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GROUP ACTS AND MISSED ENCOUNTER: LACAN AND FOULKES¹

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Prologue

The theme of action outside speech typically does not gain positive treatment in psychoanalytical contexts, with all such action vulnerable to being designated “acting out”, or at best “acting in”. But the question “how to act” transcends such false oppositions between acting and not acting, to topicalise instead ethical responsibility and social engagement. In this paper these themes are explored in terms of the relations between Lacanian psychoanalytic and Foulkesian group analytic ideas. The assertion of the priority of one model over the other, or the assimilation of one to the other is not aimed at here, but rather this paper seeks to highlight, and perhaps indicate, some potential evaluations of how each approach attempts to engage with the question of action.

While Lacanian psychoanalysis often draws a strong boundary around the analytic space, resisting the generalization of psychoanalytic phenomena outside the clinic, the social model of the psyche to which group analysts are committed, means that no such absolute distinctions can be maintained. Paradoxically, group analysts seem rather more reluctant than Lacanians to discuss questions of ethics, preferring to talk about questions of democracy, although both models share an understanding of analytical process in terms of the

¹ This article is a version of a paper delivered at APPI's 17th Annual Congress (2010) entitled; *How to Act – Ethics and the Psychoanalytic Clinic in a Culture of Suppression and Demand*.

promotion of (if also the impossibility of) free speech. The challenge therefore, is to find ways of both analyzing and intervening in, the contexts that give rise to analysis. A brief historical review of the development of group analysis indicates how this approach in fact has always done this, though – like other models – not always with broader ethical-political agendas in mind.

Although it is via the perspectives of group analysis and certain feminist and antiracist activism that these themes are explored here, this view also comprises a certain sympathy and attunement to Lacanian approaches.²

Act I: The Matheme and the Matrix?

At first glance group analysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis seem quite opposed. Obscure and esoteric Lacanian theory (of mathemes, for example) rubs against what is perhaps a rather naïve and under-elaborated theoretical openness in group analysis, and occasional mysticism around “trusting the group” - not to mention the troubling incipient gender essentialisms elaborated from the maternalist imagery of the matrix³. The Anglophone psychiatric, as well as psychoanalytic legacy weighs heavily on group analysis (generated as it was from England), including a rather concrete humanism that rather fetishises the face to face encounter (that – for Lacanians – of course must work at the level of the imaginary).

Yet these readings are perhaps contingent rather than necessary, and perhaps there are significant areas of continuity and overlap,

² In exploring this mutual engagement between Lacan and Foulkes, my readings here both owe much to, but also are independently formulated from, those of Dieter Nitzgen (1999; 2008a, 2008b).

³ Within Latinate languages anyway. However elsewhere, including where there are group analytic trainings, terms such the matrix carry very different connotations (of sci-fi films for example).

even around the role of desire for the speaking subject.⁴ For different reasons, it is possible to trace how some similar commitments emerge that touch on this theme of action. Of particular relevance to the theme of “acts”, is the model of change. In group analysis, unlike some other forms of psychoanalysis (but in common with Lacanian psychoanalysis), this model of change is based on action and reflection upon action; it is not insight-led but rather the action of and in the group both creates and identifies change; that is, the group is both the agent that makes the difference and the medium for recognising that something is now different. Foulkes argues that:

The group acts as if it knew what we call the dynamic unconscious. It can also work its way to fully conscious awareness, to have full insight. Change, however, results from the interacting processes themselves even before they are made conscious. In this view, change is, therefore, the cause of insight, not its consequence. (Foulkes, 1990, p. 291)

This can be connected with the technical imperative to work in, rather than interpret, the transference in Lacanian analysis (Collet, 1993).

Act II: Current Contexts

It should be noted that the reflections here were prompted by some recollections of group and individual actions, of varying kinds of efficacy and publicity – some of which arose in analytic contexts.

⁴ See also for example: “Lacan’s understanding of the conflictual relationship between the registers of demand and desire corresponds to Foulkes’ conception of the analytic process in groups insofar as both emphasize the articulation of desire in speech as the principal action of analysis... There is a striking similarity between Lacan’s concept of desire and Foulkes’ “social model of consciousness” (Foulkes, 1964, p. 253, p. 264). What is at issue in the group, therefore, is essentially a question of going beyond the imaginary demands for love (and, accordingly hate) by getting access to the symbolic (Laxenaire, 1983, p. 175). It is only by mutual recognition within the symbolic matrix of the group that desire can be brought into existence. However, what is brought into existence by mutual recognition, desire, is not, as Lacan insists, something already “given”. In naming his/her desire, “the subject creates, brings forth a new presence in the world” (1954-5, p. 229). “This marks the surprising, unforeseeable, creative moment in psychoanalysis as well as in group analysis.” (Nitzgen, 1999, p.234).

Also, mobilising another reading, this paper could have addressed a more explicitly artistic kind of “acting”, and indeed perhaps professional actors could reveal more about phenomena where imagination and association lead the passage into action (although of course *Antigone* mobilises the spectacle of the theatre as the arena for exploring such questions). Presently however the “acts” in question are those directed more specifically towards performative approaches (Butler, 2000) that engage the more mundanely ethical-political in and in relation to, analysis. That is, how our everyday modes of interaction and engagement – including therapeutic modes of relating – produce as well as reproduce certain practices that are inevitably ethical-political, as well as – sometimes perhaps – analytical or therapeutic.

In these days of neoliberalism, where the only actions and agents seem to be related to the market and consumption, it seems hard to formulate other models of activity and engagement. Self help, self care, the personal domain and the subject, are all equated with the individual, and it becomes harder and harder to envisage more collective forms of action. Increasingly, people in distress are exhorted to consult experts and to have individual counselling or therapy. To counter this, group therapies try to survive on the rather false rationale that they are cheap (but rarely quick), and psychoanalysts look set to disappear from publicly funded settings – or else they turn themselves into practitioners of some non-analytic therapy of mindfulness, mentalisation or suchlike.

A quick tour through the literature suggests that “acting in” is less often spoken about than “acting out”; both of course carry pejorative connotations within psychoanalytic approaches as something rendered into action, rather than symbolized and therefore worked through. In the group analytic literature, “acting in” is surprisingly little discussed – perhaps since the work of the group brings so much action into the group (and so much acting out in relation to its boundaries).

Hence although groups are nearly always in the grip of some action or other, including the analyst (whose job it is to try to keep

thinking as well as feeling), as with much other psychoanalysis, explicit engagement with activity outside the therapy room is either shied away from, or grandiosely overstated (as where some analysts claim to solve world problems by convening small groups of elites). In the *Workbook of Group Analytic Interventions* (Kennard, Roberts and Winter, 1993) – a presciently postmodern book presenting 20 or more group analysts' responses to some commonly encountered challenging situations occurring in groups – it is clear that, for example, allowing the group to eat the mince pies brought to the group before the Christmas break, and even joining in with this, before inviting members to reflect upon and discuss what function this is fulfilling for them, is acceptable or even recommended. The action is brought into the group as material available to all its members for discussion; proscribing it, or responding censoriously or moralistically, is understood to hinder or suppress the analytic work of the group in its project to “overhear” and render social, the coded “mumbling” (as Foulkes puts it) of the symptom.⁵

Thus the question of “how to act” in groups is rather different from individual work. This arises from the rather obvious - but nevertheless powerful - fact that when working with groups the analyst is always a participant, always subject to the gaze of the other group members, and involved in the flow of action and interaction. Group analysis is “...by the group, in the group, including its conductor” (Foulkes, 1986, p. 3).

This at the very least renders comprehensible how “race”, gender, sexuality, colour, class etc. , that is, all symbolically structured, embodied axes of social relations and identifications, come to be part of the analytic situation. Similarly, the group analytic term “dynamic administration” highlights how bureaucratic and material features have a dynamic significance, ranging from referral letters and pathways,

⁵ As in the oft quoted text: “The language of the symptom, although already a form of communication, is autistic. It mumbles to itself secretly, hoping to be overheard; its equivalent meaning conveyed in words is social. This process of communication is the medium of all other therapeutic agencies... Thus there is a move from symptom to problem, from dream to the conflict underlying the dream.” (Foulkes, S .H. & Anthony, E.,1957, pp. 259-260).

through to the arrangement and state of the chairs in the circle, the lighting and heating: each being a part of the remit of action and interpretation on the part of the analyst.

Both Lacanian and group analytic models focus on the central role of the Other, drawing on the metaphor of the mirror as generating imaginary reflections that may be necessary but are also in need of amendment. While Pines makes some connections with Lacan⁶, he later quotes Foulkes as putting it like this:

Mirror reactions are characteristically brought out when a number of persons meet and interact. A person sees himself – often a repressed part of himself – reflected in the interactions of the other group members. He also gets to know himself – and this is a fundamental process of ego-development by the effect he has on others and the picture they form of him. A certain degree of disillusionment about one's self, of deception as regards others, needs to be integrated into the self's education.

(Foulkes 1964, p.110, as cited in Pines, 1998, p. 84)

But mixing gestalt ideas with Goldstein's neurological ideas focusing on networks – indicated by his use of the term “group conductor” rather than therapist or leader - Foulkes' idea of the “total situation” that groups comprise, is sensitive to how wider socio-cultural currents inevitably inflect and reverberate within the smaller group matrix. The interplay between the material, cultural “foundation matrix” and its specific moment-by-moment reconfiguration within the interaction of the group (the “dynamic matrix”) is based on a thorough going social theory of the psyche: “What is inside is outside, the social is not external but very much internal too and penetrates the innermost being of the individual personality” (Foulkes, 1990, p. 227).

Yet perhaps it is precisely because so much goes on in analytic groups, that group analysis largely involves attempting to slow down or stop action, rather like its psychoanalytic forebear. Hence the

⁶ In a specific essay entitled *Mirroring and child development: psychodynamic and psychological interpretations*, (pp. 41-59) in *Circular reflections: Selected papers on group analysis and psychoanalysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

tradition of “activity groups” belongs as Hinshelwood (1999) notes, to another psychoanalytic tradition (as also part of the historical tensions between varieties of group therapy originated via Bion and then Bridger). Even from their inception, it seems that Foulkes was less interested in these. This is despite the fact that the focus on activity, on physical and practical work, itself part of the therapy, is of course what inspired the therapeutic community movement [TC], in some forms as a libertarian link between therapy, work and activist politics (Spandler, 2006). In fact, many group analysts were very active in the TC movement, and inspired in many ways precisely through the First and Second Northfield Experiments.⁷

Act III: Antigone in/and the Group

In Lacanian circles discussions of ethics usually draw on treatments of *Antigone*. Much is made, by Butler (2000) among others, of how Antigone is constitutionally predisposed not to fit in, by virtue of her anomalous position within generational orders (as the offspring of an incestuous union). This is not a question of essentialised gender polarities: feminine relationality vs. hard male rule of law, but rather of orientation to knowledge, or the impossibility of such knowledge. As such, Antigone’s gender, sexuality and for that matter youth, or indeed any attribute of her person, is in itself not relevant. She is not, as Neill (2005) points out, an ethical exemplar but rather an example of the problematic of the ethical.

According to such analyses, the conflict between Antigone and Creon is less a matter of individual ethical impulse contesting public duty, nor even of showing how Antigone’s apparent death-wish (in declaring and acting on her commitment to bury her brother Polynices)

⁷ The “Northfield Experiments” were innovations in group therapy for soldiers injured and traumatised during the Second World War initiated by Tom Main, John Rickman, Harold Bridger and especially Wilfred Bion and then S.H. Foulkes at Northfield Hospital during the early 1940s. Their contributions are discussed further later in this article.

is truer to desire than the death-loving super-egoic functions of the law. Copjec (2004) offers an analysis in terms of the structure of sublimation, formulating a Lacanian-based theory of feminist ethics, while De Kesel (2009) reads in Lacan's treatment, a parable of the contradictions of human subjectivity, of life's link with death as a relationship between meaning and its limits necessarily conducted within a symbolic system. In this sense Antigone's act does not mobilise a radical claim of something totally outside or other to the law but rather exposes its limit, and in so doing she also shows us the desire that we are:

...she makes clear how the entire order, with its power and law, is at one and the same time desire *and* lack. Under circumstances where the law appears omnipresent and all-powerful, she assumed precisely the place where the law comes up against its own limits, thereby revealing how it cannot give or realize what it promises. (De Kesel, 2009, p.222)

Armed with this analysis of the relation between law, lack and desire, certain other actions can be considered. Much is made of Lacan's founding act in 1964 (Lacan, 1964/1987)⁸. But what kind of act was Foulkes' founding of group analysis? There is a link here with the question of desire....

Act IV: The Ethics of Groups

Within psychoanalysis - after Freud's (1921) rather dismal account based on the very specific institutional groups of church and army - groups are often viewed with suspicion, as compromising individual freedom, pressurising conformity, and – after Le Bon – of even making

⁸ As is well known, as an act this was (1) mitigated or compromised by the fact that the name of the school changed 3 months later; and (2) the mode of introduction of this act troubled the relations between actor and audience by taking the form of a pre-recorded message played to a group of around 80 "dumbfounded listeners" (Roudinesco, 199, p. 309).

people lose their individual minds. Within the Lacanian frame analysis of course proceeds “one by one”⁹. Lacan is on record as expressing suspicion of group processes as “sticky”, using the term “cartel” to reflect how organisations are vulnerable to mixing bureaucracy with authoritarianism (discourse of the university and the master) (Miller, 1986).

Despite (or because of) this Lacan devised an organisational structure based on small groups, whilst maintaining this strictly individualist focus. Yet his “logical time problem” (Lacan, 2006) dramatically illustrates the social structuring of identification and the necessary action(s) of others in configuring the subject. Alongside this we might note - as significant intervention in and against mainstream British psychoanalytic currents - how group analysis, from its social theory contributed by Norbert Elias, privileges the action of the outside in constructing the interiority of the subject:

Elias’s influence on group analysis is that we constantly examine the question of the psychoanalytic primacy of projection over introjection. His legacy is the enduring challenge made by group analysts that psychology, including psychoanalysis, has not yet accepted the depth of the social within each one of us. (Pines, 2002, p. 16)

Indeed, irrespective of its pretensions, psychoanalysis has always been active in and implicated in action – its variable stance on the politics of sexuality a case in point. As with the rest of psychoanalysis, the development of group therapies owes a great deal to large group destructive events and manipulative agendas.¹⁰ Just as psychoanalysis gained legitimacy through the distress of traumatised (“shell-shocked”) soldiers in the First World War, so group therapies emerged in England as part of a project of rehabilitation to return

⁹ There are also grounds for speculation about other reasons for this, including how the small size of groups was considered so as preventing the formation of political pressure groups within the new organisation: “the idea was to organize groups that would be groups, without taking themselves as pressure groups. It is a factor in the choice of the reduction to four” (Laurent, 2000, p. 44).

¹⁰ As acknowledged by the book that Lacan discusses at length *The Shaping of Psychiatry by the War* by Brigadier General Rees (also director of the Tavistock Clinic).

soldiers to combat in World War 2. This is the story of Northfield Hospital, and the contested field of claims to the origins of a properly psychoanalytic group therapy emerges, from Bion to Foulkes and others.¹¹

It is well known that Foulkes had been running groups for both therapeutic and research purposes from 1940 in Exeter (with Eve Lewis), and he was brought into Northfield as both qualified psychoanalyst (unlike Bion) (Nitzgen, 2008)¹² and as an experienced group practitioner. Depending on theoretical allegiance, accounts of the success and influence of Bion and Foulkes' style of group conductorship and composition vary (Hinshelwood, 1999; Nitzgen, 2008). Hinshelwood rather knowingly styles their relationship as a "non-encounter" (ibid, p. 467) since Foulkes succeeded Bion at Northfield. It is also worth noting that, after a five week visit to Britain in 1945 in which he met Bion and Rickman, Lacan wrote approvingly of their experiments with groups, devoting an extensive discussion to their work (Lacan 1946/2000), while both Eric Laurent (2000) and Philip Cravers (2000) claim this as a key influence in Lacan's formulation of the cartel.¹³ Foulkes however is not mentioned by Lacan, nor by Lacanians – another "non-encounter", it seems.¹⁴

"Apocryphally" (Hinshelwood, 1999, p. 475), it is said that Foulkes started his Northfield groups by saying "Whilst in the group we are not in the army" (ibid.). What kind of an act was this? Since it was patently untrue (Northfield was, after all, a military hospital), was this statement

¹¹ Pines (1998), offers a fairly non-judgmental historical review in his chapter A history of psychodynamic psychiatry in Britain in his book *Circular Reflections*.

¹² "In fact Foulkes was one of the few fully trained psychoanalysts in Northfield. Rickman and Carroll were fully trained but Bion, Bridger and Main had not." (Nitzgen, 2008, p. 335)

¹³ Main was of course senior to both Bion and Foulkes in the military hierarchy at Northfield (see Hinshelwood, 1999).

¹⁴ Since Laurent (2000) and Dravers (2000) make much of the influence of Bion on Lacan's ideas of the group (along with his knowledge of Lewin), it is tempting to speculate how this model might have been different had he encountered Foulkes' work instead/as well. It is noteworthy that the Editorial Preface to this journal issue explicitly denies the existence of both group analysis and the availability of the notion of the "social unconscious": "Although group analysis does not exist, it is within the group, within the logic of its social dimensions, where Lacan will situate psychoanalysis and its place of work. Group analysis does not exist because there is no collective or social unconscious, which did not prevent Lacan, quite the contrary, from emphasising that the subject's dimension derives from the communal bond." (Wolf, 2000, p.7)

a disingenuous acting out, or a provocatively performative prefiguration of a discursive space beyond the immediate organisational (military) agendas? While (as Lacan enthusiastically discusses) Bion attempted a military-style campaign to boost morale and unify the men against their common enemy, neurosis - so re-socialising the men back into the military fold - Foulkes started from a different position.¹⁵ Foulkes' strategy was to address individual distress through the promotion of "free floating discussion", the group equivalent of "free association". As Hinshelwood notes:

This was not a conformist requirement on the individual to toe the line of group norms... The individual needs to be brought into the group, not as a Mr Average, but as an individual who can express (communicate) his individuality better and more congenially within the context of the group. (Hinshelwood, 1999, p. 474)

In this sense, Foulkes rejected the reduction of the individual to the social (so repudiating notions of "group mind"¹⁶), whilst nevertheless exploring how wider social currents and institutional agendas influence individuals¹⁷; further, his model of group analysis is not concerned

¹⁵ Indeed Foulkes' position was very different, as he intimates in 1948: "I have been told that my own conduct of therapeutic groups follows the "leaderless Group" principles. This is, I believe, partly true, but if so, I followed it long before it actually existed. Through an unfortunate coincidence of foreign birth, which I regret, it was not possible for me to participate in the W.O.S.B. work, and I heard only comparatively late of the leaderless groups. However, John Rickman's visits to Northfield proved a great stimulus in this respect, and H. Bridger, who came from W.O.S.B. work, played an integral part in the Northfield Experiment - in fact he conducted it from the point of view of social activities. (p.17). What is being alluded to in the "unfortunate coincidence of foreign birth" is the fact of his German nationality and refugee status, which apparently disqualified him from being involved in the War Office Selection Board activities. Beyond this, in terms of the Lacanian versions of these events, we might note that taking seriously Foulkes' contribution at Northfield (irrespective of the resolution of the claims to originality etc) would rather disrupt the dichotomous discourse of British vs. French psychiatry and their social roles (within and after the War) put forward by both Lacan himself (Lacan 1946/2000), Eric Laurent (2000) and Philip Dravers (2000).

¹⁶ The notion of "group mind" should not be confused with the extensive discussions in group analysis, initiated by Foulkes, on the "social unconscious" (e.g. Dalal, 1998; Hopper, 2003).

¹⁷ Foulkes' (1969) comments makes this clear: "Illness emerges as a social, interpersonal process. Its psychosocial analysis is of particular value in bringing to light the concealed meaning and significances of the many guises in which illness appears. It furnishes a key, in particular, to the approach to unconscious processes in three areas: the personal, repressed meaning, based on the original family groups, in psychoanalysis; the unconscious, interpersonal interaction, the "social unconscious" in group analysis; the society's ills, and thus the unconscious origins of much human behaviour." (Foulkes, 1979, p.24)

with adapting people to groups but with exploring what is at issue in the individual's struggle to relate to groups, with the developmental trajectory being "from autonomy to heteronomy" (Pines, 1998, p. 83).

Act V: Why (the positive view of) Groups?

There is another reading of action and acting out at play in the history of group analysis. Foulkes was a refugee from Nazism. He arrived in England in May 1933 as one of the first analysts invited to safety by Ernest Jones. He had to undergo requalification, as is the fate of many professional migrants, in his case as both medical doctor and psychoanalyst. Although eligible as a member of the British Psychoanalytic Society, many commentators have noted that he remained marginal to it, having little to do with its theoretical debates including the "controversial discussions" between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, yet - like Norbert Elias - appearing also to harbour resentment over the lack of recognition accorded his work.¹⁸ Just as many have speculated about what prompted Elias to write his book *The Civilising Process* at the brink of one of the most "uncivilised" periods of modern European history, so group analysts have speculated about why Foulkes arrived at his positive commitment to groups, ranging from his position as "unwanted" youngest child, to his forced migration:

How much did Foulkes' struggle to differentiate psychoanalysis from group analysis parallel his problems of transition from one country to another? How much were the problems of theoretical separation between disciplines connected with issues of emotional separation in his life? To

¹⁸ In the section (pp. 19-21) on "The Northfield Experiment", Foulkes (1948) writes: "As to the Northfield Experiment, my own function happened to be a rather important one. Firstly, I was the only person who observed it actively all the way through. I was at Northfield for over a year before there was any Northfield Experiment, except on my own ward, so to speak!.." (p.18) (Nitzgen, (2008, p.335) points out that this is not strictly speaking true, since Bion had left by the time that Foulkes arrived.) Writing of "the Northfield Experiment proper (Phase B)" (p.19) he notes "The fact that I myself was a Senior Psychiatrist and recognized Psycho-analyst helped Bridger considerably..." (ibid.)

what extent did the hostility he encountered at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis influence the idealised way in which he presented group analysis? (Nitsun, 1996, p. 20)

Of course all histories are histories of the present, and the claims made for the need for “a deeper appreciation of the role of aggression and disintegration in group life” (Nitsun, 1996, p. 41) clearly coincided with a turn towards object relations and Kleinian theory, a rapprochement that perhaps enabled greater integration into the British psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic scene for a second generation of group analysts, but nevertheless occurred at the cost of compromising some of the distinctive features of group analysis.¹⁹ It should be noted that Nitsun’s contribution of the notion of the “anti-group” to the group analytic lexicon gained such success that he later amended (or supplemented) this focus on the negative, destructive characteristics of groups with the notion of the “group as object of desire”, elaborating a distinctly non-Lacanian approach which nevertheless seeks to recover the dynamics of creativity and sexuality as positive forces within group-work (Nitsun, 2006).

Taking a more Lacanian route, to “read Foulkes by the letter” (Nitzgen, 2008, p. 341), Nitzgen points to the dynamic significance of shifts of signification within Foulkes’ life, including the changes he made both to his first and second names (from Sigmund Heinrich to (the more “modern”) Heinz during the period of his psychoanalytic training, and then – although still using the initials S.H. in his publications becoming known to his family, friends and colleagues as “Michael”. He also anglicised his name from Fuchs to Foulkes (a spelling that remained true to its pronunciation in German but rendered it more “English” in appearance). Hence Nitzgen (2008) claims Foulkes’ invention of group analysis coincides with bringing the signifier “volk”, or people, into his name.

While Nitsun’s (1986) project was oriented – explicitly - against an

¹⁹ And certainly, in my view, prejudicing those that connect more closely with Lacanian psychoanalysis.

idealisation of Foulkes as the founding father, this itself alludes to the kinds of transference to the training institution to which all trainees are subject (Nitzgen, 1999). What is highlighted here are the ways that the trajectory of group analysis has reflected a particular synthesis of individual, group and cohort dynamics that have structured the specific forms of its development in England.²⁰ This leads on to the question of adaptation.

Act VI: Questions of Adaptation/Inside and Outside the Clinic

Group analysis has a different view of the limits/boundaries around analysis from Lacanian approaches (Parker, 2011) by virtue of its explicitly social model that disallows an absolute distinction to be maintained between clinical and non-clinical contexts or “pure” and “applied” psychoanalysis. This question also touches on a very current debate about whether or not group analysis is a specifically therapeutic approach, according to which other epithets such as “applied” would then be attached to indicate its non-therapeutic uses. Yet (as Nitzgen, 2008, also emphasises), from his earliest formulations (and forms of practice), Foulkes clearly envisaged group analysis as a method of understanding groups²¹, rather than specifically being configured for therapeutic purposes (with the “slow open” “stranger group” model only emerging as a later feature).

Now, the question of adaptation (which was also discussed by Lacan in his account of his visit to Northfield) also ushers in other equally troubling group analytic notions of “ego training in action” and “corrective emotional experience”. These are often cited along with Yalom’s (1975) identification of “socialization” as one of the common

²⁰ I know too little about its development elsewhere to comment on this.

²¹ As indicated in the first sentence of the Preface to his first book “Group-Analysis is a form Psychotherapy in small Groups and also a Method of studying Groups and the behaviour of Human Individuals in their social aspects” (Foulkes, 1948/83, vii, Preface) and “Our domain remains clinical research in life, experiment in action” (Foulkes 1969, p.19)

features of all group therapies. Yet one of the distinctive features of group analysis (as opposed to the Tavistock approaches) is that it is not about adapting the individual to the group, in the sense of subordinating the interests and qualities of the individual or privileging group functioning over individual functioning.

... each individual is to a large extent a part of the Group, to which he belongs. This collective aspect permeates him all through – as we have said before – to his core. To a smaller extent he deviates from the abstract Model, the Standard of this “Norm”, he is a variant of it. Just this deviation makes him into an Individual, unique, which he is again all through, even to the finger prints....Group treatment has nothing to do with making people uniformly march in step. Quite the contrary; good Group treatment – by developing a good Group – makes both processes go hand in hand: the reinforcement of the communal ground and the freer development of individual differences. (Foulkes, 1948/1983, p.30)

Here the contrast between “hand in hand” is evoked, rather than “marching in step” as an implicit counterproposal to military psychiatry perhaps.

Recently Nitzgen (2008) has reclaimed adaptation as a positive feature – as indicating a sensitivity to the contemporary external context, the “total situation” of the shared social unconscious context in which individual and group functioning occur. Not only has group analysis developed, he argues, through adaptation to context but it also insists on an engagement with such contexts as central to therapeutic outcomes for participants.²²

Moreover some features of Foulkes’ more radically social vision have yet to be fully addressed, as in his claim that distress is not only an individual matter: “neurosis itself must be seen as a multi-personal manifestation” (Foulkes, 1990, p. 206). Perhaps this notion may be applied to the question of action too. As De Kesel comments

²² He returns to the example from Northfield he discussed earlier (Nitzgen, 2002) of the disagreement between two pianists in the band, which turns not merely on individual or local group dynamics but on the wider anxiety of being discharged because well enough to be returned to military service.

of Antigone:

Her autonomy is not that of a free subject in the voluntarist sense of the word, but that of a subject insofar as it is the “bearer” of a desire, a desire, note, that is that of the (symbolic) Other. Neither the real, nor the fixed signified, but the *signifier* and (which amounts to the same thing) the “desire of the Other” lay down the law to her.” (De Kesel, 2009, p. 223)

How to act is not, or not only, a technical question. Drawing out implications for processes of training, Nitzgen ends his paper by arguing for the role of ethics and desire:

That the group analytic attitude is not technical, but ethical in nature, is already implicit in Foulkes’ basic assumption that group associations have the “value” of unconscious interpretations (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957, p. 29). Making this “decisive step” regarding method as well as theory (1957, p. 29) he came to accept that within the context of the group-analytic situation all “ideas and comments” expressed by group members are valuable and to be valued as such and as a contribution to the whole. This is clearly an ethical assumption (with no moralist overtones). ...Calling on Lacan and Foulkes one might say that what is important in analytic training beyond the vicissitudes of love and hate “is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring his desire into existence” (Lacan, 1954-5, p. 228). (Nitzgen, 1999, p. 238).

Conclusion

This paper opened by declaring a position for the author as activist as well as analyst. Yet the discussion of acting (in and out) could be seen to invite a pathologising reading of activism. Undoubtedly activism – with its edge of agitation, with its necessary engagement of desire and the relation with the other – cannot anticipate all its effects. But the aim of this paper was also to indicate how both group analysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis are drawn to a model of the social structuring of subjectivity, via their respective understandings of the relationship between the unconscious and the other that fundamentally privileges

interaction – and so action – over reflection, and so warrants more of a connection between action and activism than either Foulkes or Lacan (and also Freud) would perhaps have personally allowed. Yet precisely by using their ideas it is possible perhaps to understand how, in each of their founding acts, and between the various connections between groups, action and activism, neither could have known quite what they had set in train.

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