Group Analysis

On Analysing Large Groups
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What is This?

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The large group can ideally be a transitional space between the public arena of an institution and the private intimacy of the individual. The large group conductor should be able to help the group to serve this purpose. This article briefly refers to some aspects of the common ground group analysis and psychoanalysis share. It is however not about the differences between the two.

This article discusses the level of anxiety and the respective different transference levels in the large group. Several suggestions are made in order to help the group conductor in dealing with his own anxieties and those of the group in regard to these emotions. 'Negative capability' is seen as a prerequisite to a fully working group analytic large group.

Reference is made in particular to institutional aspects of large groups.

Key words: individual and group analysis, large groups, anxiety in large groups, negative capability, negative transference/ countertransference, institutional rivalry

Preface

Understanding one's fear might be a helpful guidance to conduct group analytic large groups. This refers to fears of large groupings in general and to fears of any specific group in particular. Something described by Gerhard Wilke is relevant here, who states that modesty and knowledge of one's own inadequacy are key words for the conducting of

large groups. He continues, that the limited possibilities of the group conductor are not a problem requiring solution, but are part of an existential paradox, a paradox he has to live and cope with. The conductor must be genuine and able to relate to others; and he has to help the group to become a safe maternal environment (Wilke, 2007: 215)[1].

How can the large group convenor survive emotionally and cope with his anxieties stemming from very different sources? First of all, how can he not only survive, but understand his anxieties and relate them to the group's anxieties? Can he find a common language? Can he feel free enough to free-associate *and* to keep a good balanced, open-minded attentiveness? How can he be 'thinking (whilst) under fire' (Bion, 1982: 1)?

Introduction

No other analytic group is in structure as similar to society as the large group. The large group can be considered as a transitional space between inside and outside, between individual and society, a transitional space for each individual group member. In this transitional space the individual can find out new things about himself, as well as about his relationship to society in general and to this social group—the present large group in particular.

Regarding the work of Patrick de Maré, Lionel Kreeger writes:

> In their book *Koinona: From Hate Through Dialogue, to Culture in the Large Group* (1991) de Maré and his colleagues widen their vision of the large group approach to a micro-culture of society, a watershed between the world and the personal individual experiential mind, which offers the opportunity to humanize both the individual and society concurrently. The process of dialogue constitutes a transformational change from mindlessness to understanding. Hate gives way to the emergence of gratitude. (Kreeger, 2009: 284[2])

Some Common Aspects of Group Analysis and Psychoanalysis

These remarks are valid, I think, for the large group as well as for psychoanalysis, the smallest possible analytic group consisting of two people. Joining another person in order to disclose intimate feelings is a move forward, which many people never dare to make[3]. The loneliness of patients in individual analysis is often due to numerous anxieties regarding people they meet and anxieties regarding the equilibrium

of the individual ego and self, and of the internalized object relations. Thus, patients in 'individual' analysis approach a micro-culture of society not only in the sense of the two-persons-group, but also in the sense of opening up about their fantasies about society—often for the first time in their life. Anxiety must be overcome also in individual analysis—and I quote again—'a watershed between the world and the personal individual experiential mind (ibid).'

Since psychoanalysis nowadays tends to analyse the patient's and analyst's unconscious two-person-relationship, psychoanalysis is *sensu strictu* not individual but group analysis, as it is about the unconscious acting and associating of both partners of the analysis. Psychoanalytic theory and practice have become intersubjective. We could ask, if there is any difference between individual analysis and group analysis apart from the number of participants? I would think there is, but I will not further discuss this question, as in my view it requires further consideration[4]. For the purposes of this paper it seems important to maintain that individual and group analyses have a great deal in common[5]: both address the unconscious and they are about triangulation (apart from many other aspects[6]).

In his article *Building Bridges between Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis in Theory and Clinical Practice* (2009), Hopper writes: '. . . whereas psychoanalysis does not appreciate the sociality of human nature, group analysis without psychoanalysis is an empty glove' (Hopper, 2009: 407–8). Regarding psychoanalysis, my experience as an individual and group analyst differs from Hopper's position. Working in individual analysis, I have the group in mind, or more precisely the several groups the patient is actually dealing with consciously, and first and foremost unconsciously. I am thinking about the group fantasy the patient is part of (and other group fantasies the patient and myself are part of). Man develops his identity and any neurosis in a group, for instance in his family. Beyond that, patients are 'socialized', integrated into their peer groups and working groups, and are often liked more by their families, when being in individual analysis. Other patients may decide to give up an unhealthy social group that does not suit their purposes any longer. Some theoreticians may well deny the socializing effects of psychoanalysis, but in my experience they are obvious. And through the notion of triangulation the every-day experience of patients is theoretically well-founded and explained.

However, I do agree with the main part of Hopper's assertion, that ' . . . group analysis without psychoanalysis is an empty glove', in the

sense that psychoanalysis and group analysis deal with the same sub-ject, i.e. the unconscious. This has to be explained in more detail. In my view group analytic authors often overemphasize the social and sociological aspects of the group (and especially of the large group), but many of them do not emphasize enough the useful development in psychoanalysis over the last decades. It is deplorable that *bridges* seem to be necessary. What about the valley under the bridge—or the river? In this article I wish to delineate some aspects of the common ground.

Earl Hopper describes the core perspective of group analysis, and the core perspective of psychoanalysis. He refers on the one hand to Freud and on the other to the Kleinian school, as contemporary Kleinian authors (especially John Steiner) offer the best evaluated psychoanalytic theory and 'technique'[7]. Hopper writes 'Within this Kleinian school . . . all pathology is located in the patient' (Hopper, 2009: 417). And with regard to the every day psychoanalytic work of London Kleinians he observes that '. . . the only Kleinian analysts who have pathological countertransference responses to their diffi-cult patients are young and inexperienced'. Prepared by this descrip-tion Hopper can conclude: '. . . the Kleinian project . . . focused . . . on the conceptualization of the original [Freudian] ego and its objects, and their many machinations' (Hopper, 2009: 417).

My reading of Steiner and many other Kleinians, and my personal experience in therapy and supervision, differ from Hopper's view. The concept of projective identification *requires* the pathology and the pathological feeling and *behaving (acting) of the analyst*, may he/she be experienced or not, and it is difficult to handle. But even the very experienced analyst has to be entangled *unconsciously* in order to be able to understand with the help of intervision (mutual/peer supervision) or supervision. It is only then that the analyst may be able to disentangle himself. Who is not entangled cannot play a role and cannot help the patient to disentangle him or herself. Now the question is—are these individual processes or group processes? Can I deal with projective identification *in groups* without considering the new psychoanalytic findings concerning, for example, psychic retreats? Yes, I can, but then I have to develop another language for the same very difficult Daedalean intrapsychic and interpersonal (group) phenomena Kleinian psychoanalysts depict. Hence, I agree with Hopper's statement of an empty glove. But instead of building bridges I suggest to explore the common ground.

Confidentiality

How can we report on large groups? Do we report about the outer event or the inner processes? We obviously anonymize our notes in individual therapy. The same is true for small groups. With regard to the large group, however, we could hold that due to the internal 'publicness' during session—a wide publicness compared to all other analytic settings—a delimitation against outer publicness is almost superfluous. But, to carry on my argument, I believe, that the great deal of similarities which analyses share independently from the number of participants, confidentiality about any content of large groups is also a necessity. Participants should be able to rely on this. The more group members feel secure, the more unperturbed development can take place.

I discussed thoughts on the public function of large group sessions on another occasion[8]. Following the publication of a report of a large group within the profession, I ended up feeling that my inner freedom had been restricted retrospectively. I also noticed that following an ambiguous attitude towards the publicness of a concrete large group, successive sessions were in danger of becoming emotionally flat and meaningless. This could in fact be one possible source of boredom in large group sessions.

Violations of confidentiality are to be expected in any group, and even more so in large groups. In my experience this occurs when the group, subgroups or individuals cannot feel contained by a holding environment. An episode may exemplify this. A group patient accused 'a member of the group' for having 'anonymously told the district attorney' that her father had abused her. (She herself had told the group her fantasies about being abused a few sessions previously.) After some discussion I realized, that the only group member who could have done this was herself. This remark eventually removed her (and the group's) tension. Later on we were able to understand her fantasy of abuse being driven by hers as well as the group's feeling of insecurity.

The helplessness in controlling what group members talk about inside and outside the group has to be recognized, as well as possible limits of confidentiality in a particular situation. At the same time, openly addressing border violations helps the group to regain a status of confidentiality. In large groups most people feel the need to be more thoughtful about how they present themselves to the group than they do in small groups. On the other hand, people in large groups often

disclose themselves involuntarily without being hurt by the group afterwards. Like all agreements in analytic settings, confidentiality has to be brought to fruition by carefully addressing its violations.

Framework

Just like the medium sized and the small group, the large group has, no doubt, a framework, which should be respected. The rules of the time frame and the rule of free association, for example, are also valid in the large group. The more stable the framework, the more freely all participants can express themselves and the surer they can be that, after a large group session, they will not be confronted by other members or even by strangers with possibly intimate details that have their own meaning within the large group[9]. Another example for taking care of the large group's framework is the occurrence of subgroups spontaneously during the break between large group sessions. The question arises as to whether or not we can understand these groups, as part of the holding mechanism of the large group. For example, the convenor has to examine whether the *emotional* content of those subgroups is expressed in the beginning of the following large group session. In my experience those questions of possible boundary violations have to be decided as the case arises.

Shaked (Shaked, 2003 a: 5) maintains that the larger a group, the greater the danger that free association would shift to free discussion[10]. This is quite true, albeit on a rather superficial level. The individual tends to present his contribution to the large group more as a contribution to a discussion, and also as a conscious, rational statement, than as an unconscious association. Personally, I have made positive experiences with taking *all* contributions to be involuntary associations, also in the large group. This helps to understand the different transference levels and identifications in the large group (see below).

A further element of a well working large group is its particular sense of situation comedy. This is due to the atmosphere of alertness and occasional excitement resulting from the simultaneity of the multiple available transferences and identifications. The difference to smaller groups, where often there is more tension, is also apparent here. (At the other end of the range, in individual analysis situation comedy often is not perceived or not addressed due to shame conflicts.) At the same time, the members of the large group often get carried away to disclose intimate infantile desires, which are shamefully kept

secret in the small group. Each individual, especially the conductor, is moreover confronted with ideas of grandeur and power fantasies, but also with feelings of inferiority. I will refer to the raised anxiety level resulting from this later.

The Large Group as a Transitional Space

Is the large group a transitional space in a similar way to the psycho-analytic session and the small group? And if so: How can the large group analyst help the large group to be an appropriate transitional space so that its members benefit from the intimacy necessary to continue emotional growth?

I think that the large group *can* be a transitional space just as the other settings mentioned. A preliminary condition for this in any analytic setting is to concentrate on the manifestations of the unconscious—regardless of the respective 'field' in which the analysis takes place. In large groups running in institutions it is tempting to engage oneself primarily in the exploration of the institution's organization. However, such an exercise is hardly necessary and is often exaggerated. Instead, I experience it as useful to study together with the group the emotional condition it is suffering from, and at the same time to explore the different contributions the individual members make to continue this suffering.

Conducting a large group therefore requires an enormous amount of integration. Especially in the very beginning of a large group process the conductor is spotlighted as the individual who serves as the focal point in a sea of uncertainty. The group conductor is on the one hand never a group member like other group members, on the other hand he is an equivalent part of the group matrix and in this respect he is a group member as any other. On top of that he must, however, fulfil all the tasks of a group conductor. I will explain this in more detail below.

Transference Analysis

The transferences in the large group are ubiquitous and can certainly not be fully established within the session. Another factor is that there are people who find large groups difficult and others who find them easier to deal with. Both of them may draw very different transferences to themselves. In extreme cases, members can be rejected, while others may become opinion leaders who can divide the group.

These phenomena are well known from small groups, but they are more unsettling in the large group, because of the simultaneity and complexity of the available transferences.

Occasionally large groups feel close to chaos. In such moments individual interpretations are out of place in a large group. With individual interpretations one might isolate individuals, provoke splitting mechanisms, and a dynamic might develop that would be even less understandable and palpable in a large group than in smaller groups. It is best to use the metaphorical language of the particular large group because this makes obvious what the whole group[11] is referring to. If, for example, one participant tells a fairy tale and another one comments on the group situation, we can, ideally, make up a fairytale about the group.

Anxiety in the Large Group—Negative Capability
The anxiety level can be much higher in the large group than in the small group. Transference interpretations that could reduce the anxiety level are much more difficult in the large group because it might be oversimplifying to reduce the often very complex situation by interpreting it. For in the large group as well as in the small group, everybody can transfer or receive transferences, and anybody can interpret. These considerations are relevant for each member at any time, whether or not he is speaking at that moment. It is therefore not astonishing that members leave a large group session or—as happens even more frequently—go into 'inner emigration' or hide or will not attend any more sessions. They find the multiple transference pressure too much.

These open or hidden drop outs must not be confused, however, with those who drop out because a large group has become simply boring as all members and the convenor consciously and/or unconsciously agreed to keep the discussion at a superficial level. In such situations, the anxiety level is kept down for psycho-dynamic and group dynamic reasons so that nothing else can happen. This method of reducing anxiety levels by keeping the conversation shallow can be observed particularly well in large groups. Hence, if an individual participant is bored, this can on the one hand be an expression of the anxiety, which the particular group as a whole might well be able to cope with, but which is too much for the individual. On the other hand, being bored can be the expression of a lacking stability and resignation of the large group as a whole.

Let us return to the large group that can cope with more anxiety, that can hazard a higher level of uncertainty, of curiosity, and where therefore more can be discovered and more can happen. The group as a whole, and the individual members of such a group have to be able to 'contain' more anxiety. The term 'contain' is derived from the Latin— 'continere'—and means to hold something within certain boundaries; or to have the capability of holding something, giving something room, space, potential, capacity. This includes in particular the so-called negative capability that has been described by the poet Keats[12]. Sometimes all group members are affected at once. But often it is only subgroups or individuals, and the ones who are affected can change quickly. Bion would say that the positions of container and contained alternate quickly, within the individual as well as between individuals. On top of that, the extent of integration of container/contained constantly alternates with states of disintegration[13]. The group members, and the conductor in particular, alternate in holding the group ('container'). Participants or conductor introduce a content, a content that wants to be contained, or they feel persecuted ('paranoid-schizoid position'), even disintegrated. Insight can be gained because of the pattern of interaction. Establishing connections is the central principle in the development of thinking. In containment, maternal (receiving) as well as paternal (observing and connecting) functions are at work (Staehle, 2008: 120).

The Lonesome Position of the Large Group Conductor
I would like to share my observations regarding the anxiety in the large group, and in particular the anxiety of the large group conductor. His anxiety can become extreme. In him the positions of container and contained constantly alternate. As he goes through disintegrated and paranoid-schizoid states, he might find it difficult to return to the depressive position. The group conductor, also of the large group, is expected to be able to handle his anxiety. He has to provide what Foulkes calls 'dynamic administration': maintaining the setting (not only in a formal sense), dealing with border violations. He has to bring together, translate, unite, analyse resistance, and interpret. But above all he has to take hold of the group's *unconscious* fantasies—under often very complex conditions.

A particular problem in this setting is the loneliness of the large group conductor. The large group conductor is not able to share the inner processes of the large group with one of the participants as in a

supervision or intervision situation. He has no closed meetings with other experienced colleagues who are not directly involved in the large group, unless he arranged this beforehand. It is a very frequent reaction for large group conductors to look after the setting in an 'over-reactive' way. Large group conductors often believe that containment is solely their responsibility and are hence unable to sufficiently trust in the containment of the large group itself. In these cases the large group conductors find it particularly difficult to see themselves as part of the process. They think they alone are in charge while they really only have what Wilke would call 'temporary leadership' (Wilke, 2007: 215). The group conductor is also somebody who often enough does not understand anything, who interprets and is interpreted, who is teacher and learner. (The same is true if two or more conductors are working together.)

Countertransference as a Guideline

Being a large group analyst means in my view to analyse the transference. Sociological, institutional and other expertises are secondary. They are derivative and tend to sidetrack the group analyst. Sitting in a large group as analyst requires focusing on the transference at the different levels mentioned above: it requires focusing on one's own countertransference and the quality of anxiety the group is actually dealing with. I have to observe/to feel the delicate and tender feelings the group is actually expressing or avoiding. If I am able to do so I can give a 'running commentary' on what is going on. This running commentary does not have to be verbalized at all times. But the analyst speaking frankly about delicate and tender issues frees the group. The group will benefit, will be grateful, and will be encouraged to do likewise. To follow the development of the group's anxiety is the best guideline to understand the unconscious meanings that await analysis.

In the development of concepts regarding the analytic relationship, the notion of transference was prior to the notion of countertransference. Both notions initially were seen as obstructive barriers or hindrances to analysis. Later on each of them was seen as an indispensable resource to analysing.

Furthermore, the notion of countertransference has to be divided (a) into countertransference the (group) analyst feels unconsciously towards the group as a whole or to member(s) of the group, caused by his personal neurosis, and (b) into countertransference caused by his

reaction to the transference of the group. In a given situation the threshold of definition is hard to identify. We often cannot precisely define what is going on. Additionally we are subjected to projective identificatory mechanisms. If we work through a given group session in a supervision or intervision situation we are lucky to get some clarity by hindsight. But as the unconscious never is conscious, we have to settle for generating the best possible hypothesis. By all means, transference and countertransference are reciprocal processes. It seems to me that the most practical approach is to describe a group situation depicting each of the notions according to the occurrence in my mind while working through what I feel.

Case Studies—Short Term Large Groups

As a next step I will outline two examples from large groups in which I participated. The examples are meant to illustrate the lonely and desperate situation in which a large group conductor can find himself and how necessary it is for him in his isolated state to gain clarity about the whole situation. The examples also show how one can easily lose oneself in details.

In my attempt to characterize any group situation group-analytically I have—for reasons of confidentiality—to disguise the 'outer reality' and to precisely portray the 'inner reality' of the particular group at the given time. The 'outer reality' must be described in a general manner so as to be uninformative whilst the 'inner reality' has to be described explicitly in order to clearly suggest at least one transference line. In my second example I concentrate on the role of the conductor between the large group sessions and the reaction of the group during the following sessions, while in the first example I concentrate on a hidden, helpful team that apparently reflects the group process and take steps to improve the group situation. In a different way, both examples deal with the loneliness of the large group conductor.

Example 1

During a conference, a very difficult situation arose at the beginning of the first of three large group sessions. I assumed this was due to the fact that the group was taking place in a much too small (physical) space. I suppose this also reflected the inner emotional space of the group. The next session took place in a new room which was, however, not very practical, and a second conductor joined the group at this stage. This session turned out to be very difficult too. In the new

room people could not hear each other. Also, participants were consciously not clear about the setting, and unconsciously (or preconsciously?) they were not clear about the emotional stability of the group's container (transference relationship to the institutional framework, see below). People did not dare to ask questions to clarify this. The team of conductors working in the background reacted by sending a further, third conductor to the third session. With this procedure it was possible to contain the tension to a large extent.

A change of setting—in this case sending in an additional conductor—is always problematic. In this example, however, it was a solution, which the conductor team implemented creatively and successfully. They concentrated on giving participants the possibility to express themselves. Members partially did this, but it was impossible to join the contributions in a dialectic of feelings, that is to triangulate or socialize the expressed feelings. In my view this was due to the lack of clarity about the institutional context and the fear of addressing the transference onto the institution and onto the conductors.

In this example, it was just possible by changing the setting, to contain the situation so that the anxiety could be tolerated to a certain extent. The members of this large group clearly understood—although it was never expressed explicitly—that the stressed, originally single large group conductor could rely on a crew that stood ready to come in and support him energetically and creatively, even by stepping in personally, if that should become necessary. The two extra group conductors also added interpretations that were very appropriate in some way. The three conductors—obviously together with the colleagues in the background—were a good team. The conductor was not left alone with the task. None of the three conductors, however, referred in any of the three sessions to the overall context of the large group.

This leads to the conclusion that the original first group conductor, and also that of the team to which he belonged, may well have been at least in part due to a fear of the group and the conscious or unconscious taboo of the (transference) relationship analysis. This taboo seems to be quite common in large groups that are conducted according to the Tavistock-model, as was the case of the conductors in this example. Thus it is not surprising that the transference onto the institution was not addressed, as opposed to the individual and subgroup suffering.

This example, and the following one, show how difficult it sometimes is for large group conductors to manage their anxiety.

Example 2

A large group conductor complained to group members during the breaks between the (altogether five) group sessions about how persecutory the group was. Everyone felt sorry for this large group conductor with the result that, as far as I could observe, most people spared him and themselves and there was no genuine dynamic left in the large group. It became boring and somewhat irrelevant.

The large group analyst in this example could obviously neither resort to an 'outer' crew—helpful colleagues as in the other case—nor to an 'inner' crew. 'Inner crew' here means a sufficient inner thinking space of the large group conductor. This means, for example, developing and working through a fantasy about the large group before the large group sessions. Surely, none of the members of this large group resented the conductor's behaviour[14].

In contrast, while this was never expressed, all participants respected the group conductor's anxiety. Yet, the number of participants dwindled from session to session. The growing lack of interest in further clarification was probably also due to transference wishes which had been disappointed.

Having a greater number of sessions (five instead of three as in the first example) triggers off more expectations with regard to transference and self-experience opportunities, which in turn means that the group can also be more disappointing. All this is further increased when the outer and inner frameworks are unfavourable. In my view, the most unfavourable conditions in this case are: (a) no helpful intervision/supervision through colleagues who are not taking part in the large group, which leads to the conductor's 'acting' outside sessions; (b) no crew that can come to his assistance; (c) no sufficient inner thinking space of conductor and large group.

The Large Group and Its Institutional Context

Conducting large groups therefore requires a very careful transference relationship analysis firstly with regard to the group ('the group in the mind') and secondly to the (organizational and institutional) framework of this particular large group. When the institutional framework becomes more significant, the larger the group is and cannot be valued highly enough. Aspects of institutional dynamics play a prominent part, because any group, including the large group, always strives to become an institution in itself. This means it wants to continue existing, be permanent rather than transient. On the other

hand, the setting and a particular institution are always a given, especially the institution that organizes the large group. The institutionalizing tendency of a particular large group often conflicts with the institution that organizes it. I call this phenomenon institutional rivalry: which is the better institution? Triest describes this rivalry in hierarchical terms: 'The large group will always threaten the setting imposed upon it by the organization, although it is naturally dependent upon that setting for its existence.' (Triest, 2003: 167).

In organizational consultancy the large group is often experienced as more helpful than the conventional committees. This can be a cause of rivalry. The conductor of the large group, however, should be aware of the danger of being drawn into this rivalry without analysing the transference.

In my experience, the group analyst is sufficiently prepared for the complex situation if, inwardly, he has gained clarity about the possibly multiple transferences. In his own inner space the large group conductor needs to concentrate on the overall framework of the event, especially before and between sessions. His inner thinking space should then be adequately equipped for the group.

Case Study—Long Term Large Group in an Institution
Example

For five years I had been running a twice-yearly large group in an institutional setting. The institution had asked me for large group analytic self experience as they were undergoing a developmental crisis. Our group sessions used to take place during one day in spring and autumn. In the beginning, the large group was in doubt as to the usefulness of working in a large group in order to achieve conscious working issues. The first sessions were mostly experienced as an extraordinary new opportunity to have a very unorthodox communication together.

Concerning the transference analysis it was extremely useful for me to differentiate three aspects: the transference of the group onto myself, onto the institution, and onto the large group as a new containing object.

1.The transference onto the conductor can be described in the beginning as wondering about the ideas of this strange person trying to help the institution by just tuning into the group's feelings and ideas. In turn, my countertransference at that time is about unease and feeling a bit like an alien. This helps me to perceive the feelings of

alienation the group is experiencing regarding the future of the institution and the personal future of each of the members. During the work the transference towards me changes continuously.

The next step can be described mainly as an unconscious idealization of the person of 'me' and of the method I apply. (Accordingly, the absent members of the institution at that time arguably represent the transference to the contrary, the devaluation of the conductor and the method.) Once the idealization can be worked through—I myself experience this at the time as being overburdened and overwhelmed—the next step develops: the group appears to join me and my method and we seemingly work like a pure working group, not at all like a basic assumption group. Progress in the institutional as well as in the individual work is effectively made. I feel seduced at this time to be 'a brother/sister' to the group. In my hypothesis, the unconscious fantasy following this is that of the horde being able to supersede the Oedipal conflict. In analytic terms: the group denies the separation anxiety accompanying its fruitful development. During that time the every day development of the institution and its members decelerates and feelings of being superfluous (the group, the conductor, even the institution) emerge on all sides. At the same time, the more autonomous development of the group is susceptible to cause an anxiety of growing and separating, since even the fantasy of separation may trigger anxiety.

2. The transference onto the institution could be described in the beginning mainly as the transference onto a helpless mother without a husband/father, being able to triangulate. The former 'father' of the institution seemed to be aged, infirm, and maybe not thoroughly honest any more. In the past he had been a widely respected and threatening person.

The transference onto the institution changes very slowly compared with the changing of the transference onto the conductor of the group. According to my observation the first step is to 'discharge' the institution from this transference. The unconscious and conscious expectations diminish step by step. The idealization of the past and the interrelated devaluation of the past and the present can be worked through and mourned. New ideas come to surface and are initially regarded with suspicion. New members of the institution take responsible positions, members with ideas, in contrary to the rather caring members who led the institution previously.

3. The transference onto the group as a containing object can be described in the beginning as childlike curiosity about how these meetings can be helpful in any way. The transference in this respect

changes slowly to the current situation of the large group being a valuable working instrument for tuning in to ill-being, as well as the wellbeing of the institution. Numerous intermediate steps can be described, as there is fear of anonymous power relating to the unpredictable processes and emerging feelings of hatred, animosity, envy, and rivalry, evoked by the free association and free discussion method[15].

One can imagine the three transference aspects onto the conductor, onto the institution, and onto the large group as a new containing object being interrelated in a very complex way. Moreover, one can describe other transference aspects, for example the transference to neighbour institutions.

In group analysis we often find multiple transference aspects that could be interpreted. In a given situation one has to decide about the emotional priority of the transference aspects[16] disregarding or postponing aspects of less importance. After all, we tend to consciously think certain aspects to be less important, and may have to correct ourselves later on. Adhering to a transparent interpreting of the three transference levels mentioned in an institutional large group encourages the group to interpret side aspects of the transference in an autonomous way.

All three aspects having led to the current situation of the group, I would like to highlight the interrelatedness of the transference facets. First, I hypothesize the transference onto the conductor as horde against the Oedipal 'No'. Second, the transference to the institution addresses the uncertainty about the latter's ability to support its members' new ideas, and to integrate new members in responsible positions. Third, the transference onto the large group as a containing object appears as an idealization of its character as a working group.

In my interventions I have to respect all these aspects. For example, I could say in a way we are a very successful group in a flourishing institution and we tend to overestimate our possibilities. On the other hand, we might also underestimate our possibilities for security reasons, because we feel a bit 'manic'. We really do not know if there is any limitation to our possibilities. Theoretically, we do know all of this, but we still are not sure where to find our limits. In some respects our situation is more hazardous than during the previous years because we feel more engaged in feeling genuinely safe and secure. We do not know the point, the reality says 'no' to us. And *if* we should reach this point, we do not know if we can accept it. And if we respect the 'no' we may be likely to give up our efforts. The fear of regression, and at

the same time, the desire to regress are to be contained by the group and its conductor.

The unconscious fantasy of the group on the Oedipal level may be the one of an Oedipal couple with the convenor being married to the father/mother. The group tends to ignore me as the conductor being married with the group analytic method—me being in a fruitful relationship with the group analytic method, and not primarily with the group. The group might tend to ignore the triangulation.

Discriminating very precisely these three transference levels helps me to understand the group dynamic. 'Tuning in' to the atmosphere of recalling the 'glorious' past and to concerns about the future allows any later temptation to supersede the Oedipal conflict to be worked through.

Centring on the different transferences opens up new conceptions for the future. Participants of the large group and those who do not attend all sessions are free to disentangle from very complex subliminal behaviour patterns in an institution.

In the present example this fact was never verbalized. Participants were seen as 'representatives' of the institution[17], representatives who had to work through the development to which the institution had been subjected between the sessions. I never asked for any special report on a given topic except if I did not understand the *emotional* meaning of it.

I also have to underline that I have had no special meetings with the board or any other body of the institution. All necessary arrangements were made by short phone calls or e-mail. All arrangements were transparent for the group members.

To trust in the large group and to trust in the large group analyst is only possible if the large group conductor avoids any rejection of negative transferences onto himself and onto the group. On top of that, he has to deal insouciantly with the negative transference onto the institution (initially: '*devil may care*', but afterwards: 'we care very thoroughly since we understand what is going on'). This is only possible through the analysis of unconscious emotions, which avoids embarrassing the group and enables it to think and develop freely.

Many conductors emphasize their good experiences in large groups. And they assume that young colleagues are reluctant to start group work as their beginners' anxiety may be increased by the unpredictable demands of authority and leadership, especially in the large group. In his presentation *Authority and Revolt: The Challenges of Group Leadership* (2009), M. Nitsun observes regarding the small group:

> I doubt whether these anxieties in the conductor are ever fully resolved. While most group analysts probably can live with the uncertainty, I suspect that others cannot and this may account for the fact that some group analysts do not run groups once they have qualified. (Nitsun, 2009: 331)

I agree with this observation, it fits well with the observation I made in my training institute. And it is even more true for large group conducting. In my view, one reason for this is a sort of *splitting* in the idea of the large group. On the one hand, the large group is seen as the possible fulfilling of *Koinonia* (a very constructive working together, see my Introduction, de Maré et al., 1991), while on the other hand, the large group can be seen as a destructive mass, a horde, a mob.

This splitting cannot be resolved by emphasizing the creative potential of the large group. On the contrary, anxieties have to be addressed by the conductor. The conductor should not relate to the hope of participants, instead he should rely on participants' fears of being in the large group and their fears about getting gutted by the large group.

Being in the large group, I therefore analyse very carefully my countertransference. I explore *any impulse to switch from an associative into another mode of discussion*, for example conscious-targeted discursive speaking. By 'conscious-targeted discursive speaking', I try to describe a reasonably managed discussion about any obvious concerns, such as sociological or gender differences in the group. This often conceals subliminal, free-floating discussions/associations of preconscious/unconscious matters. For example, sociological and gender differences are omnipresent, you find them in any group at any time in one way or another. Speaking about such 'objective' matters is a very popular defence mechanism. Often discussing these well-known matters means a defence against the uncertainty: one never knows what we will find today in the here and now of the actual group.

Relying on the actually existing anxieties shortens the way to the emotional development of the group. Taking care of the negative transference can act as a spur to development and lessen the need for a group to develop a 'false self'.

Conclusion

In the interest of the process and the development of the individual as well as of the large group as a whole, it is as a matter of principle

desirable that every conflict can be expressed and understood *within* the group. In order to enable and promote the emotional growth of the large group, confidentiality in its content is a necessary prerequisite to be re-established at any time. The conductor's guiding principle in this process should be his countertransference. By attempting to discover his conscious and unconscious fears, the large group can develop as 'a watershed between the world and the personal individual experiential mind, which offers the opportunity to humanize both the individual and society concurrently' (Kreeger, 2009: 284).

Although it might sometimes appear even hopeless, it is possible to address real emergencies in a large group. A prerequisite is maintaining 'negative capability'. Just like a small or medium-sized group, a large group can also be an excellent intermediary (transitional) thinking space from which everyone can benefit. In order to help the group to make use of this space, the conductor must face the transferences and identifications without prejudice, especially the negative transferences onto the group, onto the institution that organizes the large group, and onto himself. He must do so, when preparing for the large group as well as during sessions. He will then be able to help generate a rich and creative transitional space.

Notes

1. From a deeper point of view, Shaked (Shaked, 2003 b: 158) puts attention to the archaic longing of the group members, the yearning for the Great Mother.
2. See Winnicott (1949).
3. These states are described for example by John Steiner in his book *Psychic Retreats* (1992).
4. See Hopper (2009).
5. For example, the use by L. Kreeger of material from *individual* psychoanalysis for his lecture in the IGA General Course on transference/countertransference in group analysis (Kreeger 1992: 397) has remained unquestioned.
6. From the psychoanalytic viewpoint, the confrontation with the stranger and the unknown offers another chance: namely to acquire an understanding of the 'stranger in us', that is, of the unconscious (Shaked, 2003 b: 157).
7. Regarding the set of problems caused by misunderstandable or mistranslated terms (like 'technique'), See Bettelheim (1983).
8. Knott (2009).
9. It is important to be aware of the fact that all insights obtained during a large group session are primarily valid in this special group at the given time.

Using those insights for other purposes (like subgroup or individual deduction) has to be done reticently.

10. This refers to conscious-targeted discursive speaking.
11. See Hinshelwood, 2007: 344.
12. Keats' expresses his theory of 'negative capability' in 1817 in a letter to George and Thomas Keats: 'I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' Horace Elisha Scudder (ed.), *The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats*. Boston, Riverside Press, 1899, p. 277 (available on books.google.com).
13. Steinar, 1987.
14. This violation of the group's border during the breaks can be understood as a misuse of the group as a container by the conductor.
15. See the article of Lionel Kreeger: *Envy Preemption in Small and Large Groups* (1992).
16. According to Grotstein (2009) the analyst should interpret not the deepest anxiety but the actually most prevalent anxiety.
17. The attendance to the large group was voluntary and varied depending on the development.

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