

Unconscious at Work

By Philip Boxer

Preface

This chapter started out as a review of a collection of essays written by members of the Tavistock Clinic's Consulting to Institutions Workshop (Obholzer & Roberts 1994). It is impossible to work in this country in relation to organizations from a psychoanalytic position without engaging with the legacy of the Tavistock's work - whether passed down through the Clinic or the Institute. The Tavistock forms a central thread in the Group Relations tradition.

Although these essays are rooted in the Tavistock Clinic, they are representative of a much broader approach to organizations which has come to be established in the UK. This approach rests on a socio-technical systems approach to organizations which makes use of a view of the individual's relationship to the organization that is based on object-relations. I refer to this broad approach as the Tavistock *paradigm*. A more detailed evaluation of this notion of a Tavistock paradigm is to be found in Palmer (1997).

My experience of that tradition reflects the views of Paul Hoggett in seeing it as: "frustratingly marginal to the concerns of those British practitioners to whom they should have an enormous relevance - change agents in organizational and social systems, managers and policy makers in the human services, etc." (Hoggett in press). Hoggett too was reviewing the collection of essays.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to begin to engage critically with the Tavistock paradigm, and to ask how it might have become "frustratingly marginal". Although the views expressed in this chapter are my own, my particular thanks go to the Working Group on Groups and Organizations for their support in developing these ideas, and in particular to Barry Palmer for his comments on this text¹.

In his review, Hoggett criticizes the Tavistock paradigm's use of a 'systems approach' as functioning more

¹ GOWG was founded in 1994 under the auspices of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research. Its aim is to develop its members' understanding of groups and organizations, rooted in their practices of intervention. Its approach is to work through its members' experience of the organizational interventions in which they are engaged, and the challenges they present; and via a reading of psychoanalytic and other texts, which throw light upon this experience. At the core of this work is a questioning of the basis of authority (author-ity) of whoever intervenes in the group or organization – the psychoanalyst in relation to the group, or the consultant in relation to the organization. Working papers are to be found on <http://www.brl.com> where GOWG has a home page.

as a private metaphor than as linked to the wider movement of systems thinking. As a result, he identifies a failure in the paradigm to address the nature of relations of power as a fundamental *lack* within the paradigm, illustrated by the use of the concept of *primary task*. This concept is defined as “the task which an organization must perform if it is to survive” (Miller and Rice 1967, p25). It emphasizes questions of viability to the point where it becomes difficult to consider an elaboration of the tasks of the organization as being primarily a development of the interests of those involved with it. In arguing for the importance of both sides of this distinction between survival and development, Hoggett supports Armstrong’s substitution of the concept of *primary process* as a way past this impasse. An example of how Armstrong formulates this in the context of an Authority providing high security psychiatric services is as “the emotional task of ‘managing vulnerability’, or more exactly of managing the emotional experiences of being vulnerable and of making others vulnerable to oneself”. (Armstrong, 1995, p6)

In formulating primary process, Armstrong appears to draw on the analytic notion of primary process to elaborate that which the consultant is working with – the emotional experience of the organization that is in the people working in the organization while not being simply of them. He invokes Bollas’ ‘unthought known’ (1987) as a way of formulating what it is that is being worked with in this way. This working with the emotional experience of the

organization is elaborated later in this chapter in terms of the second (communications) dilemma.

Hoggett’s argument is that the future development within the Tavistock paradigm “hinges upon the construction of a more sophisticated approach to ‘the social’ than existing models can provide. Power saturates all human relations, and consultants and researchers are part of these relations of power. Effective consultancy requires a double reflexivity, to one’s own emotional experience of the collective organizational unconscious and to the nature of one’s agency within the dynamic field of forces at play in any organizational setting.” Hoggett argues the need for a much greater appreciation of “an interpenetration of the realms of the emotions and unconscious and the realm of power and politics”. (Hoggett, in press p6). But how is this to be achieved?

This chapter seeks to understand how the separation of the two realms identified by Hoggett might have come about – a separation between an internal world of emotions and the unconscious, and an external world of power and politics. I will argue that this notion of primary process itself takes place around a third (control) dilemma affecting relations to power and relations to the unconscious, which are (among other things) constitutive of the author-ity of the interventionist himself or herself.

Introduction

How are we to place the Tavistock paradigm within the wider context of thinking about organizations? My starting-point was Schein's work on Process Consultation (1969). Taken as being paradigmatic for the Process Consultant, Schein placed the basis of process consulting as being "anchored deeply in social psychology, sociology, and anthropology". Here, then, was a tap-root in the realm of the social (sciences). Working out of a humanistic psychology, process consulting became identified with the educational methods of sensitivity training (the US parallel to the Tavistock Study Group), in which the process consultant was pioneering a new form of practice, with all the challenges of articulating its own processes.

Schein pointed out that consultant interventions on structure alone were incomplete. Because people occupied the network of positions and roles, people introduced *processes* that formed an informal organization, which mediated the effects of the formal organization. It was on these mediating relationships between people and groups - processes - that the process consultant intervened. But Schein did not theorize the nature of these processes constituting the object of the work of the process consultant².

² This critique of Schein is elaborated in more detail in Boxer (1994a)

Whereas Schein's work may be taken as being paradigmatic of a process consulting approach, Checkland's work (1981) with Soft Systems Methodology may be taken as being paradigmatic of a systems approach to organizations. In this approach, the descriptive methodology used by the participant observer is itself 'modeled'. Here is an approach that seeks to make explicit the combined effects of both formal and informal organizational processes. But the dualism installed between the 'Real World' and the 'Systems Thinking World' has been recognized ultimately by Checkland as being problematic (1996), in that it seeks to install 'Systems Thinking' as a kind of common language which conceals both the effects of the observer and the effects of power. Soft Systems Methodology comes to suffer the same limitations of becoming a 'private metaphor' as those leveled by Hoggett at the Tavistock's 'systems thinking'. So perhaps this is not so much a problem with the Tavistock paradigm as a difficulty with the use of systems thinking itself?

Maturana's theorizing of languaging sought to address this difficulty with Checkland's constructivism by making constructivism *radical*. This involved considering the effects of language itself not only as a medium in which these 'metaphors' were constructed, but as a medium through which reality itself was constituted as such. In the process of doing this, however, he sought to establish a 'constitutive ontology' which could establish languaging as *nothing but* what arose in the coordinations between human

beings. (Maturana and Varela 1987)³ As an inheritor of Von Foerster's (1960) second order cybernetics, later developed by Bateson (1972), Maturana's use of this radical constructivism in systemic therapy was nevertheless developed by the Milan Group to understand the language 'games' of families and organizations (Palazzoli 1986). This provided a powerful approach to disentangling the different levels and contexts of communication within organizational life, but it still worked within a paradigm of seeking to 'work together harmoniously'. The effects of power were still not theorized.

Foucault may be taken as being paradigmatic of an approach to the effects of Power. He approached language games as "discursive practices", through which not only was the subject constituted as such (Foucault 1970, 1972; Gordon, 1980), but also made subject to practices of power. Foucault's discursive practice was formulated in terms of the particular ways in which it was possible to speak as a knowing subject, and as such to have the power to command others' obedience. Foucault saw the 'Power/Knowledge' effects of a discursive practice as being achieved through its particular way of suturing three

³ Lacan had pointed out the fundamental difficulties with this direction of development in 1955 in his second Seminar (Lacan, 1988), the implications of which are developed in Appendix I of Fink's book on The Lacanian Subject (1995).

dilemmas⁴. By this he meant that the effects of power were installed in the subject through the very practices of knowledge itself. These can be expressed in terms of dilemmas of governance facing organizations⁵:

- The command dilemma (top-down vs bottom-up, or the transcendental vs the empirical) - the basis on which something can be said to be true.
- The communications dilemma (espoused explanations vs explanations-in-use, or the 'cogito' vs the unthought) - the sense in which language is deemed necessary to being able to know.
- The control dilemma (affiliation vs alliance, or the retreat in time of the origin vs the return to the present of the origin) - the point of origin in time in relation to which author-ity is vested.

Foucault's analysis of the conditions for knowing subjectivity presented the subject with a challenge that Foucault sought to answer in his later writings on Sexuality (1986). Even though Foucault and Lacan shared a certain commitment to an ethics centred on the subject's relation to truth (Rajchman 1991), Foucault sought to stop at a constitutive 'ethics', just as Maturana's radical constructivism sought to stop at a

⁴ These dilemmas are themes running through Foucault's work, describing the problematics of power/knowledge as he unfolded them in his works, and are described in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982)

⁵ This organizational form of the dilemmas is developed more fully in Boxer 1994b.

constitutive ontology. But for both, the displacing of the transcendental by the constitutive effects of languaging or of discursive practice was also marked by a refusal of the effects of the unconscious⁶. Not for them Freud's subject of the unconscious, a *being* where *it* was.

Whether working directly from Schein's process consulting paradigm, or going via the systems thinking paradigm through Maturana's radical constructivism, both trajectories arrive at the problematics of power addressed in Foucault's discursive practices. The limiting horizon of this trajectory is the possibility of the subject's reflexivity - of the subject's capacity to know the truth about himself.

This then is what makes the Tavistock paradigm of such great interest: it represents another trajectory unfolding in parallel with the other two, even though the approach appears to have ended up remaining "frustratingly marginal". Why then did this become so? Is there something incommensurable about the questions of power and of the unconscious?

It was in this spirit that I approached the Tavistock 'discursive practice', in order to see how the unconscious could take its place in a paradigm which embraced the sentence, systems, symbolization and subjectivity of the

foregoing approaches⁷. The means for doing this was through a reading of the book reviewed by Hoggett: *The Unconscious at Work: Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services* (1994).

⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller develops this critique of Foucault in Armstrong (1992).

⁷ For a view of the Tavistock paradigm as a discursive practice, see Palmer (1996).

“The Unconscious at Work”

The title of this book is important. What are being talked about are human service organizations - organizations which, if they are to put the *good* of the client/patient first, must, by definition, be formed in relation to the needs of their clients. The ambiguity in the title can be taken as concerned, on the one hand, with the unconscious processes ‘in operation’ in relation to those that are working. On the other hand, it can be taken as concerned with the effects of working in relation to clients/patients who have unconscious processes that affect what happens in the workplace.

This ambiguity runs throughout the book. It is clearly about the former in Part I (Conceptual framework), and about the latter in Part II (Working with people in pain), but it is out of this ambiguity that Parts III and IV appear to be written. In Part III (Institutions in crisis), the leaning is still towards the latter - with a series of problematics being described in terms derived from Part I. But the cases in Part III reflect the inadequacy of these terms for engaging with the radical shifts undermining the 'old' consensus.

These shifts concern what constitutes the nature of public service as a result of the internal ‘market’ reforms, which introduced ‘private’ notions of contractual relationship into a publicly owned system. In Part IV (Towards healthier organizations), the essays return to an explicit advocacy for

an 'old' consensus, relying heavily on Part I again. This assumes that ‘the good’ can best be established through a ‘healthy’ hierarchical form of organisation, capable of containing the anxieties of those who work within it.

Three themes come through the book:

- the particular approach of the Tavistock Clinic to working with Human Service Organizations, covering
 - Some unconscious aspects of organizational life: contributions from psychoanalysis
 - The unconscious at work in groups and teams: contributions from the work of Wilfred Bion.
 - The organization of work: contributions from open systems theory
 - Authority, power and leadership: contributions from group relations training
- the particular challenges associated with working in Human Service Organizations, formulated in terms of the processes whereby they are enabled to contain anxiety (in the Kleinian sense).
- an underlying critique, running throughout the book, of the current internal market reforms in terms of their effects on Human Service Organizations, and a demand that some of the dilemmas facing them should be addressed more explicitly.

My conclusion was that the book is a useful contribution to identifying the particular challenges and dilemmas facing

these forms of organization in pursuing strategies formed in response to the needs of their clients. But the conceptual framework does not address the power issues reflected in either the internal market reforms or what brought them into being, nor does it address the nature of the 'ethical' dilemma behind the reforms surrounding the strategies for formulating a public 'good'. Although Obholzer's Afterword, ending on the notion of consultancy as "licensed stupidity", is temptingly close to the notion of a form of consultancy based on an ethic of not-knowing, my criticism is the same as that of Schein. There is an absence of critical examination of the discursive formation within which such 'licensed stupidity' might take its place.

The conceptual framework

It is perhaps not irrelevant to consider the influence the genesis of the Tavistock Clinic has had on its subsequent work. It was formed in 1920 to work with "the neurotic disorders labeled as 'shell-shock' believed to be endemic and pervasive in modern society". This work developed to include "an understanding of and treatment of the stresses of military life in time of war", and following World War II, took the form of "a special relationship with the British Psycho-Analytical Society". This reflected the British Psycho-Analytical Society's part in "the widespread optimism and commitment to social change - 'winning the peace' - that was already driving the formation of the reborn

Tavistock, and that had swept a Labour government to power in 1945" (Trist and Murray 1990).

Miller and Rose (1988, p171), using Foucault's notions of governmentality (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991) characterized the part the Tavistock played in this movement in terms of its contribution to three elements of government:

- "a conception of government as a varying set of rationales and programmes which seek to align socio-political objectives with the activities and relations of individuals;
- the constitutive roles of psychological and managerial techniques and vocabularies; and
- a notion of subjectivity as a capacity promoted through specific regulatory techniques and forms of expertise."

This critical stand-point is reflected in the concepts that the book gives a central place to:

- Leadership directly related to the aims and the primary task of the organization, in which there is congruence between authority and power;
- Organizations as open systems defined by input-conversion-output processes, the effective management of which depend on the management of the boundaries; and

- "symbolic expressions from the unconscious", and "understanding unconscious institutional anxieties and the defences against them", reflected in "basic assumption mentality" as "the formation and continuance of the group" which "becomes an end in itself", thus bringing leaders and members of groups to "lose their ability to think and act effectively".

The theory of the unconscious as being the locus of anxiety, and as giving rise to symbolic expression, as well as to the notion of defenses against this anxiety, whether at an individual, group or institutional level, is a well-defined and well articulated theory. In terms of the three dilemmas, it problematizes the first command-and-control dilemma in order to open up questions surrounding the second communications dilemma (espoused explanations vs explanations-in-use) - relating to the sense in which language is deemed necessary to being able to know. As such it is a crucial and important contribution to changing the level at which the organization's processes can be brought into question, and the consulting processes whereby this can be brought about.

But notably missing in this account are some other key bodies of ideas from that time:

- Jacques' elaboration of accountable hierarchies in terms of requisite organization - "those institutions whose articulated structure and functional arrangements provide solidly regulated conditions of

trust in working relationships, and hence of authority with freedom and justice"⁸; and

- Foulkes' problematizing of the relation between the individual and the group.

Jacques is notably missing here, not only because his Stratified Systems Theory does a good job of unifying the implications of Foucault's first top-down-vs-bottom-up dilemma concerning the basis on which something could be said to be true – on the basis of transcendental vs empirical truths. Such a consideration of the organization as a stratified structuring of processes of symbolization – an architecture in its own right - is also notably missing, despite its ability to address the problematic of inter-group relations. Such an architecture brings together definitions of organization based on developmental aims as well as those based on the survivability of primary task. Jacques later repudiated the Kleinian notion that bad or dysfunctional organizations were a reflection of pathological psychological forces to be understood and resolved by the application of psychoanalytical concepts and methods. He nevertheless still maintained that "the managerial hierarchy is a direct reflection of the hierarchical structuring of human mental complexity in working" (Jacques 1995 p348). But for our purposes, it is the absence of this notion of architecture that is of interest.

⁸ A relatively recent rendering of these ideas is to be found in Jacques (1989) from which this is a quote (p132).

The absence of Foulkes is also notable, given the emphasis given to boundary management in the management of organizations. Foulkes problematizes the very formation of the individual and group in relation to the matrix - a concept closely paralleling Foucault's notion of discursive formation as being formative of subjectivity. Thus Foulkes uses the group not only like a model of the mental apparatus of ego, id and superego, in which its dynamics are personified and dramatised by the group (as does Bion). But he also says that:

"In the group-analytic group, the manifest content of communication, broadly speaking, relates to the latent meaning of this communication in a similar way as the manifest dream relates to the latent dream thoughts. This matter is so important and so bound up with our concept of a *group matrix* that I shall once more take occasion to stress the group matrix as the operational basis of all relationships and communications. Inside this network the individual is conceived as a nodal point. The individual in other words is not conceived as closed but as an open system. An analogy can be made with the neuron in anatomy and physiology, the neuron being the nodal point in the total network of the nervous system which always reacts and responds as a whole (Goldstein). As in the case of the

neuron in the nervous system, so is the individual suspended in the group matrix."(Foulkes, 1964, p118)

Foulkes' notion of the matrix not only placed the individual as a node in a network of relationships and communications, but also rendered the group itself as a node. Thus Foulkes, too, was concerned with the way in which the larger context of symbolisation was formative in the constituting of the group itself⁹. Again Foucault's second dilemma is problematized through an articulation of a form of unthought 'known', formulated as a matrix, in relation to which the individual's and group's languaging was constituted.

Why are these elaborations absent, with all their implications for the symbolic logic(s) which they point towards? Two 'explanations' offer themselves for these absences. The first is that there is no wish to include them, given that the Clinic had no wish to open up controversies between the 'old' consensus of hierarchical forms of organization, born out of the post-war institutional reforms of which it was an essential part, and other forms of organization - other architectures - capable of sustaining the performativity of Human Service Organizations. This is the explanation which Miller and Rose (1988) end up on in the

⁹ David Armstrong takes this question up in comparing the approaches of Group Relations Conferences, The Grubb Institute's Organizational Role Analysis and Gordon Lawrence's Social Dreaming Matrix. Armstrong 1991.

'Government of Subjectivity' paper. Clearly, taking up Jacques' project would be to make this 'old' consensus all too visible. Thus a debate about architecture is a debate about the very forms of hierarchy which brought the post-war Tavistock into existence within the context of the NHS. And yet it is this very context which is being called into question by the current internal market reforms.

The second explanation turns around the nature and primacy of unconscious phantasy as formulated by the Kleinians; and the secondary/derivative nature given to the symbol formations that arise to contain/defend against these anxieties.

"I believe that phantasies operate from the outset, as do the instincts, and are the mental expression of the activity of both life and death instincts. Phantasy activity underlies the mechanisms of introjection and projection, which enable the ego to perform one of the basic functions mentioned above, namely to establish object-relations." (Klein 1988, p58).

The fundamental axioms of 'The Unconscious at Work' book rest on the primary place given to phantasy by the Kleinians, together with the paradigmatic paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and their associated symbol formations. These fundamental axioms rest on a reading of Freud's death drive in relation to phantasy, with which Foulkes, for example, did not wholly agree:

"...notwithstanding the great dynamic power of phantasies, are we to regard them as primary motor directing instinctual energy and reality, or are instincts (*drives*) and their reality-objects the primary agents, leading to the formation of phantasies under conditions of conflict, frustration, etc.?¹⁰....."

Foulkes was arguing that it was the drives that were primary, and that phantasies were a response to them. In addition, when it came to the interpretation of these phantasies:

"...we are always given to understand that the elucidation of the patient's unconscious phantasies, inner objects, etc., is the result of painstaking labour on the part of the analyst, belonging as they do to the deepest unconscious levels. Surely, what Dr Heimann describes is the outcome of her own interpretative work with the patient and not comparable to the spontaneous conscious statements, reactions, etc., with which the psychiatrist is concerned...."¹¹

The point at stake here was not only the primacy of unconscious phantasy, but also the mediating effects of the analyst's own interpretative processes. If symbolic

¹⁰The Freud-Klein Controversies 1941-1945 p430

¹¹ibid p431.

formations are secondary to phantasy, then the analyst's interpretations remain secondary. But if the reverse is the case, then the analyst's interpretations become an elaboration of phantasy which take place within the context of their own symbolic formations, and thus to fall under their own relation to phantasy.

This question is at the root of Foucault's third dilemma concerning the point of origin in relation to which knowledge is constructed - the retreat and return of the origin. Rendering the drive primary makes the processes whereby the 'counter-transference' can be a reliable guide to the interpretation of phantasies wholly problematic, thus calling into question the whole basis of authority of the psychoanalyst's interpretations. We will see this problematic in the case studies which follow.

Thus, just as the first 'explanation' is in terms of the Clinic's wish not to have called into question its hierarchical place within the referral networks, so too is the second "explanation" based on a hypothesis. This is that there is no wish to re-open professional controversies surrounding the origins of the Kleinian movement, and run the risk of either discovering or displacing those origins. No wonder then that the third dilemma is not opened up, because it was exactly on this issue that the controversial discussions raged concerning the basis of authority of the psychoanalyst. Is this the incommensurability of which we were speaking earlier? This would mean that the third affiliation-vs-alliance dilemma was precisely the dilemma of power vs the relation to the unconscious.

If so, then it would appear that this second explanation is constituted more on the side of power than on the side of the unconscious.

This is not to imply, however, that these 'explanations' had been part of the conscious aims and purposes of those involved in the development of the paradigm. I am considering them to be the side-effects flowing from the axiomatics of the formation of the very subjectivity of the consultant. But how do these axiomatics formed out of an alliance around the very problematics presented by the client become an affiliation to the effects of power? To consider this, we must look at some selected cases from the book.

The Cases

Shady Glen was "a specialized hospital for severely impaired elderly people who, without being particularly ill, required intensive, long-term nursing care. It had two wings: the smaller North Wing had three rehabilitation wards for those patients who were thought likely to be able to leave the hospital eventually; South Wing had four 'continuing-care' wards for those who were not expected ever to be able to live outside the hospital again." (p75). Two external consultants were brought in to report to senior managers on the way the continuing-care wards dealt with the stresses of the work itself.

In contrast, the second pair of case studies were more concerned with issues in the institutional processes between the staff themselves. Thorne House was regarded as "a particularly progressive therapeutic community for the treatment of disturbed adolescents" (p132). The role of the external consultants was to address a row which blew up week after week in the staff meetings between two individuals reflecting different approaches to the work. Sheldon House was a residential unit for sexually abused children, in which the issue facing the external consultant was around the staffing and management of the House itself. First a staff member (Tony) and subsequently a child (Terence) became the centre of management concerns.

Shady Glen

The analysis of anxieties and defenses provides the basis for an elegant elaboration of the 'unthought' explanations of behaviour at Shady Glen known to the consultant. It also 'fitted' with the current primary task definition that was deeply embedded in the way in which Shady Glen was currently constituted:

"The new primary task definition also had implications for how the hospital was structured.... whereas before each discipline or department had had its own discrete task, and was therefore managed as a separate system, the new definition of a shared task required a new boundary around all those

involved in patient care. Furthermore, the separation of rehabilitation from continuing-care wards no longer had any rationale, since their previously different aims were now subsumed under a single task definition...."
pp78-79

The recommendations to management, centring around re-defining the primary task, included developing three new kinds of support for staff:

- face-to-face contact with hospital management to review staff needs and the development of their new practices;
- time and place for staff to reflect together on their work and how it was carried out in small groups with continuity of membership; and
- mechanisms for inviting, considering and implementing ideas for change from everyone in the system, whatever their status (including patients and their relatives).

The change in primary task definition sought to shift the organization from being defined on the basis of functional descriptions of task reflecting the different professional groupings within the hospital, to one based on the way in which the organization sought to respond to the needs of its residents. It is not clear to what extent the open systems modelling supported this re-thinking of the

overall logic of the organization, but it was intuitively justifiable in the interests of the good of the patients.

Equally, the staff groups and review meeting made a lot of sense as a means of holding open the relation between the experience of what-is-going-on and the way people spoke about this. But were they, together with the large group process - the mechanism for change - an adequate response to the problem. What was the problem behind the presenting problem in relation to the larger context in which the staff were operating? There is a complete absence of analysis of the power issues which might be expected to arise in trying to implement such a change.

The solution to working through the implications of the changes in primary task definition were given to a multi-disciplinary team. This is how the story of Shady Glen continued:

"Where task-systems have overlapping boundaries, and their members are part of two management systems, the question of who is managing what - where authority is located - can become critical..... The proposed new ward-team boundary, which included staff from other disciplines, needed to be managed by someone with sufficient authority to make decisions about patient care.... In the end, the necessary authority was not delegated to the

ward sister, and as a result, fundamental change to the continuing-care system as a whole did not take place.... The failure to implement the report came as a devastating disappointment to the therapists. The nurses' response was more along the lines of, 'Well, what do you expect?' - the beginning of a move back to the old splits along fault-lines between the different disciplines."

So the system reverted to a functional form. A 'good idea' was rejected by the historically dominant ways in which power was exercised. But where was the analysis of the larger context in the first place? If the larger context had been included in the client system, could such a redefinition of primary task have been made in the first place? And where is the boundary to be placed around the larger system as a whole anyway? Is the larger context itself part of the system of defences against anxiety?

The case is an elaboration of the concepts in Part I as far as they go, but it is strikingly silent on the very power issues that appear most relevant to the outcome. Where were the processes that could bring about an alignment of power and authority in relation to the leadership challenge?

Thorne House and Sheldon Road

The approach taken by the consultants here was to recognize that the unconscious processes of the individuals

concerned gave them a valency for the institutional processes they had become caught up in. But the key to a successful intervention by them was to access the institutional dilemmas through the group processes. We get some insight into how this was done:

"Thus, what needed to be recognised at Thorne House was the two sides of an unexpressed institutional debate on permissiveness versus control, so that the fight could become the public, ongoing debate within the staff group as a whole that it needed to become. Indeed, this debate taps into the very essence of the adolescent process, with its unconscious struggle between authoritarian and anti-authoritarian parts of the maturing self." (p133)

and

"The child who was hurt by Terence represented all of the staff: 'Look what is happening to us as a result of your decision.' Terence's behaviour expressed not only his own rage, but also the rage all the staff were feeling at parental figures who abuse and fail those whom they should protect. At the same time, first Tony and then Terence were used to voice the group's unacknowledged anxieties about the quality of the service they were

offering, anxieties which were split off, projected and finally got rid of by the removal of the 'whistle-blowers'." (p130-131)

So, besides personal insight, it was useful for managers and other professionals to have training in understanding group and institutional processes - the ways in which these anxieties manifested themselves and were defended against at the group and institutional level. But was this an adequate description of what it took to be able to "maintain a position at the boundary of inside and outside"?

The way dilemmas are dealt with by an organization can be seen as being constitutive of its strategy¹². So how were dilemmas dealt with in the book?

"Institutional dilemmas (eg permissiveness versus control), like personal ones, are anxiety-provoking, and regularly give rise to the kinds of defensive projective processes described above." (p133)

Certainly, it is important to be able to understand how institutions use individual members to express fundamental institutional dilemmas. But does this understanding provide an adequate basis for working through the implications of those dilemmas in institutional terms? Can it be adequate to read back everything in terms of an essence of our own

¹²A good introduction to this way of approaching strategy is to be found in Charles Hampden-Turner's book (1990).

personal dilemmas? And who is to make these interpretations?

The Afterword

The beginnings of a response to these questions is offered in the Afterword. First, Obholzer sets out the theme of the book:

"The theme of this book has been that working in the human services inevitably arouses anxiety, pain and confusion. As a result, institutions, working practices and staff relationships are unconsciously structured so as to defend against anxiety. Furthermore, these defensive structures come to be seen as the optimal way of performing the task and, as such, not to be questioned. We have also seen how institutional defences within helping organizations often exacerbate rather than reduce the stress of working with people in distress. The need for change is therefore self-evident and generally acknowledged. Yet what is also evident is that useful and meaningful change is extremely hard to bring about. Why is this so, and what can we do about it?"

The first step of the solution, with which I agree, is that we need to understand the anxiety-containing function of institutions. This means not only accepting the problematics

of the first top-down-vs-bottom-up dilemma in working with the institution. It also means appreciating the implications of the second espoused-vs-in-use dilemma - the 'cogito' vs the unthought. The anxiety-containing function of the organization goes beyond what it is said that the organization is there for.

By re-formulating primary task in terms of primary process, Armstrong (1995) addresses the work of the consultant to that which goes beyond what it is said the organization is there for. In this way, we might say that he is elaborating the Tavistock paradigm in relation to the second dilemma. But as regards the question of the origin of author-ity around which the third dilemma turns, on this the Afterword is silent. Instead it goes on to identify a number of do's which lend themselves more to being authoritarian than to being authoritative:

- There must be clarity and ongoing discussion about the primary task of the organization, taking into account changes in the environment.
- Authority structures need to be clear.
- It is essential that clear and open communication between all sectors involved must be maintained.
- There must be work-related staff support systems to contain the anxieties arising from the work itself, as well as out of the process of change.
- Personal support systems should be available.
- Managers also need support.

Apart from reading as a specification of the role of a Tavistock consultant, with the exception of the first two, these are all enabling activities, which support the change process once it has been defined, but which also seem to say little about the nature of the role itself.

What clues are there, then to the way this question of author-ity is approached? How are the changes to be defined by the Tavistock consultant?

The answer appears to be addressed implicitly in the second of the do's in the Afterword - in the way the consultant seeks to ensure that the Authority structures have the load-bearing characteristics required of them - something interpretable by the Tavistock consultant:

"Consultants to institutions can be regarded as having an analogous role to the architect's, predicting which are the load-bearing structures, and helping to identify what sort of emotional loads these structures are carrying."
(p209)

It sounds more like a structural engineer's job, again oriented more towards the anxiety-carrying role of the organization than on either its ongoing development or on its continuing viability. And it leaves the position of the consultant unexamined.

I would agree that an understanding of the architectures of organizations provide crucial insights into the symbolic logic(s) through which they are constituted.

But the way the metaphor is being used here is to underpin the consultant's professionalism, rather than to point towards questions concerning the nature of the professionalism underpinning the consultant's role.

How then have these axiomatics of the formation of the very subjectivity of the consultant, which formed out of the origins of the Tavistock paradigm, become rendered as an affiliation to a particular form of institutional practice?

It would appear that the answer would lie in the way the ontological status of primary task itself has remained unquestioned. The book remains silent concerning the problematics surrounding the first of the do's above. It would appear that the licensed stupidity of the consultant does not extend as far as questioning the axiomatics of primary task itself! No mention is made of the problematics of primary task, and its roots in the nature of the discursive and non-discursive formations by which the organization is constituted.

But am I being unfair about the aims of the book here? For would not making such mention be to question the good of Human Service Organizations?

Conclusion

It would appear, then, that it is the unquestioned status of the 'reality' brought into being by the 'private metaphor' of open systems thinking in general, and primary task in particular, which lies at the root of the problem. Just as with Soft Systems methodology, this private metaphor installs a language which conceals both the effects of the observer, and behind these, the effects of power.

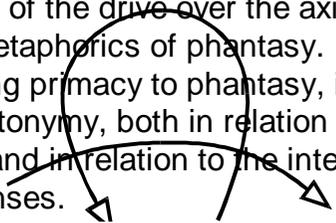
These effects of power are informed perhaps by another metaphor, installed through the part the Tavistock paradigm played in 'winning the peace', and concerned to support the good of the HSO through the mediating effects of healthy hierarchies. In neither Shady Glen, nor Thorne House, nor Sheldon Road were the institutional dilemmas addressed.

But if this selective blindness is not to be part of the conscious aims and purposes of those involved in the development of the paradigm, how are they to be considered as the side-effects flowing from the axiomatics of the formation of the very subjectivity of the consultant.

The primary status given to unconscious phantasy, and the bio-logic metaphoric underlying the formation of object relations installs another kind of metaphor as privileged. Working interpretively with the counter-transference under the influence of these metaphoric

installs a particular form of subjectivity which is no less an effect of power than is the reality of primary task.

In the diagram below¹³, the metonymic characteristics of speaking are shown as running along chains of association which escape from underneath the retroactive effects of listening – a listening which always takes place under the influence of metaphor.

Privileging the drive over ~~listening~~ is to privilege the metonymic effects of the drive over the axiomatising tendency of the metaphoric of phantasy. The Tavistock paradigm, in ceding primacy to phantasy, is privileging metaphor over metonymy, both in relation to the consultant's 'take' on 'reality'; and in relation to the interpretation of unconscious defenses. 

Obholzer's "licensed stupidity" comes close to formulating the paradoxical nature of a strategy of intervention based on privileging metonymy, just as his metaphor of the architect points towards an understanding of an organisation in terms of the axiomatics of power which an architecture supports.

But to privilege metaphor over metonymy, rather than vice versa, is to privilege affiliation over alliance. This, then, is how the two realms became separated. The separation,

¹³ This formulation is based on an early Lacanian formulation of the relationship of metaphor and metonymy, and is elaborated in Boxer and Palmer 1994.

being inherent in the origins of the paradigm, was installed along with the paradigm itself, so that to escape this separation would involve calling the power of the paradigm itself into question, and with that the practice of the consultant under its influence.

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