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# The Group and the Unconscious

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drunk; the crowd roars like the ocean, breaks into waves, destroys like a tidal wave. The crowd is compared to a drunk, delirious, dangerous woman, to an orgy ending in human sacrifices; the crowd, a man-eater or quicksand, swallows up those imprudent enough to fall into her midst; the crowd exerts the attraction and arouses the fear of vertigo; it is a gaping void that fascinates and captures by the thousand those who hurl themselves into it; the crowd is a suckling child, wailing, yelling, expressing himself in monosyllables, humming, who demands to eat, to drink and to bite, who flies into a rage, defecates, bares its teeth, stamps, kicks, screams, goes to sleep suddenly, exhausted by exercise, pure milk and fresh air. The emotional instability, physical impulsiveness, proneness to anxiety, the concrete, intuitive, syncretic character of its ideas, the thinking in terms of pairs of opposites, etc., described by Le Bon (1895), can be explained only by the presence of this imago. This also explains the well-known solution to the dangers of a spontaneous crowd: surround it, infiltrate it, organize and discipline it, in other words, establish the supremacy of the paternal over the maternal imago.

Is it possible to apply the second Freudian meta-psychology to groups? Do the id, the ego and the superego have meaning for group dynamics?

The id is present in a group in the following way: the number of individuals produces libidinal and aggressive drives in each of them; drives achieve greater intensity in groups. From a structural psycho-analytic point of view, there is no other problem in a group than that of satisfying these drives. This seems to corroborate rather well the clinical observation of groups.

The drive or id is formed at the same time as the ego, which, at first archaic and physical, becomes better able to carry out the functions of control, of choice between the drives and of the reality sense. The archaic ego, which the group takes on to defend itself from its own drives and to take reality into account is the leader or the chairman of the session. But, starting with the individual egos of members, groups tend to construct a common, fictive, relatively autonomous ego, which can make the group self-regulating and guarantee both control over drives and a perception of reality, accompanied by a critical sense.

With this fictive group ego the group builds a superego – rules born of common consent and binding on all – and a group ego ideal, whose functioning in the army and the church was described

by Freud. If one adds the additional distinction between the ego ideal and the ideal ego, we should describe the primacy of the ideal ego, that is to say, the ideal of narcissistic omnipotence, in certain gangs.

In conclusion, let us say there are two very different ways of studying groups depending upon the level of analysis.

In the first case the small human group is seen as a miniature society: in fact one finds in it, in a nascent state, magnified or simplified, certain fundamental social phenomena: the circulation of information, the exercise of authority, variations of 'atmosphere' and 'morale', resistance to change, negotiations, pressures, tensions between the common interest and the satisfaction of individual needs, conflicts between the requirements of organization and the preservation of individual differences and of creative spontaneity, norms, codes, beliefs, a common language, commemorations, hesitation between toleration and ostracism of deviants and cliques that weaken the collective unity, antagonism between outstanding personalities, generally re-enforced by those of corresponding sub-groups. Much revolves around such themes: as majority-minority-unanimity, scapegoats, heroes, leaders and masses. In this experimental society, restricted in size and duration, and from which certain reformers have extracted a model of utopia, it is possible to live and study several problems of political philosophy, sociology and social history, so long as these studies do not relate to the size and duration of real societies. Such studies might well be called 'microsociology'.

But a small human group is also a place where people meet, a place of confrontation and of bonds between these people outside of any social reference. Affinities and clashes of personality thrive. Individual wishes, always just beneath the surface, cry out violently to be fulfilled: a call for help and protection, the lust for power, exhibitionism, denigration or contradiction, curiosity, admiration, idolatry. The narcissism of each individual meets with sweet victories and bitter defeats, victories over others where they can be treated as the objects of my wishes, wounds that other narcissistic beings, willy nilly, give me by their very existence. Anxiety common to the group arouses the oldest individual fears. The fear of being a group, of losing one's identity in the group, is no doubt the first difficulty encountered. In the depths of these fears are phantasies, unconscious imaginary scenarios in which the most secret wishes meet the most archaic defence mechanisms.

From these vulnerable points emerge works of art, madness and crime as well as dreams and day-dreams. Here the group is the laboratory for other experiments: over and above the programmes, the avowed goals, the work done together, the group arouses the resistance of all these individual phantasies. Because unconscious can communicate directly with unconscious, the disparity between these phantasies produces group disunity; the anxiety aroused by predominant phantasies produces the paralysis of the group; the convergence of phantasies may produce an ideology even a mythology, both defensive and peculiar to the group, or it may provide the group with the energy for its work. To succeed in the latter is the goal of the psycho-analytic study of groups, whether they be temporary (e.g. training and psychotherapeutic groups) or real.

## Chapter 7

### The group illusion

To the three major social forms of illusions that Freud described in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913) and elaborated in subsequent works – the religious illusion, the artistic illusion and the philosophical illusion, which I would prefer to call the ideological illusion – I propose to add a fourth: the group illusion.

It now seems to me that the analogy between the group and the dream may be carried farther. First, the dream, individual illusion *par excellence*, is produced in sleep, a state in which the cathexis of external reality is withdrawn. But training groups also take place in a situation of cultural isolation, outside social and occupational life during a period that interrupts the rhythms of everyday life. External reality is suspended. To this withdrawal of object cathexis corresponds, in economic terms, an over-cathexis of the group, that is to say, freed libido is cathected in the only reality present: the here and now. The group thus becomes a libidinal object. The observation of real groups confirms that there too one finds the same economic equilibrium as Freud discovered in the individual psychical apparatus between object libido and ego libido: there is an inverse correlation between group cathexis of reality and narcissistic cathexis of the group.

Second, in groups as in dreams, the psychical apparatus is subject to a triple regression: chronological, topographical and formal or structural. The group situation produces a chronological regression not only to secondary narcissism, but even – and this is one of my theses – to primary narcissism. To limit myself to the example of secondary narcissism, confrontation with others is felt as an anxiety-arousing threat of the loss of ego identity. This in turn produces narcissistic counter-cathexis, which leads to well-known difficulties in communication and cohesion in group work

a defence against his own problems and those of others; his manifestly sociable, sympathetic and conciliatory attitude quickly became unbearable to the group. This loss of a narcissistic mooring on the others produced depression: he lost his bearings. But the women in the group realize this and function as co-therapists and allow him, in the Kleinian sense, to begin a reparative process in his depression. At the same time the group, which had dumped a number of problems on to François-Joseph, could deal with them through him.

In the case of Alex, events could not take the same course for, unlike François-Joseph, he was an obsessional. It was necessary to provide other participants with the opportunity of asking themselves questions concerning the problems posed by his psychopathology and to learn something about dealing with such persons. Alex was given the opportunity of realizing how he affected others and of examining his reactions instead of repeatedly imposing his will on them. Where a fundamental unconscious phantasy of one person is at work, a training group cannot make him progress; only psycho-analytic treatment could do that.

The monitor needs to be firm when presenting this problem, for the central character tends to consider only the problems he speaks about 'true', and not the problems he presented for others. Thus both firmness and tact are required so that this person does not feel that he is being singled out by the monitor, as he inevitably is by certain participants. Moreover, if the monitor does not act in a clear and timely manner the group runs the risk of paralysis. In such cases one interpretation is not sufficient; clear interpretations are arrived at by real work and persistence. In the case of group members fascinated, irritated, inhibited or made passive by this pathological individual, work needs to be done to disengage their spontaneous reactions and to develop their awareness of this individual's effect on them. If the monitor does not provide an example of psycho-analytic work and if he does not help to create the conditions needed, such work will not be done by magic. This is, in fact, one of the forms of the 'psycho-analytic illusion' (Anzieu, 1973).

## Chapter 13.

# Psycho-analytic group theory

### (A) An overview of unconscious group processes

The aim of this chapter is to consider unconscious group processes and organizing principles in the light of psycho-analytic theory. Clinical examples will be used to illustrate fundamental group processes.

The value of psycho-analytic explanation derives from the fact that it operates in terms both of forces and of meaning. Lewinian explanation, on the other hand, recognizes the group as a system of forces, but ignores it as an organization of unconscious meanings. The error of psycho-sociologists is to explain one manifest phenomenon, group functioning, on the basis of other manifest phenomena (common goals and norms, inter-individual relationships, etc.), whereas for the last three quarters of a century psycho-analysis has shown that manifest content is explained by latent content.

At present the only fruitful work being done with groups uses psycho-analysis; psycho-analytic practice and theory have demonstrated to us the inadequacies of the psycho-sociological approaches to groups. The remainder of this chapter will review in psycho-analytic perspective a certain number of key-group processes.

### *The group illusion*

As we have said (see chapter 7), the group illusion is a feeling of group euphoria. The non-psycho-analytic monitor tends to participate in this illusion, which is gratifying for him: a good group has a good monitor.

In the group illusion the group itself is a libidinal object. Monitor and participants address the group in their discourse. 'The group' is to be told what 'the group' feels; the monitor suggests that 'the group' organize itself, analyse itself. In fact, an occasional, provisional group is no more than a collection of persons thrown together who hardly constitute a group in the psychological sense of the term and sometimes do not want to be one. To speak about this group-object, which does not exist, is to give participants the more or less explicit task of making it exist. Being a good group is a defensive displacement of the real goal: personal insight. The 'group' becomes the group's goal, a collective restoration of threatened individual narcissism. With hardly any experience, members set themselves up as monitors: they form groups in order to get others to share the euphoria and collegial ideology to be found in a group. The group thus functions in the minds of participants as an ideal ego.

This group process alternates with the process of identification with the leader as common ego ideal. Where the group situation mobilizes the ego ideal, the image of the leader, an all-powerful and benevolent father is cathected. Where it mobilizes the ideal ego, the group itself (narcissistic identification with the breast, associated with pleasure and fecundity) is cathected. Only a psycho-analytic type of interpretation can enable participants to recognize these processes instead of being taken in by them.

#### *Wish-fulfilment in groups*

The group illusion is but one example of group phantasies produced by the group. This is why we have drawn an analogy between the group and the dream (see chapter 5): groups, like dreams, fulfil wishes.

As in dreams, the primary psychic processes, which, in the group, become objects of wishes shared by its members, are displacement, condensation, symbolization and reversal into the opposite. As in dreams, secondary elaboration re-arranges the results of the primary processes; in groups this takes the form of the production of myth-like narratives or intellectual constructions of an ideological type in which forbidden wishes are displaced. As Kaës (1971b, 1974b) has shown, myths and ideologies are compromise formations to be found only in group or social situations.

The group unconsciously creates illusions as individuals do dreams. Whether the group maintains pre-conscious phantasies by endless conversations or engages in reality-directed activities, participants 'stage' their common wishes in the 'theatre' of phantasized group space. In other words, in all groups, both natural and artificial, there is a process that incites participants to stage what Ezriel (1950) has called the lowest common denominator of their individual phantasies.

#### *Phantasized group space*

Just as the nocturnal dream takes place against the backdrop of one's own derealized body image and perhaps, more primitively, the image of the breast-mouth, so group phantasies take place against the backdrop of phantasized group space.

In an informal small group, the spatial arrangement participants spontaneously adopt is a circle or oval. Underlying phantasies generally take the following forms. If participants are in a circle, the group is a mouth from which emerges coherent group discourse, a place where a multitude of mouths eat one another (phantasies of the group as hydra are almost always found in silent group members, later interviewed individually); the group may also be a vagina, a central hole in which the words of monitor or chairman-phallus penetrate and impregnate. If the form is oval, the group is a closed egg, the monitor the seed and the participants waiting to be born. In all cases, the circular or elliptical formations suggest a female, maternal image, whereas rows, such as are found in schools, function to loosen the hold of the female imago and to impose the paternal imago.

In the large group; participants tend first to stick together in what Turquet (1974) had called 'my neighbour's skin'. Then they sit side by side in a closed line (or two concentric lines) forming ovals or rectangles and delimiting an internal space. The central space is so anxiety-arousing that both participants and monitors feel the need to put tables in front of themselves and/or in the middle. Whether empty or filled with a table, this hole is phantasized as inhabited by the bad object (in the large group destructive drives are projected, not on to the outside, but on to the centre), or by the monitors (wherever they *actually* sit). Groups phantasize orifices and their functioning (though they

really need to open doors and windows at certain times) and appendages or excrements (participants sitting behind others or off to one side).

The large group is then experienced as the inside of the mother's body. Correlative material deals with:

- (a) exploring the surface and inside of the body. Some sessions are like anthropologists' descriptions of mythical voyages in healing rites or giving birth; participants in training seminars say they have come to be cured or to be born. These amount to the same thing: becoming autonomous from the phantasized mother's body. Participants are ambivalent about this objective. They jealously defend their personal identity (their personal autonomy with respect to the group-mother); and, conversely, they are comfortable in the small group as in a mother's womb, and do not want to come out;
- (b) the acquisition of symbolism as the appropriation of the mother's body and the sublimation of the anxiety over losing her;
- (c) the rivalry of children (children-penis, children-excrement) in the mother's womb, destructive either for them or for her;
- (d) phantasies of joined parents and of the primal scene projected on to the team of monitors.

### Split transference in groups

Experience has shown that positive transference tends to concentrate on the small group and negative transference on the large group. The fixation of destructive fragmentation anxieties, as well as of persecutory or depressive anxieties on to the large group, hold the large group at a constant, archaic level of regression. This frees the evolutive libidinal processes that emerge in small diagnostic or psychodrama groups. These processes are: pregenital and genital sexual phantasies, intercourse, relation to authority and law, and to the double prohibition of incest and murder, the intermingling of masochism and narcissism, guilt feelings and their eroticization, the role of transgression, and the diversity and mobility of libidinal choices. In a seminar, the small group becomes the phantasized place of pleasure; the large group the phantasized place of death.

Not only the nature but also the object of transference differs in large and small groups. In a small group, the central transference is on to the monitor but there is also the lateral transference of participants on to one another. This is due to the fact that in a small group participants rapidly get to know one another. There is also a third type, much harder to discern, analyse and interpret: the transference of participants (and the counter-transference of the monitor) on to the small group as an object or entity.

Matters are quite different in a large group. In the first place lateral transference is minimal. In fact, participants who belong to different small groups hardly know one another. Our observations have even led us to the hypothesis that lateral transference in large groups is a displacement of central transference on to monitors. In small groups, by contrast, lateral transference of one participant on to another, while sometimes being displaced from the monitor, generally has meaning for the two persons (the object and subject of transference); it is the task of psycho-analytic work to shed light on and verbalize this double meaning.

In the second place, large group transference is directed at the team of monitors or one monitor as a member of the team. Material specific to large group transference includes the following themes: the monolithic solidarity or fragmentation of the 'staff', its cohesion or disagreements, its authoritarianism or 'laissez-faire', its knowledge or ignorance, its honesty or love of manipulation, its heterosexuality or homosexuality, its genital or perverse polymorphic character, the phantasized pleasure of staff members, the staff's intention to hide its wishes from participants in its' womb without letting them out, etc.

Transference in the large group is complementary to that in the small groups. In a small group it is difficult to analyse the transference of participants on to the group as libidinal object because the small group is both subject and object of the transference. For example, it is difficult to analyse the group illusion, so frequently found in small groups, in a small group, even if the monitor is not duped by it. It may be analysed in the large group. Interpretation in such cases stresses the splitting of persecution and idealization (of the small group, monitors and group dynamics). More generally, interpretation needs to take into account group forms of the superego, the ego ideal and ideal ego.

*Manifestations of archaic anxieties*

Threats to the ego (breaking apart phantasies) mobilize archaic anxieties and defences against these anxieties. Related to the maternal imago, these are (1) anxieties of annihilation or emptiness, (2) anxieties of persecution and (3) depressive anxieties and (4) schizoid anxieties of breaking apart. Defences against these include (1) the splitting of the object into good and bad, (2) restoring the bond and (3) projective identification.

Depressive anxiety ('we aren't getting anywhere', 'we're no good', 'we're incapable of making the group function without a leader or monitor') is easier to tolerate and express than persecutory anxiety. One of the defence mechanisms to which it gives rise is identification with the monitors (trainees want to become, in turn, monitors and therefore in training groups speak as though they were monitors). Identification with the lost love object is in fact the surest and oldest way of overcoming the loss and reincorporating the love object.

Annihilation anxiety is the most trying because it threatens physical destruction and radical castration. Defence mechanisms in groups generally come in the following order: silence (certain participants are paralysed and do not manage to say a word), identification with the aggressor and with the victim (one participant presents himself to the group as its victim or does everything he can to be so treated; another reproduces the supposed narcissistic omnipotence of the monitor in sado-masochistic relations with other participants) and finally pairing. In pairing, one looks for a particular partner, whether of the same or the opposite sex, by whom one can be recognized as an individual; this counterbalance anxiety aroused by the 'bad mother' group who loves her children to keep them undifferentiated within herself without letting them be born: in this sense pairing is an escape from the group and at the same time a reparation of injuries incurred there.

(B) *The circulation of phantasies*

Very broadly speaking, we can say that there are two opposite preconceptions concerning groups. The first, which may be called 'technical', makes the group out to be a mechanism that will work

properly only with the right sort of know-how. Consequently, 'technical' preconceptions exclude phantasies or unconscious life. The second, which may be called 'phantasized', makes the group out to be a place where wishes come true, and where manipulations of reality are excluded. The second we have called the group illusion.

All human activity aims at satisfying the needs of the living organism or of the social body by a mixture of phantasy and know-how. Those who are under what we might call the technical illusion resist phantasy; conversely those who are under what we might call the illusions of phantasy resist know-how.

Phantasizing is stimulated in two or three persons by love or deep friendship; in groups, this is done by joint activities like free discussion or dramatic improvisation (so long as group members have something at stake). Intermediary situations include hypnosis, psychoanalysis and relaxation. Moreover, the society itself provides three principal sources of phantasy: art, religion and science.

Phantasies are perhaps individual psychic reality *par excellence*, since the child becomes a subject when phantasies are organized; unconscious phantasies produce individuality. Thus it is not surprising that when participants in a training or therapeutic group feel their individuality threatened, they mobilize phantasies. More generally, in any encounter between several persons, an individual either turns in on himself to protect his threatened identity and his individual, unconscious phantasies, or he imposes these phantasies on others. Groups become paralysed if several competing individual phantasies cancel one another out. The apparent group unity may coalesce around such an individual phantasy thrust upon, for example, a scapegoat or deviant; sometimes there are endless abstract discussions, personal quarrels, prevarications, rationalizations, wild psychological analyses and even outbreaks of violence. Oppositions between two sub-groups may arise from the phantasized antagonism of two individual group leaders.

What is the psycho-analytic definition of individual phantasies in groups? It is a phantasized scenario between several persons, which the subject generally watches and does not take part in. It follows that this scenario has an *internal group organization*. In his behaviour, symptoms and nocturnal dreams, the subject tries to act out this scenario. His role and those he gives others are permutable; the scenario has variants but its structure remains the same. Each character in the scenario derives from the subject's

identification with one or several real persons of importance to him and one or several representations of internal psychic processes. René Kaës (1976d) has drawn a homology between the internal group organization of phantasies and the group situation in which certain members are sometimes used as recognition points and sometimes as projective supports for their subjective topography and for their drives. We agree with Kaës that there is an internal group organization in individual phantasies. This is the basis of phantasy-resonance. Moreover, the homology of the group psychical apparatus with that of the individual is reversible: Freud conceived of the individual's organization (id, ego, super-ego) as an internalized group.

Phantasy-resonance is the grouping of certain participants around one group member, who, through what he says and does, focuses the others on his individual unconscious phantasies. 'Grouping' means here not so much agreement as common, converging interests, echoes and mutual stimulation. As carriers of repressed desires; phantasies arouse horror, fascination or indifference, depending upon whether the wish arouses a violent condemnation by the superego, or a similar, hitherto latent wish now ready to break through, or effective defence mechanisms; particularly negation. Missenard (1971) describes the development of resonance thus:

Group discourse may be understood as the staging of the phantasy of its 'bearer', to which other group members react. More exactly, each of the protagonists has an individual position in the phantasized scenario of the 'bearer'.

This is possible for two reasons: first, the unconscious has only a limited number of themes; secondly each human being has to go through them in his own way.

Other participants speak about these themes and thus can easily take one of the 'places' in the phantasy.

Those who remain silent are nevertheless present – as 'spectator-listeners'. Thus they identify with those who 'act out' the phantasy; . . . some do it by identifying with another's wish, others by defending themselves against this same wish.

It is, then, an unconscious individual phantasy that 'organizes' the group's functioning. I would like to add an allusion to the organizing principles of the psychical life of infants and small

children. Spitz distinguishes three successive ones: at three months, the infant smiles at a human being (this marks the transition from passive sensorial reception to active perception; there is elaboration of pre-object and pre-ego and the beginnings of social relationships); at eight months, the infant feels anxiety on seeing a strange face or anxiety at the loss of the love object (with differentiation between what is mine and what is unfamiliar, the structuring of the ego's boundaries with the id and with reality, the beginning of integration and adaptation); at about fifteen months, children begin designating things and persons (this is the condition for speaking, negation, judgment and communication at a distance).

The effect of 'unconscious resonance' in psychotherapeutic group has, since Foulkes (1948), become commonplace in psycho-analysis applied to groups, because a better term has yet to be found. The analogy with the physical phenomenon of resonance is particularly clear. Acoustic resonance was discovered about 1450. Helmholtz generalized the concept in 1862 after observing that the same phenomenon occurred in optics, in electro-magnetism, etc., in short, wherever there was a vibration. A physical system may be set in vibration even by a frequency unlike its own; this effect remains weak but strengthens as the stimulative frequency nears the natural frequency; it attains a high intensity vibration (volume) when it corresponds exactly with one of the natural frequencies (resonance frequency): the system is then said to be 'résonant'. The phantasy would appear to correspond therefore to one of those 'natural frequencies' of an individual and, when a phantasy in one subject sets one in another oscillating, their content may be qualitatively different but the frequency closest to the natural frequency makes it 'vibrate' at near maximum intensity. These are, of course, only metaphors.

Ezriel (1950, 1966) noted that in individual or group therapy, the thoughts and attitudes of the patient manifest themselves in the form of a wish to establish individual relationships with the psycho-analyst-here and now. This comes from a need to find an outlet for unresolved unconscious conflicts by releasing the tension they have created in the subject. In everyday life, in groups and in individual therapy transference is one of the patient's efforts to establish such relationships with those around him. When several persons meet, each tends to project his unconscious phantasies on to the others and tries to make them act as he wants. If this

corresponds to their own phantasies, the others will play the role expected of them. If enough members of the group find enough mutual response (phantasy-resonance), a 'group tension' will result unless a majority of participants get together to use unconscious defence mechanisms against this tension. What the group psycho-analyst tries to understand is 'what the attitude and thoughts of one group member mean for the others and how each one reacts in a specific manner to a common group problem'. The analyst's interpretations concern a latent problem, revealed by the manifest content of the discussions, 'the common denominator of the phantasies of the group'. Resistances to the common group tension may take the form, for example, of a general silence, autobiographical accounts, inconsequential chat about jobs or literature or jokes, refusal to speak in front of others, or speaking for others.

This theory of intra-group phantasy-resonance is the basis of the technique of group psycho-analysts. The interpretation applies to the here-and-now situation only (whereas in individual analysis it links the individual's past to his present). It aims, not at an individual's problems, but at the common denominator of the unconscious phantasies of group members, or at collective mechanisms mobilized against common group tension. Finally, it only takes into consideration *central* transference on to the psycho-analyst – *lateral* transferences between members is considered as displacement of central transference. (It is true that for Ezriel, as for most British Kleinian psycho-analysts of groups, one psycho-analyst is enough to run a group.)

André Missenard (1971) has observed that the origin of phantasy-resonance is to be found in the dual, symbiotic relationship between the child and his mother. He proposes the metaphor of the plasmodium to describe the wishes common to participants and monitor(s). 'At this level of its functioning the group may be described as a living tissue called plasmodium, composed of a set of nuclei in a single cytoplasm. The group may be represented as oscillating between this image of itself and another, that of a tissue made up of differentiated cells, each having a certain unity.'

Thus one unconscious organizing factor of the group tends to construct the group psychic apparatus around that of an individual. This is 'isomorphy' (Kaës, 1976d), which Kaës believes is one of two group tendencies and can lead to the fusion of individual psychic apparatuses with the group psychic apparatus.

The second factor is what Kaës calls increasing 'homophormy'. By this expression Kaës means that the group apparatus is propped up by the individual psychological apparatus, but is differentiated from it.

#### *Organizing principles: (1) a dominant individual phantasy*

When a group is manifestly organized around the unconscious phantasy of one of its members, how does this affect its latent structure? I think that the members unconsciously delegate to one leader the role of arbitrator between the ego and the id, between the ego and reality; they get rid of their own psychological conflicts by dumping them on to him; this leader is central to the group's latent structure and acts as an ego to the group.

In his 1971 article, Missenard gives us an example of the first principle: the organization of group phantasies around the phallic claims of Dominique, a female participant. The group of Cythera (or Paradise Lost), which I described when dealing with the group illusion, was organized around Léonore's phantasies of narcissistic omnipotence. The triumphantly egalitarian ideology corresponds to an isomorphic tendency. On the other hand, failure of the first organizing principle involves risks of a breakdown if the group refuses to fuse with the central (individual) phantasy: it is no coincidence that the breaking-apart phantasy is the counterpart of the group illusion.

The unconscious individual phantasy also functions in natural groups when, for example, an enterprise or organization institutionalizes the phantasy of their founders. In the eyes of an ill-informed observer, these organizations seem to function around the image of their leader. A boss who succeeds in such an organization is one who, dealing effectively with external reality, controls the phantasy-resonance within the group. There are serious difficulties, however, when there is dissonance between the phantasies of the official leader and those of the group. In such cases informal leaders appear, or the formal founder disappears, leaving its organization with resonances none the less present because the founder has 'retired'.

By contrast, in training groups predominant individual phantasies are generally less stable. Because the phantasies of group members are not compatible, some bar the way for others and

thereby impede phantasy-resonance. In a group where all members are equal, no one phantasy can predominate. Thus the group goes adrift and has to look for another organizing principle.

*Organizing principles: (2) the imago*

Bion here sets us on the right track, providing one thinks out more rigorously several of his intuitions. His notion of unconscious basic assumptions is an interesting and significant attempt to find what the second organizing factor does. Bion's contribution follows in the Freudian tradition, showing how members of a collectivity find a sense of unity, each one substituting for his ego ideal the same ideal image, that of the leader. For Freud, it is not the prevalent phantasy of an individual but the imago of a leader that gives a group coherence. The imago belongs to the same order of unconscious reality as the phantasy, with two important differences: a phantasy is the representation of an action – which implies several protagonists personifying drives and defences – whereas the imago is the representation of nobody, a representation constituting a nucleus of regulatory psychological agencies of the ego, such as the superego, the ego ideal and the ideal ego. Secondly, phantasies develop with the individual. At least for Freud, the imago was constituted during the development of the species and exists potentially in all children at birth. Hence the universal character of imagos and their predisposition to provide groups (organizations) with a profound psychological unity. Hence also, the greater stability that imago organization confers on a group: the same imago may support several individuals and the imago-based group may follow more easily the changes encouraged by the leader than if it is organized around the phantasy of an individual member.

The imago, then, is the second organizing unconscious principle in groups. Jung used the term imago to refer to three domains: paternal, maternal, fraternal. In chapter 8, I showed, for example, that the collective oral phantasies derive from the organization of a group *around* the alternatively good and bad maternal imago. In chapter 12, I interpreted the difficulties in a company's management committee as being due to conflicts organized around the massive presence of a *paternal* imago.

The inventory of imagos remains an open question. The

existence of a maternal or paternal imago (the object of ambivalence) is obvious and beyond question. Should the imago of the phallic mother be added to this list? The phallic mother and the bad mother are undoubtedly two quite different psychological realities. But the former seems to me to be more a phantasy than an imago. The notion of a fraternal imago needs to be taken into consideration. Béjarano (1974) successfully studied it in a large group and called it a 'societal' imago.

Imagos tend to give a group a balance between isomorphy and homomorphy. Their function in groups illustrates particularly well the articulation between organization and structure. The imago emerges as the manifest organizing principle of the group when the underlying structure of the group is dominated by the ego ideal (see Freud, 1921), the ideal ego (e.g. the Cythera group), or the superego.

Although an imago may guarantee the unity of a group, the bivalence of imagos, which Freud was the first to stress, facilitates sudden reversals (in general the good imago becomes bad), which leads to upheaval, disorders or transformation in the internal organization and functioning of the group.

*Organizing principles: (3) primary phantasies*

Primary phantasies may be classified and related structurally:

- (1) To the individual's origins; these are phantasies of intra-uterine life, of the child-to-be-born in the womb of his mother, of the coitus of his parents, in short, of the primal scene; these phantasies underlie the infantile sexual theories by providing children with ways of answering the question of where children come from.
- (2) To the origin of sexual differences; these are castration phantasies. The child imagines a unisex penis, the preservation or disappearance of which defines men and women respectively in his eyes.
- (3) To the origins of sexuality: these are phantasies of seduction, the sexual emotions of the child, which he explains as the effect of the seduction of the desired object. (See Laplanche and Pontalis, 1964).

I treated intra-uterine phantasies in the section devoted to phantasized space and in my discussions of the large group. I also alluded to group phantasies of exploring symbolically the inside of the mother's body.

Primal scene phantasies may be observed in several forms in groups. Scaglia (1976b) shows that the triadic situation – monitor, observer, group – allows for all possible permutations of this phantasy. The observer may feel himself and be felt as the outsider, excluded by monitor and group. But the group may equally feel excluded from monitor-observer relations. In certain large groups meetings between monitors and observers are phantasized as collective coitus, as a primal scene that tempts participants to spy (peeking through the keyhole, coming in to disturb).

Castration phantasies assume rather specific forms in T groups, as I have mentioned in my chapter on breaking-apart phantasies (chapter 9). Here one finds both phallic castration anxiety and oral anxiety at being separated from the other. Primal phantasies usually remain unexpressed at first and are then communicated with great difficulty, after several sessions. Confronting these phantasies is a risk that trainee members must take in group situations: it is unconsciously felt as the 'real'-ization of a threat. In the psycho-analytic sense, the group dynamic operates between the two poles of wish-fulfilment (participants go to groups as they enter a dream) and of the realization of a threat (once the group has begun, they will experience the situation as a persecutory machine, see the analysis of group machine phantasies. In psychodrama groups, primal castration phantasies may be expressed in the themes of deformed children unable to walk or talk.

Seduction phantasies seem to correspond to Bion's third basic presupposition. The phantasy of the group machine, discussed in chapter 10, illustrates the transition from persecution by the bad-mother imago to a primary seduction phantasy.

Primal phantasies are also aroused in monitors. Inter-transference analysis is necessary when such phantasies too strongly dominate counter-transference.

With primal phantasies the group psychic apparatus acquires a more elaborate and varied system of oppositions than it does with the bivalence of the imago: for example container-contained (intra-uterine phantasies), actor-observer (primal-scene phanta-

sies), active-passive (castration phantasies), initiator-initiated (seduction phantasies). These differences tend to cancel out the group illusion (see chapter 7), which for this reason I have considered as a primal counter-phantasy. The group organized around a primal phantasy may accept differences between its members because it is assured of sharing something definite, namely, the origin. Individual psychic apparatuses are recognized in their relative autonomy and in their transitive character. They may occupy antagonistic, symmetrical or complementary positions on different vectors of the group apparatus. Some identifications are accepted; others are refused. Codes of exchange and codes for classification of internal and external realities come into being with primary phantasies, the third organizing principle; the group tends towards homomorphy, which counterbalances the tendency towards isomorphy. The organization of the group unconscious around a primal phantasy seems to me to correspond to a group psychical structure in which the prevalence of one particular psychical element (e.g. the ego) is not stable: different individuals may, depending on circumstances and the particularities of their subjective topographical organizations, occupy different positions in the group. There is thus a certain variety and variability in drives, defence mechanisms and the perceptions of rules and values.

#### *The Oedipus complex and the organization of the family*

Freud's position is well known. The Oedipus complex is the psychic nucleus of culture and social life; as it is of child-rearing and of neurosis: the mythical scenario of the collective murder of the father would appear to constitute the group or social version of Oedipal phantasies. This thesis raises several objections.

My first argument is that the organizing principles are not necessarily the same in individuals as in groups. Certainly, groups are made up of individuals. Thus, although they deal with the same psychic material, these processes are organized differently. Three principles of homomorphic organization are: the inter-individual imago, the resonance of an individual's phantasy and the universality of what we may call the 'collectivization' of a primal phantasy. The group imago is inter-individual; it occurs in relations between two or more persons. The resonance of an

individual's phantasy is one specific to groups, institutions and crowds. The collectivization of a primal phantasy is specific to informal groups, large or small.

My second argument derives from everyday observation. Supposing a group is made up of individuals who have dealt adequately with their Oedipal problems and behave in accordance with the genital phase of libidinal development. Once in a group such persons will have considerable difficulty feeling, thinking and reacting at an Oedipal or post-Oedipal level. Every informal group, large or small, provides those who participate in it, observe it or interpret its acts, with a demonstration of the existence of a *pregenital* psychic life. Precisely the same thing is true of institutional groups, but the phenomenon is partly hidden by the institutional framework (institutions are a defence against pregenital regression). If the pleasure of understanding what is happening in groups is a largely Oedipal pleasure (see Anzieu, 1976a), the attraction or the pleasure of being in a group consists of sharing or of hoping to share with others pregenital experience relegated to the back of one's mind or repressed at the genital stage.

My third argument, formulated in France by Lacan and in England by Foulkes (1972), is the following: the Oedipal situation is a family complex. Oedipal attitudes and feelings, in real families as in the legend, are the product of parents as well as children. Laius, frightened by the new-born Oedipus, turns him out and mutilates him; Jocasta, who probably recognized her son when he returned as conquerer, consorts with him knowingly; the Oedipus complex of children towards their parents is often a reaction to the Oedipal complex of the parents towards their children. As Foulkes observes, the same drama may centre on any member of the family group.

My final argument, suggested by Annie Anzieu, is that the genital stage presupposes that sexual differences have been recognized, thus allowing *triadic* rather than dual relationships. However, only individuals have a sex. A group does not, nor can it have one.

There is a natural tendency for all groups to level out the sexual difference of its members. I have not noticed any fundamental difference in the unconscious dynamic of the group, whether it be composed of members of one or of both sexes, or if of both whatever the proportions of each may be.

The group is a psychic reality that precedes sexual difference. Pregenital, homosexual, unconscious bonds are stronger in groups. They constitute a good defence against the potential aggressivity of its members. This is not the case in the family, where heterosexual relationships are dominant.

It is common knowledge that the group situation enables members to let off steam they could not let off within the family on account of sexual prohibitions. It is no coincidence that incest prohibitions exist universally. Freud in *Totem and Taboo* uses the clan as at once the group and the family. This confusion of group and family led Freud to attribute to groups a characteristic specific to the family. I prefer to think that Freud's proto-group-horde represents a phantasy of collective life, a sort of primal group phantasy.

In conclusion, the Oedipus complex is one of the organizing principles of the unconscious in families; it is not so in groups. Oedipal aspects of actions or free associations in groups may be explained by the other three organizing principles: (1) the resonance of an individual's phantasy (in which the Oedipal element is important), (2) emotional reactions to a central imago (see chapter 12), and (3) a primal phantasy (in which case one is dealing with early forms of the Oedipus complex, which Melanie Klein brought to our notice).

I am even tempted to go further; groups often use the Oedipus complex as a pseudo-organizing principle. It is hardly necessary to add that this is a pseudo-Oedipal defence against pregenital regression; forming a group is for some participants a way of adopting a pseudo-Oedipal façade (Anzieu, 1976a).

My hypothesis that the structural organization of the unconscious of the family and of the group is different sheds light on the fact that Oedipal organization may be obtained only within the family; no other social reality, whether informal or institutional, can take its place. The failure of free communities – in which so many of our youth have participated – is clear. However, once groups are unified by unconscious organizing principles, they really act on the basis of the intellectual and affective resources of their members. A work group, for example, manages to function according to common rules, a division of labour, reality-testing and self-regulation, if most of its members have got beyond the Oedipus complex.

Studies of so-called primitive societies attest to the coexistence,

on the one hand, of an extended family (clan) ruled by a chief, and in which sexual relations are regulated and, on the other; the group in which the bands of young heterosexual peers function temporarily as a mother substitute. We find the maternal imago as organizing principle of the first peer groups.

The psychotherapeutic group has an intermediate status: like the family, it mobilizes the Oedipus complex in members individually. Several patients individually re-experience incestuous or parenticidal drives. Group therapy can only treat the individual Oedipus complex *indirectly*: in groups, it operates regressively in transference by means of late (delayed) substitutions and displacements (Foulkes, 1972, p. 61). As Foulkes observes (p. 68): 'Generally speaking I have the impression that the glimpses we have of the conflictual Oedipal situation come to us in groups like the beacon of a distant light-house, each patient behaving as though the signal were his.'

#### *Organization, pseudo-organization and disorganization*

In addition to the psychological organizing principles I have mentioned there are economic, sociological and historical ones. Ethologists have even found chemical principles in insect societies. Moreover, groups may try to find substitute principles.

For example, the individual phantasy may be unconscious (dream, symptom, etc.) or conscious (daydream), as Spitz has noted. The same holds for groups. In chapter 6, I cited the daydream of the animals in the Camargue. Max Pagès (1968) analyses the 'whale' group, so named because of the group's whale phantasies. However agreeable such phantasies may be, their training or therapeutic effect is virtually null; they were pseudo-organizing principles. Nocturnal dreams that participants relate during sessions are quite another matter. Pontalis (1972) has analysed a group on the basis of dreams related by its members, and dream material is important for the analyses of monitors and observers. The similarity of the dreams of different members of the same group is 'sometimes striking. In one instance, two members dreamed of a scene in George du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson* (1891). This is but another illustration of phantasy-resonance.

In a group, as in an individual, a phantasy may also function as a

disorganizing factor, depending upon the nature and intensity of the anxiety connected with it. The group-as-machine phantasy reflects a fragmentation anxiety; certain silences may express the anxiety of being devoured. The group illusion is constituted around a denial of the loss of the love object; it is a collective defence against the anxiety of this loss. Breaking-apart anxiety is more difficult to define: at times I have explained it as a phantasmized castration, at other times as the loss of the object. It is always accompanied by the projection of destructive envy. This is to say that the phantasy may be related to three very different levels of anxiety. Its frequency is no doubt due to its position as common denominator of the various disorganizations possible by which participants in a group may feel threatened: thus it appears as the primary factor in the disorganization of the group's psychic apparatus.

In training or psychotherapeutic groups the appearance of disorganizing phantasies and anxieties leads participants to resort to primary defence mechanisms or to breakdowns. In natural groups, the institutional framework constitutes more stable collective defences against such phantasies and anxieties (see Jaques, 1955). To understand the constructive or destructive influence of resonating phantasies one has to consider notions of the body image and what we have called the psychic 'envelope'.

#### *The group's body imago, its 'envelope', its imago*

It seems appropriate to add another organizing principle to those already mentioned, the group's body imago (see Kaës, 1976d and Gori, 1974). Freud's fundamental hypothesis that all psychical functions are related to organic ones does not apply to groups. Groups suffer from not having a body and consequently imagine one. As I noted in chapter 5, metaphors of the group as a 'body' and individuals as 'members' express this wish. A group does not exist as such until it has acquired an 'esprit de corps'.

I am not sure these metaphors should be taken literally. Like the nocturnal dream, they are wish-fulfillments. Whether allegorical or mystical, the body thus designated is not more than an *ersatz*, a substitute for the biological body that doesn't exist. From the foregoing it may be supposed that:

- (1) the supposed imago of a group body is in fact a pseudo organizing principle;
- (2) it corresponds to a nostalgic dream of symbiosis between group members.

However, the psychic apparatus, whether of individuals or groups, constitutes a containing envelope; it is delimited and protected by what I have called an ego-skin (Anzieu, 1974b). A number of authors have observed similar phenomena.

Pierre Turquet (1974) has shown that besides the projection of destructive envy on to the out-group or on to an individual (the monitor or a deviant, who are not considered as really belonging to the group), there is a projection on to the centre, particularly in the large group. The group centre symbolizes the interior of the body by becoming the place where the bad object is. Another Kleinian psychoanalyst, Donald Meltzer (1967), discovered that in addition to the three imagos (the good breast, which nourishes and heals; the bad breast, which frustrates and destroys; and the idealized breast phantasized as all-powerful, omniscient and immortal), there is a more primitive toilet-breast. Here the anal function of expulsion is primal and constitutes the earliest representation of the mother as part object.

For Meltzer, the resolution or non-resolution of projective dependency on the toilet-breast establishes the boundary between psychotic and normal mental development.

Argentinian psychoanalysts were the first to apply this notion to groups, by stressing their function as a waste depot. Scaglia (1976a) believes this role is attributed in groups to the monitor. Unconsciously, for participants and even for the monitor, the observer in a training group is effectively present and silent: one can say anything in front of him, for, on the one hand, he will not tell anyone outside and, on the other, the disagreeable wishes participants project on to him will not boomerang. As Elliott Jaques has observed, the participants 'shit on' the observer. André Missenard (1971), in the observation of the case of François-Joseph, also uses the notion of a garbage can, a dump: while attacking François-Joseph for defensively avoiding regression and free speech, most participants dumped their problems on to him and were able subsequently, by treating his, to treat their own indirectly. Gear and Liendo (1976) have applied these views to an understanding of the unconscious dynamic of families one member

of which is psychotic, and to overall psycho-analytic work with such families:

The breast-toilet functions as a dump; it receives without reacting, is neither loved nor hated; like Pandora's box in Greek mythology, which enclosed the principal evils of humanity unleashed as winds, it is a container. It is imperceptible and for this reason highly regulatory. It is also a dumping process that liberates phantasies, creativity and the wish to know (epistemophilia) in participants and monitors.

I can now return to the distinction I made earlier between structure and organization. The individual or primal phantasy and the imago can 'organize' the group's psychic structure on condition that it is to some extent structured. This structure, or rather pre-structure, is provided by the psychic agencies described by Freud and developed by his successors: the id, the ego, the ideal ego, the superego, the ego ideal. But the identity of the group is not one of perception of thought, as in primary and secondary processes respectively, but an enveloping identity. In fact, what tends to dominate in the psychic organization of the group tends to be not so much the centre, the nucleus, but rather the enveloping 'ego skin', which guarantees its unity, its continuity, its integrity, the differentiation between inside and outside, in which one finds areas of selective exchanges, implications and things forgotten. An adequate understanding of the psychic group envelope calls for further study.