

Book Review

Tubert-Oklander, Juan and Hernández-Tubert, Reyna. *Psychoanalysis, Group Analysis, and Beyond: Towards a New Paradigm of the Human Being*. Routledge, 2022.

‘Orthodox psychoanalysis has traditionally had an anti-environmental bias’ (p.1).

With this, the first sentence of their book, Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert nail their ideological colours to their group analytic mast. It is their declaration of war against individualistic versions of orthodox psychoanalysis and their anti-environmental biases. By ‘environmental’ the authors mean to include the ‘interpersonal, social, cultural, political [and] ecological’ (p.2).

Over the course of the book, the authors promise to do three things: to explain how this bias came about; to set out a number of challenges to this bias; and finally, to contribute to the project of building a new paradigm of human nature and psychotherapy.

The book consists of a series of essays written by the authors, sometimes singly, sometimes jointly, and it represents the evolution of their thoughts from 1992 to date. Their ultimate ambition: to further the process of constructing a non-individualistic paradigm for the human condition, a paradigm that goes ‘beyond’ the conventional mainstream psychoanalytic understanding.

Earl Hopper, the editor of the *New International Library of Group Analysis*, is not convinced about the necessity or possibility of producing a new paradigm, one that goes ‘beyond’. In the Forward to the book, Hopper questions whether the new models would be ‘as fecund as the one that we have [already] established’ (p.xvi).

I personally, am not in agreement with Hopper on this point, but am in complete agreement with him when he says: ‘this book will become a landmark in our attempts to make clinical use of our appreciation of the sociality of human nature and the nature of human sociality in the global human group and in each individual member of it’ (p.xvi). I can only endorse Hopper’s generous description of these essays as being both, beautiful and erudite.

But this review is not about Hopper nor me; it about the life work of Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert as encapsulated in this book.

A central task of this book is to introduce the works of the Argentinian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Enrique Pichon-Rivière to an English-speaking readership, and to compare and contrast his ideas with those of S.H. Foulkes. The ultimate aim being to include Pichon-Rivière in the group analytic fold. It turns out that there are many surprising, and surprisingly deep, similarities between how the two of them came to think of things (but also differences); in effect the authors are inviting us to embrace Pichon-Rivière as another father of group analysis.

They (the authors), set out to establish that because both Pichon-Rivière and Foulkes construed of human existence as ‘unitary’, on which basis both thought that notions of individual and group and social were abstractions rather than realities, it follows that the relationship between them is readily describable as that of ‘figure and ground’. They conclude that ‘psychoanalysis and group-analysis are no longer in opposition to each other, but turn out to be two aspects and perspectives of the field of *analysis* . . . [as] inaugurated by Sigmund Freud’ (p.4).

The book is divided into three. The first part (seven chapters) describes how and why orthodox psychoanalysis came to be ‘gelded’—that is, castrated and made impotent in regards to its radical potential—as an instrument of social critique as well as that of therapeutic practice. The second part, ‘A Fresh Look’ (five chapters), is an attempt to reincorporate what had previously been excluded and discarded (the aforementioned ‘environment’). The final section ‘Bridging the Gap’ (four chapters)—consists of approaches towards building the new paradigm.

The first chapter written by Juan Tubert-Oklander, takes on some of the contradictions in Freud’s writings and thinking. For example, is Freudian psychoanalysis an objective scientific project, or a hermeneutical one? Are its ultimate aims to find ‘causes’ or ‘meanings’?

Tubert-Oklander concludes that one does not have to choose between the two, and that one can have it both ways, as 'psychoanalysis is a hybrid and ambiguous being, a product of the mestization between scientific and humanistic thinking . . . [between] causal explanations and hermeneutic interpretation' (p.22).

The second chapter, written by Reyna Hernández-Tubert, also argues for a 'both/and' position regarding the basis of human condition (individual or social), claiming that 'a balanced synthesis . . . preserve[s] the various points of view and maintains a dialectical tension between them, integrating them, but without losing their specificity or blurring their differences' (p.27). However, she says, that at a deeper level, there are differences that 'are not negotiable, since they represent the essence of our position vis-a vis ourselves, existence and others . . . such differences can only be identified . . . acknowledged and accepted, but never eliminated or ignored. This generates a dialectic tension in our community, which cannot be solved, but with which we can live, as long as we acknowledge and accept it' (p.27). She is arguing for the analyst to inhabit the liminal space which allows them to participate in mutuality and dialogue rather than inhabit the position of 'omnipotent and omniscient authority' of the classical psychoanalyst (p.29).

The third chapter (by Tubert-Oklander) positions Winnicott as an exemplar of the difficulty of explicitly and publicly differentiating from Freud because of the opprobrium that follows from it. This was played out on the occasion when Tubert-Oklander presented this very paper, in which he argued that Winnicott was more revolutionary than he himself was willing to admit, because of his need to preserve a continuity of his ideas with those of the psychoanalytic orthodoxy. When Tubert-Oklander presented the paper, 'The Chairperson . . . was visibly appalled at this picture of a Winnicott that differed so much from the Freudian-Kleinian tradition' (p.30).

The fourth chapter (Hernández-Tubert), continues the Winnicottian theme with a story of the hostility that Winnicott's ideas were met with by the New York Psychoanalytic Society in 1968, a year before his death. Amongst other things, the hostility was due to Winnicott arguing for aggression as a good thing, as life force and beneficial for society, rather than the Kleinian understanding of aggression as something ultimately destructive, emerging as it does from the death drive. Hernández-Tubert says that this rejection of Winnicott's thesis was born of a conservative psychoanalytic vision in which challenges to social norms are thought to be bad. This vision would have us accept and fit into established norms. Hernández-Tubert reads the

Winnicottian thesis as truly revolutionary, in that aggression is necessary to subverting unjust established social orders. Otherwise, there is only passivity and compliance. She goes on to suggest that the invocation of the conservative attitude in the clinic 'is particularly damaging for the treatment and the patient, since it tends to generate an apparently good analytic relation, intellectualized and conflict-free, that reinforces and validates the socially induced repression of the patient's aggressive potential' (p44).

Hernández-Tubert goes on to castigate the psychoanalytic community and its institutions for having 'organized the training of new generations of psychoanalysts in similar vertical, authoritarian, and dogmatic terms . . . [this is] yet another form of reaction of the social system to neutralize the radical revolutionary potential of analysis' (p46). *We have to ask ourselves, is this true of our group analytic training institutions today?*

The way that chapters three and four follow on from each other, exemplify the way that the book works, and why it works well. The two authors, Tubert-Oklander and Hernández-Tubert, work as a tag team. They pass the intellectual baton between them, from one chapter to the next, in this instance, in the service of fleshing out the revolutionary depth of the Winnicottian thesis, and the orthodoxy's attempts at gelding that follow it.

Part 2, A Fresh Look, introduces us to the ideas and history of Pichon-Rivière and melds them with those of the British group analytic tradition, specifically, the work of S.H. Foulkes. Chapter 8 sees Tubert-Oklander drawing parallels and affinities between Pichon-Rivière's notion of the link or bond (*vinculo*) and Foulkes' notion of the matrix, which he uses to construct a '*Syncretic Paradigm*, that allowed an easy integration of individual, relational and group mental processes' (p.115). At the chapter's conclusion, Tubert-Oklander uses John Donne's famous lines, 'No man is an island', to say poetically and therefore powerfully:

Islands do not really exist, they are only mountains whose essential continuity with each other, through the sea bottom is concealed by the deep waters from which they emerge. The same is valid for the individual subjects, who are built on the foundation of being-at-one, not only with all others, but with everything-that-is. This is the philosophy that underlies the concept of the bond, and the very spirit of group analysis. (p.116)

Chapters nine, ten and eleven (jointly written) bring together the two traditions of group analysis, The Argentinian and the British, and

their relation and understanding of the social unconscious. Given that Pichon-Rivière called his groups 'operative groups' (not group analysis), and called the convenor 'coordinator', 'co-thinker' and 'social psychologist' (not group analyst nor group conductor), the authors have to establish whether it is even legitimate to allude to Pichon-Rivière's way of thinking as group analysis. They establish that it is legitimate, despite some significant differences.

Pichon-Rivière thought that each person came into the group with their own sets of assumptions which he called 'Conceptual Referential Operative Schema' (CROS; in Spanish, 'ECROS'). The conflict between each individual's CROS, results initially in conflict, but then eventually and hopefully, understanding. There are difficulties of course, one of them being that aspect of the CROS are also 'largely shared by the conductor and members in as much as they belong to a same social context. This makes it invisible' (p. 125). We can see here, clearly, the parallels and affinities between the social unconscious and CROS.

The title of chapter ten, 'A context that becomes a text', reminded me of Caroline Garland's well known paper, *Taking the Non-Problem Seriously* (Garland, 1982); the non-problem being the here and now group context and the problem being the text. The chapter throws light on the notion of the social unconscious from the Latin and British traditions.

Chapter eleven, 'Listening to Voices in the Wind' is a description of their ways of thinking and working with large groups, and contrasting them with those of the British group analytic tradition. There is much richness here, a richness that I can only hint at. For example, a discussion about interpretation: They say, 'to interpret implies placing a text with a relevant context' (p.144). However, there is no clearly designated text as such, only fragments, 'voices in the wind' as it were. And rather than think of interpretations singly, they speak of an 'interpretative dialogue' and an 'interpretative process' which (crucially) include members of the group as well as the group conductor. They are mindful of both dangers: of powerful group conductors taking over the work of the group for their own narcissistic satisfaction, and its opposite that 'the wish to avoid charismatic leadership and the fear of its dire consequences . . . [might lead to] the other extreme of abdicating our responsibility towards the group' (p.146).

The final part of the book makes a case for the relevance of Ferenczi to group analysis, and the same for what is called relational

psychoanalysis. The book concludes with a number of points that the authors think should be intrinsic to the new paradigm.

I loved this book; it is beautifully and clearly written. I have learnt much from it, but have not been able to do justice to the complexity and richness of its scope and argument(s), particularly the latter part of the book. I have learnt that Pichon-Rivière was explicitly political in his outlook in a way that Foulkes was not, and this in itself is an enrichment of the established group analytic discourse. The same can be said of the authors, Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert. It seems to me that they too are more explicitly political (and philosophical) than is the case in my experience of the British milieu.

In *Psychoanalysis, Group Analysis, and Beyond*, I recognized much of what I was trying to say and do in my first book, *Taking the Group Seriously* (1998). The subtitle of each of the two books makes this evident, *A New Paradigm for the Human Being* and *Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory*. There are also many affinities between the list that they generate in their final chapter 'And What Next?', (elements that they say should be integral to a new paradigm), and the list which summarizes the ideas of Radical Foulkes in *Taking the Group Seriously* (Dalal, 1998, p.64-6).

Having disagreed with Hopper about the necessity of going 'beyond', I am now going to disagree with the authors for not going beyond-enough! I wonder whether the authors have fallen foul of one of the very things they were cautioning against, in the following way. In one place they speak of how contemporary theoreticians and practitioners authenticate themselves and legitimate their proposals by claiming a continuity with the established orthodoxy and on versions of what Freud 'really said'. Are the authors doing something similar to Winnicott when they use the figure-ground analogy to claim that 'psychoanalysis and group-analysis are no longer in opposition to each other, but turn out to be two aspects and perspectives of the field of *analysis* . . . [as] inaugurated by Sigmund Freud' (p.4)? I have similar questions about some of the situations where they call on the principle of 'both/and' to resolve contradictions.

In my view, a new paradigm necessitates a *rupture* with the old one and think that the use of the figure ground analogy obfuscates their incommensurability. 'Either/or' is not necessarily and always a bad or incorrect resolution.

There are parallels here with their reference to Fromm, who the authors describe as saying that ‘Freud was no revolutionary, from the political point of view, but a rebel’ (p.3). They continue, ‘[Freud] fought against the unfairness of being left out of the positions of power and prestige, which he craved, but did not question the hierarchical structure of society. . . he was conservative in this respect’.

I think that the ideas of Tubert-Oklander and Hernández-Tubert are in fact potentially revolutionary—with the potential to transform the theoretical system, rather than simply rebellious – tweak the system, but leave it intact.

In my view, I think something of this theme is being played out at the Institute of Group Analysis (London), and perhaps elsewhere too, where the move to foreground the issue (and absence of) Black group analysts by the membership is being conducted on similar lines; that is, wanting to include them more but at the same time leaving the systems themselves, (both, theoretical and bureaucratic) intact. In this sense (in my view) there is the potential of a ‘rebellion’ but not as yet a ‘revolution’ (Dalal, 2021).

A similar criticism is made of liberal feminism by Arruza, Bhattacharya and Frazer, who point to Facebook’s Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg as effectively advocating for a kind of equal opportunity domination ‘where the task of managing exploitation in the workplace and oppression in the social whole is shared equally by ruling class men and women’ (Azzura et al, 2019, p.2). Sandberg wants women to have a larger slice of the capitalistic cake, whilst leaving capitalism itself intact.

So I think that the issues and themes raised by Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert in their book, go even further, go ‘beyond’ arguments about theory and practice: they are potentially revolutionary. They speak to how group analysis is to be lived, and the way it is lived are necessarily patterned by power relations. Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert are very mindful of this, as exemplified by their criticism of the authoritarianism endemic to analytic trainings, as reproducing ‘yet another form of reaction of the social system to neutralize the radical revolutionary potential of analysis’ (p46).

In sum, I have found this to be an inspiring book that has spoken deeply to many of my cherished interests and concerns.

Through the reading, I have been heartened to discover Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández-Tubert to be fellow travelers, walking on parallel paths, albeit on different continents.

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