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The Latin-American Approach to Group Analysis
Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández de Tubert
Foreword by Malcolm Pines
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For our children
Hector, Sandra and Rodrigo
Ivan, Mara and Eduardo
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*Malcolm Pines, Institute of Group Analysis, London*

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Foreword

For many years my Latin-American colleagues in psychoanalysis and group analysis have frequently told me that in Latin America Enrique Pichon-Rivière was the great pioneer in our field, that his ‘operative groups’—to me a mysterious concept that was never properly clarified—were closely related to Foulkes’ group-analytic groups, as were their basic ideas. The few papers that set out to illustrate Pichon-Rivière’s work were stimulating but insufficient, snacks rather than a substantial meal. Now we can feast on the substance of this remarkable, important book.

I was delighted to meet Juan and Reyna at a meeting of the International Association for the History of Psychoanalysis. I found how knowledgeable they were of Foulkesian group analysis and that they had a mission to bring Pichon-Rivière’s work to the attention of the Anglophone world. I already knew that in Mexico there existed a strong group movement which had hosted a meeting of the International Association for Group Psychotherapy during my presidency in 1984, but I had not previously known these authors and their scholastic and clinical abilities. Combined, they have tremendous clinical experience and a most impressive knowledge of psychoanalysis, group analysis and the Latin-American schools of group psychotherapy.

When Foulkes began his first group in 1940, he had already been thinking about a group-analytic approach to human mentality and therefore to psychotherapy. His work with Kurt Goldstein after World War I had introduced him to ideas about the human network and its basis in the network of central nervous system; perhaps his work during that war as a telephone operator had shown him the fundamental importance of communication through the functioning network and the effects of disruption on the
network, similar to the disruptive effects of brain injury to the network of the brain. Also influential in his thinking were the ideas of historico-cultural processes on mentality developed by his friend Norbert Elias, who also had worked in communication networks during the war, creating and restoring telegraphic networks in the front line. Trigant Burrows and Paul Schilder’s writings on group psychotherapy were also important for Foulkes. Then came World War II and Northfield. But Foulkes did not have to face Pichon-Rivière’s huge problem of how a single psychiatrist can work effectively in an under-staffed asylum of 4500 patients. It was this challenge that Pichon-Rivière met through developing trainings for nurses and patients in action-oriented operative groups.

Pichon-Rivière was a radical reformer who studied and influenced social organisations, at one time even attempting to work with a network of a whole city, Rosario. The Latin-American lifestyle of meeting in cafes late into the night with ardent discussions is in marked contrast to Foulkes’s more conventional London lifestyle.

What is fascinating is the convergence of their ideas, part of the developing network of psychoanalytic and socio-psychological knowledge of the mid-twentieth century.

The present book is a major contribution to the network of group-analytic knowledge at the beginning of the 21st century. I am indeed grateful to the joint authors for the dedication to the task of lifting the language barrier between the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking worlds in the field of group psychotherapy.

*Malcolm Pines, Institute of Group Analysis, London*
Preface and Acknowledgements

Group analysis developed in Britain from 1940 onwards, starting with the pioneering work of S.H. Foulkes, and under the leadership of the Group-Analytic Society. But there has been another independent school of group analysis, which was born in Argentina, beginning in 1938, as a result of the work and teachings of Enrique Pichon-Rivière, who was therefore a true pioneer in this field. These two approaches to group analysis are fully compatible and complementary. However, Pichon-Rivière’s conception of operative groups is hardly known outside the Spanish-speaking countries, since his writings have never been translated.

This book has a threefold objective: 1) to introduce Pichon-Rivière’s conception of operative groups to English readers; 2) to present our own ideas and experiences in this field, which stem from and are included in the operative group tradition, but have also been deeply influenced by the work of Foulkes and his group; and 3) to clearly illustrate the way in which theoretical and technical concepts are used in real-life work with concrete groups.

The present text is the outcome of many years working with groups. Juan Tubert-Oklander was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he studied medicine and group psychotherapy in the Institute of the Argentine Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy Association. In 1976 he moved to Mexico, where he trained as a psychoanalyst at the Mexican Psychoanalytic Association, and later became a Mexican citizen. He has been working with groups since 1971 and he has written a previous book in Spanish on The Learning Operative Group (Tubert-Oklander 1990–92). Reyna Hernández de Tubert was born in Veracruz, Mexico. She studied medicine and psychiatry at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, trained as a group analyst at
the Mexican Analytic Group Psychotherapy Association, and then as a psychoanalyst at the Mexican Psychoanalytic Association. She has been working with groups for almost two decades.

We have been working together for the past ten years, both in conducting clinical groups and in writing many papers of psychoanalysis and group analysis. This volume is a greatly enlarged, revised and updated version of the ideas that were put forward in Juan Tubert-Oklander’s previous book in Spanish (Tubert-Oklander 1990–92). It is also a presentation of a particular point of view that we have developed in our conjoint work. We have endeavoured to make it useful for English-speaking readers, by building the conceptual bridges that bring together the group-analytic and the operative group traditions, as well as including, whenever possible, the necessary references in English. As the works of Enrique Pichon-Rivière have never been translated into English, we have had to rely on our own translation and paraphrasing of his ideas.

Chapter 1 of the book presents a historical introduction, in which we compare the approaches and concepts of Foulkes and Pichon-Rivière, and draw a brief biographical sketch of the latter. Chapter 2 introduces Pichon-Rivière’s fundamental concepts of operative groups. Chapter 3 is an exposition of our own theoretical point of view on the subject. The rest of the book is devoted to a presentation of our own approach to the clinical practice of operative groups. We have dedicated Chapter 4 to the learning operative group; Chapter 5 to the use of operative groups in the training of psychotherapists, psychoanalysts and group analysts, and Chapter 6 to the use of operative groups in social research. We had intended to include instances of our work with therapeutic groups and families, but this proved to be materially impossible, since it would have required too large a volume. We therefore decided to leave these most interesting subjects for our next book. Chapter 7 offers a final review of operative groups and group analysis, vis-à-vis psychoanalysis. In this brief text we pose our present position, advanced in Chapter 1, that considers group analysis to be a natural development of psychoanalysis.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and deeply thank a number of people whose contributions have had a far-reaching influence on the writing of this book. First and foremost is our friend Malcolm Pines, who encouraged us to write it, and offered his sympathy and support along the way. Next, we are bound to mention four towering figures whom we never met in the flesh, but who are ever present in our thinking, through their spirit that still breathes
in their writings: Gregory Bateson, W.R. Bion, S.H. Foulkes and Enrique Pichon-Rivière.

We would like to acknowledge Robert D. Hinshelwood for helping us to get our historical data right on the Northfield Experiment, and Mara Tubert-Brohman for her support and her technical help in preparing the final manuscript. Our thanks go also to María del Carmen Álvarez and all the members of the Hermosillo group, as well as to everyone who has participated in our groups, both therapeutic and non-therapeutic, thus teaching us not only about groups, but also about the human condition.

Juan Tubert-Oklander would like to thank the four teachers from whom he learnt most of what he knows about groups: Alejo Dellarossa, Guillermo Ferschtut, Jorge García Badaracco and Jorge N. Weil. He also appreciates Earl Hopper’s contribution, both in his writings and in several most pleasant and stimulating conversations. Elizabeth Goode de Garma and Marco Antonio Dupont Muñoz gave him the opportunity to discover psychoanalysis, and for this he will always be grateful. He also owes a debt of gratitude to Antonio Mendizábal, who gave him the opportunity to coordinate for five years the operative group of the technical staff in his psychoanalytic therapeutic community, the Mendao Institute; and to Vidalina Ramos de Moreno Corzo and Luis Moreno Corzo, who shared with him an inquiry on the supervisory group, which is included in Chapter 5.

Reyna Hernández de Tubert thanks José Luis González Chagoyán, the pioneer of group analysis in Mexico, for having taught her to understand and value groups, as well as all her teachers during her training as a group analyst. Also, she expresses her gratitude to Juan Vives Rocabert.

We are also most grateful to our children, Hector, Sandra and Rodrigo, for their patience and support, spiced with a dash of humour, whenever we were too busy or overwhelmed with the writing of this book.

Finally, both of us wish to thank each other for the privilege of sharing our lives, our work, our thinking, and our writing.

Juan Tubert-Oklander and Reyna Hernández de Tubert
Mexico City, March 2003