Traumatic Experience
in the Unconscious Life of Groups
The International Library of Group Analysis
Edited by Malcolm Pines, Institute of Group Analysis, London

The aim of this series is to represent innovative work in group psychotherapy, particularly but not exclusively group analysis. Group analysis, taught and practised widely in Europe, derives from the work of SH Foulkes.

Other titles in the series

The Social Unconscious
Selected Papers
Earl Hopper
ISBN 1 84310 088 6
International Library of Group Analysis 22

Building on Bion: Roots
Origins and Context of Bion’s Contributions to Theory and Practice
Edited by Robert M. Lipgar and Malcolm Pines
ISBN 1 84310 710 4
International Library of Group Analysis 20

Building on Bion: Branches
Contemporary Developments and Applications of Bion’s Contributions to Theory and Practice
Edited by Robert M. Lipgar and Malcolm Pines
ISBN 1 84310 711 2
International Library of Group Analysis 21
Two volume set ISBN 1 84310 731 7

Relational Group Psychotherapy
From Basic Assumptions to Passion
Richard M. Billow
ISBN 1 84310 739 2 pb
ISBN 1 84310 738 4 hb
International Library of Group Analysis 26

Dreams in Group Psychotherapy
Theory and Technique
Claudio Neri, Malcolm Pines and Robi Friedman
ISBN 1 85302 923 8
International Library of Group Analysis 18

Group
Claudio Neri
ISBN 1 85302 416 3
International Library of Group Analysis 8

Rediscovering Groups
A Psychoanalyst’s Journey Beyond Individual Psychology
Marshall Edelson and David N. Berg
ISBN 1 85302 726 X pb
ISBN 1 85302 725 1 hb
International Library of Group Analysis 9

Self Experiences in Group
Intersubjective and Self-Psychological Pathways to Human Understanding
Edited by Irene N.H. Harwood and Malcolm Pines
ISBN 1 85302 587 6 pb
ISBN 1 85302 596 8 hb
International Library of Group Analysis 4
Traumatic Experience in the Unconscious Life of Groups

The Fourth Basic Assumption:
Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification
or
(ba) I:A/M

Earl Hopper

Foreword by Malcolm Pines
# Contents

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES 6

FOREWORD 9

*Malcolm Pines, Institute of Group Analysis, London*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 11

Introduction 17

1 The Theory of Cohesion Proposed by Bion and Turquet, and Modified by Others 29

2 The Fear of Annihilation and Traumatic Experience 53

3 The Fourth Basic Assumption: Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification or (ba) I:A/M 66

4 The Personification of Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification 91

5 The Treatment of Difficult Patients in Clinical Group Analysis: The Personification of Aggregation by Pandoro 108

6 The Personification of Massification by Pandora 124

7 An Illustration of Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification in the Extreme: A Group of Child Survivors of the Shoah 138

8 Summary, Invited Critical Commentaries, Discussion and Suggestions for Further Research and Applications 150

Appendix I: Some Conceptual Distinctions about Social Formations from Sociology and Social Psychology 195

Appendix II: Encapsulation as a Defence against the Fear of Annihilation 199

REFERENCES 212

SUBJECT INDEX 230

AUTHOR INDEX 237
List of Tables and Figures

Figure 0.1 ‘Face it Fred – you’re lost!’ 19

Table 1.1 Alternative explanations offered for three basic assumption processes 35

Figure 1.1 An explanation of basic assumption processes 36

Figure 1.2 An explication of my version of Turquet’s theory of basic assumption oneness or (BaO) 42

Figure 2.1 The Hopper theory of fusion 57

Figure 2.2 The Hopper theory of the fear of annihilation 58

Figure 3.1 A flock of flamingos 69

Figure 3.2 A herd of walruses 69

Table 3.1 Some features of the fourth basic assumption of incohesion 71

Table 3.2 Some features of the work group: optimal cohesion (or heterogeneity) (1) (2) 86

Table 4.1 Some features of the personification of the fourth basic assumption of incohesion compared to the leadership of a work group with optimal cohesion 94

Figure 6.1 An illustration of polarisation and aggregation in the seating pattern of the group 128

Figure 8.1 A summary of the theory of Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification or (ba) I:A/M 151
…can anyone tell with absolute certainty the difference between the sounds of those who are in despair and the sounds of those who want desperately to believe?

from Fugitive Pieces
by Anne Michaels
For my daughter
Rachel Sarah
a constant source of inspiration
For more than forty years – from the war in Vietnam to the war in Iraq – Earl Hopper has steadily evolved his theory of social, cultural and political cohesion and incohesion. He has also applied his ideas to clinical practice with traumatised persons, including drug addicts, criminals, and sexual deviants, as well as survivors of massive social trauma. He has worked with traumatised organisations of various kinds, and has been an advisor to film directors and studios about the psychological and social dynamics of scripts and their production. In this monograph Hopper shares his rich clinical and consultancy experience, and demonstrates the vital importance of working within the transference and countertransference relationship.

In his Acknowledgements, Hopper writes about a broken vase in his childhood home. He loved this mysterious, beautiful object, wondering how it held together, and who it carried across the sea. Hopper, too, has crossed the sea. In the United Kingdom, he has dedicated himself to the study of integration, solidarity and coherence, and to helping broken persons to become whole again. Eugene O’Neill (1926) has written that although Man is born broken, he lives by mending, and the grace of God is glue. Indeed, this may be why psychoanalysts and group analysts know that their work always has both religious and political dimensions.

Group analysis is a broad church. Earl Hopper’s style of work, as that of all mature workers, is an expression – a ‘personification’ – of his own integration of his different educations and trainings in sociology, group analysis and psychoanalysis, matrices of family and cultures, debates with colleagues and a deep, extensive knowledge of the literature of our discipline. Traumatic Experience in the Unconscious Life of Groups is one of the products of his labour. Yet another is his (2003) selection of papers The Social Unconscious. I am proud to include these important new books in this series, which has encouraged many significant contributions to group analysis.

Malcolm Pines, Institute of Group Analysis, London
References


Acknowledgements

I first began to think systemically about the cohesion of social systems within the context of traumatogenic processes during the early 1960s. Those were the days of assassinations and Vietnam, drugs and revolution, not to mention rock and roll. Clearly, it has taken me a very long time to write this book.

One reason for the lengthy gestation is that the topic of cohesion is very complex. It has been necessary to study an abundant literature from several disciplines, and to acquire sufficient clinical and consultancy experience to illustrate – if not to test – the theory of social cohesion that ultimately I have developed. Another reason for the lengthy delay is that it was difficult to find colleagues who shared my interests, and with whom I could discuss my work. American sociologists were unfamiliar with the work of the European Fathers of Sociology, namely, Marx, Weber and Durkheim, and with the great debates concerning conflict and consensus paradigms for the study of social systems. Indeed, ‘social system’ precluded the study of social change. However, British sociologists regarded applied psychoanalysis as useless, and were not familiar with the fields of group dynamics, group relations and group analysis, and with the work of Bion and Foulkes. Similarly, psychoanalysts and group analysts barely acknowledged one another as members of reputable professions, and hardly credited sociologists as having a legitimate field of study.

It is, therefore, a pleasure to acknowledge the encouragement that I received to pursue my particular intellectual quest by the sociologist Norbert Elias and by the psychoanalysts and group analysts S.H. Foulkes, the Father of Group Analysis, and Robert Gosling, who at the time was the Chairman of the Tavistock Clinic.

I also received enormous help and support from several organisations, colleagues and friends. In 1968, the Group Analytic Society and The Institute of Group Analysis (London) offered me an opportunity to study group dynamics from the point of view of sociology, psychoanalysis and group analysis as a student on Introduction to Group Analysis (London). Not only did I participate in a weekly ‘experiential’ group for thirty weeks, but also in a so-called ‘large group’ for ten weeks, and had the chance to read the work of both Bion and Foulkes and their early collaborators. This course was, and perhaps still is, unique. Later, I was on the staff of the course, and it is hardly
fortuitous that I now co-convene this course with Roberta Green. Our staff team consists of Geraldine Festenstein, Sonia Ingram, Patrick Mandikate, Percival Mars, Carmen O’Leary and Christopher Scanlon, with whom I have had many stimulating discussions about the dynamics of social cohesion. In fact, I first presented my ideas about social cohesion in terms of a fourth basic assumption in the unconscious life of groups and group-like social systems in 1986 in one of my lectures for the course, entitled ‘A Deeper View of Groups’. (The other lecture was called ‘A Wider View of Groups’, and was the central theme of *The Social Unconscious: Selected Papers* [Hopper 2003], the companion to the present book.)

Subsequently, I have presented versions of my theory and various clinical illustrations of it to colleagues and students throughout the world. My work has benefited from their critical comments and difficult questions, and I hope that they recognise their influence. I very much appreciate the hospitality that I have been given by colleagues who I have met through our work and play at various conferences, in committees and on the Boards of the Group Analytic Society (Europe), the International Association of Group Psychotherapy and the International Psychoanalytical Association.

In 1989, I committed to writing a very early version of my theory of the fourth basic assumption in ‘Notes on Psychotic Anxieties and Society: Fission (Fragmentation)/Fusion and Aggregation/Massification’ for a Plenary Lecture for a meeting in Cambridge of the Psychotherapy Section of the Royal College of Psychiatry. Although these ‘Notes’ were rough, or perhaps because they were rough, I received many helpful comments and questions from psychiatrists and other members of the mental health profession who were not psychoanalysts and group analysts, but who were generally interested in my attempt to conceptualise what so many of them experienced daily in their work with difficult, traumatised patients within organisations that were chronically under-funded and under constant administrative and political pressure.

In 1996, I presented a more developed version of this work as the Ilse Seglow Memorial Lecture for the London Centre for Psychotherapy. My lecture ‘Incohesion (Aggregation/Massification): A Fourth Basic Assumption of Unconscious Life in Social Systems’ (Hopper 1996a) was reported by Sally Baldwin in *Reflections*, the journal of the London Centre for Psychotherapy. Her report made me realise how many links I had omitted from my argument.

The Group Analytic Society Committee reminded me that 1997 was the centenary of the birth of Norbert Elias. They hoped that as Norbert’s colleague I might be able to present ideas that reflected his influence on my thinking and on group analysis in general. It is not generally recognised that in my lecture I tried to do precisely this through my emphasis on helplessness in the traumatogenic process, as opposed to innate, malign envy. However, in retrospect, I can see that in the context of the ambiguities of my argument I did not give sufficient emphasis to the importance of Norbert’s ideas concerning the relationship between the individual and the group in terms of what he might have termed a ‘recursive figuration’. I have tried here to put the record straight.

Lionel Kreeger (1997) was the Respondent to my lecture. He said that my argument constituted a kind of ‘re-punctuation’ of Turquet’s (1975) ‘Threats to Identity in the Large Group’, which Lionel included in (Kreeger 1975) The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy, and that through this I had changed the meaning of what Turquet had written. To illustrate his point, he told an especially apposite joke:

During the celebratory parade in Red Square following Leon Trotsky’s exile, a cablegram is handed to Joseph Stalin who is standing proudly on Lenin’s great tomb. He raises his hand to still the proceedings and declaims, ‘Comrades! A most historic event! Trotsky sends me congratulations!’

The masses cheer and Stalin reads the historic cable aloud: ‘Joseph Stalin, Kremlin, Moscow. You were right and I was wrong. You are the true heir of Lenin. I should apologise. Trotsky’.

You can imagine the roar of astonishment and triumph that greeted this communication, but in the front row below the podium a little tailor calls out, ‘Comrade Stalin, such a message, but you read it without the right feeling’. Stalin again raises his hand to quieten the crowd and says, ‘Comrades! This simple and loyal worker, a good Communist, tells me that I have not read the message from Trotsky with enough feeling. Come up here, comrade worker, and you read it to us correctly!’. The tailor mounts the reviewing stand, takes the cablegram, clears his throat and reads: ‘Joseph Stalin, Kremlin, Moscow. You were right and I was wrong? You are the true heir of Lenin?? I should apologise??!! … Trotsky’.

I later learned from Lionel that the original manuscript for Turquet’s chapter was submitted at the last moment in the form of lecture notes, and that the manuscript that was eventually published reflected his extensive and creative