

EGATIN
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"Between Mission and Profession."
Do we know what values we convey in Group Analytic Trainings?"

**The Citizen in The Group and The Group in The Citizen:
Training and human values in group analysis**

John Schlapobersky, Institute of Group Analysis, London

Introduction

I wish to extend my thanks to Lukasz Dobromirski and Joanna Skowronska of the Local Organising Committee, and to Jutta Gliem, Chairperson of EGATIN's Management Committee, for the invitation you have extended for this contribution. It is an especially poignant invitation for me because I was one of EGATIN's founding members. Warsaw was one of the cities in which we held some of our initial meetings and finally, by October 1988, our Constitution and Articles of Association were ready to be adopted at the first formal Delegates Meeting at the IGA in Heidelberg where I passed on the role of Secretary to my friend and colleague Bryan Boswood who is sadly no longer with us. But it is very heartening to be attending this occasion together with Werner Knauss and Jerzy Pawlik with whom those early committee days were shared. Werner became our first Chairperson and Jerzy, it is gratifying to be in your home city once more and to enjoy the hospitality of the training institute you helped to found.

In posing the important questions arising out of our topic for this meeting – do we know what values we convey in group analytic training – I have chosen to speak on the citizen in the group, and the group in the citizen. I will explore these subjects through the biographies and values of two remarkable figures with corresponding lifespans: S.H. Foulkes and Charlie Chaplin.

Our work can at times seem tedious, comprised of seemingly obsessional detail in the formalities of our training protocols. But the purposes to which we commit ourselves in programmes of training have deep and enduring benefits for the societies in which they are constituted. The membership considerations for EGATIN, based on agencies rather than individuals, and the membership criteria - Introductory, Intermediate and Qualifying - continue to hold good and provide a lasting framework that brings you all here today. The prolonged debates that took place in the committee as we met in so many cities during the formative years, are now a matter of history. Taking account of the committed professionals attending this meeting now, and these informative proceedings, it looks like we got the beginning right.

What we could not have foreseen is quite how dangerous the world around us was to become which is why a return to questions about basic values is so timely. In the 1980's, we set out training

parameters in the belief they would tender development in old, new and recently established democratic societies with the shadows of World Wars I and II, and the clouds of mass atrocity behind us. The period that shaped us begins with the bombardment of Guernica in 1937 and ends with the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, 1945. It includes the Holocaust, the carpet bombing of Germany and the first use of nuclear weapons. When we started out more than 30 years ago, the Berlin wall had still to come down, the Cold war was raging, the terms glasnost and perestroika were known only in the Russian language and the events of Europe's bloody history were still in the living memory of many. Half of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust had been living in Poland and this beautiful city was left in ruins. Poland suffered devastating destruction with the death of more than 17% of its pre-war population. It's heartening for visitors like ourselves to see such visible testimony to its reconstruction. Something of this spirit shapes the values of professional bodies like EGATIN and the institutes it represents. When we started out, it looked like our terrible history was safely behind us. What lies ahead now?

Through the biographies of Charlie Chaplin and Sigmund Heinrich Fuchs we can look back at what they lived through to cultivate sources of resilience to help us look forward. Their biographies span the most difficult years of the 20th century. I hope we will find that their own powers of resilience can continue to inspire us. Chaplin was born in London in 1889 and died in Switzerland in 1977. As we will see, he was orphaned by his father's early death and mother's chronic mental illness; he grew up in extreme poverty in London, went into care and emerged to make the world laugh and cry through cinema. Foulkes was born in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1898 and died in London in 1976, just one year before Chaplin and ten years younger. They both lived through two world wars, they were both rejected by the countries in which they lived and worked and, in their very different contributions, they both called on a communicative medium at one level, to promote social values at another.

Chaplin was an entertainer and Foulkes was a clinician. Chaplin's subject was the comic figure of 'The Little Tramp' in film. Foulkes's subject was a group of people at work through speech and silence. Chaplin reached a mass audience. Foulkes's gift in the communicative process, passed on through his colleagues, allowed group analysis to enter a range of settings previously thought unreachable through psychotherapy - forensics, refugees, survivors, psychosis and other areas of extreme suffering; and work for peace and reconciliation across boundary-lines of conflict. How do we train our group analysts to work across these very diverse fields? Is the extension of psychotherapy from its originating focus to such a widely dispersed range of human suffering, a legitimate extension? And what about our training institutions? Are they set up with obligations

towards the societies in which they are constituted? In London, for example, trainees at our institutes make an abiding contribution towards low-cost, public service psychotherapy in different mental health settings provided by the National Health Service. As well as the country's pervasive mental health problems – to which these training institutes make a real contribution - the country is troubled by grave forms of racism, urban violence and levels of dishesion and fragmentation that those outside the country look onto as the spectacle of Brexit unfolds. Your perplexity from outside, mirrors our own. Do we face these public issues with obligations of any kind? If so, in what way can we contribute? Before we begin looking at Foulkes's legacy and psychotherapy's originating goals, I wish to offer the counterpart figure of Chaplin at work making films.

You will see from later source material that Foulkes's observations about group analysis – which he saw as a means to promote citizenship - correspond to Chaplin's own values set out in the speech he gives to his first talking character in his film 'The Great Dictator'. Chaplin plays two characters, both Adenoid Hynkel, Dictator of 'Tomania', and his look-alike, a little Jewish barber who is mistaken for the Great Dictator. The film was released in the opening months of World War II and is concluded by Chaplin's speech given at the Annexation of the Republic of 'Osterlich' in which, mistaken for the Great Dictator and speaking as the humble Jewish barber, he renounces violence and war, repeals the invasion, sets out a humanitarian vision based on fellowship, freedom and brotherhood and demobilises the world's armies. The critique of the film by Theodore Adorno, an early associate of Foulkes at the Frankfurt Institute until 1933, describes the film as a failure. As we know only too well, the failure was more than cinematic. The film opened a few weeks after Warsaw's occupation by the Nazis and on the threshold of the world's greatest catastrophe. 80 years later we are still harvesting the significance of this remarkable film. What does this have to do with group analysis?

The Goals of Psychotherapy and The Work of Group-Analytic Psychotherapy

The Goals of Psychotherapy

In order to help us explore questions about values in psychotherapy, I have incorporated material from my recent book, *From The Couch To The Circle: Group-Analytic Psychotherapy In Practice*. These passages come from Chapter 1.

Language is emblematic, a kind of badge for its user. One of the best-known such emblems begins with Freud, who is reported to have said that mental health can be found in someone's capacities to both love and work. This captures in a single statement the original goal of his *talking cure* (Jafee 2014). It aimed to make possible a person's enjoyment of loving relationships on the one hand and on the other a generative disposition through which a person could express themselves in work,

child bearing or creativity. References to the phrase 'love and work' in Freud's writing are occasional. For example, he describes how 'the communal life of human beings had, therefore, a two-fold foundation: the compulsion to work, which was created by external necessity, and the power of love' (Freud 1930, S.E. 21:101). Google has so many entries for the phrase. Today it gives authority to a wide range of contrasting schemata for psychological well-being. Although this emblem now has so many different uses, it does provide a fitting phrase of departure for the journey from the couch to the circle.

There are other phrases to guide us. Auden's epitaph in poetry, *In Memory of Sigmund Freud*, honours his passing in 1939 by saying that 'To us he is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion under whom we conduct our different lives' (Auden 1940/1986). Climates change, but even in psychotherapy's current concerns with behaviour and cognition, audit and evaluation, the motives that Auden attributes to Freud are of lasting relevance. Auden saw in Freud's vision a hope that psychoanalysis could equip us to live on satisfying terms with our sexuality, find freedom from childhood's injuries, make terms with the childhood that lives on in every adult; that it could help us to make terms with what he called 'the nervous and the nights', accept that 'to be free is often to be lonely' and accept the loneliness with a rational voice and without illusions. The post-modern era carries with it a special caution about grand systems and claims that go beyond the possible, so we are wary of global answers to life's most challenging questions some of which – like Freud's – are cast in secular terms and others in religious ones. If it is too much to expect of psychotherapy that it could help a person find both love and work, using each of these terms as a figure of speech for much more than the word itself, it may be more realistic to claim for psychotherapy that it can help a person free themselves from the opposites of these fundamental states of mind. Psychotherapy can offer freedom from hatred and paralysis. Hatred, directed against self or other, has many attendant, related emotions like shame, malice, envy and contempt. Paralysis also has many similarly troubled relations that include impotence, passivity, subservience, self-loathing and dejection.

The Work of Group-Analytic Psychotherapy:

The person in the group and the group in the person

Our work is closer to the terms of 'normal' human intercourse than many other forms of therapy. Intimate conversations that make a group therapeutic replicate the kind of exchange that happens between people at a dinner table, in a meeting or round the hearth. Group therapy 'borrows' from these normative groups, but behind the seeming simplicity of ordinary conversation, something more complex goes on. The group's attention is shifted from what is troublesome in the world –

reported on in people's homes or offices – to what is troublesome about the world within the room and the person in the group. It is here that resolutions may be found as the group progresses through its spiral of growth and development, revealing the hidden but active group at work inside each person in the room. The troubled members of a group are found internally 'occupied', and therapy bears fruit as the troubled group that each member has within, is played out amongst the others. The group's resources – its narrative, drama and analysis – move the experience from the telling of stories to interactions of the moment, and then to reflection and reparation.

The Work of The Conductor

The conductor's first responsibility is to bring people together on the basis of related needs and a common capacity to contribute to a shared resource – the group – from which its members can each derive benefits. Second, the conductor calls this 'community' into the room where the group as a whole becomes the therapeutic agent. And third, the conductor does nothing for people in the context of the group that they can do for themselves and one another. A group that is well constructed and well led will release naturally occurring sources of renewal and resilience amongst its members that can bring profound benefits.

The conductor works with a group's silence, speech and language, following a progression from relational through reflective to reparative process; and from monologue through dialogue to discourse. Attention is given to who is speaking, to whom and about what, to focus on what is not being said - secrets, conflicts, failed disclosures and dissociation – through work in the dynamic present.

The conductor is the convenor, therapist and group member. They need to help foster trust in the setting; establish conditions for intimacy; cultivate speech and appreciate silence; foster reciprocity and exchange; make themselves available for transference projections; call on counter-transference to locate focal issues; attend to the developmental dynamics of the moment; shift attention between figure and ground; use principles of location, translation and interpretation to generate a new understanding of the issues at the source of a group's disturbance; and move it forwards to help make metaphors mutative so novelty can be harvested in the interests of growth and change.

What an extended list of requirements - we are asking a great deal of ourselves and our trainees! How do we equip people to do this work? Well, according to EGATIN's protocol we begin by offering people a place in a well-conducted group. It all starts with personal therapy and goes on to later include the simultaneous experience of supervised practice and theoretical teaching. This Foulksian

legacy has been passed on by Foulkes and his colleagues, contemporaries and successors. A range of current applications in just two countries with sound training institutions is given in The Powerpoint slide on Psychotherapy and Social Need. It describes ten clinical applications of group-analytic psychotherapy in Norway and UK. The moral compass of a society is discovered in its responsibility towards its most vulnerable – children and the elderly, the ill the mentally ill, the disabled and the deviant and – finally – the impoverished amongst whom each of the other categories will be over-represented. The wide range of training institutes in EGATIN's membership list, the extensive turnout at our national and international meetings and symposia, and the continued interest in our training approach and philosophy from even further afield – Australia, China, India and the USA – all point to a vigorous and developing field of endeavour. But what about Charlie Chaplin and why do we need to make any reference to his oeuvre on stage and screen at a meeting like this?

We face the threat of historical repetition with dark clouds that we thought were behind us, now looming on the horizon in front. In some countries, presidents set themselves above the very rule of law they swore to uphold; in others, real and would be dictators take issue with judicial independence; freedom of the press is threatened by the assassination of journalists in many; electorates are preyed upon by social media and manipulated by propaganda; and whole populations are once more threatened with the same kind of elimination suffered in 1941 by my own immediate family, be they Hutu, Bosnian, Darfuri, Yaziri or Rohindra. Beyond all this, the environment faces global threats that have no precedent. These are real threats to the democratic context in which group analysis has thrived. Do they put the discipline itself at risk? I have picked out Chaplin and Foulkes's biographies to underline that, when the going gets tough, we can find vision articulated by these early pioneers to help us on our way. So, part of my purpose today is to help us take a step back, to consider where our pioneers came from and what lessons they provide, to help keep us go forward on enlightened terms.

The Seeding of Vision in The Early Foundations of Group Analysis: Frankfurt 1923 - 1933

After an overnight departure from their home in Frankfurt, a period of stay in Switzerland and then another in France, Foulkes, his wife and three children arrived in London in 1933. They were supported in their application to settle by the British Psychoanalytic Institute and were given domicile as refugees. Foulkes was to spend the rest of his life in the UK and lived and worked in London, Exeter and Birmingham. The training institutes that claim him as their founder – like my own – owe their origins largely to his proteges and trainees like Malcolm Pines, Robin Skynner and

others. His gift and bequest to us was group analysis itself. My Foulkes lecture of 2016, 'On Making A Home Amongst Strangers', explores the paradox of group therapy to focus on homelessness and homing as key ingredients of the therapeutic process in groups. James Anthony, the co-author of Foulkes's most influential book and one of his protegees, describes Foulkes's legacy this way:

Foulkes was the man whose resiliency helped me to find mine. He lost so much that had been his own in the Holocaust; he came to the UK to live and take up a professional life in an alien language, established a war-time service that matured to become a way of understanding people and relationships ... generated a therapy that opened up a whole new field of endeavour 'gradually forged . . . through trial and error using the group as a laboratory situation in which his evolving ideas were continuously put to the test of observation, reformulation and revision' (1978:8). While doing all this he lived through a World War in an adopted country and alien language, through a divorce with his first wife and the untimely death by cancer of his much-loved second wife, Kilmeny (***From The Couch To The Circle 2016: xxvii***).

Where did this resilience stem from and what were his own sources? Much of what we would like to know on personal terms is obscure because records have not survived and key informants perished behind him. The definitive professional biography is a paper by another of his colleagues, Malcolm Pines, and I believe Dieter Nitzgen in Germany is busy with further biographical research. What I wish to focus on today is what we already know, because of the literature that Foulkes was shaped by and to which he contributed. Between 1923 and 1933 Frankfurt was a centre of enlightenment in Germany. Thanks to the guidance of my colleague Thomas Mies in Munster, Germany, I have been able to describe its milieu as follows:

- The intercollegiate exchange of clinical perspective and theory that flourished in Frankfurt was the 'source' of group analysis ... The time period is framed first by the publication of Buber's *I and Thou* in 1923 and concluded by the Nazi accession in 1933 when those named here scattered, if they could get away. They had a profound influence on medicine, social science and psychosocial theory... and their contribution ... has yet to receive an integrated study.
- One of Foulkes's mentors was the neurologist Kurt Goldstein, who developed a clinic in the city for brain-injured soldiers during World War I that he directed until 1930, when he moved to Berlin. Fritz Perls, the founder of gestalt therapy, also trained with him. The philosopher

Ernst Cassirer – both a colleague and a relative of Goldstein – spent time at the clinic and a two-way channel was opened between philosophy and clinical practice that influenced Foulkes.

- Foulkes was director of the city's Psychoanalytic Clinic that shared premises with Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research ... where Adorno, Fromm and many others including Foulkes, met regularly. Foulkes was also associated with another range of visionary thinkers at the city's Goethe University. Wertheimer developed gestalt psychology ... Kurt Lewin devised the principles of field theory and group dynamics that he later developed in the USA; Karl Mannheim and Norbert Elias developed the sociology of knowledge that Elias later brought into group analysis in UK through his study of figurations.
- Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1923/2000) published in 1923 was a seminal text in theology and philosophy. It influenced all those named here and its influence continues to this day. (***From The Couch To The Circle 2016: 12***).

Charlie Chaplin and The Little Tramp: A life of laughter, tears and social justice

Charlie Chaplin was born in 1889 to parents who were both music hall performers. His mother Hannah was believed to be part Romany (Gipsy) and had an older son – Sydney - by a previous partner. His putative father Charles left the family and Hannah struggled to raise her two boys on her own. She was affected by episodic mental illness, was admitted to psychiatric custody several times and, before Charlie was 8, the two boys had been left to the care of the workhouse twice. They were occasionally left in the care of their alcoholic father who died of cirrhosis of the liver when Charles was 11, the year in which Charlie concluded his schooling.

Charlie's performing life began at the age of 9 when he joined a group of clog dancers called 'The Lancashire Lads'. Clogs were a form of footwear for miners and hard labour in the North of England. To dance in them with agility and grace was a sign of triumph and freedom from misfortune and servitude. From then on, he performed in song, dance and clown routines in vaudeville and in music halls in London. He was 14 when his mother was finally admitted to a long-term asylum where she was to spend the next 17 years. Charlie was left destitute until his brother returned from the merchant navy to rehabilitate him. Charlie's career in music halls continued until, through his brother's introduction, he joined Fred Karno's burlesque group in 1907 in mime, ballet and acrobatics. During three years with this group in UK he became a star and in 1910 he went with them to USA. Another three years spent with them there led to an invitation from the NY Motion Picture Co., to join one of their subsidiaries, Keystone Comedies and he began film work in Edendale California in 1913. Over the five years following he became one of the most celebrated figures in

the world, directing and starring in 36 films in the last of these years alone. He moved on to Essanay for whom he made *The Tramp* (1915), a turning point amongst the fourteen films he made there; then Mutual – where he made *The Immigrant* and *Easy Street* - and then First National corporations, making films as he went. By 1919 he had co-founded the distribution company, United Artists, together with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and D.W. Griffiths, where he was to make all the films that followed. His early output there included *The Kid*, his longest film so far. It was released in 1921 and, within three years, was screened in over 50 countries. *The Gold Rush* followed, one of the films he regarded amongst his finest, followed by *The Circus*, 1927, and then in 1931 he made *City Lights*, his greatest popular and financial success. The British Film Institute cites it as Chaplin's finest accomplishment, one critic describing the closing scene as "the greatest piece of acting and the highest moment in movies". It was Chaplin's personal favourite. It was followed by *Modern Times* in 1936, *The Great Dictator* in 1940 and *Limelight* 1952.

Chaplin's silent films follow the Tramp's efforts to survive in a hostile world. He lives in poverty, is frequently treated badly but can remain kind and upbeat and, defying his social position, strives to be seen as a gentleman but often creates mayhem round him. In 1925 he said, 'The whole point of the Little Fellow is that no matter how down on his ass he is, no matter how well the jackals succeed in tearing him apart, he's still a man of dignity.' The Tramp is the everyman of the slums, he defies authority, gives as good as he gets and, as a representative for the underprivileged, will not be put down. Several of his films end with 'the homeless and lonely Tramp walking optimistically ... into the sunset ... to continue his journey,' sometimes accompanied by his partner.

His subject matter is wealth, poverty, injustice and the unexpected. He stands always for the little man against serious odds. His longer films strike out on topics within this range that come together in a body of work that educated, informed and consoled a public brought to laughter and tears in the same process by which they were educated. The greatest authors of the 19th century who were also social reformers - Mark Twain, Victor Hugo, Maxim Gorky and Charles Dickens - stand as figures of comparison. The underlying themes include greed, illegitimacy, public tragedy, sexual relations, economic disaster, unemployment, immigration, drug abuse, child poverty, disability, ageing, antisemitism, fascism, militarism, and the stage itself.

The Comic and The Serious

Who would have thought comedy could be quite so serious? I have singled out four brief film clips to lighten the mood of this delivery and allow time for entertainment as well as gravity.

Film clip 1

This 'funny waiter scene' comes from Chaplin's 'The Rink', a silent film released in 1916, his eighth film for Mutual Films. **It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sQrqDqz5mM>**

Film clip 2

City Lights was released in 1931. This clip describes its opening scene.

It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzUlq5Pd9PI>

Film clip 3

The Great Dictator was released in 1940. This clip describes 'The Globe Scene' as the great dictator exchanges views with Herr Garbage who helps focus his vision on the timing by which he might become the greatest dictator the world has known, wiping out all brunettes and Jews along the way.

It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqyQfjDScjU>

Film clip 4

The Great Dictator is concluded by Chaplin's first use of his own voice in cinema. In the role of the little Jewish barber mistaken for his double - the great dictator - he gives a speech to the world that turns the fascist vision on its head.

It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7GY1Xg6X20>

The Citizen and The Group

How do we now bring these biographies together? Max Horkheimer, a philosopher and sociologist celebrated for his work in critical theory was one of Foulkes's Frankfurt colleagues. After their exodus in 1933 he wrote that 'in view of what is now threatening to engulf Europe ... our present work is ... destined to pass things down through the night that is approaching: a kind of message in a bottle' (Müller-Doohm, S. *Adorno: A Biography*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005:262).

Foulkes brought this kind of critical thinking with him to the UK where he took it into conventional psychoanalytic and psychiatric practice. Here amongst his colleagues he took the message out of the bottle and applied it to what we have inherited, described in the pages above. This is how he describes himself at work:

The group analyst treats the group as adults on an equal level to his own and exerts an important influence by his own example. He sets a pattern of desirable behaviour rather than having to preach to the group. He puts emphasis on the 'here and now' and promotes tolerance and appreciation of individual differences. The conductor represents and promotes reality, reason, tolerance, understanding, insight, catharsis, independence, frankness, and an open mind for new experiences. This happens by way of a living, corrective emotional experience (Foulkes, S.H. *Therapeutic Group Analysis*. George Allen and Unwen/Karnac 1964/1984: 57).

This is how James Anthony described him at work:

- The Foulkes group is essentially democratic so that, in his view, the therapeutic group provides not only a better way of life for the individual in the group but also for the individual in the world.
- For the group to accept the therapist deeply as a leader, there must be some qualities that facilitate such transference reactions. The therapeutic leader needs to be democratically oriented in his everyday life, reasonably secure and reality-prone, and especially immune from any temptation to play God.
- For the psychoanalytic group therapist, there should be a resolution of the oedipal conflict which enables him not to abuse power
- The analytic group therapist's aim is to create peers, and it is not surprising to learn how many ex-patients have become active in the field of group analytic psychotherapy

(Anthony, J: The Dilemma of Therapeutic Leadership: The Leader Who Does not Lead. In *Psychoanalytic Group Theory and Therapy: Essays in Honour of Saul Scheidlinger*. Ed. S. Tuttmann, AGPA Monograph, International Universities Press, New York 1991).

Conclusion: Three Dynamic Principles In Group Analytic Psychotherapy.

In the conclusion I will introduce underlying principles in our group analytic approach that are both simple and inclusive. Group analysis provides a forum - a group circle - in which the agency of understanding and change allows each member to find their own voice in a circle of others, to bear witness to the voices of others and, by talking together, to bring their lives out of the shadows and so discover themselves amongst others. My colleague Uri Levin sent a request to a group of us currently working in the field in which he asked us to offer our own views, in non-technical language, about how group analysis works and what its agency is comprised of. He had been asked by the Group Section of the Czech Society for Psychoanalytical Psychotherapy (CSPAP) to give a presentation at their meeting in Prague next month. I offered him this account and watched as my colleagues came forward with their own words. Those of you fortunate to be attending this meeting will hear his delivery and see how the group came out of the shadows in the circle around him, found their voices and gave witness to the voices of the others. Here by way of a last word are some other brief applications of these principles.

Finding A Voice; Bearing Witness; Coming Out Of The Shadows

Finding a voice

I am sitting in a small group of eight people as two of its members, a man and woman who have both been with us for some time, recount detail of early betrayal by their parents. They were cared for physically but were each embroiled in a catalogue of emotional injuries for which they had neither words nor recognition. They have gained new degrees of autonomy and well-being by finding voices for these histories but there is a newcomer amongst us, a man who has been in the group for only a few months who, unexpectedly and without any warning, draws attention to himself – something he rarely does – to tell us he is having a panic attack in the room. He can't bear to hear what the other two have to say about their childhoods. He has no memory of his own but is filled with alarm as he listens to theirs. His agitation and upset fill the room. It must have been terrible, he tells us, because he can't remember anything. He has given us glimpses of hurt and injury and we know that his mother sent him abroad to live with relatives to get him away from conflict with his alcoholic father. His body carries the panic that his mind cannot register. We see him speak with his body's voice. He is embarrassed by his agitation and loss of control and others encourage him to talk to us about what he's feeling in the moment as we believe it gives a register for what he must have been feeling as a little boy that he simply cannot remember. We are here sitting through what Fairbairn calls 'the return of the repressed'. This is the personal expression of

private sorrow to which our small groups give voice and we can see corresponding expressions in the public realm.

Bearing witness

This is an episode in Johannesburg – the city of my birth and upbringing – in 1968. I am a student and sit in a discussion that includes a celebrated African artist who is challenged by critics in the room who are angry that his artistry is not devoted to capturing the sorrow of his oppressed people. He replies with anger of his own to tell us a story. Walking in town he saw, on the other side of the road, a chain gang of convicts going down the street towards an industrial site where they would be set to work. They are handcuffed one hand to the man in front and the other to the man behind. There is an escort of armed police. It is winter and they are all wearing woollen hats in the cold morning air. A hearse goes by carrying a coffin followed by cars carrying the bereaved. The convicts stop to pay their respects and the prison guards challenge them for stopping but they won't move. As it passes them, going slowly along the street, they try to take their hats off in a mark of respect, but they cannot get their hands up to their heads to do so and they all end up in a tangle. They come together to release the pressure between them and then take their hats off in unison and bow to the passing of the deceased. The artist watches and he tells us that he cried as he did so. This is what the artist bears witness to. He introduces us to the dignity of the dispossessed which even their imprisonment cannot strip away. And this principle of bearing witness is what our groups make possible.

Coming out of the shadows

We are at work in a small group in which the issue of peoples' mothers is a familiar and recurrent topic. Some have had endearing mothers, others speak only of bad mothers and others have complex and ambivalent relationships. Whenever the subject of mothers – good bad and indifferent – comes up, Natalie more or less 'leaves the room'. She just seems to disappear. Her withdrawal is radical and immediate. It's noticed and commented on but Natalie herself – though she's explained how little mothering she had, many times over – cannot see herself through others' appreciation. We're just getting to know her in the group. She comes in one day to tell us of her deep embarrassment at the opera. She was with a friend at Madame Butterfly and, as the story unfolded, the Japanese mother of the little boy is depicted waiting for the father of her son to return from America. The boy is played by a marionette, a puppet. At a point in the sad story, the distracted mother looking out to sea has no eyes for her child and the marionette looks up at her with his little head in a wordless gesture of desperate and imploring need. She shows us how he looked up at his mother and opens her mouth as the marionette did on the stage. As she does so she breaks down

in a wave of tears. She sees her childhood in the marionette and cries her heart out in the group. She is comforted over a long period as tears wrack her body. When she can finally speak she tells us this also happened in the opera and she had to go out for a time. It was embarrassing. In the months that follow she comes to tell us how this part of her history was lost in the shadows of her life. And now she is coming out of the shadows.

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