

THE GROUP METHOD OF ANALYSIS^{1 2}

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A paper that sets out with a paradoxical title can hardly be expected to invite one's confidence unless we can somehow get square with this initial misnomer. An analysis presupposes, of course, the isolation and examination of a part or element representing the structure of a system, combination or group of elements. But biologically, a group represents a synthesis and only its parts are susceptible of analysis. So that a group method of analysis is of its nature self-contradictory. One could as consistently speak of a synthetic method of analysis as of a group method of analysis. And yet there is in fact the group material to be confronted and there is, as I see it, only the analytic method of confronting it. And so, in attempting to reconcile processes that are so obviously opposed—the one group or synthetic, the other individual or analytic—there is clearly some consistent explanation called for. It is this explanation for which it is difficult for me to find words. If, however, as far as may be, you will participate with me in this endeavour, I think that we may together arrive at some common interpretation that will reconcile this seeming contradiction—a contradiction that has for a long time, I confess, been too little clear in my own mind.

I think we do not realize to what extent we have come to employ the term group or combination in an entirely artificial and conventional sense. The landscape gardener arranges a group of trees, the historian a group of chronological events. The educator will form a group of students, the sociologist a group of welfare workers. There may be a group of scientists or iron workers or artists, but such grouping is entirely external and arbitrary. There is no organic inherency uniting the several elements composing such groups. Where elements are assembled in such manner, what is really represented is but a collection or placing together of elements. On the contrary, when we come to speak of such a group as is represented in a colony of ants, let us say, or a herd of deer or a tribe of primitive men, we are at once connoting an assemblage of elements that is grouped into one integral whole by reason of an inner organic bond common to the several elements of which it is composed. It is this type of group that unites the elements of the species. In such organic groups the connecting link among them is an essential and instinctive one. It is not one that is separable by any arbitrary or external process of arrangement.³

¹ Reprinted from *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, July 1927. Ref. 35 in TB Bibliography.

² Paper read before the Washington Psychoanalytic Society, November 14, 1925. "Die Gruppenmethode in der Psychoanalyse," *Imago*, Band XII (1926), Heft 2/3. In the interval between the presentation of this paper in November, 1925, and its publication at the present time, investigations referred to in the text as being still in process have resulted in findings which call for certain modifications of the group method both in conception and in technique. With the group researches completed and the original laboratory organization dissolved, the final description of the group basis remains to be written. It may be said, however, that the chief modification has been in the direction of greater emphasis upon the observation of immediate material with a proportionate disregard for reminiscent episodes.

³ "An Ethnic Aspect of Consciousness", paper read at the mid-year meeting of The American Psychoanalytic Association, New York City, December 28, 1924.

The life of man today in the midst of his complex civilization embodies still the organic bonds of this instinctive racial unity. The essential biology of the race is not in the least altered from that of the days of man's early primitive societies. Organic principles do not vary under the variations of external circumstance. Racial instincts do not wear out with time. But something has interposed itself unconsciously within the group life of man. Unlike the groups or colonies occurring within the lower orders, man's societal life has been arbitrarily affected by this unconscious factor and he has not been allowed to group or colonize in response to the natural behest of primary instinctive bonds. On the contrary, man has gathered or disposed himself in various forms of groupings and affiliations - social, political, economic, national, religious- that have been wholly superficial and utterly alien to him from the point of view of his instinctive group life. And so it is necessary that the synthetic and instinctive group life of primitive tribal man be very clearly distinguished from the collective or pseudo-group formations into which man has entered at the dictates of social and conventional tradition or authority.

Naturally in a group that embodies but an arbitrary collection of individuals the part or element within such an assemblage may, without jeopardy to organic instinct, be readily drawn aside and subjected to a process of isolation and examination —the process we know as analysis. Isolating the individual or part of such a conventional association of elements entails no organic breach —not any more than would the disturbance of the landscapist's arrangement of trees or the school principal's distribution of pupils. But tearing the leaves or petals from their stalk in order to analyze them is a process that necessarily severs the part under examination from functional continuity with the organic whole of which it is a part. The continuity of the organism as a whole is instantly destroyed. So with the ants removed from their colony or the deer withdrawn from their herd. But, after all, the operation of this organic group law within the life of gregarious animals is not an observation restricted by any means to the biological expert. It is a circumstance of practical utility among all intelligent keepers of wild animals. Hagenbeck was not less familiar than Darwin or Kropotkin⁴ with the significance of this organic principle uniting the individuals of a species. But while we all tacitly admit that there is this tribal or racial instinct extending throughout and binding together the elements or individuals of a species, we have yet to recognize it within ourselves as an organic principle of consciousness. We have yet to see that this societal principal, observable in the spontaneous clusters of primitive man, exerts its instinctive and biological sway equally today within the life of civilized communities.

From these considerations I have come to an altered outlook in my analytic work. I have come to the position that, with respect to the organism of man, an analysis, which presupposes the isolation and private examination of the individual elements apart from their instinctive racial congeners, leaves out of account the larger societal organism of which the individuals are a part and without which it is not possible for them to survive in their coherent unitary life. Such an isolated process of analysis, when applied to the individual of the species man, destroys the organic integrity of the organism as a group or race as truly as we destroy the integrity of the organism composing the flower when we isolate its petal or leaf in order to examine it apart from its structural continuity with the whole. The organic principle uniting the group or societal aggregate represents functional solidarity; the isolated element represents its disruption. So that the analysis of the individual element is contradictory to

⁴ P. Kropotkin, "Mutual Aid", Alfred A. Knopf, 1921

the preservation of the whole. In other words, the continuity of the group and the isolation of the individual are processes which are of their nature exclusive of one another.

In order to offset this inexorable breach as it operates within the system represented by our own psychoanalytic method, with its inevitable isolation of the single individual, the group of students with whom I have in the last years been working in association have undertaken, through a long and exacting experimental method, a process of analysis that takes account of reactions as they pertain to the species as a whole. This comprehensive scheme of analysis has the merit of leaving intact the material of our societal and instinctive group life, while at the same time it proceeds from this group background to examine analytically the social as well as the personal substitutions and repressions embodied in the arbitrary collective sum or pseudo-group represented in this selfsame societal organism.

In order to accept with scientific sympathy the analytic basis of this group technique, it is necessary that as analysts we forego, at least tentatively, certain personal and pseudo-group convictions — convictions that rest rather upon the artificial covenants of single individuals in their merely collective expressions than upon the organic bonds of their essential group biology. We need to rid ourselves of the idea that the neurotic individual is sick and that we psychopathologists are well. We need to accept a more liberal societal viewpoint that permits us to recognize without protest that the individual neurotic is in many respects not more sick than we ourselves. For we quite lose count of the circumstance that the neurotic in his private substitutions and distortions has merely failed to ingratiate himself in the collective confederacy of substitutions and distortions which you and I, with no less an eye to our self-protection, have had the cunning to subscribe to under the cover of our arbitrary, pseudo-group symptomatology. It begins to be clearer to me that only in this inclusive outlook shall we be prepared to take account of factors which otherwise are quite closed to us as social individuals thinking only of our social self-protection.

If we will make a disinterested survey of our psychoanalytic work upon its present personalistic and confidential basis of technique — a technique that concerns itself solely with the isolated element or individual— I think it must become evident that, from the point of view of science, our attitude is quite sadly in arrears. The esoteric practice of closeting a patient in our private consultation room in order to hear a story of ineptitudes and maladjustments that are due to social interpositions and substitutions common to the race and therefore identical with one's own, has, I think, nowhere its counterpart in any sphere of scientific procedure. We make no secret of the various physical anomalies to which man is subject. Cardiac and digestive disorders are willingly submitted to medical investigation. Likewise diseases due to the abuse of our organisms, such as overeating, excess of alcohol or even venereal disease, we accept quite openly in the clinic or laboratory. The reason is not far to seek. The individual no longer holds himself morally responsible for such conditions. Today he no longer regards them as providential visitations. He does not think of them as in any sense reflecting upon his personal integrity. And yet the no less organic distortions represented in our emotional and sexual inadvertences and pathologies we treat in a wholly moral and semi-religious manner, and in compliance with the attitude of mind we now hold toward these conditions we invite patients to treat us in secret conferences that are out of all relation to their medical and scientific significance.

Were we observing data presented in the chemical or biological laboratory, surely none of us would think of attempting to observe such processes in any other than in a consensual scientific attitude of approach⁵. Consensual observation is synonymous with scientific precision of technique. The noting of immediate data under conditions of observation that establish a correspondence of sense perceptions among the several observers is the acknowledged prerequisite of the laboratory criterion. And so I think we must come to see that it is only our unconscious social resistances that have all this while kept us psychoanalysts from adhering to the same basis of scientific procedure that has been the acknowledged criterion in every other sphere of scientific investigation. I think we must bring a social analysis to our own social resistances and gradually recognize that in the sphere of our mental observations we have adhered to an esoteric and imprecise basis of determination which we would not for a moment have employed regarding data pertaining to any other field of observation.⁶

In the laboratory or group work of my associates and myself, such factors as sexual fantasies, the unseemliness of family conflicts, the incongruities and deceptions that mark many of our social or pseudo-group contacts become the materials of our laboratory observation. These ineptitudes, to which not only the moralist or preacher but also the layman generally holds himself, at least by implication, superior and which the psychoanalyst concedes mention of only behind closed doors, are openly presented and observed by us in sessions composed at times of as many as twenty people. After all, the point that we psychoanalysts have missed, because unconsciously we like to miss it, is not at all that an individual is a victim of sexual conflicts but that all individuals under our present social system of repression are equally the victims of equal sexual conflicts. The reason that the nervous patient wishes to make so deep a secret of the inadvertences of his sex life is not at all because these matters are really private to him but because society says to him "do not dare to presume that these matters are not private to you". And we psychoanalysts have unconsciously fallen in with the prevalent attitude of the social system that blindly bullies the so called neurotic into inviolable self-concealment and isolation. And so we invite in him this absurdly timorous and isolated attitude toward the social system because our own social attitude is equally timorous and isolated.

I have stated what seems to me the inadequate basis of the private method of analysis. In various writings I have made as clear as I can the altered position to which I have been brought through the researches of my students and myself during recent years. It may seem to some that I have not placed sufficient emphasis upon the results of our work in the usual sense of an objective tabulation. But results in the subjective field cannot possibly have more than a theoretical meaning to those who through circumstances have felt obliged to leave entirely to others the task of securing these results. It is experimentally demonstrable that people who show most theoretical interest in the social processes which others have taken the pains to collaborate in understanding are precisely those who stand in greatest need of participating in the same group study of their own social processes. So that

⁵ "Psychiatry as an Objective Science," paper read at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of The American Psychopathological Association, Washington, D. C., May 7, 1925. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, Vo1. V, Part 4, 1925 ; and "Psychoanalytic Improvisations and the Persona1 Equation," read at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of The American Psychoanalytic Association, Richmond, Va., May 12, 1925. *THE PSYCHOANALYTIC REVIEW*, Vo1. XIII, No. 2, April, 1926.

⁶ "The Need of an Analytic Psychiatry," paper read before the joint session of The American Psychiatric and The American Psychoanalytic Associations, New York City, June 10, 1926.

I would remind the reader that the spirit of the mere onlooker at processes common to all of us as social beings is very far removed from that of the direct investigator of those processes as they may be witnessed within oneself, and that "results" must of necessity have a very different connotation according as they are perceived from within or without. There have been results —very definite results— but the results people have in mind, who merely want to look at them, are results which imply something objectively patent and conclusive, like an experiment in chemistry, for instance, with its postulate and conclusion expressed in set terms of mathematical exactness. But the course and development of man's life is a process. It is a condition of continuous flow, of uninterrupted movement. It is not a static, fixed condition. So that in the sense of a neat pharmaceutical remedy, obtainable upon application, one cannot speak of results as they pertain to the instinctive and evolutionary processes of man's growth.

The reader will readily understand, though, how much more thorough and effective is the result of an analysis that stirs to the bottom not only a patient's individual situation but also whatever pseudo-group situation a patient finds himself a social participant in.

This new process of analysis has the merit of uncovering complexes which are socially sustained under the covenant of the secret family cluster as well as those occurring in the individual neurosis. Under these conditions we have experienced again and again how much more readily the schizoid, for example, resting in his intrauterine lethargy, is roused from his dreaming inactions and learns to enter into the objective immediacy of the surrounding actualities; how much more radically the hysteric is ousted from his egocentric reveries and at length lends himself to the day's constructive demands; and, finally, with what greater despatch the cyclothymic surrenders his bi-dimensional mood-alternatives in favour of an adaptation to life that represents a symmetrical, unitary effort. The result of this more encompassing program, therefore, has assisted toward a rapid technique of restoration in our neurotic subjects and furthered the freeing not alone of individual but also of mass reactions as a whole, whether represented in families or in other unconscious community clusters.

In summary, certain of the outstanding results among those of us who have been dealing at first hand with our own immediate reactions are as follows:

1. The disclosure socially of a universally unconscious social suggestion (the condition first recognized scientifically by Freud in its individual expression under the term "transference").
2. The phyletic dissolution of the bipolar fixation comprising the mother-child relationship such as underlies this social hypnosis or transference as represented in each individual.
3. The determination of the completely vicarious and socially unconscious reaction represented in the factor of "sublimation".

In addition the following mechanisms have been observed and studied by us in their social setting:

1. The "vicious" alternative of the image-fixation underlying the composite mother-child relationship as it exists within the personality of each individual, and the bipolar impasse of this image basis.

2. The social extension of this private image basis leading to the substitution unconsciously of social images for reality "God", "love", "virtue", "together with", "marriage" and "family" regarded as "institutions".⁷
3. The social mechanism of projection as a universal manifestation and its gradual resolution into its ontogenetic source.⁸
4. The ambivalent irreconcilability of personal mood reactions within the "normal" as well as in the neurotic individual and their compulsively alternating phases of good and bad, love and hate, praise and blame, as shown in the interreaction of these moods within the social milieu.⁹
5. The psychological identity of the pseudo-sexual images now commonly divided as "homo" and "hetero-sexual", and the complete dissociation socially of both these components from man's societal or organic sex instinct.
6. The presence of distorted states existing in social clusters, such as paranoia, homosexuality, hysteria and the like, but heretofore commonly regarded in clinical isolation as disease entities peculiar to the "neurotic" individual.¹⁰
7. The experimental evidence for the principle of primary identification¹¹ of the individual with the mother and the demonstration of a preconscious mode in its phylogenetic or societal significance that is comparable to this primary subjective phase of the infant psyche hitherto posited in regard to its ontogenetic basis.

The foregoing categories, I fully realize, cannot possibly be wholly clear to the reader in the absence of a laboratory background of experience in the study of subjective social reactions. Students of conditions which are the result of objective laboratory findings would not think of attempting to reckon with the processes leading to those findings in the absence of familiarity with the objective laboratory technique requisite to their understanding. But because of the factor of social resistances involved in the study of subjective processes those who have not as yet participated in the group study of these processes, notwithstanding their lack of training and experience, too commonly hold the subjective laboratory answerable for making a clear presentation of its findings. While the inadequacy of the preceding statements may be attributable in part to my own ineptness in formulating them, certainly the responsibility for the understanding of our methods and aims cannot rest wholly with me as long as the reader lacks familiarity with the processes and technique of the laboratory from which these results have sprung.

What the scientific inquirer is really interested to learn primarily, after all, are the advantages, if any, of the group method of analysis as compared with the restricted method that limits the analysis to conferences between the physician and his individual patient.

⁷ "Social Images versus Reality," paper read at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of The American Psychopathological Association, Philadelphia, June 7, 1924. The Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology, Vol. XIX, No. 3, October-December, 1924.

⁸ "The Reabsorbed Affect and Its Elimination," paper read at the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of The American Psychopathological Association, New York City, June 11, 1926.

⁹ "Our Mass Neurosis," paper read at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of The American Psychoanalytic Association, Atlantic City, June 3, 1924. The Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 23, No. 6. June, 1926.

¹⁰ "Insanity a Social Problem." The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, Part I, July, 1926.

¹¹ "The Genesis and Meaning of Homosexuality," paper read at the Fourth Annual Meeting of The American Psychoanalytic Association, Albany, New York, May 5, 1924. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC REVIEW, Vol. IV, No. 3, July, 1917.

First it should be pointed out that the group method of analysis by no means excludes individual conferences between physician and patient. In point of fact every patient's analysis begins with such personal interviews, and he is at liberty to return to them as his need demands. But it is of significance that such interviews do not rest upon the arbitrary and pseudo-group basis that presupposes only the neurosis of the patient while the physician stands as a mere onlooker in respect to it. The patient is at once expected to look at his own disorder as part of a neurosis shared very generally by a social community in which his physician is, along with him, also an integral part. (Inclusive analysis). From this organic group basis composed thus of two persons the patient later comes into conference with three or four individuals and gradually into the larger group conferences which may be composed of as many as eight to twelve. A significant aspect of these group sessions lies in the circumstance that the patient is from the outset observer as well as observed. He becomes at once a responsible student of our common human problems, personal and social.

Besides, there is this further advantage in a patient's entering upon the group analysis. In his association with a group whether as individuals or as a whole, quite apart from the analytic sessions, he becomes part of a *societal plexus* as it were, along with people pursuing an interest common with his own. Still preserving these biological amalgamations inherent to his organism he has the opportunity to form social relationships with mature, more experienced students upon a basis that preserves throughout the day their mutually analytic aims. This means that the hysteric and paranoiac types have opportunities for social contact without being forced up against the vicarious accommodation of our socially galvanized pseudo-group adaptations. It means that the psychasthenic or precoid type of personality comes into group relationships which, while in no sense critical of his ingrowing habits of self-accommodation, do not permit him to regress into the privacy of his own introversion.

In the personal analysis the consummation upon which the analysis depends from the outset is the transference. This must be brought about and preserved at all costs. "*Keine Übertragung, keine Psychoanalyse*". In our group procedure this condition of a patient's dependence upon his physician is from the outset precluded. We know very well that the essence of the neurosis is the mother-child relationship, that this is the neurotic patient's unconscious impasse, that fixation is his unremitting quest. But, in the group, the mother-child relationship is from the very beginning submitted to consensual observation and study, and no surrogate for this relationship such as obtains in the usual technique of analysis is permitted to creep in unconsciously and defeat the real purpose of a psychoanalysis. I do not mean for a moment that there is not in each patient the tendency toward such a fixation or transference in the group situation. It is constantly present. But under conditions of group association naturally there is not the opportunity favourable to its secret lodgement and entertainment as is the case in the private work involving months of solitary confinement with the individual analyst. What would be the individual transference in a private analysis becomes neutralized in the social participation of many individuals in their common analysis...

There is further inherent in the group method the opportunity for each student to see disinterestedly the elements composing his own neurosis as they are directly reflected to him in the neurosis of another. (Mirroring). For in a group analysis the manifestations in another are repeatedly shown to be identical with one's own. (Socialization). This factor of our group method is of the greatest significance in its influence upon the central factor of resistance. I recall so well Freud's words at the

Second International Psychoanalytic Congress in Nuremberg in the year 1911. It was in reference to a statement of Jung's. And I remember Freud's saying *that the task of psychoanalysis lay not at all in the discovering of complexes but in the dissolving of resistances*. It is precisely here, it seems to me, that the group technique offers its most distinctive advantage. (Ego training in action). For the essence of resistance is undoubtedly one's sense of isolation in one's own conflicts. Where conditions allow the individual to recognize the common nature of his conflicts, naturally a sense of isolation is gradually resolved and with it the resistances which are the backbone of his neurosis.

It must be remembered that our group work is still in its very beginning. There have been in all but four years of actual group analysis. The two years prior to that consisted simply of experimental variations upon the original analytic theme and in mere tentative adaptations of it. Naturally with a method that is as young as ours and still in the process of its growth other aspects are from time to time coming to light which yet remain to be tested in their fuller implication, but the outstanding interest of our work has been the realization of what is man's commonly neglected societal or essential group basis and its challenge of our commonly accepted or pseudogroup amalgamations. From this essential group basis the careful analytic study of the manifest content of our so-called social consciousness has revealed, and is daily revealing, latent elements in which there is not less contrast with our manifest social adaptations than that which Freud first discovered to be the contrast between the dream life of the individual patient and his actual or manifest adaptation as expressed in his daily life.

I do not wish to be understood as repudiating our conventional social forms of association. They undoubtedly have their place in the process of man's conscious evolution, precisely as our primitive societies had their place in the structural or organic sphere of our evolutionary scheme. I have in mind only to repudiate the substitutive factors whereby such external social groupings are made to replace the organic feelings and instincts which unite man as an integral colony, species or race.

Persons who have become acquainted with our group method of analysis tend to think of it as an innovation in the psychoanalytic method. They seem to think that my thesis offers a departure from the original aims of Freud. I do not share their view. For this is to miss the internal significance of Freud's original direction of inquiry. In my interpretation the group method of analysis is but the application in the phylogenetic sphere of the individual analysis as first applied by Freud within the ontogenetic sphere.¹² In a just appraisal of the work of Freud one must not fail to recognize the essentially laboratory spirit of procedure that was Freud's approach to the study of consciousness. From the very beginning Freud attempted to replace personal prejudice with scientific observation. He observed what he saw in human consciousness not only as it exists in his patients but in himself and he reported faithfully what he saw. This was the application to the field of consciousness of the same precision of laboratory technique that had hitherto characterized our scientific attitude of observation in respect to the biological sciences. In brief, Freud raised the study of consciousness to the sphere of the biological sciences. The result was an outrage to social sensibilities and the social mind with all the weight of its traditional social unconscious has opposed itself so compellingly to Freud's laboratory method that its extension to include the social organism was promptly intercepted.

¹² "The Laboratory Method in Psychoanalysis," paper read before the Ninth Congress of the International Psycho-Analytical Association, Bad Homburg, Germany, 1925. American Journal of Psychiatry, Voi. V, No. 3, January, 1926.

Instead of receiving the support of a consensual group of co-workers Freud was met by an unconscious resistance that was social and pertained to the collective, pseudo-group reaction. He was alone in his position and alone he was powerless to meet this reaction in its incoordinated social form. This was inevitable. In the absence of a consensual societal group of co-workers it was not possible for Freud's work to proceed to the inclusion of the generic social unconscious. Though it was inherent in the very nature of Freud's discovery that a consensual laboratory spirit of observation is alone competent to envisage the problems of consciousness, the social resistance with which Freud was confronted from the very beginning is still unrecognized and unresolved within our psychoanalytic ranks.

It is the position of my associates and myself, working as a group, that the pseudo-group prejudices that are the unconscious basis of our social resistance will not be resolved until we have recognized that they are as definitely unconscious a manifestation on the part of the social mind as the individual resistances that are met in the individual analysis. The condition which our group investigations have led us to emphasize is that this resistance within the social mind can no more be resolved in the absence of a social analysis than in the absence of an analysis it is possible to resolve the private resistances of the individual patient.¹³ In any other recourse we become Freud's followers merely in the sense of collective, arbitrary, pseudo-group participants, and the spirit of the discoverer and of the laboratory becomes submerged under the mass weight of an imitative or competitive social unconscious. Far from being a departure from the essential significance of Freud's basic discoveries the results that are now issuing from our group analysis are simply the results which with Freud were temporarily intercepted through an absence of a consensual collaboration on the part of his social congeners.

The sum of our findings resolves itself into this. The prevailing view that man is an individual is one which the psychopathologist needs bring into serious question. Man is not an individual. He is a societal organism. Our individual analyses based upon differentiations, which along with others of our kind we have assumed to rest upon legitimate scientific ground, rest in fact upon very transient social artifices and lack the support of a true biological basis. Man's analysis as an element is his isolation as an element. And his isolation is an essential affront to an organic group principle of consciousness.

¹³ Just as no one has ever yet really understood the significance of the individual analysis except as he himself entered upon the individual analysis, so no one will by any process understand the group analysis except as he himself enters upon it. From the first Freud emphasized the futility of knowledge about or in regard to psychoanalysis. Knowledge of psychoanalysis is not an intellectual process. Resistances which are the barrier to an understanding of psychoanalysis do not reside in the intellect. Only as one submits one's own feeling, personal or social, to the process of analysis, does one truly come into an understanding of psychoanalysis in the only true sense of understanding—namely, into an internal acceptance of the significance of man's unconscious processes.