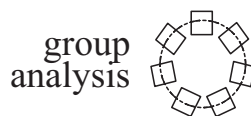


Article



Approaching the mountain: A journey into the wilderness of large group thinking

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Although the large group is a mandatory part of the Institute of Group Analysis London Qualifying Course, its history and theory have been absent from the curriculum. This fringe status can be seen as a reflection of the challenge the large group offers the analyst—trainee and practitioner alike. It exposes structures of power, reveals issues around race and gender, and brings historical trauma to light. The question is, are we willing to look within?

My 'journey into the wilderness' is a step towards an answer. As such, this article is framed as field research, focusing on the lived experience of the large group, as well as revisiting its past. It moves between two paradigms of practice—developmental large groups in training institutes and discrete large groups at conferences—and seeks to define the purpose of this ritual, as well as set new ground lines for ethical practice.

Through the use of large group material, I trace the theoretical language of koinonia, fellowship, dialogue, oversight and equivalence, and exemplify learnings around the mechanisms of projective processes. I suggest that a projection must be felt before it can be returned, but in such a multi-person setting, 'countertransference' does not do this work of integration justice. Finally, I address containment and introduce the concept of reverie/participation. Through this model the large group grants us an experience of embeddedness, and awakens our responsibility for the challenges of history making, and social change.

Key words: large group, group analysis, oversight, koinonia, fellowship, dialogue, developmental large groups, discrete large groups, projective processes

Introduction

Until now (2020) there has been no teaching on the theory and practice of large groups at the Institute of Group Analysis in London, in spite of a wealth of literature, mandatory student attendance at the IGA training large group, and the continued ritual of large group sessions at conferences in the tradition of Kreeger and de Maré (Kreeger, 1975: 14). This ‘lack of place’ is a reflection of the secondary status of the large group, usually meeting within the frame of another context, and its underrepresentation—in terms of its position as a marginal discipline and the problem of professional diversity it reveals in plain sight.

With such a lack of containment, writing about the large group feels like trespass, and authorship unwise, in the words of Tom Main: ‘The complexities of large-group life mean that any accurate interpretation about “it” is at best a part-truth (Main, 1975: 81)’. There is a difficulty here beyond the question of accuracy, which every psychotherapist grapples with, and that difficulty is authority. Is an analyst still an analyst if there are no patients in the mix? And who am I to speak for what happens in large groups? It is conventionally the conductor who tells the story, but it is time for other voices to enter the discourse.

At the start of my training, course director Andy Thomas shared a piece of thinking from Christie on the subject of qualifying papers (1995). He described how these papers are too often seen as the ‘masterpiece’ under scrutiny and offered us an alternative. Christie uses the analogy of the goldsmith, going through a long apprenticeship and finally gaining entrance to a professional guild by presenting a single piece that demonstrates ‘a sufficient grasp of the finer points of the craft and the practical ability to express them’ (Christie, 1995: 17). Andy suggested it is not the paper we are presenting, but the therapist as artefact, communicated *through* the writing.

The words goldsmith, guild, apprenticeship and artefact woke something up in me. They are old words, from a time past. I studied history at university and it was in this context that I began to value people’s (and peoples’) stories, to consider the act of witnessing, and question the process of retelling. This reflex to storytelling continued in my early professional work as a filmmaker and emerged again in my training as

a group analyst. Without a conscious end in sight I spontaneously started writing process notes about our monthly training large group. I wanted to understand what I was part of, in terms of the analytic collective, then and now. When it became clear that there would be no teaching on these strange gatherings, my interest intensified. It was as if a state of not-knowing (and a hint of opaqueness) about a fundamental part of our history and practice awakened my capacity for enquiry. So I packed my bags and set off in search of large group experiences that might begin to shed light on our past and present.

Over two years I participated in large groups of 40 to 350 people, moving between developmental large groups in the IGA training context (ongoing, slow open) and discrete large groups in the International conference setting (short term). These constructed analytic large groups meet in order to learn about themselves, their organizations and their social context, and provide a framework for experiencing and reflecting on complex psychological processes and social systems. Throughout my first two years of the Qualifying Course, QC1 and QC2 I kept large group process notes (14 sessions) and attended large groups at conferences in London, Birmingham and Belgrade (eight sessions). My field research and theoretical reading began as a way to fill a gap on the IGA curriculum, but quickly became a search, and eventually a call, for greater openness. I was shocked to discover only one paper on the subject of ethics in large group practice (Schneider and Weinberg, 2007).

Throughout this article, I follow the lead of Schneider and Weinberg, using the International Organization Development Code of Ethics (1991) ‘ . . . to define and protect the confidentiality of my client-professional relationships’ (2007: 223). In the use of large group material, I protect the identity of my fellow group members using a systematic four-stage process.

1. All material must be anonymized;
2. In the case of vignettes, descriptions must be shared with participants who might recognize themselves;
3. In descriptions of conductor intervention, featured individuals must be contacted for approval; and
4. If an individual does not wish to be featured, material must be removed.

I have secured informed consent on the basis of anonymization, from peers and staff members who have participated in the IGA

training large groups under discussion. In terms of the conference setting, the field at present is not governed by consistent conventions or a code of practice; this article is a step towards both. I have nonetheless anonymized conference material and secured consent from participants and conductors who could be identified through my writing.

In the words of Schneider and Weinberg, ‘Providing real case material explicates and amplifies theory and technique, while educating the next generation of large group leaders about the nature of the beast’ (2007: 17). The ‘nature of the beast’ is more than just a turn of phrase, it reflects the intensity of the experience, an emphasis on primary process and the kind of splitting that quickly becomes personified as an ‘it’ out there with malintent. It also grants the large group leader huge power and responsibility. No wonder the case material is lacking.

In my experience, these affective challenges are less potent in developmental large groups, where the members of the training community are known to each other and there is more time and space. Writing about the Norwegian Training Programme, Island concludes ‘over the years the large group in this context has developed a culture where the vitalizing and creative potentials of the large group have become more evident’ (2003: 211). At one end of the spectrum a beast, at the other a ‘City Square’ (Island 2003: 212). The enduring difficulty is that the large group contains both.

During my first year on the qualifying course, someone said something that resonated deeply. ‘I’m scared of what I will become here, all the more experienced people sit stony-faced in that serious analyst pose . . . where’s all the life force?’ In that moment I became aware of the times I had failed to give voice to difficult thoughts and feelings. Held back by a mixture of superego and analytic reserve, ‘the help giving group analyst denies his own needs and desires by giving to others through his interpretations’ (Wilke 2014: 128). The large group offers us an alternative, ‘a space where you can experience yourself, and be experienced by others, as an ordinary human being as well as an analyst’ (Wilke, personal communication, July 12, 2018).

Looking back through my notes it is possible to trace this journey for myself. Arriving late to the first large group of QC1 felt like walking in front of a firing squad. As the months passed I consciously enjoyed being part of the process but struggled to arrive on time. I kept turning up in a rush, until session seven, when I arrived early. I suspect this shift occurred because I had stepped out of an

observational stance in the previous session and offered an authentic communication. A patient preparing to join my NHS training group had killed himself. I was deeply shaken and struggling to hold myself together. I remember not knowing if the large group was the right place to speak, but I tried to put it into words. After one response to my disclosure the conversation moved on, focusing on a dream full of sexual content from a previous session. I did not feel supported, but I did not feel wholly abandoned. Towards the end of the group someone returned to me, offering an acknowledgement that what I had brought might be too much to bear for a room full of training analysts. Kind words followed: 'I know what it's like to lose patients, three of them, but I don't know what it's like for you', and I felt a tangible sense of de Maré's fellowship (de Maré et al., 1991). I began to understand that although suicide forces complex feelings into those who are left behind, the danger lies not in the expression of those feelings, but in believing that they all belong to you.

In small groups the fabric of the matrix is built on the basis of intimacy, but in the large group personal disclosures do not meet with a maternal response, as one participant reflected, 'I remember vividly the first time that I ventured to really say something here and I was met by deathly silence'. In spite of this, 'intimate connections' do seem to rise and fall (Jarrar, 2003: 41). Those connections are not so much insight, as 'outsight', a term which de Maré introduced in 1972, and later described as 'the outward expansion of social consciousness and thoughtfulness' (de Maré, 1994: 207). Schlapobersky identifies outsight as 'key to the dynamics of change in groups' (Schlapobersky, 2016: 21). Perhaps it is through the cultivation of outsight that the large group extends our perceptive faculties beyond our own resources, and knits us together, becoming 'a method of exploring the social unconscious of a whole social system in a historical context' (Wilke, 2014: 81).

My early large group experiences felt like being thrown around in rough seas. It took time to formulate thoughts about these elemental forces and begin to appreciate the way in which large groups conceal and reveal projective processes in very particular ways. The trajectory of this learning (delayed) parallels a core clinical concept—that before a projection is recognized, worked with and integrated, it is *felt*. Is this countertransference, or do we need a new word for such a multi-person experience in the large group? I will return to this question after tracing the development of theory and working through a second set of vignettes.

There are four stand-out literature reviews on the subject of the large group: Kreeger (1975), Agazarian and Carter (1993), Schneider and Weinberg (2003), and Segalla (2015).

Kreeger's introduction to *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy* (1975) leans on the therapeutic community and reflects a classical psychoanalytic frame. Drawing attention to Schiff and Glassman (1969) he quotes their list of variables relating to increasing group size, of which point six stands out 'the greater threat to the individual' (Kreeger, 1975: 21). Kreeger leaves us with a distinct sense of the large group as an emerging discipline; perplexing and challenging to conductors and participants alike.

Eighteen years later in 1993, Agazarian and Carter used systems theory to bridge the psychodynamic and sociological approaches, tracing the growth of large group thinking through of three bodies of theory: projective identification with Kreeger, the fourth basic assumption with Hopper (building on Springman and Turquet) and transformation with de Maré. Where Kreeger notes 'the mad, primitive, fragmented bit of ourselves which becomes introjected' (Agazarian and Carter, 1993: 217), and Hopper's thinking reveals the mechanisms through which 'dangerous experiences are being avoided' (Agazarian and Carter, 1993: 222), de Maré's vision of the large group is liberation, in terms of freedom from family transferences and the creative potential within primal hate. From a systems perspective, Agazarian supports de Maré's transformation model, but sees it as powered by functional subgrouping (Agazarian and Carter, 1993: 232). Although seemingly interested in progressive theory, Agazarian and Carter conclude, 'learning by experience in the large group for large group therapists is not primarily about group dynamics; it is about the primal, tribal terror of the mass, the horde, and the crowd' (Agazarian and Carter, 1993: 215).

In 2003, framed as the follow-up to Kreeger's 1975 classic, Schneider and Weinberg published *The Large Group Re-visited* (2003). Their introduction contains a short history covering the established thinkers, and identifies de Maré as the turning point 'for understanding society and culture' (Schneider and Weinberg, 2003: 15). Although they offer fresh definitions for contemporary practice (Schneider and Weinberg, 2003: 17), there is no comment on what we discover about our own community of practice through the act of looking within, and it is striking that a publication dealing openly with situations of equivalence makes no mention of racism, slavery or colonialism. As Einhorn questioned in 2007: 'Have enough years

passed before this nightmare gets the same psychological understanding or has it begun, but as a primarily white profession, it arouses too much guilt for us to take it on?" (Einhorn, 2007: 460).

More recently, Segalla (2015) set out to explore the large group through the perspectives of self-psychology and intersubjectivity, tracing the work of Harwood (1995), Benjamin (1998), Grossmark (2007), and Orange (2011). She argues that traditional Freudian and Kleinian dyadic perspectives endure 'relatively unchallenged' (Segalla, 2015: 247) and seeks to integrate the regressive tendencies of the large group with its health seeking behaviour. In tracing the early development of practice, Segalla states 'many of these new formulations came from physicians and others who were working with these war traumatized people on a daily basis' (Segalla, 2015: 246) missing an exploration of the fact that these 'physicians and others' were also war traumatized people. Foulkes lost family members to the Holocaust (Schlapobersky, 2015: 413), de Maré dealt with the horror of breakdown close to the front line (Jones and Wessely, 2005: 86) and Bion carried a psychological rupture within, voicing in the dissociated third person, that he '... died on the Amiens–Royle Road on August 8, 1918' (Bion, 1982: 265).

The large group upsets the clinician/patient dynamic and challenges the therapist by taking them out of the analyst's chair and into 'an experience of chaos' (Foulkes, 1975: 52) in a public setting. It exposes established hierarchies and painful splits. It also summons ghosts from the collective past, as von Sommaruga Howard observes in her New Zealand work, 'I suspect that the feeling of not having enough time or space might be an emergent trace from the original colonizing experience' (von Sommaruga Howard, 2011: 234). Bollas asserts that analytic work cannot take place 'until the analyst has a thorough understanding of his own profession as a countertransference enactment of an early object setting and relation' (Bollas, 1987: 100). It follows that analytic *group* work cannot take place until the analyst has a thorough understanding of the unavoidable enactments of the wider group (society), and that our continued ritual of the large group might enable a particular category of learning to occur.

As I began to attend large groups in the conference setting I experienced an 'increase in psychic space' (de Maré, 1985:85). The Northfield Conference introduced me to de Maré's exhaustion centre work (Nitzgen, 2018) and a comment from the audience suggested that the accepted 'hate' of large group theory may have been part of

the wartime context in which group psychotherapy emerged, rather than a given of the large group experience itself.

If I were more established in the professional network I might have known the name behind this comment and be able to give credit. But being an outsider from the younger generation, I exist on the fringes, caught between the imperative to listen and the inescapable ticking of the clock. As the final large group of the Northfield Conference came to a close, Dylan Thomas' words were spoken, 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' (Thomas, 1952) and it seemed for a moment as if the poem written for his fading father contained an archetypal moment of transition for us all.

In an earlier generational handover of the 1970s, Foulkes was uncertain about de Maré's new vision; 'somewhat critical' in his own words (Foulkes, 1972: 153). After his first experience of the large group at the 1972 Symposium, Foulkes submitted a set of comments to Group Analysis. He found the seating arrangement 'uncomfortable', explaining 'All I could see were two backs or more in front of me'. He seemed unsettled by de Maré's convening style, recalling 'I myself felt, and I imagine so must a number of others, emotionally very affected by the fact that the leader . . . spoke with such vehemence and emotion' and he felt frustrated by the loss of agency, 'some time ago I asked Pat if I might say something to what he has said, but I haven't had a chance' (Foulkes, 1972: 153). Although Foulkes later described the large group as 'a new and promising field' (Foulkes, 1975: 56) this early response is an authentic description of its challenges, all the more valuable because it comes from Foulkes as participant, a rare glimpse of the man rather than founding father.

Ten years later, de Maré reflected that 'it is now up to us to take that step, viz., the more direct application of principles that Foulkes culled from small-group psychotherapy to larger settings' (de Maré, 1983: 231) and in 1985 he delivered the Annual Foulkes Lecture on this new 'psychocultural therapy', noting the lack of response to Kreeger's 1975 publication. By 2009 de Maré's vision was in trouble, 'Even within group analysis his ideas have not really flourished . . . perhaps it is left to us to develop his legacy, or allow it to die' (Blackwell, 2009: 301). So, where are we now?

At the 2018 EFPP Conference in Belgrade, psychoanalyst and organizational consultant Julian Lousada presented a paper on complacency as an organizational defence against the trauma of change. He highlighted the discrepancy between the humanity we show to our patients and the difficulty we have working together in

our professional teams and associations (Lousada, 2018). From a different, but related angle, Dalal, quoting Littlewood and Lipsedge, remarks that ‘projection is a mechanism not an explanation’ (Dalal, 2002: 78). It is a reality of the discourse that landmark publications *The Large Group* (Kreeger, 1975) and *The Large Group Re-visited* (Schneider and Weinberg, 2003) are almost entirely authored by men, with only two female contributors, Weyman (co-author to Hopper) and Jarrar. Agazarian’s Foulkes Lecture (Agazarian, 1988) presenting her Tokyo large group is little referenced in the group analytic literature. Although this is changing, led by the work of von Sommaruga Howard (2011, 2012, 2018), Penna (2014), Segalla (2015), and Mojović (2015, 2016)—all white women no less—the question of whether we are willing to look at societal issues such as gender and race within our own system, and how a participant such as myself might present large group material, touches upon a number of important issues, first and foremost confidentiality.

Schneider and Weinberg describe a study day in Tel Aviv (2007). Theoretical papers were presented first, to be followed by discussion of a verbatim report of a large group held in Bologna. Objections were immediate and ‘a very stormy debate ensued . . . for many members, it seemed inappropriate to reveal detailed information of large group process, as this was (for them) a violation of confidentiality (Schneider and Weinberg, 2007: 224). Likewise, when I voiced a wish to write about the experience of our monthly IGA training large group there were valid concerns around confidentiality and consent.

Perhaps this unresolved debate speaks to the lack of shared understanding about the large group, fueled by its ‘ungovernable’ emotion (de Maré, 1985: 83) and ‘projective missiles’ (Wilke, 2014: 87). In addition, there is no contract for members, written or spoken, and no code of conduct—other than the accepted primary frame which offers an agreement around clinical practice. The IGA student handbook contains one sentence of description: ‘The large group experience is an integral part of the IGA Qualifying Course and takes place nine times a year in London and twice monthly and twice during each block weekend in Manchester’ (2017: 24). Although Schneider and Weinberg have called for a consultancy approach, ‘providing written information or a brief statement about purpose and ground rules in introduction to the experience itself’ (Schneider and Weinberg, 2007: 223), little progress has been made, in stark contrast to the group relations tradition (Jarrar, 2003: 36–37).

If the large group embodies ‘society’, the argument has been made that ‘there is no reason (or possible way) to ask large group members to avoid revealing the events of the large group’ (Schneider and Weinberg, 2007: 224). ‘Events’ has an impersonal ring to it, but this is an idealized position. In instances of spontaneous personal disclosure, scapegoating and professional infighting, the consequences of a lack of containment can be very real. The large group is a laboratory ‘artificially created’ (Schneider and Weinberg, 2003: 16) and dynamically administered by professional bodies. What is stopping us from providing a level of transparency to participants? Is the large group still perceived, and experienced, as Le Bon’s mindless mob? In an exploration of crowd psychology and the powerful ways in which ‘elitist psychologies legitimate the rule of elites’ Reicher recalls Martin Luther King’s insightful words that riots are the language of the unheard (Reicher, 2017: 595). What is really being communicated in our large groups? And dare we name it? Most recently Segalla observed that ‘different races and cultures become victims of the large group in which the majority of the members have similar backgrounds’ (Segalla, 2015: 255). Like Foulkes’ autistic symptom, ‘hoping to be overheard’ (Foulkes, 1965: 260), perhaps the key challenge to participants of the large group is not so much speaking, as hearing.

As my QC1 year drew to a close, we prepared to say goodbye to our conductor. Session seven featured conflict between staff members played out in confusion around the announcement of the new conductor’s name. When this information was finally given, some expressed annoyance at the way the news was delivered. The anger in the room rose quickly, and our conductor suggested that this anger might be meant for her. The word ‘survival’ was thrown into the mix, and links were made to a wider context of loss—departing conductor, final year students, peers who had been unable to complete the training.

The following session, another staff member announced they would be leaving their post. There were fantasies of poison in the IGA, followed by familial associations to parents arguing behind closed doors. Someone mentioned sadness about saying goodbye to QC3 students, and it was noticed that only one member of that final year group was present (attendance had been sporadic). People felt discarded; someone commented ‘I thought that group analysts were supposed to stay with difficult feelings’. At this moment our conductor asked a question, she asked what might be going on with the group, and if there were any ideas in the room.

The only member of QC3 present said the word ‘authority’, and suggested that something was indeed being communicated by the absences, ‘a big fuck you’ for everything painful that had been projected into their year group—the schism with Birkbeck, the loss of the M.Sc qualification, staff splits and QC3 having to hold it all. Added to this, a student intending to join their year group had died before starting the course. There were supportive responses in the room, and I found myself saying ‘I’ve always idealized you, and your group. I wanted you to be strong, I see that now and I’m sorry’. The moment at which the projection was released (after three years no less) an essential vulnerability could be seen and the group-as-a-whole were empowered to face the trauma that the institution had been through.

There is a wake-up call in all this. While the projection remained active some participants were in a double bind, either to carry the burden of invulnerability or absent themselves. This is a symbolic life or death, but it is a dynamic that translates into real life or death in wider society. In the words of Reicher, ‘a key test of experimentation lies in the ability of our findings to help us make sense of what happens “out there”’ (Reicher, 2017: 597). This inside/outside dynamic is central to group analysis, from the group conductor’s stance as ‘participant observer’ (Foulkes and Anthony, 1965: 61) to its maxim ‘by the group, of the group, including its conductor’ (Foulkes, 1975: 3). I felt the effect of straying from this at the EFPP Belgrade Conference when I began watching the large group rather than taking part. Anxious about this study and far away from home, I absented myself emotionally and attempted to interpret the dynamics on the fly. It was like trying to hit the wind with a stick, and my notes felt empty. If I wanted to find out what this large group was about, I needed to travel within. In doing so I lived the difference between bystanding, witnessing, and activating, in an unconscious parallel to the conference theme of ‘Social Trauma’. This is a prime example of equivalence, introduced in 1979 to describe the repetition of traumatic situations in large groups (Hopper and Garland, 2003: 100) and later defined as ‘a very particular process, based on very primitive inter-psychic processes, one function of which is to communicate that which has been made unconscious because of the anxiety and splitting involved’ (Hopper and Kreeger, 2003: 94). I found the courage to speak in the final large group and gave my support to a fellow participant who had walked out in anger. At the end of the session, someone commented ‘there is the fantasy that someone, somewhere

in the room must know what is going on', a fantasy which continues to obscure the way in which we each have the opportunity to take responsibility for the challenges of history making.

This need to feel in order to think (and to learn) brings me back to the importance of *feeling* a projective process as a precursor to working with it in the large group. This is countertransference in the sense that 'feeling' is a signpost to your own experience and identity, but it is a countertransference of embeddedness, more 'check your privilege' than look to your childhood. Reverie is a closer term, implying breadth and permeability, but it is drawn from the dyadic frame (Bion, 1962: 35). In Bion's conception, the infant is flooded with stimulation and evacuates beta elements by use of projective identification. It is the mother in reverie who contains these elements through her own alpha function and enables her child to develop a capacity for thinking (Ogden, 2009). I see my own development in the large group as a related process, transforming sensitivity into sensibility, catalyzed by the act of participation. The archaic use of the word 'participate' means to have or possess a particular quality, suggesting that something moves from the outside in, becoming embodied. If reverie enables a 'tuning in' to the beta elements of the large group, perhaps it is participation that facilitates their containment.

In an article on the subject of *Primary Maternal Preoccupation in the Group Analytic Group* (Doron, 2014) Doron returned to Foulkes' 'mother as container' and Winnicott's 'reciprocity within relationship'. She looks at the way Bion was prepared to own his anxiety as therapist (Doron, 2014: 20) and describes the network of support that the conductor of a new group requires, just like a new mother. She identifies the turbulence of this shared experience as the fear of fragmentation, experienced by the new members/infant and projected into the conductor/mother (Doron, 2014: 23). Her thinking connects with Hopper's conception of equivalence, specifically in terms of his assertion that 'situations characterized by extreme helplessness are especially likely to be repeated' (Hopper, 2003: 131).

In her clinical experience Doron credits her supervision group as providing an essential 'mother function', allowing her to feel her complex feelings, decode projections and support group cohesion. Is there a 'mother function' in the large group? I would argue that the large group disappoints expectations for containment and instead requires participants to make use of their internal mother for personal security, in terms of Klein's positively integrated 'mother inside himself' (Klein, 1975: 179). Likewise, projections do not so much land

on the conductor as impact the entire space through the connected processes of resonance and valency, activating a collective responsibility. Foulkes and Anthony first wrote about resonance as an essential group specific factor in 1957 (1965: 149-152) and Schlapobersky has described it as 'the elementary conveyor of emotions' (Schlapobersky, 2016: 252). To resonate is to connect in specific relationship to identity (Foulkes, 1990: 298), but it is also innate, in the words of Bion, a man 'can have . . . no valency only by ceasing to be, as far as mental function is concerned, human' (Bion, 1961: 116).

This is our history. Where Bion set himself apart, observing the group as if through 'transparent walls' (Bion, 1961: 14), Foulkes offered himself in, as a member 'of the common pool' (Foulkes, 1990: 298). We require both valency/reverie and resonance/participation to put the large group to work, and in return it offers us a middle way between collapse and retaliation. By engaging reverie and participation in a process of continual calibration, the large group provides members with a rare experience of embeddedness made conscious—the 'unlearning' we require to hear what is hiding in plain sight.

It was de Maré who first compared studying the large group to 'approaching a mountain' (de Maré, 1985: 79) and it is indeed a vast expanse, harsh in climate, and daunting. I set out to climb this mountain, holding Foulkes' words in mind: 'In order to see something whole we have . . . to see it in relation to a greater whole, so that we can step outside of that which we want to see' (Foulkes, 1990: 230). I have come to believe that the large group is not so much a mountain, as a great river. A rich seam where the community of practice collides, develops, regresses, remembers, forgets, ages, mourns, renews and moves through time together. We need to talk and write more about this unusual space, but we need to do so with ethical rigour, willing to uncover the kind of information we so often close our ears and eyes to. It is in this sense that our continued commitment to constructed large groups in developmental and discrete settings has real purpose. For the participant/practitioner in becoming more awake to powerful projective processes, and for the professional community, in terms of fuelling a courageous self-scrutiny of structures of power.

In the words of Grossmark, 'everyone is involved' (Grossmark, 2015: 59).

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