word ‘reflective’; the second involves the discovery of symbolic meaning in which we can hear what Foulkes and Grotjahn call, ‘the voice of the symbol’ (Foulkes, 1975 (1986): 132; Grotjahn, 1971). Arising out of the relational and reflective dimensions is a group’s reparative dimension. *Reparative moments* can arise in highly charged cathartic experience or in quiet moments of resolution. They can also be understood in different ways that include first, remorse and concern, the development of guilt and the capacity to make restitution to both self and other (Klein and Riviere, 1964); and second, the corrective recapitulation of primary family experience (Alexander and French, 1947; Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

Figure 1 describes the three dimensional model. It starts with the relational dimension at the top. The outside set of arrows describes how therapy begins with the relational and progresses through the reflective to the reparative dimension. Therapeutic experience is always circular and a therapy that becomes reparative is then further enriched in its relational significance. The inside set of arrows shows how these three dimensions are always in dynamic relation to one another. Each dimension builds on the one that goes before and, as they progress, they lead to insight, outsight, reality testing and self-discovery that take the business of change to deeper levels. *Outsight* is a term first introduced by de Maré (1972: 159) and then by Pines (Pines, 1982 [1998]: 31). It identifies how, that which is found in another, seen or recognized outside the self, gives access to what could not otherwise be owned in the self and is a key part of the mirroring process in group therapy. It is studied in some detail in my forthcoming book (Schlapobersky, 2015).
The Relational Dimension

Vignette 2: My Brother, What Have They Done to You?

A group of eight men sit in a circle with two therapists for the first meeting of what will be a two-year programme in a clinic providing services for refugees. They come from countries in which torture is endemic and have all been profoundly injured. What they have in common in their different countries of origin is prior experience of violence and multiple traumatic loss.

We struggle through introductions that falter and halt. People refer their questions to one or other of the therapists from whom they expect answers. We are occasional and cordial participants but consistently refer back to the group. Then there is silence followed by limited narrative sequence in peoples’ fragmented stories of origin and arrival. We are enabling but the edge to peoples’ anxieties is inhibiting. All new groups begin like this with a form of serial monologue. Some 30 minutes into it one of the men, Mustafa from Iran, asks where the toilet is. He is directed by one of the therapists and...
everyone sees him gather his crutches from beneath his chair and limp across the room to the door. He was already seated when the other members arrived so—until now—only the therapists knew how handicapped he was. We watch his every move in a kind of charged silence that remains unbroken whilst he is out. A few minutes later the door opens and, watched by everyone, he struggles across the room back to his seat and stumbles into his chair perspiring from the effort. Finally he replaces his crutches beneath his chair.

Jonas from Rwanda has visible scarring to his face and neck and speaks with a commanding French accent. He looks at Mustafa and, leaning towards him says, ‘My brother, what did they do to you?’ There is a long pause and then, with the reply, the room fills with relief and a real exchange. Mustafa speaks in broken, faltering English about how soldiers at home broke his back with their rifle buts and boots. He goes on to tell us he is lucky to be alive and how his family saved him. He describes his escape and tells us of his wife and the baby they are expecting. This is a relational moment that moves us from monologue to dialogue. The dialogue between these two leads to a non-directed and random exchange across the group in the kind of conversational exchange that discourse is comprised of. It informs us that the group is coming to life. It will falter, fall back and confound itself many times over. But in this first relational moment we all became witnesses and, in the act of bearing witness, group therapy begins.

Commentary
Jonas’ question is not only an enquiry but also a statement of identification and a gift to the group and its therapists. Nothing could have prepared us for it and it could not have been anticipated or rehearsed. These are portal moments in which ‘a sense of mystery, astonishment, and uniqueness . . . transcends technicalities’ (Cox and Teilgaard, 1987: 17). This kind of question is also a communication and an answer to a number of other, unstated, earlier questions: ‘Who are you? How did we all survive? How can we face the extent of human cruelty? What can we do together about the injuries that show on our faces and in our bodies?’ It is also an answer to yet another unstated question. I will be your brother, he says, will you be mine? In the moment of his question he begins to create brotherhood amongst us. These people had lost just about everything—their relatives, health, home and country, and their sense of integrity. Generosity emerged as a quality they had not lost and by discovering this, each of them would rebuild their world. Though preoccupied with their
own losses they could recover their dignity though compassion. They settled down to two years of productive work, stabilized their lives in a strange country, began the mourning process of coming to terms and did so as displaced people in the absence of their customary rituals of mourning and grief work, relying instead on the group itself. Finally they began to generate a real sense of future.

The Reflective Dimension
Vignette 3 captures the mood and emotional texture of long-term therapy as a new comer’s assimilation brings changes to the group as a whole.

Vignette 3: Something New Cooking in the Group
Whenever George looks at Caroline she gets furious. ‘Don’t put your depressed eyes on me,’ she says, ‘You fill me up with sadness when you look at me.’ People are finally able to convince Caroline that it is her susceptibility to take up a depressed position under George’s sad eyes that gives them power over her. His projected feeling of wretchedness can only penetrate her because she is wretched in herself. The figuration comes to include Ella who has been going through a long period of initiation in the group. She has become known for just how much she has to cry about, first in her sad family history and then with the break up of both her marriages. Developing changes become noticeable as she settles and starts talking about her new interest in cooking including her family’s traditional Polish recipes. A narrative emerges in the group about television chefs and their spice recommendations seen to draw on her changes. The resonance to her newfound interest fills the room with stories of recipes and accounts of the things that different people are learning to cook. The group has amplified her developing sense of nourishment and it would seem to have happened by itself.

The conductor identifies and enhances the symbolic content of the exchanges without interpreting them and this leads to an amplified resonance in the figuration of nourishment and home making. This engenders in the group’s reflective climate a new level of understanding about the homes people did not have as children. In another session there is an emerging sense of sadness projected from one of its members and identified with by the others, about a lost childhood. Parental encroachment, abuse and neglect left them with little capacity to play and a poor sense of enjoyment. The shadows of their sad histories outside emerge in vivid contrast to the sense of something new now
‘cooking’ in the group. Someone says the smell of the kitchen in this group has suddenly become delicious. We live out a novel sense of playfulness and its new found vitality allows its members to appreciate, during moments of much sadder reflection than any we have known, the shadows that kept their childhoods in darkness. In the aftermath of this play there is mourning for their childhood hurts that leads on to the reparative dimension explored through the next vignette.

Commentary
People take back their projections, the group owns its figurations, attends to their progression and in the reflective dimension people appreciate the different sources of symbolic meaning through a range of related associations includes cooking, nourishment, playfulness and a delicious kitchen. We can all hear what Foulkes and Grotjahn call ‘the voice of the symbol’.

In Tune 4: Va Pensiero
Va Pensiero, a chorus from Nabucco, one of Verdi’s operas, is known as The Chorus of The Hebrew Slaves. We hear the sound of peoples’ voices raised against servitude and longing for home. It captures some of the movement described above. Giuseppe Verdi composed it as the centrepiece for his opera which, though set in Babylon 580 BC, was really an account of the plight of the people of Lombardy and Piedmont living under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He located the narrative in a faraway time and place to get behind the political censors of the time and, within days of its first performance in 1852, it was sung all over Northern Italy. It became the song of the Risorgimento, Italy’s own War of Independence, and it is today the country’s unofficial anthem.

Va Pensiero

Fly, thoughts, on wings of gold;
go settle upon the slopes and the hills,
where, soft and mild,
the sweet air of our native land smells fragrant.
Greet the banks of the Jordan
and Zion’s toppled towers.
Oh, my country so lovely and so lost!
Commentary
I first introduced this music to a teaching seminar with my Israeli colleagues in Haifa 2006 to illustrate mutative metaphors. When I recounted its personal significance in Verdi’s biography we entered the reparative dimension of his own life. He was a young composer with two unsuccessful operas to his name when his wife died in childbirth with their second child who also perished. Their surviving little girl died soon after. For a long time he was grief-stricken and lost to consolation. Someone finally put a libretto in his pocket and sent him home to set it to music. He got in, threw it towards the fire but it missed and fell open at the words of Psalm 136 in which the Hebrews, taken captive in their thousands, long for their home in Jerusalem. You can hear longing in the music that became Verdi’s own salvation and his first musical success. You can also hear defiance in the courage of voices raised to the vision of a different future. As we discussed this nine years ago my colleagues and I began humming it together. Though we did not know its words the music touched us all and I am honoured to see so many of you here tonight.

The Reparative Dimension
Vignette 4: The Woman Whose Birth Saved Her Mother

The concluding vignette describes an experiential group I conducted at a Symposium of this Society held in Heidelberg 25 years ago. There were 10 of us, many from countries that had been attacked or over-run by Germany during the Second World War. We met for an hour and a half through the four days of the conference. There were two German women and the interaction between them—Susanna and Sabina—and the rest of the group, especially in the content of their disclosures, illustrates the progression that brought us to the reparative dimension.

We were all born in the post war period. People were preoccupied with stories of wartime events learnt from their parents’ generation that were now brought to the surface by their visit. As they shared their associations they sometimes looked through the windows onto the wide streets and imagined the city dominated by swastikas and military parades. Each had a different story to tell of events that befell the previous generation during their country’s Occupation.

Susanna and Sabina were subdued and unforthcoming. Only after a warm alliance had been forged did one of them—Susanna—share some of her history. She was still coming to painful terms with an
earlier decision not to have children and used the group to help her grief. She had fallen pregnant two years earlier and after a short but heavy period of doubt—because she wanted to have the baby—she decided against it. It was too late in her life to have children and at the time she had no stable relationship in which a baby could grow. Her exchanges with different members, including Sabina, helped her to see that her unhappy relationships with men had something to do with the complicated history of her early childhood and then a later crisis with her otherwise beloved parents. Whilst she was a young adult she had fallen in love with a man from the Near East. Her parents’ rejecting reactions gave her—what she called—‘a very intensive course in every day racism’. The rupture with her parents damaged their relationship leaving her with political and moral confusion that she now brought to the group. Her parents had been ‘normal’ mainstream people of their time but the link between their racism and the fascism of the country’s past left her unable to find a clear way and by the time she did so it was too late for children.

Many of us, first-time witnesses to the burden of history carried by the next generation on the other side, were distressed. We tried to do what we could do to help Susanna free herself from culpability that preceded her birth and she found that peoples’ efforts to make contact with her lifted the sense of guilt.

Sabina remained silent, tearful and withdrawn and she finally spoke in our concluding session to tell us she had been carrying the weight of her mother’s depression as a lifelong burden. We explored what part this played in her own decision to become a therapist and the story unfolded in an unexpected direction. She was born in a small town in the east of Germany close to the Polish border on a day in July 1945 when there was still fighting in the area then invaded by the Russians. People were in a state of terror knowing that the invading soldiers came to rape and pillage. When the Russians banged on the door of their home her grandmother called out that a baby was being born at that very moment. A Russian officer came in to inspect and on seeing her mother in labour was so moved he made a sign of the cross that he then marked on the door of their home and he wrote beneath it in Cyrillic. The message described the baby’s birth and called for all who lived there to be given security which was honoured throughout the occupation despite the soldiers’ despoiling activity elsewhere. Later her mother fled with her to West Germany where she had been raised. The picture formed by the non-Germans of suffering amongst Germans—of which they had no former
picture—created a new figuration with reparative significance that had far-reaching consequences for all. The story took on new meaning when the group’s membership was able to construe this as an account of how the innocence of new life in a baby’s birth had saved its mother and her family.

Commentary
The story had powerful symbolic meaning for all. Its reparative significance, expressed through the symbolic voice of a baby’s innocence, provided a sense of absolution brought by the new born with benefits of redemption for her mother and the household. The decisive impact of a birth at a critical moment—and the continuing presence of a baby’s vulnerability—halted the blood craze of vengeful soldiers.

The group discovered a sense of grace with consequences for both women that touched all of us. We began to see how the innocence of those born after the Holocaust could work back to soften the burden that lay on the responsible generation. When Susanna and Sabina could see historical meaning in the hurts of their own upbringing and share this with people from ‘the other side’ who had similar biographies, they could carry the circumstances of their lives with a new grace that would always be with them. In the primordial domain of the group’s common zone the baby was still there in the grown woman. It brought out in everybody the recognition of a new generation’s innocence. The discovery sent us away as changed people. History is not destiny.

Conclusion: Longing and Belonging
In our groups there is always interplay between the thematic terms longing and belonging that can be used as registers to identify the prevailing affect. These terms have their origins in Winnicott’s understanding of the infant’s mother, both as their first object and as their original environment (Winnicott, 1963:1985). At any point in its progress a group can represent either or both of these figures—object or environment. It can provide a containing environment for its members and become, provide or represent the object(s) of their desire. Some of the most important work done in group psychotherapy involves a shift in members' prevailing affect from longing to belonging. Truthful meetings and encounters in the relational dimension are often thwarted or blighted by the shadows and tensions that members bring to it. Work done in the reflective dimension sheds light on those
forces and circumstances that stand against the relational that can open the door to reparation in the third dimension.

When we involve ourselves in the de-construction and re-construction of peoples’ lives, we invoke symbolic and metaphorical experience that has its origins in the earliest states of longing and belonging. This is the source of another kind of freedom. In order to work therapeutically with these states, group therapy does not necessarily require the kind of long regression involved in psychoanalysis. Successful work with the child hidden in the person does not require of the person that they become a child in therapy. The earliest symbols continue to inform the most evolved and sophisticated. They can be reached through work done in the here and now and so help to re-shape the basics that allow members to find resilience, authenticity, a truthfulness of self and, finally, a way of being at home with themselves and one another.

Notes

1. ‘Home Is Where The Music Is’ composed and performed by Hugh Masekela and band, Blue Thumb Records (BTS 6003), The Verve Music Group 602517686830.
5. Table 1, ‘Basic Principles In Group-Analytic Psychotherapy’, is reproduced from Table 1.2 in Schlapobersky, J.R. (2015) From The Couch To The Circle: Group-Analytic Psychotherapy In Practice.
6. Figure 1, ‘Relational, reflective and reparative dimensions of psychotherapy,’ is reproduced from Figure 2.1 in Schlapobersky, J.R. (2015) From The Couch To The Circle: Group-Analytic Psychotherapy In Practice.


References


http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harrriet/2012/10/sean-connery-reading-cavafys-ithaca/?woo


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