

Comments
by
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On The Keynote lecture;
Crisis: The Matrix Disrupted

I would like to start by thanking the scientific committee for asking me to accept this honorable task of being the commentator to dr. Marina Mojovic's key note lecture.

I am grateful for this.

I feel this lecture could be regarded as a culmination of experiences extending most of her professional life as a Group Analyst and lasting about a quarter of a century, involving massive impact of trauma and suffering. Thus bringing an important voice into the turbulent world of today.

In the lecture is woven also a deeply invested personal history, as she have been in the middle of these tremendous eruptive events, changing the map of Europe and the lives of millions of people in our contemporary history.

Marina has felt the impact of these historical events on her own person literally speaking. This makes her lecture all the more moving and impressive as knowledge derived from the chaos and turbulence of deadly conflict. She has shown us some of the impacts of trauma this conflict has had on persons, groups and the society as a whole. The effect and after effect on such essential things as survival and identity, coping with overwhelming fears and frustrations, is vast. At the same time the ordinary “business of every day life” must go on, tending to rational boundaries. The reactions to the disrupted Matrix Marina has shown us, must be viewed as a way of adapting and surviving in extreme situations.

Therefore developing defensive strategies like psycho-social retreats preventing breakdown from trauma and suffering makes good sense to me. Also important is your pointing out that this could spread and grow in groups as well as in individuals, and that in the course of time and with good work in groups, it is possible to find hope and trust to let go or reduce the “adapted shield”, and find new and better ways of engaging with the “world”. I like the openness in your focus on these issues. It can go both ways; both constructive and destructive. A retreat can become a *Clastrum* (Melzer), or a sheltering and nurturing space for recuperating, as is well described in Michael Endes book; “The Never Ending Story” (“Die Unendliche Geschichte” [1979])where the little hero after a long and exhausting struggle and travel comes to a strange house(a matrix) with a benign woman who is nurturing him until he is ready to go on in his endeavour to save “Phantasia” – that is the space for creative imagination.

We know that working with trauma and crisis could be a bit more demanding than working with; “The un-thought known” (Bollas) or “Ego training in action” as Foulkes put it. More like an impact of the un-thought *unknown*. Trauma usually adds something new - overwhelming affects and impressions. There are usually more intensive emotions stirred up, and more structure is often needed demanding the analyst to contain, and often carry more for the group. I think some of the conceptual tools you have developed over the years, comes from the need to understand the meaning of the reactions to severe trauma and the demand for intervention in crisis.

Your openness is a sign of the dedicated researcher. To quote LeBon; “The present age is not merely an epoch of discovery; it is also a period of revision of the various elements of knowledge. Having recognized that there are no phenomena of which the first cause is still accessible, science has resumed the examination of her ancient certitudes, and has proved their fragility. To-day she sees her ancient principles vanishing one by one. Mechanics is losing its axioms, and matter, formerly the eternal substratum of the worlds, becomes a simple aggregate of ephemeral forces in transitory condensation. This fact well established, it seemed to me evident that if a great number of historical events are often uncomprehended, it is because we seek to interpret them in the light of a logic which in reality has very little influence upon their genesis.

...(I) arrived at the conclusion *that beside the rational logic which conditions thought, and was formerly regarded as our sole guide, there exist very different forms of logic: affective logic, collective logic, and mystic logic, which usually overrule the reason and engender the generative impulses of our conduct.* All these researches, which are here summed up in a few lines, demanded long years for their accomplishments.»Gustave Le Bon, 1912, 3 – 9) The Psychology of Revolution.» iBooks.

I think you have a clear awareness of these different logics, and it is important to keep in mind that we, as commentators to the times we live and work in, are not free or exempt from the influences of these different kinds of logics mentioned.

I see your lecture as an example of what I call the epistemophilic desire for understanding.

It is important to gather knowledge in different ways. Both empirical knowledge by doing research and intelligent speculation and concept construction and testing.

In your case this coincide with your own history and lived life in a society exposed to shattering crises and trauma. This makes the lecture all the more moving and heartfelt. When a whole nation is made into a perpetrator nation many things changes, also for the members of that nation on many levels.

In one dimension of existence there are lots of projective and identification (primary) processes going on. On another (secondary) dimension there are relocations and translocations of processes and both dimensions having much to do with the struggle of identity preservation and change.

I think it is often necessary to make inference, like you do, from the individual to the social, then making the assumption that the social is about ties and relations to other people and things. This has been exposed to critique from those who think society is badly explained by concepts derived mostly from individual psychology, especially psychoanalysis. Some of the critique is relevant of course, and it is right to question the validity of this method: Is it to be understood on a metaphorical or analogical level? Or is there even a claim of equivalence? As we see in the morphological history writing of Toynbee and Spengler. The perspectives postulating that societies grow like an organism (start-middle – end) and can be explored like that. On the other hand it can be stated that in every person or group, there is some representation of a society incorporated and some identifications made, that makes it acceptable to postulate a society within, a group in the mind or a society in the mind of people.

What is inside or outside or where the membranes(boundaries) are and how they work concerning permeability is still open to debate. I like the beautiful lyrics from Cohen about the cracks that can make the light come in - like enlightenment.

As Freud put it in his work on “Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”(1921); every psychology is in the end social psychology. This very connection between social and psychology somehow is a quantum leap in direction of combining the one with the other and thus introducing a dependency which opened for new models of complexities and new perspectives. In the wake of this, some very important questions arise like: Essentialism – is there anything particular human within individuals, like core self? Or is everything to be found outside? What about the question of agency? What is moving the world, individuals, groups and organizations? Where is intentionality to be located? Is everything to be rooted in history? Or in contingencies of the cause – effect paradigm?

Or is there also strong influence from the moment of here and now in complex surroundings? This makes it also legitimate to question the social as such.

Also the construction (individual) or co-construction of reality (the social) is necessary to consider. If there is no essence, does anything go, as in the so called performative imperative that J. Butler assumes, where everyone can be one's own creation? Maybe the essentials might be some preprogrammed potentialities, like the mirror- neuron?

However it is not so that what is called social is an uncomplicated entity. Latour (2005) puts it this way: “There is a difference between social as in ***social ties*** and social as in ***social associations*** “(p.65). The first connotes relations of longer standing like bloodline, family, often vertical roots. The second is more related to the moment or ad. hoc. groups and organizations that is horizontal or network based:

“Once the second meaning of social as association is in place, we can understand what was so confusing about the sociologists of the social. They use the adjective to designate two entirely different types of phenomena: one of them is the local, face - two - face naked, unequipped, and dynamic interactions; and the other is a sort of specific force that is supposed to explain why those same temporary face – to – face interactions could become far-reaching and durable.

While it is perfectly reasonable to designate by social the ubiquitous phenomenon of face – to face relations, it cannot provide any ground for defining a social force that is nothing more than a tautology, .. a magical invocation, since it begs the question of how and through which means this increase in durability has been practically achieved. *To jump from the recognition of interactions to the existence of a social force is, once again, an inference that does not follow from the premise*”(ibid,p.65).

Now some words about dissociation. This is a very important concept linked to trauma and experience of pain and overwhelming emotions. This phenomenon is said to be first observed in psychiatry by E. Azam (1886) under the term “double consciousness”. It was also described in literature by Stevenson (Jekyll & Hyde) and Dostojevskij (The Double), and occurred in Freud (1893) under the term “Abspaltung” which was translated as “cut off” in SE. Later these phenomena were covered by the term splitting, often seen as a precondition for projection and projective identification (Broch, Lossius & Tjelta, 1987), and this term kept its place in the literature until the studies of trauma, especially sexual transgressions, dissociation and multiple personalities became popular again in the 1980-90s. It is of course debatable if we are dealing with the same or different phenomena. If dissociation is something else than a kind of splitting.

John Steiner (2005) also thinks along these lines when he writes about defensive structures as psychic retreats: “If we consider the defences themselves, then their mechanisms can be described, in most cases involving splitting and projective and introjective identifications” (p. 2).

Marina, you have found that these phenomena can be seen unfolding in psycho-social retreats also in groups. Just as Bion with his theory of projective identification also as communication (between mother and baby, container – contained and the beta-elements treated with alpha function, reverie), and Later Ogden (1979) turning projective identification into relational communication, took it from one person psychology (Klein) into relational or two person psychology. You have taken this further and made an important conceptual extension into the group dimension.

As I read you, we must accept the concept of group on two arenas: As an organization in the mind as well as a group in the external reality coming together in group analysis, for instance. This all makes for a lot of groups assembling in a group analytic setting. For me the question how a group in the mind should be regarded is important. You rightly point out that there is a lot of good work done, and I would include you in this. However there still remains some work to do, such as concept clarification, theory synthesis, and research.

It is said that every person has a social, a personal and a secret life. I think the two last ones belongs to the life of desires and fears that are often encapsulated (Hopper) and loaded with shame and guilt, what Foulkes termed the autistic domain withheld from communication. Helping people come out of their encapsulations is an important task for group analytic dialogue.

Last but not least, a word about the social citizen experiment. It is probably important to differentiate between group analysis as treatment, and the applied use of the group analytic method in making observations and gaining knowledge from society and large groups, as you have started in Serbia, with the social citizen experiment. Working with large groups like this is not therapy but it might have great therapeutic effects, maybe a kind of paradox, and teach us a lot about organization, cooperation and dialogue in larger groups.

So thank you Marina for an excellent key note lecture, and thank you all for listening.