OPUS Conference September 1985

By
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The Organisation for the Promoting of the Understand of Society convened its first public conference in September 1985 using a mode of experiential learning, focused around the role of citizenship. The first part of this paper is an account of the process and content of that working conference from the perspective of one particular participant. The account is published with the encouragement of the OPUS staff, who see some of the raw material provided as an important complement to their own conference report. An appendix to the account treats some important theoretical and methodological questions quite fundamental to the use of this kind of experiential learning in the exploration of social systems behaviour. [1985]

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[*OPUS, An Organisation for Promoting Understanding in 5ociety, was Directed by Olya Khaleelee, and is now Directed by Lionel Stapley, 26 Fernhurst Road, London SW6 7JW, from whom further details can be obtained.]

Formation

As first member to arrive I was able to observe the formation of the opening plenary. The first members to register came in and clustered near the open window at the end opposite to the fireplace, in the centre of which the Director of OPUS had clearly marked her own chair. With two exceptions this group grew from its edges round towards the director's seat, which was eventually left isolated with empty chairs, one on each side.

Opening Plenary

There was inevitably a certain amount of anxiety and confusion as to what being a member of the conference might mean and I sensed that this anxiety was reflected into and by the role of director during this first plenary session. Olya Khaleelee introduced herself and welcomed members then proceeded to give a series of coded indications of the norms of the conference.

There was a comment on the geographical distribution of membership with the most northerly and most westerly points noted and identified with particular people. Those from the east and the south appeared to be non-significant. In terms of world construct, therefore, we were clearly identified as facing north-west, with our backs to the eastern block and the underdeveloped, or southern hemisphere. This east/west split, with east denied, and the north/ south split with south denied was taken up symbolically within the body of the conference as one of the ex-members of the Communist party picked up the theme of "blowing cover", while we utilised events south of the river (Brixton Riots and child murders) as some kind of dumping ground of sadism, strangulation and riotous behaviour. It was as if the observational lens of this particular working conference was focussed to the north-west and that the blind spot lay to the south-east, although we were acutely aware that the dynamics of the north west were in some way a defensive flight from the psychotic disturbances of the south east.

In her role as Director of OPUS, administrator and convening chairperson of the conference, Olya was inevitably the focus of dependency. However, rather than drawing attention to this dynamic and reflecting it back into membership, she appeared to accept the role and act in a dependence-leadership mode, leading on to a rehearsal of the myth of the founder and a rehearsal of the salvation history, the saga of his life's development and the evolution of the organisation. There was then an introduction of scriptures, with a reference to written materials which had been sent out, and in particular to the booklet 'How Society Works' attributed to Sir Charles Goodeve. Several points stood out as particularly significant. The name itself appeared to be in contradistinction to a 'bad-eve' and we were immediately thrown symbolically into some kind of genesis myth, the battle between good and evil in the primal origin of the species. It was as if the 'good-eve' had come to the rescue in some

messianic way to provide a way out of the mess into which the actions of 'bad-eve' had plunged us.

This impression was intensified by two further comments, the first being that Charles Goodeve's role in the Second World War had to do with 'the deflection of mines'. One sensed that his later career represented a continuous repetition of this paranoid psychodrama. The mines were not disarmed, blown up or removed, they were deflected, the task being to find some clear channel through the potentially nihilistic, explosive, anarchic, threatening waters of the deep, seeded destructively by the powers of evil. If we followed 'good-eve' then we had some hope of getting through unharmed. The second comment concerned the purpose of OPUS as indicated by Sir Charles, namely 'the understanding of social process in order to lower the irrationality of social behaviour', so that understanding became the deflection of mines within the social system. It was as if understanding was being offered as some kind of sophisticated defence against psychotic irrationality. I was left with an uneasy sense of confusion, something to do with the irrationality itself as not included in that which had to be understood, but rather as some kind of diffuse quality which needed to be lowered, as something that was seen as potentially threatening, the hidden 'mind-field' through which we needed to learn to pilot our way without being blown up. It felt as if the irrationality was being disowned as part of the society which itself needed to be understood and gave further evidence of the levels of primitive splitting which underlay the field.

In so far as Olya offered herself as Director of OPUS in the throne of succession to Sir Charles, she offered to us the model of 'good-eve', the facilitating mother, providing the boundaries of dependency and the source of nurture, an idealised good object, or good environment, so inviting the regression, transference and projection of the conference as a whole.

Olya attempted to describe her own role within OPUS, and by implication, within the conference structure. OPUS was characterised as a network, members were equally balanced in power, as were the members of the conference. The fact that communication tended to have to flow through Olya as Director and through the office, put her in a somewhat special position, about which she clearly felt ambivalent, introducing a negative, or denied, symbol in the words 'I wouldn't call myself the spider in the centre of the web'. It was an intensely significant meta-communication. The network was immediately focussed around her role, she offered herself as the spider in the centre of the web, and then denied the association, with all its psychotic and terrifying connotations of the bad breast or persecutory cervix. If Olya was not the spider in the centre of the web, where was she? Were we flies caught in the web with the spider waiting in the wings? Or were we the spider and she the fly, caught in the centre of the web? What was the denial, of the centrality, or the spideriness of her role? Anxiety rose among the membership and there were whispered joking comments about 'come into my parlour said the spider to the fly'.

On reflection I find myself making connections and associations in the light of other symbols and material which emerged during the conference: the symbol of the cake to be baked, shared, destroyed, consumed; of the sandcastle created to be jumped upon, and sadistically annihilated, with the denied image of the sandcastle being eroded by the lapping water of the incoming tide; of the plenary room being the site of placental connectedness between the living body of the conference and the outside world, the point of mediation, of no man's land, of belonging neither to the inside nor the outside; and of the symbolic convergence of the

spider's web and the tree within pre and perinatal analysis, with all the ambivalence between idealised good and idealised bad, as that dependence base upon whose preservation one depends for life itself and yet whose failure threatens death and against whose abdication psychotic talion, terror, loss, rage is mobilised and then repressed in the interests of survival.

I sensed that the Director became acutely aware of the intense anxiety and ambivalence being focussed around her role, in that having negotiated acceptance of the conference structure and timetable she came to the end of her introductory speech and fled. It was as if she could not get out of the chair fast enough to get downstairs for some coffee, so preventing the formation of the conference itself, and providing a role model of flight from anxiety which perseverated in the conference culture for the rest of the weekend.

I found myself collusionally and powerfully caught up in the whole psychodrama, quite unable to see through what was happening as it was happening sufficiently powerfully to offer any reflection in the here and now. Others in the coffee break shared their disturbance and sense of fury that they had been unable or unwilling to do anything about it at the time.

On reflection this opening plenary seems to offer an intensely powerful model of social process, indicating ways in which certain positions of leadership are taken up and then become the focus of terrifyingly disturbing social projection and ambivalence, of dependency and counter-dependency, pressures which seek out the weak points of leadership and throw them out of role to the point where they begin to act out in collusional counter-transference of the social process. So political leaders are elevated as promising to take up the mantle of the messiah, only to be seen through once in office and discarded, as epitomising the bad mother, the bad breast, the bad womb, the bad placenta. That which in initial fantasy is seen as providing protective walls reverses into the origin of imprisonment and containment, oppression and deprivation. I think therefore in the opening minutes of the conference at an extraordinary powerful and fast moving pace, some of the most fundamental dynamics of current British political and social culture were re-enacted.

Initial Sub-Groups

Membership of these first sub-groups had been 'randomly selected to ensure greatest diversity', whatever that meant. One sensed that the use of the word random was some attempt to defend the conference administration from responsibility for what actually happened in terms of the composition of the groups, while at the same time the administration had not exercised 'random selection' but had picked people to go into the sub-groups in order to give the sub-groups the maximum and widest mix and diversity of members. The paradoxical contradiction was not commented on, but again provided some sense of norm of denial of choice-making and responsibility, in an attempt to deflect the mines feared to be lurking in the waters as people reacted to the kind of grouping in which they actually found themselves.

The sub-group task was 'sharing of individual experience and identification of trends and issues'. I was a member of the small group which remained in the plenary room in which Olya also remained as initial chairperson and OPUS scribe. My memory of the group is in no sense detailed or sequential, which must partially at any rate reflect my own confusion and inability 'to see' what was going on within the conference or it sub-sectors. We were

concerned with boundaries: boundaries as divisions, as containers. A central theme focussed around the story of one member from a middle class Surrey commuter-belt background now living in the centre of London who was concerned about a particular wall in her residential block which was bulging, about to fall down, potentially lethal, in danger of collapse and for which no other resident would take responsibility. The member concerned went along with this abdication of responsibility taking upon herself not to reflect back to the community the irresponsible abdication but to take up on their behalf mediation with the authorities, with the owners, and to negotiate for the rebuilding of the wall. Comments were that she had acted out of terror and fear of the wall collapsing and its consequences, and reference was made to her childhood upbringing within a convent. I was fantasising associatively about walls as providing the security of the social fabric, the containment of infantile anxieties and in particular of the walls of Mother Church containing and providing somehow a safe space for the regressive parts of society. The danger was apparently that the fabric of society was in danger of fragmentation, of falling in upon its inmates and killing, destroying, entombing them. Echoes of Liverpool/Juventas crowd riots, stampede, falling walls and death, of the Mexican earthquake and entombed babies, leading on to key words emerging in discussion like: polarisation; logger-heads; blame; struggle; confusion; anger; pushing. In reaction to the sense of the social fabric disintegrating the emotional tone was one of fear. Action, therefore, was the acting-out of fear, or the acting out of fear, so that action was perceived as some kind of defence against anxieties, generated and triggered by the social process, which might or might not have anything to do in functional reality with what was actually happening in the community.

Other divisions and walls became the focus of attention. Divisions between classes as alternative walls; between races; between the black and the rest; differences as providing the fabric of social differentiation, distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups, always with the danger of the divisions themselves coming under stress, decaying, rotting, and breaking down and having to be put back up lest the difference between the inside and the outside would have to be faced and resolved across the boundary.

At one point colour became significant in that the black, deviant, criminal, needy, weak sector was associated in some kind of black hole, contained by the thin **yellow** band of the police. The person who introduced the word 'yellow' for the police was immediately filled with confusion as to why that particular colour had emerged, as if the normal containing forces of authority dressed in blue had suddenly somehow turned yellow in our midst. Perhaps the police were full of fear and acting out of social terror. Significantly or not, the mis-take occurred at almost the same time as the 'accidental' shooting of a black woman in Brixton, destined to trigger off massive rioting by the end of the day. On the other side of the thin yellow line were those who were in a position of strength, the carers, the community watch, with all the ambivalence and uncertainty as to what was the difference between care and control operating across the boundary between the haves and the have-nots, the powerful and the powerless. Other forms of displacement of psychotic talion across boundaries emerged fragmentarily and fleetingly. The issue of rising levels of child abuse, and the particular incident from south of the river, strangulation, murder, were mentioned only to be dropped again quite quickly.

There was brief mention of the change of level of social acting out as the boundaries of containment had broken down, so the Liverpool fans had pushed through the wall, and the Toxteth riots had come home to London. Liverpool's anarchic testing of the boundaries and pushing of the walls of the national structure had moved up level from the deprived

neighbourhood to the city as a whole. On later reflection similar imagery of course emerged in the Labour party conference where in his famous speech Neil Kinnock denied that the Labour movement simply had to make a 'great noise' and the walls of the Thatcher government would collapse. There is some sense that maybe if the mobs can rush around the boundaries, throw petrol bombs and blow their own trumpet loud enough, the oppressive social structures of the Establishment will collapse and then those who have-not can rush in and take possession of the Promised Land, looting, pillaging, raping, as they go. The underlying themes of envy and destruction, of counter-dependence, of the good supportive, resourceful structures becoming bad, containing, imprisoning and depriving went unnoted.

With 10 minutes to go we were reminded by one OPUS scribe of our need to report to the next plenary and after some confusion and resistance we became a good group, compliant with the wishes of the Director. We used the member whose social role was apparently putting back together walls on behalf of others to record a series of brainstormed key words and pin them up on the wall. No responsibility whatsoever was taken by any member in terms of speaking to those words. The assumption of dependency culture implied that the scribe was responsible for the words and for carrying the meaning of the small group through to the plenary, in spite of the fact that she had quite clearly resisted any such role.

Second Plenary

I found this session marked by intense ambivalence about sharing what was inside with what was outside across the sectors of the conference. The good, compliant group had put its summary words on the wall, another group split between two factions, one wishing to write something up, the other wishing that they wouldn't and eventually one member on his own authority writing a few words on the flip chart in an illegible script as if making some mark on the wall was important, only to have his contribution disowned and reversed by other members of the group. Another group had also written words down but sat on the sheets of paper and would not put them up. The fourth group had written nothing and had nothing to show for its work, feeling that it didn't want to report back. There was ambivalence as to whether the fourth group was deviant or strong, good or bad, as to whether the children of the conference membership, acting out in their corporate gangs, were somehow vying for the pecking order in showing that they didn't have to go along with the wishes of the conference mother.

Evidence that this was a struggle about the conference directorate became clearer as the pressure mounted on Olya to take some kind of control of the situation. The underlying task of the testing of authority was perceived as endangering the overt task of reporting from the sub-groups. Again the pressure was such that I sensed that Olya was forced out of role, unable to reflect on the underlying meta-process as a microcosm of social behaviour and taking more and more managerial responsibility for ordering, chairing, determining which group reported first and how they should go about it, enforcing the compliance of the third group to put its paper up on the wall and talk about it, and so forth. It appeared that anxiety about the content was obscuring study of the process, which I felt in retrospect was mirroring powerfully the behaviour of sub-groups within a social system, each holding on to its own information and refusing to give signals to other groups, as if information was power and resource. Internal group secrets are used to define group boundaries and therefore sedate anxiety about loss of identity within the whole. There were fears of surveillance and the

misuse of information by those in power and under it all primitive levels of regression, dependence, counter-dependence and the struggle to sustain an identification between what was inside and what was outside in order to sedate psychotic anxieties of disintegration, with the yielding up of power and authority, issues of civil disobedience as the corporate acting out of adolescent struggle and so forth.

Again a few words and phrases stand out as significant, like the fear of getting up against reality, of ambivalence about containers. One member who had joined at lunchtime reflected somewhat punitively on the way money was being treated as a bad object. The intervention meant that we were unable to examine this evidence from the social process and instead were being asked to conform to what ought to be going on, in other words money is a good object and should be treated as such. So the pieces, the fragments of evidence of counter-dependency, of the breakdown, of reversals, of conversion reactions, were denied and buried, resources had begun to be seen as persecutory wealth as threatening malignancy, containers as prisons. The conversion reaction appeared to be in the primal splitting between the good womb and the bad womb. It was as if society was moving across from one pole of idealisation to the other. Good things, instead of being idealised with the denied bad, were themselves being denied and reversed with the idealised bad becoming dominant. At one point action was described as 'premature' and I have a field of associated words like: regression; enormous undercurrents; pull; escapism; constraint; building up; blowing up; decay; rotting, as if at one level there was a fantasy of premature failure of the placental support system leading to psychotic terrors of being entombed in the womb, which had to be ripped apart, blown up, in order to escape and survive. It was, however, intensely difficult to stay with this level of interpretation and awareness and the collusional oppression and denial of the unconscious processes was extraordinarily intense.

By the end of the session it was quite clear that the themes around which subgroups for the next session were intended to form were in no way clear enough to allow the sub-sectoring to happen. Again Olya was seduced into taking some managerial role, suggesting the reconvening of the plenary for a limited period, so that the themes could be clarified and the sub-groups formed. Members suggested 20 minutes, Olya over-rode this and extended it to 30 minutes and closed the second plenary. It would appear that she was completely overwhelmed by anxiety about the content and management of the process of the conference, in that during the tea break Olya then took responsibility for identifying the themes on behalf of membership and wrote them up on a flip chart. I sense that we as members of the conference were placing enormous pressure upon Olya to manage the boundaries and process of the events in such a way that membership was defended from the anxiety of having to work at the understanding of society. It was as if the Director was giving directions, that the task of the conference was in fact so threatening that it could not be tackled.

I think, again on reflection, that this must represent a three-level collusional process. Firstly, that Olya in her own role was experiencing intense anxieties to do with representing directorship of the work of conference membership. It has something to do with providing containment of psychotic anxiety by displacement into the group around her, in defence against understanding the microcosmic internalisation of social process within her own role and its collusional resonance with her own intrapersonal psychic defence structure. The second level of collusion is that between Olya and the membership, which individually and corporately colluded in transference, generating immense pressure in flight from understanding social process and concurrently therefore exposing the structures of defence at

intra- and interpersonal levels within the conference itself. The third level of collusion represents the boundary transaction between the conference event and the wider society of which it was a microcosmic holograph. It would appear that there is a seduction of 'experts' into the role of understanding society on behalf of others, so serving the social defence task of repressing understanding of social processes and in particular of those irrational psychotic elements, anxieties and defences which, when acted out, become the powerful common, corporate dynamics, reified into social structure and acted out in social process. I suggest that the unconscious defensive task, or primary task, of the event, collusional compliance with which was essential for the survival of OPUS, had something to do with the perseveration of social ignorance and innocence, the repression of understanding, the rendering blind of insight, the occlusion of the field of vision.

I am increasingly certain that it is the defences against psychotic anxiety which are actually reified in the social structure and behaviour, any understanding of which therefore raises psychotic levels of anxiety. If the person, institution, event, seeking to understand social process is unable to withstand or stand under the levels of psychotic anxiety released as these defences are seen through, then the task of attempting to understand society is bought off by the collusional defence against psychotic anxiety.

Continued Plenary and Self-Selected Sub-Groups

At the start of the reconvened plenary I took a chair in pole position to Olya's throne, which had now become a very significant centre of dependency within the room. Not only were chairs left empty on either side of it, but other chairs had been withdrawn from the position, which was left in isolated pre-eminence. Olya's white cardigan, draped symbolically over the back of the chair, partially hid the black maw of the open fireplace behind. Protective courtiers, members of the church and other OPUS consultants, ranged themselves around her at the end of the throne room. I opened proceedings with a symbolic challenge to authority, noting that I did not think I was the only person in the room who was deaf to what she was saying and indicating that the noise of traffic etc. coming through the wide open windows from the world outside was rendering it very difficult to hear what was actually going on in the room. There was an immediate rejection of the move to close windows on the ground that we needed the noise in the room from outside in order to keep us in touch with reality, a comment which confirmed my sense that we were in flight from task and hiding behind the noise in an attempt to avoid hearing the signal. Another member had added two or three more themes to Olya's list and slowly major elements were identified. There was an attempt to cut off the additional elements and only to use the themes identified by Olya, again indicating the intense dependency upon the director's role. I had the rising sense that the themes themselves were simply being used as figures to avoid examining the ground of the process in place, namely the mode by which society divides into self-selective sub-groups which have to justify their existence by having distinct purposes, ideologies, boundaries, locations in space, but which at another level are microcosmic mirrors of each other, caught up as a galaxy enacting the multiple, fractured, reified psychotic defences. I had previously decided to take my place in the furthest corner of the basement room as a point of examination of foundations and regression within the conference structure. Another member indicated that they wished to work on fragmentation, boundaries, chaos and disintegration and that they would also be going to that room and that sector in fact left first. I have no

personal access to the process by which the rest of the conference membership segmented into the remaining four groups.

Self-selected sub-group

12 people gathered in the basement room 'with the comfortable orange chairs'. There was an initial clarification that members had gathered to talk about fragmentation and boundaries, although I indicated that I had chosen the room prior to the sectoring of topics, because I wanted to dig into the foundations of what was going on in the conference and was working with the hypothesis that the apparent themes around which people were gathering were comparatively irrelevant. I expected similar material to rise in each sector, although the dynamics of the sectors would be complementary. My comments were met with a fairly heavy level of denial from other members.

HR was prevailed upon to introduce the subject of boundary testing with an account of the way a particular local authority continually breached the boundaries of a children's home, seemingly quite unable to provide the containment, security and autonomy required to engender maturation of the residents. It appeared more interested in games of power, invasion, control and sustained dependence. In retrospect I think the members of the group felt themselves to be inmates in some kind of children's home, in danger of having their boundaries breached by the powers that be. There was a certain amount of confirmation of this perspective in the phrase that we were ' all in the same hole together', with the attempt to generate some kind of whole or unity out of the apparent sense of fragmentation present in the room.

After some silence a member commented that she felt we were in a condition of mourning, an insight which was immediately taken up and applied to the wider society with the query as to whether the whole British community was in mourning having lost its sense of Empire, its status, and didn't know where it was going. The perspective came under fire from another woman as too glib, then GP (a priest), who was sitting diagonally opposite the open door, in which HJ had brought an extra chair (high and black) [It was HJ who had applied the mourning comment to the wider society] - responded in terms of the resolution of mourning by the provision of some hope for the future, paralleled to the understanding of life after death for the individual.

I noted the intensity of grief associated with loss of the known world, and the role of the church in denial of grief, its displacement into religious constructs and its reification into some kind of pseudo hope of resurrection, noting that it was people like him (i.e. priests within the community) who prevent the cathartic working through of grief and therefore perpetuate and fixate its phenomena socially. His response was immediate and sharp in that he described me as one of those people who undermine the security of the social system. This nascent fight threatened to destroy the priesthood in the room and called in question the boundaries of belief, meaning and ultimate security, in the absence of which intense levels of anxiety began to rise. PA launched an intense attack upon me, interrupted and deflected by HJ, resulting in intense fight being displaced into the female pair, in which it was apparently safer. MA, caught in the middle, intervened and stopped the fight, offering me sympathy, protection and comfort. I interpreted her role, as in previous interventions, as attempting to put the walls back up when they were threatening to crumble around us and indicated that I

did not wish for her protection. I wondered why it was necessary for the group to avoid the conflict and fragmentation which was evidently present.

There followed an anxious attempt to restore the priesthood within the room, with first one and then another woman, probing to see whether there were one or two priests present. GP was obviously recognised in role, but the search for some dependency leadership to guarantee the boundaries against fragmentation led two or three people to probe my role with a rising sense of disconcertedness to find that while I was a reverend, I still asserted there was only one priest present. I noted the split and idealisation between Christ and anti-Christ, my presence appeared to have torn a hole in the assumed boundaries of the dependency culture,

RV, sitting on the floor at the pole of the longer axis of the group, facing the window, appeared to have been out of the discussion since the comment on mourning. She intervened with an interpretation of the structure and dynamic of the group, noting the polarisation between the female and male elements into two groups facing each other, associating with the left and right of the group. Her comment was attacked as being irrelevant and inaccurate, since one woman was sitting with the men. The person concerned however appeared to be having considerable sex role difficulties, being dressed in black and white with trousers and later wandered into the gents toilet by mistake. I had two main associations, one was to the attempt to develop polarisational splitting within the group, generating two sub-groups in an attempt to contain within the gap the anxieties about fragmentation and boundarylessness of the group as a whole. Associated with that was the attempt to set up a battle of the sexes, as some way of acting out in safety the more personalised fights between individuals of the same or opposite sex. My second main association was that this was an attempt to characterise the group as a brain with the splitting into left and right hemispheres. This interpretation clearly did not fit, however, since the female group was on the left from the speaker's perspective and the male group was on the right. The interpretation did, however, reflect the culture of the group, in that the female element was utilising dream material, symbol structures, body and feeling related words whereas the male core of the group was using analytic and theoretical construct related material.

In spite of attempts by one member to value and sustain the relevance of her insight, RV clearly felt that her contribution was unacceptable and shortly left the room to go first into the coffee room, where the group was tackling the subject of action, then in flight from a priest and a smoker, to work her way up through the building, arriving eventually at the group in the room at the top, where on reflection she said she felt much more at home. I learned later that she had taken the seat of another woman, who left the conference during that group session and did not return the next day. This was a complex pattern of scapegoating, flight and displacement as the chaos, fragmentation, loss terror and fight were exported from the basement, moving up through the building like some kind of magma core to irrupt out of the top and blow another member out of the boundary of the event. On later reflection, it was significant that the room at the top was dealing with dreams and after the departure of RV we began to deal with nightmares.

On further reflection the interpretation of group dynamic in terms of left and right, male and female, made sense if we perceive the unconscious patterning of the basement group not only as a left/right split but also as a psyche/soma split with RV taking the place of the head, from whose perspective the soma was split between left hand and right hand, the left hand being female and the right hand being male, corresponding to the reversal in her own psyche

perception of the left brain dominant analytic, in contrast to the right brain dominant intuitive and symbolic. In this sense the group went through a process of decapitation, losing its head, exhibiting the fragmentation in the fourfold splitting of psyche/soma, left and right.

The cutting off of the head in the face of the intense anxieties generated by examination of broken boundaries and fragmentation became clearer in the group culture over the next few minutes. The issue of the boundaries of the field of analysis used to provide the construct for the understanding of society was raised, with some indication that if the boundary of analysis was drawn at birth and only the post-natal field allowed for examination then paranoid-schizoid processes were seen as instinctive and could not be understood either individually or within the social process. That we needed therefore to shift the origin, at least back to conception, if we were to understand the psychotic and intensely regressive phenomena in which we were caught, both within this group and also in society as a whole.

The attack eventually mobilised in response to this level of interpretation, reflecting the intense anxieties stimulated by allowing primal material into the frame of reference, came paradoxically from a primal therapist, albeit one utilising a Jungian construct to handle the anxiety-defences and stress levels involved. This led to a period of outlawing of any jargon, any reference to any other word written, a cutting off of any intellectual understanding which might require prior knowledge or expertise. It was as if the norm of the group became the cutting off of the head, we were left only with somatic language, preverbal, regressed states of consciousness for which the only way of communicating was the reflection of the sense of nightmare, fear, palpitations, nausea - this in spite of the fact that at least 8 of the 12 group members were highly skilled and experienced, and well read, in individual and group analysis.

The sense was that insight was too terrifying to be tolerated. The psyche itself was persecutory - a malignant organ from which all apparent threats to the group originated. So with the group symbolically decapitated the residual soma proceeded to deny and repress all psyche elements still operational within the room. The experience was one of intense disorientation and oppression, a despair of being able to use any skills whatsoever to bring any insight to bear on what was going on. Eventually after one prolonged period of silence, the ex-Greenham Common woman, who continually stressed the need for meditation, commented that the fragmentation appeared to be over and we had at last reached some common ground in the stillness, whereas previously she had been aware of palpitation of the heart and intense knotting in the solar plexus. I was sitting in pole position opposite to her and indicated that I had taken up some of those feelings myself, seeing the group silence as a regressive flight from handling the differences into some attempt to provide a preverbal unity, or undifferentiated whole within a safe environment. I sensed that in the cutting off of insight I was being asked to handle the nightmare on behalf of the group. Gradually other members of the group were able to own part of the nightmare themselves and to handle some of the sense of psychotic terror at the fragmentation of boundaries, the shaking of the foundation in response to which the pattern of multiple fight, splitting, flight and regression had emerged. Before closure we were able to do some work on the integration between left and right, male and female, good and bad, whatever the polarities happened to be, noting the need for a two-dimensional field to integrate polarities which tended to emerge as opposite ends of a line in the one-dimensional construct. The task facing us was that of holding together differentiated polarities in creative integration, rather than allowing the polarisation

as a dynamic to push us into one extreme or the other and then give up any possibility of talking to the antithesis.

In conclusion HR commented that while he could see the necessity for doing this, believed it with all his heart and tried to work towards it in his own life, in practice within social systems he had given up the fight and was overwhelmed by the process of polarisation.

Reaction after the first day

As I travelled home on the tube I was increasingly aware of rage. It was as if, having pushed back out of the depressive position towards the end of the group, naming the sense of fear used to repress the fight, the residual material, which had not been capable of significant expression within the group began to surface. I began by identifying rage against specific persons around specific relationships, comments and interchanges, then slowly refocused into rage about the culture, particularly of the small group work, with the intense annihilation of capacities for social understanding, process awareness, the sense of destruction of competence and the feeling that I had only been able to live consciously with a very small part of myself. Then there was a third stage of focussing which centred in on my own collusion with that process, an inability to take risks and push back out, to sustain work with strength.

As I worked through some of the material later that evening with a colleague we were able to identify some of the triggers which had given the group process such power, together with identifying the collusional defence maintenance constructs, particularly the overtly religious and the Jungian, being used to contain and suppress anxiety and at the same time therefore to suppress creative insight and work on the task of the conference itself.

As information and pictures about the Brixton rioting began to filter through on the late night news it seemed to make sense of the whole dynamic of those at the bottom of the stack losing their head and acting out in enraged fury and mindless destruction, the sense of being trapped, provoked, rendered impotent and yet impinged left no way to go other than the road of anarchic violence. I was acutely aware that the tabloid papers of Saturday morning had carried the banner headline, 'fury at too lazy blacks', indicating a response to the MP's comment complaining about the provision of small business grants to Afro-Caribbean members of the Handsworth riot area. The subliminal notice appears to have been to trigger black fury, whatever the skin colour of those acting it out.

Sunday

Preparation

Knowing that I had been exposed to a high level of adrenaline release the previous day and would probably face even higher stress levels during the coming 24 hours, I decided that the best way to sustain a working insightful role, rather than simply be overwhelmed by adrenaline poisoning and act out, would be a fairly heavy physical workout session. I rose early, did a very hard mile and half run, taking about 15 seconds off my personal best for the

distance, I had a tepid bath, light breakfast and then jogged two miles to the station. I had also moved out of grey trousers into light-weight summer slacks and changed from a blue to a red tie. I felt good, very full of energy and alert, clear headed, powerful, able to handle fight culture without being overwhelmed by it, though aware of some tendency to move towards a manic phase after the depression in the group culture of the previous day.

On the way in I reviewed the tabloid and heavy newspapers on two new-stands and eventually selected the Observer as providing the most news-full and graphic presentation of the Brixton rioting.

Opening Plenary

Arriving some 10 minutes early, I chose the seat central on the back wall facing the windows, at right angles to the long axis of the room. Seating had been rearranged from the snake of the previous day to a double oval. I sat quietly reading the Observer and watching how people filled up the seats. As on the previous opening plenary, BK came and sat next to me, the vicar's wife from Brixton sat opposite to me, Olya had retained a seat at one pole of the long axis, although this time sitting central on the wall facing the fire place. There appeared to be a lot of anxiety at the doorway, people hung in a group, blocked other people's way in, someone put an extra chair into the inner circle bulging it out towards the door, clergy took up positions on either side of the fireplace, as if in the sanctuary seats for a Sunday morning service, but the chairs in the immediate centre of the fireplace were left vacant. Slowly attention was focussed on them and the group quietened to be taken by surprise as Olya spoke from the opposite end of the room. It had been assumed that the queen was absent. In contrast to her role of the previous day, Olya gave a clear statement of the purpose of the plenary and passed the responsibility for working on the task back into membership.

Contributions from the theme groups of the previous evening were made essentially in order from top down. The two largest groups were in the attic and the basement, the middle ground had been largely vacated. In the attic, dealing with the theme of dreaming, visions and hope, 14 people had congregated, including the Director, and two other OPUS consultants, identified in fantasy as Thatcher, Scargill, and Powell. Somebody identified the attic as the place of junk. It was the head, trying to do the creative thinking on behalf of the rest of the conference, dreaming in the attempt to generate some sense of political vision for the future, yet finding itself barren, impotent and strangely uncreative, though comfortable. One person later described a sensation towards the end of the session where he had been caught up in almost a waking dream, or trance-like state, at a pre-verbal, almost proto-mental level, with intensely sensual experiences of being held in a warm, vibrating, living tactile environment, which he associated with a good womb.

Four rooms were available, five groups had formed. One met on the landing in the heart of the building, tackling the theme of money and babies. They sensed that they were blocking everybody else, they were in the way and yet they were the centre of communication, everybody had to pass through them to get anywhere - they were the pulsing heart of the conference. Next door to them, left behind in the plenary room were the ones who were mourning the fact that they had no dream, no theme, they were the dreamless ones left behind in no man's land, who eventually became caught up with the theme of mediation, making the connection between the inside and the outside, somehow not part of the action and yet not

part of the outside world either - a placental form mediating life from the outside world through the doorway onto the landing, into the navel of the conference unconscious.

Below the plenary and staircase groups (of four and five members respectively) two further groups had met in the basement. Four had gathered in the coffee room around the theme of action, while 12 of us had met in the back of the basement near the toilets, looking at fragmentation and boundaries. The action group found themselves struggling with the theme of containment and of pollution. HJ and PA provided a brief account of the fragmentation group. I found myself struggling to recognise that it was the same group in which I had taken part - the account seemed incredibly idealised, superficial, denying the depth of struggle which had been experienced in the room. After four or five minutes, I returned to the theme from the basement, summarising my own perspective of that particular group's process, indicating the need to break through the idealisation and repression of the religious and the Jungian constructs, the need to be able to tolerate and stay with levels of psychotic terror, rage, grief and love if we were to be able to understand the processes being acted out in the social system around us. I was fascinated to find that the contribution evoked an immediate retaliatory counter-blast, virtually outlawing the use of the word 'psychotic' together with any analytic interpretation in the field of social understanding.

As latecomers arrived, they filled up the seats leaving the central chair in the fire place vacant, to be taken eventually by the last person to join the plenary, as some kind of guilty victim, the late arrival made to sit at the front and be the focus of everyone's attention, seated in pole position to Olya in the throne she had vacated, flanked in the sanctuary by the representatives of the Roman and Anglican communions. It was as if power and authority, church and state, held the ends of the long axis, while the vicar's wife from Brixton whose home had been broken into during the looting of the previous night sat centrally under the windows facing across the short axis to BK and myself, representing some kind of homosexual pair linking arms in support of the magistrate who sat in front of us, facing the rioters arraigned with their backs to the window.

I had become acutely aware of colour changes in the room. People who came on Saturday dressed in red were wearing black on Sunday morning. Some who were wearing black, or black and white on Saturday had emerged in multi-colours, greens and blues. Blues from the Saturday had tended to change to red for Sunday. It was as if at some symbolic level there had been a conversion reaction, dynamically represented by the shift of axis from one end of the room to the other, as if the babe had turned. Dependency and counter-dependency were reversed.

I drew attention to absentees, raising the issue of what had been deposited in people who were not able to rejoin for the Sunday. KJ tried to say something about chaos and despair, only to be completely overridden by GP, speaking from the sanctuary. A little later LJ encouraged KJ to have another go and she raised the possibility of chaos being barren and hopeless, indicating that chaoticisation does not necessarily have to be creative, it can just be destructive. It was significant that her contribution was immediately followed by an intervention from another clergyman, the effect of which was to annihilate the possibility of despair, as if there was no way that could be tolerated and worked on and examined as one element within the social process.

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BK shared that while getting breakfast ready that morning he had had an intense daydream about jelly babies which he had associated in some way with the conference. It was not a symbol that anybody appeared to be able to work with and yet made much sense of the intensity of regression, the feeling of being very, very tiny in a massive powerful world, over which one had no control. Members were at the mercy of the environment which was orally sadistic, which would come and destroy them, eat them, bite off their heads, there were themes of baking cakes and eating them, jumping on them, destroying them, feeling glee when the product was actually consumed. Creations, organisations, were sandcastles, ephemeral structures to be jumped on and smashed with sadistic, annihilatory delight. A comment was made about the dream world at the top of the building that there was no biting or sucking going on and again and again I was forced into imaging a level of regression to the embryonic, sub-foetal, with all the terror of placental reversal, of the environment becoming persecutory, poisonous, deprivatory, threatening to abort, as if the resource system were inadequate and was going to detach from the environment. As I doodled my initial schema of the theme groups changed from a floor by floor representation, to a complex foetal symbol, with the head in the attic, the torso, heart, bowels, navel on the landing, the placenta and umbilicus in the plenary room, the foot and anus in the group dealing with action and pollution, and somehow right out at the back the maternal musculature and diaphragm, holding the terror of the boundary and the possibilities of fragmentation and eviction. It was this womb which had crushed out RV forcing her up through the building.

I began checking out the symbol with one or two people near me and then over coffee got together with a man from the other side of the room. We commandeered the flip chart in the coffee room and began drawing our different fantasies of the structure of the conference. My image was of a regressed foetal trance, attempting to preserve the myth of the good womb, in sustained regressive fight from the terrors of parturition and yet already invaded by the implications of placental failure. I realised after I had finished that the placenta was actually detached from the womb wall in the drawing. The other man replicated my initial drawing of the building in 3 floors, categorising the functions in a Freudian framework of super-ego as the dreamers at the top, ego on the middle-floor, and the chaotic surging id in the basement. We tore the sheets off the flip chart, and BJ took charge of them and stuck them up on the wall in the focal place behind where they were serving coffee. What had started as just scribbling and sharing it with a neighbour had escalated into a public, symbolic interpretation of the conference process, with all the implication that this might be some kind of mirror or model of the unconscious dynamics being acted out in the wider society.

Second Plenary

As members took their seats after coffee the patterning out of the conference dynamic became even more clearly defined. MO and Olya faced each other from opposite poles of the long axis of the room. MO was seated under the fireplace, like some regressive majestus, flanked to right and left by Roman Catholic and Anglican priests who had moved in from the outer circle. To right and left of the priests were DT and HJ respectively, forming a kind of five-fold phalanx. At the other end of the room PA and the Greenham Common meditator, both dressed in black had moved in to sit to the left and right of Olya. RV (the decapitated head of the fragmentation group of the previous day) had rejoined the conference at coffee time and sat facing MO directly in front of Olya.

Polarisation across the short axis had also clarified. BK, now strongly identifying with police, occupied the back wall central position, facing the windows, with the lady magistrate

directly in front of him. Facing them, with their back to the window was another triad, centred around the vicar's wife from Brixton, with her neighbours providing some sense of defensive support. SE and HR both of whom had indicated a certain degree of alienation from the conference and who had been singled out as representing the furthest north and furthest west representatives in the opening sentences of the very first event, confirmed their position as door keepers to left and right of the entrance. Diagonally opposite to them in the far corner, a place which he had occupied in the small group the previous night, sat GP while the other diagonal focussed on the relationship between ME and BJ.

After Olya's opening clarification of the task of the plenary, BJ made a fairly strongly supported bid to reconvene in the small groups of the previous evening as providing a more effective working format to review the position reached in the conference. ME noted that during the coffee break he had felt a need to get out of the building and had sat in the park outside and wondered therefore whether the attempt to reconvene in the small groups was some sense of flight from the struggle we were having to understand what was going on in the larger group as some reflection of the social process. At this point I joined the interchange, asking BJ two questions to clarify the boundaries and purpose of his proposal in an attempt to strengthen commitment to work in the context of the plenary, leaving the fantasy of the small groups to hold the regressive dynamics of flight. The underlying processes became clearer through three later contributions within the plenary in which the magistrate commented that she would much rather be in her narrow boat on the canal, a narrow boat which was incidentally named 'OPUS' which seemed to represent some alternative small group mode of regression to a good, secure, holding environment away from the madding crowd. Later still, as stress levels increased, PA commented forcefully that she would much rather be in the small group and ME clarified that he now understood precisely the function of the little suburban wombs as some kind of acted out regression, opting out of the struggle to be a citizen of the whole of society.

The emotional culture of this session was much more intense than the previous plenary. Divisions were highlighted to the point at which conflict became intolerable between the political left and right. There were some extremely sharp exchanges between male and female fight leaders. Early in the process I commented on the enforced verbal redundancy of several members within the large group, whose active participating silence used the verbalisation of others in a representative way. The remark drew fire from the previously peaceful Greenham Common person who indicated that redundancy was obscene as a concept applying to anybody within the group. Another woman, ex-member of the Communist party, also commented very sharply denying any corporate representative role within individual behaviour, so effectively obscuring any understanding of common transference, projection and acting out within social role.

Further evidence of polarisation emerged within class structures. The lady magistrate, voicing her distress at the way when she would say ' Good Morning' (in a cultured, sing-song, upper middle-class, brusque, professional way!) she frequently got the obscene response 'Fuck you'. Someone else reflected that maybe saying good morning in that kind of voice sounded obscene to the people she was talking to. Polarisation continued to focus more clearly into the black/white confrontation, with the conflict managed by the thin blue line, albeit it with shades of yellow. The British bobby is recognised to be carrying a role exposing him/her to intense levels of fear, which may well be acted out under conditions of stress. No amount of clarification that violence in society was not limited to the black

community could be heard. The negative, destructive, psychotic elements were designated black, so there was the reference to white, working class blacks from Liverpool, and under the breath a reference to white middle class black priests in Brixton. Polarisation into good and bad was also reflected into structures of leadership. Thatcher became the bad leader and we were caught up in an attempt to provide a good alternative by elevating Olya as representing power and management, but with openness, flexibility and approachableness. Again the pressure was upon Olya to become the good mother, somehow to hold the fantasies of dependency of the body corporate within the conference.

Each time that anxiety rose and emotions became somewhat difficult to handle it was significant that either JD, an Anglican priest, or PA, the Jungian therapist, were drawn in to make lengthy contributions, whose dynamic result was repression of the emergent emotion. ME drew attention to the processes of projection, which might be involved, but the plenary seemed unable to work at this level. Olya risked a clear personal statement of what had happened to her the previous day - her fury, the intense pressures that had been mounted upon her in her role as Director, and for which she had felt quite unprepared. I was left wondering how many people who emerge in positions of political responsibility and leadership find themselves completely overwhelmed by the unconscious projection and displacement into the role which they have taken up and end up acting out as some puppet of the social unconscious. This chink of light in the darkness was immediately extinguished by two contributions, one from each side of Olya, exposing the collusional repressive pairing of the two black-clothed ladies in waiting. The dynamics of denial were joined by JD from the other end of the room.

About the middle of the session I commented that we had seen very clearly the dynamics being acted within society, and the processes being mobilised to contain and control the acting out. I sensed, however, that our understanding of social process required a probing to the origins or causal sources of the psychotic rage, terror, grief, which gave rise to the phenomena we had been observing. EC at this point made his fourth, and sharpest, intervention to deny psychotic levels of social process as if approaching this level of understanding in society raised for him anxieties which were totally intolerable, and therefore he headed up flight from the possibility of work at this level. However over the next 20 minutes there were some very moving contributions and several members were in tears, either while speaking or listening. A comment was made that if we are all in responsibility then we have to own the negative parts of ourselves. There was a symbolic and displaced use of ethnic minorities in the search for the origins of the psychotic elements of the social system. The origins of immigrant groups were traced back into their Afro-Caribbean sources, as if somehow the British people were not psychotic, but had been invaded by demons from outer darkness. The idealised defences of Empire and the missionary enterprise began to surface from the depths. There was also a moving awareness of the breakdown of the containing environment and a sense of shattering of naive, innocent hopefulness. The story of one particular family was offered as a microcosm of society. This particular mother and father had adopted a black boy baby some 17 years ago with all the naive middle-class idealism of the 1960s. As he grew up and came through puberty they found that they were the targets of intense anger, occasional thieving, malicious damage and although they had attempted to provide a firm but flexible, containing, secure environment for him, the relationship had broken down. Several members were moved to tears, identifying the sense of the breakdown of the holding environment of the social system and yet also at an intrapersonal level identifying the loss of the safe, holding environment of the good womb,

triggering unresolved parts of the primal mourning process and identifying the root causal matrix of psychotic terror and rage, regression, anarchic retaliation, or suicidal destruction. It was at this point that PA commented 'This is so huge ... I want to go back into the safety of the small group', a contribution which spoke worlds about her previous role in blocking and repressing emergent emotion within the group.

Provided we can preserve the myth that the psychotic processes in social systems are caused by certain identifiable sectors, then scapegoating always raises hope for the recovery of sanity within the system. So the problem is dealt with in displacement, its causes preserved, since it is apparently more tolerable to pass through the holocaust of social breakdown than to face within ourselves the origins of the emotions being acted out. If we could only paint the blacks white, or send them home. If we could outlaw the left, or the males. If we could shoot the police, or the politicians, then all would be well.

Right at the end of the plenary session came an impassioned comment from HR identifying with the socially disruptive elements on the streets of Glasgow, when he said 'The last thing that these people want is to be understood'. Again I heard his comment as displacement from the here and now process, a reflection of the fundamental flight from understanding of the society represented within the plenary session and therefore the destruction of the task of OPUS as a defence against psychotic anxiety.

After lunch: sub-groups

I had given notice during the morning that I intended to continue to work on the origins of psychotic behaviour in social systems and the understanding of defences used to contain psychotic anxiety and that I was prepared to work with anyone willing to operate at that level. Over lunch I had made a contract with RV to work together on what had been cut off and denied in the small group process the previous evening and had given indications to various people that I would be working in the rear basement room again. The boundary of that space became a significant point of interaction with the rest of the conference. For some time we were left alone in the room, while others who had previously indicated their intention of working on the suggested agenda in that space stayed in the corridor outside talking in twos and threes. The vicar's wife from Brixton came in, asked anxiously whether she had to be in that group or could she go where she wanted to. In response I commented that I thought the conference was breaking up into sectors to discuss what action could be taken personally and corporately in the future. She appeared immensely relieved and rushed out of the room and up the stairs. Others came in, appeared embarrassed and withdrew without exploring any working agenda.

Apparently the hope was that if RV and I could be left alone in the room, the pairing could overcome the psychotic anxiety and produce something which might lead to hope, arising out of the ashes of chaos. Eventually BJ and HR joined, making a foursome. A group apparently led by HR came down the stairs looking for space to work. We identified that their agenda was almost identical to the one that we understood ourselves to be tackling, yet they felt they could not share space and work together with us. I commented that the working agenda appeared to be subservient to the relationship structures of the sub-sectoring. Next a larger group, led by Olya came to say that they wanted to work on talking about the things that could not be spoken of. Again there was no attempt to explore the possibilities of working in

the same space together and it was as if the group retreated in confusion back up the stairs. I was left with the sense that the main membership of the conference was in flight from its boundaries, seeking refuge in the middle ground, an impression later confirmed when I found that ME had been left alone in the attic with MA, the ex-convent carer, whose restoration of protective walls had been so strenuously rejected in the basement the night before. Perhaps the hope was that pairs on the boundary would create something significant while the rest took refuge in some central laager. Finally we were joined by two ladies, one of whom was FM, the ex-Communist, who had appeared to be more and more intensely enraged by every contribution I had been making during the conference. She said she wanted to work on the subject we were tackling but couldn't stand being in the room with me and expected to fight me to the death. I replied that I thought that exploring what that fight was about might be part of the agenda and that I was quite prepared to risk working that through.

There followed a certain amount of desultory checking out of political orientation within the room and assumptions began to emerge that political action of some unspecified nature was required in order to deal with the situation exposed by the working conference. I had the experience of every contribution I made being immediately annihilated and cut off, whatever mode of reference I used. I eventually drew attention to this process, indicating that some level of analysis of what was going on in society was an absolute prerequisite of any understanding of society and that I f ailed to see how what was being talked about actually furthered the objective. FM turned on me in fury, outlawing with great strength and violence two fundamental areas of approach - one that there could be any link between the way an individual behaved and the social context in which they were placed, and secondly denying any link at all between personal therapeutic issues and overt, adult behaviour. Although a practising therapist herself, she expressed herself as enraged at being 'analysed to death' associating the activity in particular with the relationship to her father. I decided to risk providing an opportunity for cathartic examination of what lay behind that, inviting examination of the transference in the words 'If I were your father sitting here what would you want to say to me', at which she exploded in fury at the attempt to turn everything into a therapy session, a sentiment vehemently supported by her friend. I take it that that was roughly what she wanted to say to her father and that lying behind this intense anxiety and rage were intrapersonal elements of suppressed psychotic anxiety presumed to be death-dealing and therefore not to be disturbed by any analysis. By displacement, the process of therapeutic analysis itself became the source of death and therefore the object of attack, to be destroyed, contained and rendered impotent at all costs. I take it that the task of this particular sub-sector was to ensure that precisely no breach could be made and sustained in understanding of the psychotic processes of social systems and their associated defences. It was an exercise in defence maintenance at all costs, including the task of understanding society. It is perhaps better to endure a bloody revolution than to face precipitating traumata of intense impingement and alienation. It is safer to act out than to integrate. The last thing these people want is to understand.

Final Plenary

By the time I came to sit down there were very few vacant chairs. I sensed a lot of pressure on me to take the chair under the fireplace in pole position to Olya, but resisted and instead took the other remaining vacant place on the minor axis of the inner circle, facing the window and next to LJ. I felt ambivalent about the position, feeling that there was a sense of

containment about it. I had come to recognise and respect LJ's working competence within the conference but suspected that the placing of us in juxtaposition would have the effect of reducing both our working competence, the other hope being that pairing in this dominant position within the inner circle might generate something worth investing in for the future. My feelings were of the sustaining of oppression of work task with the move from an intense fight culture to one of pairing and expectancy, as some kind of denial of the boundary of the conference.

SE and HR were still the boundary keepers on either side of the door, a position which made sense of the Freudian slip which someone had made to me in passing during the previous plenary about God and MaGod (Gog and Magog being the two pillars on either side of the door of the temple guarding the entrance to the sacred space).

I think there was a fairly high level of confusion about what was meant by action within the terms of reference of OPUS. Some appeared to understand it as action to be taken to do something about the society in which we lived, while others perceived it as action to further the task of understanding that society. There was therefore a certain amount of polarisation between political activism and reflexive analysis. I do not think we were able to clarify this at all and sense that the ambivalence is fed in from confusion within OPUS, reflecting the covert task of the organisation, in terms of the deflection of mines, the actual doing something about the bad things in society. OPUS at its bottom line is in applied research with unwritten values. It is an action unit, seeking understanding not simply for the sake of understanding but in order to do something about presumably undesirable characteristics of the society in which we find ourselves. I think there is a whole area of exploration here which would repay some careful teasing apart.

I felt the conversation was to a large extent desultory, a kind of talking out of time. There was concern about surveillance, an issue which had arisen earlier in the conference, wondering what use would be made of the OPUS staff members' notes. The feeling that maybe the conference itself was under surveillance by professional social analysts and therefore had a covert agreement not to perform. The theme of surveillance was focussed again by FM, who had earlier expressed concern about her 'cover being blown'. Her back garden backed onto the nursery school which Prince William has recently started to attend. She was aware that the whole neighbourhood was under surveillance and that there would be some security checks run on people living round about because 'it was clear that the child who was born to be king was a prime target'. The symbolic displacement of the messianic hope of the pairing culture was caught up in the ambivalence about destruction of the new creation. The subliminal warning apparently was that we needed to watch out lest our infantile and as yet immature visions should be snuffed out by some terrorist attack launched from among our own neighbours.

Themes of fermentation and gestation, yeast, biological and human growth emerged. One person commented that they had made the resolution to be arrested again this year. It was two years since they had been arrested and it took a lot of energy to pluck up the courage to go through it again. There was a lot of support for her, as if she became a carrier of some kind of corporate protest, a vicarious focus of passive resistance against the powers of darkness. But the theme of arrest was taken up in different ways. The conference itself was a case of arrested development, was in imminent danger of being arrested, or of having a rest. I had associations of new conceptions leading to spontaneous abortion or still-birth, a sense

which seemed to be confirmed by key words as we approached the end of the session, focussed around the feelings of drifting or being drained. About 10 minutes before the end I felt I had sufficient evidence to attempt a more precise interpretation of the underlying social process being mirrored within the conference. I put together HR's comment at the end of the previous plenary that 'the last thing those people out there want is to be understood' with the sense of the destruction of the task of the conference within its own membership. I commented that if the last thing people out there wanted was to be understood then the last thing that could be tolerated within this conference was the act of understanding. I therefore posited that we were in major collusion between the inside and outside of the conference membership in sustaining the blocking and destruction of the work for which OPUS in fact existed. I noted increased clarity of perception of the psychotic processes operating within society and of the mechanisms being used to contain and manage them, but I was very much aware that every time I, or anyone else, raised the possibility of trying to probe deeper to understand the origins and functions of those psychotic processes, the agenda was subject to a retaliatory objection, reflecting the underlying anxieties and effectively blocking further exploration. I indicated that I felt that further understanding of society required the tolerance of psychotic levels of anxiety and the development of structures of understanding of those parts of human behaviour previously deemed unalterable datum of the instinctive levels of the human psyche.

I was aware of intense silence following my contribution. There was no retaliatory denial but I was left feeling intensely guilty for having named the unnameable and broken the taboos which energised the unwritten, collusional agenda of the conference. I was also aware of struggling as I was speaking at the limits of my own ability to stay articulate under the levels of anxiety raised by what I was trying to name. Even in writing down these reflections I am not at all certain how far what I think I said was actually what I said, or whether it represents a later idealisation of what I now wish I had said.

After a few minutes LJ was able to take up some of my contribution and refine it further, ensuring its application to the internal world of membership, both personally and interpersonally, so disallowing the defence of displacement into people out there. In conclusion DT made an impassioned plea for passionate thinking. It was as if at the end of the conference we had reached the beginning of the working agenda.

APPENDIX: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.   The Implicate Order of Social Systems

The issue of representation became a focus of concern at several points within the weekend. The 39 members of the conference were from an extremely narrow band of the social spectrum: white, sophisticated, educated, basically coming from the helping professions, the church, therapists, organisation development consultants, analysts, trainers, group workers and social workers. One fundamental question that has to be raised, therefore, is how far the dynamics and process of such a group of people can legitimately be taken as a field of study having any bearing on, or mapping of, social processes in the wider community. A naive understanding of social behaviour would posit that such an unrepresentative gathering can in no way re-present with any accuracy the behaviours of its wider context. On this understanding, study of the conference process itself, as anything other than the psychodynamics of an intensely narrow, self-selected psycho-class, is an illusory waste of time. The most that such a gathering can hope to do is to reflect upon processes in the wider society about which such a group has a lot of information. The conference would, therefore, have to become more in the nature of a seminar or reflective think-tank, whose experiential life in the here and now would either help or hinder the main objective. That experiential life in itself would not form part of the subject under scrutiny.

However, each individual has undergone a life-long process of projection and introjection between self and environment from the moment of conception to the here-and-now. The individual represents the living point, or frontier, of the multi-humanoid coral reef of the species as it advances through time. Foundations of personality and potential, generated, refined and rendered ever more specific from generation to generation, find their particular fruit at the particular conception of the particular person, at a particular point in social space and time. From thereon the interplay between the developing organism and its environment, within a complex set of orders of such environments, reaching from intrauterine to global village, provides the formative matrix for the development of a multi-dimensional holographic imprint of that person's world, as it evolves through time.

I would therefore argue that the participating adult contains an imprint of the world, even of the universe, existentially acquired through a specific life-trace. The imprint is more or less accurate, more or less distorted and incomplete, depending upon the life history and developmental social context of the person concerned. It contains an internalisation of that person's world, shaped by the projections and introjections, the transference and counter-transference, the fantasy displacement, denials and defences, of both individual and context. As such, each person, or part, represents a microcosm of the whole, a holographic fragment, to illuminate which is to see the whole, however blurred and distorted the picture may be.

To bring together in a complex reflexive unit a large group of such individuals permits the development of a more complete holographic representation of the whole world from which those people are drawn, not just of the particular sub-sectors from which the particular individuals happen to have been (self) selected. The processes of projection, displacement, denial, splitting, idealisation, scapegoating, which characterise the wider society will be

recapitulated in the temporary institution of the working conference. In astronomy, a small lens creates an image of the night sky which is complete but more or less blurred with a comparatively low level of resolution. On the other hand, a very large diameter reflexive telescope sees the same picture but increases the power of resolution. So I would argue that an individual, whose skin boundary defines not only what is inside but also what is outside, forms an internalised image of the global village. The larger the human group, the more precise the resolution of social representation. Increasing the size of the group beyond a certain number adds little to the field of study, other than intensifying the detail of the narrow differentiated parts and therefore possibly enabling greater focus on the microstructure of the social system. From this one would argue that there must be some optimum number, or range, for this kind of event. On the other hand, the larger the number of people involved in a social system the more the common dynamics will dominate and the deviant effects of sub-groups and individual differences be rendered insignificant. Study of the dynamics of very large groupings therefore, their history, dynamic development, rituals, mythologies, symbols, organisational structures, defences, interactions and so forth, may therefore also provide an intensely powerful microscope, or rather macroscope, for the study of that which is common to the unconscious core of human being.

If we may take a simile from the current frontiers of theoretical physics, one could postulate that it is as if the whole is implicate in the part, and the part is explicate in the whole (see David Bohm, 'Wholeness and the Implicate Order'). At some level the complex dynamic of the global village, evolved over millennia, is encoded in the individual psyche/soma and conversely, the deep core of what it is to be an individual human is writ large in the species as a whole, evolving through time and space.

2. The Paradoxical Task of an OPUS Conference

Eliot Jaques described the primary motivation for institutionalisation as 'defence against psychotic anxiety'. A large scale social system represents a complex, multi-dimensional matrix of interlocking institutions, together with the set of all inter-relationships between the persons in whatever sub-groupings, who make up those institutions. I would therefore posit that the primary dynamic of social systems represents the self-preserving interplay of structures of defence against psychotic anxiety.

Now any attempt to understand society has as its objective the seeing through, or understanding, of the common social defences against psychotic anxiety. In so far as that task is achieved, just so far are the defences themselves weakened, so raising for those engaged in the task those very psychotic anxieties against which the defences were in place. The task of understanding society therefore raises psychotic anxiety against which the very defences, understanding of which is sought, are in place. By displacement, the psychotic anxiety is then assumed to be generated by the task of seeking to understand society, an objective which is presumed to be terrifying, threatening and persecutory, to engage with which is to risk annihilation, disintegration, chaos, and ultimately death. The task of OPUS therefore becomes subject to the paradox that in so far as the task is successfully achieved, just so far is the achievement itself subject to the very defences into which insight was initially sought. The result is that the pursuit of the task of the understanding of society generates and mobilises and the social defences against anxiety as, in displacement, social

defences against the understanding of society. The initiative therefore carries within it the seeds of its own destruction.

If, as in classical Freudian analysis, the fundamental psychotic anxieties are seen as generated by instinctive processes within the human psyche, then individual, institutional, and social defences against psychotic anxiety are essential if people and their associated social systems are to be protected from psychotic breakdown, and enabled to function in a healthy and normal manner. Moreover, the participants and consultants in any working conference whose task is to understand society are themselves subject, at an intra- and inter-personal level, to those same elements of psychotic anxiety against which the social defences are in place. It is therefore essential that the defences be preserved and operative within the study conference concerned. The subjects engaged within the study of social process are therefore themselves subject to the very same constraints which block insight into social process. Any significant dismantling of the defences, required if insight into their operation - i.e. the task of the conference itself - is to be achieved, would threaten the members and staff of the conference and/or the society of which they are a part with the realities of psychotic breakdown, disintegration and chaos. The working conference therefore finds itself in a collusional double-bind, both in terms of the persecutory nature of the perceived task, and also of the self-preservatory requirements of the maintenance of defences against psychotic anxiety at the inter- and intra-personal levels of the working conference and across its boundary within society as a whole. As one member commented, 'The last thing people out there want is to be understood', which, if we read the displacement in reverse, is an existential affirmation that the last thing members of a working conference on the understanding of society want to do is to deepen their understanding of society. If they were to achieve that task, the threats to themselves and to the society in which they found themselves placed are fantasised as being intolerable.

Within this frame of reference the most that can be achieved in such a working conference is a descriptive delineation of the overt processes within society, together with some fairly shallow analysis of the means of containment of psychotic anxiety, as evidenced in the social process and replicated in the implicate order of the social system, in the experiential life of the conference itself. Any deeper probing is felt to shake the very foundations upon which the security and safety of the learning space of the conference itself depends.

Herein lies the impasse which made W.R. Bion leave the world of group analysis and immerse himself on the frontiers of psychoanalysis, with particular reference to the functioning of paranoid-schizoid mechanisms, and their associated object-relations within human behaviour. Any further breakthrough in the understanding of social process can only follow breakthrough in the understanding of the origins of psychotic anxiety itself, and a deeper elucidation of the common defences utilised to contain it. No such advance is possible within a framework which takes as an axiomatic starting point the understanding of this level of human behaviour as instinctive. Further advance in the field therefore requires the calling in question of the basic assumptions of Freudian and Kleinian analysis, together with those of the schools of object-relations theory and their concomitant application to group, institutional and social processes. Recent advances on the research frontier of the field of pre and perinatal psychology appear to offer the foundations for precisely such a paradigm shift within psychoanalysis and its consequent application to social systems. New understanding of the process of psycho-somatic imprinting has extended our awareness of human memory and the capacity for transactional experiential learning deep into the

intrauterine period. We are therefore faced with the necessity of marking the origin of life not at the breast, as in Melanie Klein, or in the primitive nursing environment of the neonate, but at conception. We would do well to reserve for the term 'instinctive' those capacities, potentials and predispositions transmitted through the genetic material at fertilisation, while recognising that that which is 'innate' represents a combination of the genetically instinctive and inherited with that which has been learned during the period of gestation and parturition.

It is during this very early period that the most common experiences of homo sapiens occur, experiences which resonate deeply in the social processes of later adult life. If post-natal psychic development is concerned with the projection and introjection of good and bad part-objects etc., then the intrauterine psychic life is concerned with the introjection and projection of environmental-relations. It is, of course, characterised by certain sounds, tactile sensations and objects within the good enough symbiotic holding environment of normal pregnancy. However, as the foetus approaches full term it is now clear that there is a species-wide occurrence of normal placental degrade and comparative failure, with associated reversal of the sense of good and bad environment, a process of idealisation and conversion, displacement and denial, rendered massively more intense during the normal experience of birth trauma (impingement under conditions of helplessness). It is now widely argued that the experiences of psychotic anxiety are commonly encountered at this point in human development and that the primitive psychic defences utilised at that stage to handle the intolerable stresses perseverate at the boundary of the foetal unconscious, emerging in the neonate as the fully developed 'innate' paranoid-schizoid defences which then relate to the part objects of the nursing phase.

Within this new frame of reference the paranoid-schizoid defences are perceived as innate but not instinctive, learned not inherited, quite as much open to analysis and resolution as defences associated with any other trauma experienced by the human psyche. The fundamental resistance to the interpretation lies in the intensity of the impingement and the associated anxieties, the primitive stage of development of the organism in which the defences are imprinted, and the common collusional maintenance of the defences within adult social systems. The resistance is not, however, infinite and can be tolerated, once the myths of ego destruction and imminent psychic death associated with penetration to this level of the psyche have been laid to rest. Understanding of the origins of psychotic anxiety within the pre and perinatal field, together with cathartic resolution of the material and consequent integration of the consequent splits and reversals of the regressive fixation experienced at the boundary of birth, can lead to the resolution and dismantling of the primitive paranoid schizoid defences utilised to sustain common repression of primal trauma.

It seems to me that within the terms of reference generated by this paradigm shift lies the possibility for a completely new order of understanding of the social processes, as the out-working of common innate defences against resurgence into the adult consciousness of traumatic pre and perinatal experience. In so far as the staff and consultants of a working conference are able to tolerate the intense stress and anxieties released as the perinatal defences are seen through, just so far are the members of the working conference able to gain access to the 'psychotic' elements of human process, whether at the individual, group, institutional or social levels, together with a much clearer perception of the roles of common defence structures in sustaining repression of those areas of psychotic anxiety. The basic assumptions of the human group engaged in unconscious defence maintenance are appropriate to those of the full term prenatal foetus, regressed to the safe holding

environment of the good enough womb, idealised into the perfect heaven of sacred space, in reaction to the overwhelming anxieties generated by placental failure and subsequent perinatal impingement. The social systems behaves as if imminently threatened at its boundary, both geographically with other groups and temporarily with the future, by the onset of the terminal phases of the womb-world. The common threat is nothing more, nor less, than that of being born. The myth is that birth is death, the cervix the mouth of Plato's cave, a black hole, to pass through which is to be cast into outer darkness, psychotic chaos and social breakdown.

In contrast, while these processes of primal defences are endemic within the social system, members corporately and individually appear to be condemned, cyclically, to repeat the approach to birth, the onset of primal terror, the reification of primal defences and regression to the good holding environment. It is a cyclic oscillatory process, managed in most societies by the institutions of religion, and reflected in the dominant ideologies and processes of the body politic and economic.

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