Title: Broader than psychoanalysis and deeper than sociology: the psychosocial promise of group analysis[1]

Abstract

This paper starts from the suggestion that there is a deep, historic chasm between the disciplines of sociology and psychoanalysis in the United Kingdom. It proposes that we might look to the group analytic tradition for a psychosocial clinical practice and body of theory that draws on both sociology and psychoanalysis. It introduces the psychosocial and relational ideas of S.H.Foulkes, and the move he made beyond the individual/ society dualism. The paper suggests that group analysis works with a generative conceptualisation of the constitutive permeability and entanglement of being human that is broader than is generally understood in psychoanalysis and deeper than is understood in sociology.

Keywords

Sociology; psychoanalysis; group analysis; interdisciplinarity; dualisms; the psychosocial; relationality.

There is, and long has been, a chasm – a wide space of non-encounter – between the disciplines of sociology and psychoanalysis in the United Kingdom. At best, and at their most respectful, traditional practitioners and teachers of each bracket off the concerns of the other. Matters societal have no legitimate place in the consulting room. When they appear, they are to be understood as distractions or defences, detracting from the real business of attending to the individual psyche and its maladies. Mirroring this, matters unconscious, and maladies of the individual psyche, have no real place within the social scientific sociological problematic. They are categorically *not* the focus of sociology, which exists to probe the structures, processes and problems of the social.

At worst, there is profound suspicion, and even hostility, between two disciplines that barely publicly recognise the existence of the other. Each represses the challenges posed by the other through powerful practices of silencing, while occasionally giving vent to their visceral

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distaste for the other: under the cloak of anonymous referees' comments on papers submitted to mainstream journals in which the author is seeking engagement between the fields; in the privacy of reports on prospective trainees who might bring with them contaminating ideas from outer worlds; and in the safe spaces of the conference and seminar room where disciplinary identity formation takes place and disciplinary boundaries are reproduced. (I write from experience, as the subject of and a witness to, such acts.)

Yet, this conference on "Sociology and Psychoanalysis" has gathered up a motley crew of renegades who have somehow escaped, or are, at least, interested in questioning, our disciplinary destinies. We are speaking with each other, and listening to each other, and, doing so under the auspices of our respective learned societies, the British Sociological Association and the British Psychoanalytic Society. This conference is, therefore, an historic moment. In sociology in particular, it marks a real achievement, given the powerful objections that existed from senior figures within the discipline to the very formation of the Study Group for Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial within the British Sociological Association, when the proposal for its establishment was put forward in 2011.

Our coming together for this conference is possible, from the perspective of sociology, because of the shifting of the tectonic plates of disciplinary formations that has taken place over recent decades. In the wake of the social movements of the '60s and '70s, sociology has been challenged to its core by the development of critical interdisciplinary spaces: women's, gender and sexuality studies; cultural studies; post-colonial; and critical race studies. In these new fields, traditional social scientific concern with social divisions and inequality has come into dialogue with profoundly affective questions of identity, subjectivity and personal experience, and their pains and troubles. Through this substantive and conceptual challenge, the foundational dualisms on which sociology has been built have been opened up to scrutiny: individual/ societal, reason/ emotion, personal/ political, psychological/ sociological. As these new interdisciplines reshaped the intellectual landscape, they created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of another new interdisciplinary field: psychosocial studies.

Psychosocial studies is, as I see it, an explicit project to undo the 19th century distinction between psychology and sociology, and to focus on the exploration of the complex entanglement of psychic and social, of inner and outer worlds. It does this through its

distinctive mobilisation of the notion of 'the psychosocial'. Yet not all of those attracted to the project of psychosocial studies are sympathetic to psychoanalysis – and many who are remain, at heart, firmly located at the 'psycho' end of the spectrum, not able or willing to really embrace the scope of the challenge that taking the social seriously in all its instantiations would entail.

Because it is difficult to *really* work with the complexity of the totality of human experience – and with its fissures, fractures, and fragments – it is difficult to hold together multiple levels of human experience: individual and collective, the intensely personal, the interpersonal and intersubjective, the familial and small group, the peer group and the communal, the local, the regional, the national, the global; and the interactions, intersections, contradictions, tensions and conflicts between them. It is difficult to allow the plurality, the multiplicity, the messiness of thinking beyond metaphors of structure that stabilise and solidify the processual and the relational. It is difficult not to bracket off that which eludes our established disciplinary conceptualisations, to allow ourselves to admit to not knowing quite how to grasp the slippery, the fleeting, the momentary, the traces, the echoes, the multidimensional. It is so much easier to focus on what our established conceptual languages enable us to see and to hear, and to convince ourselves that this is what really matters.

Yet there is a practice and a body of theory that has long been working in this almost impossible, uncharted, and rather dangerous terrain of the psychosocial. Group analysis is a clinical practice rooted in, and productive of, thinking that self-consciously understands itself as emanating from both psychoanalysis and sociology. If to those of us of a psychosocial persuasion, neither sociology nor psychoanalysis has, thus far, been able to attend adequately and simultaneously to both the 'depth' of unconscious human experience and the 'breadth' of human sociality in its complex, diverse, historically specific instantiations, then, I want to suggest that group analysis offers an altogether more promising topography – one that is better able to understand and work transformatively with the complex constitutive relationality of human life and its many vicissitudes.

But what is group analysis, and how does it do this?

The person to whom the founding of group analysis is attributed is S.H. Foulkes (1898-1976).[2] Michael Foulkes, as he became, as a refugee in England, was a German-Jewish medic and psychiatrist who trained in neurology with Kurt Goldstein, and then as a psychoanalyst in Vienna with Helene Deutsch.[3] In the early 1930s, as Director of the clinic of the Institute of Psychoanalysis in Frankfurt, he worked in the same building that housed the Institute for Social Research, the place to which many of us who are seeking a rapprochement between sociology and psychoanalysis return again and again in our minds and our reading. Leaving Germany in 1933 for London, he continued his practice as a psychoanalyst, became a training psychoanalyst, and in 1939 moved to Exeter in south-west England, where he conducted his first analytic groups, bringing individual patients together in groups for therapy.

During the second world war, Foulkes worked as a psychiatrist at the Northfield military hospital, where first Wilfred Bion and John Rickman, and then he, developed ways of working traumatised soldiers in groups, out of which the therapeutic community model developed.[4] After the war, working analytically with groups of patients became his preferred form of practice, and he started writing about it soon afterwards. It was from these experiments that group analysis as a distinctive modality of psychoanalytic therapy developed. In 1951, Foulkes and others formed the *Group Analytic Society* to develop the field, with refugee sociologist Norbert Elias a founding member.

In his first major work on group analysis, *Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy* (1948), Foulkes presented his Goldstein-influenced ontology of holism: 'Life is a complex whole. It can only artificially be separated into parts, analysed' (p. 1). He proposed a radical critique of what he called the 'isolating scientific method' that came to dominate in the 19th century, arguing that psychoanalysis had begun the work of acknowledging the importance of the 'total situation' of any individual patient (p. 7) and of investigating how 'the present personality and the present situation, even in their totality, are inseparable from the past – that of the individual and the race – and the future' (p. 9).

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[2] There is growing recognition in group analysis globally of the pioneering work of American psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow (1875-1950) and his influence on Foulkes. See Pertegato and Pertegato (2013).
[3] Kurt Goldstein, as both a neurologist and psychiatrist, is known for his holistic approach to human life and for coining the term 'self-actualization', and influenced greatly the emergence of Gestalt psychotherapy. See Goldstein (1955, original 1934).
[4] See Harrison and Clarke (1992), Harrison (2000), and Mills and Harrison (2007).

Foulkes credited Freud with showing that 'the "outer" world becomes internalised, that man's inner dynamic world is a microcosmic reflection of the whole world, at least his whole world' (p. 10). But he started to develop a critique of psychoanalysis for failing to have 'allotted to this social side of man the same basic importance as it has his instinctual aspect' (p. 10). He went on to argue that it is wrong to understand 'the "world" and "society" or even the family' in terms of '"individual" interactions':

> It is the same mistake, as it was, to consider the whole as the sum of its parts. From a mature, scientific point of view, the opposite is true: each individual – itself an artificial, though plausible, abstraction – is basically and centrally determined, inevitably, by the world in which he lives, by the community, the group, of which he forms a part. Progress in all the sciences during the last decades has led to the same independent and concerted conclusion; that the old juxtaposition of an inside and outside world, constitution and environment, individual and society, phantasy and reality, body and mind and so on, are untenable. They can at no stage be separated from each other, except by artificial isolation. (p. 10)

In this passage we can see Foulkes' sociological problem and his reaching for a psychosocial solution. He begins with a classic Durkheimian position, the fundamental tenet and foundational claim of sociology as a discipline: that society is not reducible to the individuals of which it is made up, that it has a reality *sui generis.* In this, he is articulating a social determinism: the individual is 'basically and centrally determined' (p.10) by the group.

Now this is a radical and deeply challenging statement in the context of psychoanalysis, but to a contemporary sociologist it is likely to immediately raise the problem of agency: how, if we are all entirely socially determined, does change ever take place?[5] What are the sources of creativity, innovation, transformation? Moreover, wherein lies the singularity of lived experience?

But Foulkes immediately undercuts this position with the psychosocial claim that 'inside and outside world, constitution and environment, individual and society, phantasy and reality, body and mind and so on' cannot actually be separated from each other. He posits, in the

[5] Sociology was subject to trenchant, and influential, critique by Wrong for its attachment to an 'oversocialised' conception of personhood and an 'overintegrated' view of society. Wrong suggested that psychoanalysis offered a less deterministic view of 'man' (sic) than sociology. Highly unusually, he published papers making much the same argument, but aimed at different audiences, in both The American Sociological Review (1961) and in Psychoanalytic Review (1962).

language of Goldstein's neurology, an understanding of the individual as 'part of a social network, a little nodal point' (p. 14). He challenges psychoanalysis to take seriously 'the patient's total life situation', rather than seeing '"life" and "reality" merely as projection, screen and reflector of his "unconscious phantasies"'. They are, he says, both 'at the same time. The truth is, that the two can never be separated' (p. 15).

In Foulkes' later writings, this emergent psychosocial ontology is re-articulated as essential to group analysis. In 1966, in *Some Basic Concepts in Group Psychotherapy*, he set out the claim that group analysis is developing:

> a method and theory that would do away with such pseudo-problems as biological versus cultural, somatogenic versus psychogenic, individual versus group and reality versus phantasy. Instead we must endeavour to use concepts which from the beginning do justice to an integrated view" (p. 155).

In 1973, in 'The group as matrix of the individual's mental life', he argued:

> As group analysts we do not share the psychoanalytic juxtaposition of an "internal" psychological reality and an "external" physical or social reality which, for psychoanalysis, makes good sense. What is inside is outside, the "social" is not external but very much internal too and penetrates the innermost being of the individual personality. (pp. 226–7)

And in 1974, in 'My philosophy in psychotherapy', in the context of expounding his philosophy of mind, he said, 'we cannot make the conventional sharp differentiation between inside and outside, or between phantasy and reality. What is inside is always also outside, what is outside is inside as well (p. 278).

So, Foulkes was proposing a new, transgressively psychosocial mode of thinking that drew on both psychoanalysis and sociology, and that was seeking to move beyond the individual/ society dichotomy, many years before the emergence of psychosocial studies. And this mode of thinking was fundamentally relational in orientation (Roseneil, 2013).

Group analysis starts from the premise that people are group animals, always already formed by the groups of which we are members, and that sociality is fundamental and originary: the individual, and the supposedly individual unconscious, are always already social. Our subjectivity is multiple, group-ish, the product of the introjections and projections not just of individual care-givers, but of much wider networks of relations, personal and impersonal.

Group analysis places great emphasis on culture lived through both biographical and generational time. It attends to the customs, traditions, norms and places that form us and that we carry with us, and that we make and remake in our everyday lives, and in the analytic group itself, recognising that much of this remains outside our consciousness (hence the core group analytic concept of *the social unconscious*).[6] Group analysis stresses collective inheritance, which is much wider than familial intergenerational transmission. It is concerned, as a matter of course, with issues of national and ethnic and racial belonging, and with the traumas and losses resultant on war and conflict, about which people are often unable to speak, and which elude conscious awareness, causing much psychic distress and relational disturbance.

This means that in group analysis laterality becomes as much a focus as the horizontality of parent-child relationships: the formative importance of sibling, friendship and peer group relationships, and the ongoing centrality of these in adult life, and within the group itself, are the explicit object of analysis. And in this questions of power – of inequality, difference, competition, envy and shame – take their place as central to understanding emotional life, and its trials and tribulations. Noticing, and grappling with, practices of domination and subordination based on class, gender, race, sexuality – and their lived realities within and without the group is the everyday business of group analysis – or it should be: practice does not always live up to its radical psychosocial promise.

Where psychoanalysis places two individuals in a room together and focuses on their relationship (which it might then, in some approaches, conceptualise as triadic) – attending with a particular affective and theoretical intensity to the internalisations and transferences of dyadic relations, and taking largely for granted the power relations between analyst and analysand, mother and child – group analysis places up to eight people in a room together, with the group analyst, who is also understood as a member of the group, albeit with the very particular role of 'conductor'. The work of the group is to explore all manner of relationships that emerge within the space of the group, between its members. This enables an analytic focus on the multiplicity and complexity of the internalisations and transferences that exist beyond the narrow confines of the historically and culturally specific, patriarchal, procreative,

[6] See, for example, Hopper (2003) and Hopper and Weinberg (2011).

heterosexual nuclear family form on which psychoanalysis is based, and which less and less maps on to the lived realities of contemporary intimate life.

All this is done through the collective yet intensely personal exploration of the variety of embodied multi-sensory modes of communication between group members, who are seated facing each other in a circle. With the guidance of the conductor – more explicit at the beginning, less so as the group's culture develops – the group attends to the ebb and flow of the exchange between its members, to the blockages in meaning and understanding, to the silences and differential taking up of time and space, and to the free associations as topics change. The group learns to read languages of mind and body by noting the particularities of those of each member, and how they shift and change over time, identifying practices of mirroring, and feeling the affective power of the resonance of experience between members.. Over time, group members ideally might develop an appreciation that we are each bounded and singular in our individual bodies, and yet also fundamentally permeable of mind and body, living always entangled with each other in ways that are broader and deeper than we ultimately can ever fully grasp. So it is that group analysis works with a conceptualisation of the constitutive permeability and entanglement of being human that is broader than is generally understood in psychoanalysis and deeper than is understood in sociology.

I end by returning to the metaphor with which I began: that of the chasm that seems to exist between conventional modes of sociology and psychoanalysis. I suggest that from the perspective of group analysis, this chasm might more productively be regarded as a crack in the disciplinary ground on which we walk - less impossible to breach, and indeed containing generative possibilities. As the late, great Leonard Cohen reminds us:

> There is a crack in everything
> That's how the light gets in. ('Anthem')

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