

When Divided Worlds Meet
Confluences of Identity, Culture, Continuing and Change
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Keynote Presentation

From Toxic Bonds To Healing Relationships
A Journey Through Group-Analytic Theory And Practice
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Abstract:

This presentation offers navigational principles for therapeutic practice. Three points are required for the work of location in time and place. These three chart the movement of therapy groups. The first is the responsibility to foster a climate that allows each of a group's members to find their own voice. The second is the bearing of witness to the voices of others. And the third is in the dynamics of collective engagement that create a new emergent, the group-as-a-whole, that allows members to come out of the shadows together and find themselves anew. These shadows might represent a traumatic history, painful past or troubled life – any experience blighted by the circumstances of time and place.

These three principles – finding a voice, bearing witness and coming out of the shadows - are set in the ordinary language of daily experience to engage with the hurt, the injured, the lost and the displaced. Together they chart a course through the life of small groups to focus especially on identifying and resolving unknown and un-mourned grief – problematics at the heart of trans-generational trauma.

The vignettes illustrate process dynamics – what Foulkes and Anthony called 'group specific factors' – in which resonance holds the key to configuration. The presentation calls on the work of more recent authors to explore scenic understanding and enactment in the theatre of group analysis, addressing basic principles of witnessing and positioning and bringing in the work of Galit Atlas, Nick Barwick and Norbert Elias, illustrating the complexity of paradigms on which we draw in group analysis. In the surprising and sometimes disconcerting elaboration of these dynamics, time can be compressed or dilated as experience undergoes condensation.

An earlier set of navigational principles was devised to chart progress in the language of the group from monologue through dialogue to discourse. It was followed by another navigational set charting movement in the group between relational, reflective and reparative experience. The principles now introduced embrace the two earlier sets. We call on them together to foster a group's resources through narrative, drama and analysis, moving from the telling of stories to playing with the interactions of the moment and going on to reflection and reparation.

These principles can be applied in the consulting room to the practice of therapy and outside the consulting room – ‘in the street’ – to address the public concerns of our current time. Parallel vignettes are drawn from ‘the consulting room’ and ‘the street’, with each of these terms standing for the realm they represent.

I open with music and song, describe navigational principles with diagrams and illustrate the journey with paintings by contemporary artists. There is a progression in their artwork from faces of the day in the current domain to faces and feelings of the night in the projective and primordial. Objects of the accessible mind proceed to those of the unconscious, describing the transpersonal in images and collage that can burst into arresting poetry. We conclude with paintings that convey the most potent agency for movement from desolation to resolution - mood texture and spirit.