The Unobtrusive Relational Group Analyst and the Work of the Narrative

Robert Grossmark, Ph.D

ABSTRACT

I outline the concept of the unobtrusive relational group analyst and the related concepts of the flow of enactive engagement, psychoanalytic companioning and the work of the narrative in group analysis. A clinical example will be offered to illustrate these concepts.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of relational psychoanalysis has been instrumental in moving psychoanalysis beyond what had often appeared as a closed world cleaving to an individual or one-person psychology somewhat detached from the wider world of broad social and historical context and has championed understanding of the human subject as embedded in the intersubjective matrix, of the multiplicity of human subjectivity and mind, and of the presence of the psychoanalyst as a co-participant in the co-construction of psychoanalytic process. Ideas from relational theory have been widely adopted in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy generally, and many analysts and patients themselves now breathe more easily in the egalitarian and co-participant sensibility of contemporary psychoanalysis and psychotherapy¹. There has also been a growing integration

¹ I find much consilience between the broad egalitarian sensibility and the contextual understanding of human process and experience that is the signature of relational psychoanalysis and the field of group analysis which is barely known within American relational
of relational ideas and sensibilities into the field of group psychotherapy (Grossmark & Wright, 2015).

Alongside the developments in relational theory and practice there has been an emerging question as to how to work relationally with patients who are not able to avail themselves of a treatment that foregrounds awareness of the clinical interaction and the ability to relate to and utilize the other of the analyst (Director, 2009, 2016; Grossmark, 2012a, 2016). These are patients for whom there is little or no self or object constancy, for whom there are few alternatives to merger and the loss of self in human interaction, for whom sadomasochistic object relations predominate their every interaction and for whom space, time and reality are simply not experienced in a cohesive ongoing manner. Such patients have chronic experiences of emptiness and fears of relational impingement (Bach et al, 2014). I am also referring here to patients who are able to engage with what can appear to be intersubjective vitality, but may also harbor self states that contain earlier undeveloped and unspeakable parts of themselves. Such states, as Bromberg (1996, 2006) has so forcefully described, are sequestered and encrusted due to unbearable trauma, shame and envy. Such areas of the self or self states are often chased underground, as it were, by a psychoanalytic treatment, either group or individual, that puts a premium on relatedness, thought and dialogic exploration.

psychoanalysis. Rooted in the work of Foulkes (1964, 1975; Foulkes & Anthony, 1957) and beautifully rendered by Pines (1988) and Schlapobersky (2016) among others, group analysis foregrounds relations “between” rather than relations “within”. The individual is never understood apart from the social context and the immediate personal relationship, and the unconscious is seen as inherently social.
THE UNOBTRUSIVE RELATIONAL GROUP ANALYST

In looking for a way to work with such patients, I found much that is useful in the work of the British Middle School, in particular the work of Michael Balint. Group therapists may be familiar with Michael Balint. He was one of the few psychoanalysts of his generation who also did group work. His “Balint Groups” and his group work in hospitals and institutions have received insufficient attention in the psychoanalytic literature.

At the time when he was writing, the predominant modality of treatment was a psychoanalysis that relied heavily on a neutral analyst who intervened almost exclusively via interpretations (Balint, 1968) and he noted that many patients were struggling to benefit from this approach. His invaluable observation was that it was the relationship between the analyst and the patient itself that was paramount for the treatment to progress and furthermore observed that regressed patients seemed to require a form of relatedness that was “more primitive than that obtaining between two adults” (p.161). This relationship was much less reliant on words themselves. Indeed he noted that for many regressed patients, words themselves did not function denotatively. Rather, he saw them as what the philosopher J.L. Austin would have termed “speech acts” which have a “performative function” (Austin, 1975). He recommended that the

2 In attempting to elucidate the unobtrusive relational group analyst I draw on a diversity of psychoanalytic sources and group analytic threads. I realize that some of these might not appear to sit comfortably or coherently together, but I am happy to pull on these diverse sources in the hope that a new and engaging group analytic patois will emerge that can expand the nature and breadth of psychoanalytic and group analytic explanation itself.
analyst “recognize and be with the patient” (p. 172) and be “unobtrusive and ordinary” (p. 173) so that a treatment environment would be created in which the patient could experience a benign regression. This would be a regression to what he called the “basic fault” (1968), the area of primal dependency from whence the patient could come to a “new beginning”, develop their own sense of themselves and grow their own true self. He contrasts this benign and growth-promoting regression with a malignant regression wherein the patient diminishes him or herself in a false compliance with the all-knowing, interpreting analyst.

Balint recommended that the analyst be very patient with these patients and avoid too precipitously interpreting or otherwise knowing which might tilt the treatment into a malignant regression. When emphasizing that the analyst “be-with” these patients Balint was explicit that such experiences “cannot, need not, and perhaps must not, be expressed in words” (p. 174). The treatment (group or individual) becomes the “human place in which the patient is becoming whole” (Ogden, 2005, p. 96) and is shaped by the idiom, character and unconscious of the patient. A prime value is placed on the treatment belonging to the patient. The analyst is present as him or herself, but is unobtrusive to the realization of the patients’ needs and the manner in which the patient can utilize the analyst as an object. Oftentimes, this involves a denuding of the analyst’s subjectivity as the patient comes to incorporate the analyst in his or her own primitive world and primal needs. Winnicott has talked about states of regression where the analyst is taken for granted and where: “the object behaves according to magical laws, i.e. it exists when desired, it approaches when approached, it hurts when hurt. Lastly it vanishes when not wanted” (Winnicott, 1945, p. 153). In other words the unobtrusive relational analyst surrenders to the developmental needs of the patient and becomes the analyst the patient needs (Grossmark, 2012a), and can use. Balint was prescient in highlighting a psychoanalytic healing that is
primarily due to the analyst being with the patient. The emphasis here is on being-with the patient as these altered and regressed states are entered, not intruding with his or her subjectivity. This point of view resonates with the growing literature in contemporary psychoanalysis that highlights being-with patients (Eshel, 2013; Grossmark, 2012a, 2016; Reis, 2009, 2010, 2016) along with the growing recognition of the implicit processes of human relatedness that are fundamental to the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis (Boston Change Process Group, 2010; and Lyons-Ruth, 1998).

The unobtrusive relational group analyst applies this sensibility to work with groups. Rather than “neutral” or “abstinent”, the group analyst is present as him or her self. There is no mystery and avoidance of one’s own subjectivity. Primacy is placed on each group developing its own unique idiom and culture and the analyst is unobtrusive to its development and expression. The analyst unobtrusively companions the group in the flow of enactive engagement and in the emergent narratives of trauma and regression that emerge. The emphasis is on companioning the group as it flows into altered and transformative states. The unobtrusive relational analyst does not regard him or herself as outside of the group process and able to interpret from a domain of neutrality, from a “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1989). He or she conducts the group from within and constructs and is constructed by the group process even as he or she occupies the distinct role of leader or conductor. Treatment is by the group. The members work with each other and companion each other into and out of enactments and regressed worlds of trauma and neglect. Words are present but it is understood that, just as Balint so presciently observed, much of this work is outside of the domain of language and must remain so. I am reminded of the words of one of the founders of group analysis, E. James Anthony, when describing his experience of group work with Foulkes. He wrote: “Perhaps the
most valuable lesson I received from Foulkes was on the value of unobtrusiveness on the part of the therapist and on the limits of explicitness” (Anthony, 1983, p. 30).

THE FLOW OF ENACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND THE WORK OF THE NARRATIVE

The unobtrusive group analyst companions the group as areas of diffusion, confusion and damage arise between group members and in the group-as-a-whole. These are manifestations of non-represented experience (Levine et al, 2013) and unformulated potential experience (Stern, 1997, 2010) that have yet to have form. This is the realm “where thoughts arrive as actions” (Bollas, 2011, p. 239). These are not experiences or memories that are “tellable” or relatable. They emerge as enactments in the field of the group between members, much as Bromberg, (1996, 2000, 2006) and D.B. Stern (1997, 2010, 2015) describe the emergence in enactment of the dissociated not-me. They show, rather than tell. The group analyst can be unobtrusive to this emergence but is deeply engaged and knows that he or she can only know a small portion of what is actually emerging. It is in the shared companioning of the group analyst and the group members in these hitherto inchoate aspects of self that coherence emerges and mind, mentalization and self-other relatedness take root.

When the “flow of enactive engagement” (Grossmark, 2012b, 2015) of the group members with each other and the group analyst is allowed to unobtrusively unfold, the work of the narrative becomes manifest. The group will spontaneously tell many stories (Grossmark, 2017). These are not only told in words but also in the shapes and narratives that emerge as the group process and interaction unfolds. The field of the group will come to capture and express the unconscious, and yet to be formulated potential experiences of this unique group with these unique members. Furthermore, the field of the group captures unconscious, non-represented
trauma and dynamics from prior generations and historical ghosts of all participants (Davoine & Gaudilliere 2004; Harris, Kalb & Klebanoff, 2016, 2017). The flow of enactive engagement in group is an interactive, engaged and multi-personal version of the Freudian idea of free association much like Foulkes’ adaptation of free association to group analysis that he called “free-floating discussion” (Foulkes, 1964, 1975). However, unlike Foulkes’ “free floating discussion” the flow of enactive engagement involves the analyst as embedded in the enactment and foregrounds the embodied incarnation of trauma and states of primal psychic functioning and regression.

Such flows of mutual enactment can capture and tell a narrative of past trauma of the patient’s life (or his or her forebears’) that has been dissociated and never formulated, or as Aron and Atlas (2015) have outlined, can tell a story of the future as new dimensions of relatedness emerge. And as Neri (2008) and other neo-Bioninan field theorists describe, such enactive engagement can describe unconscious and yet to be known aspects of the group itself. The key is that the analyst flows with the group into areas that have yet to find psychological shape and form in the group members’ or the analyst’s minds. The group analyst fully utilizes his or her “negative capability” (Bion, 1971). The companioning of the group in these emergent experiences evokes a field that is itself transformative. Elaborating on Bollas’s transformative object (Bollas, 1987) the whole intersubjective matrix of the group may be viewed as a crucible of transformation within which the members come alive. The following example will illustrate how a narrative of the past is told, not in words, but becomes incarnated in mutual action in the group. And the narrative of the future is in the process of being built as the group members together share these experiences of transformation of what had been isolated fragments or beta elements (Bion, 1962) into a shared, companioned experience of wholeness together.
AN ENACTMENT OF FAMILY TRAUMA

Greta, an unmarried white woman in her mid-40s has been attending this ongoing group for two years. She initially came to group for help with persistent depression and a growing feeling of despair that she would never find a life partner or advance professionally. She had been a lively presence in the group and was much liked by the other group members, but frequently fell into evacuative states, where it appeared that her only mode of managing internal anxiety and arousal was to speak in a pressured manner, often asking the same question of another group member over and over again. When she would fall into this mode, the group would become impatient with her and she often found herself on the receiving end of both anger and desperation from other group members. I too would experience extreme agitation when she would go into this mode. They would appeal to her to slow down and to take a breath. Generally, she would fall into sullen disappointment and withdrawal on such occasions and would return the next week with some degree of insight. For instance, she might return the following week, apologize for her behavior and say that she has realized that she lost touch with her feelings and made the others uncomfortable. Typically, the feeling that would have eluded her was anger or fear. On this occasion, she came to group and described a situation at work. Her manager was bullying her and was openly favoring a colleague of Greta’s and together the boss and the colleague had made fun of her. Greta had begun to realize that she was, once again, going to be passed over for a possible promotion. Both the manager and the colleague were substantially younger than Greta. Greta relayed the story with a mix of fury and disdain for her manager and her colleague, but also conveyed a sense of resignation. She said that there was nothing that she could do: “the dye is already cast”, “you know how it is”. Some group members joined with her acceptance
and resignation and agreed that it was too dangerous to swim against the current, one had better
keep one’s head down and live to fight another day. One of these was Doris, who had grown up
with an abusive mother. Seeming to have frequently entered delusional states, her mother would
single her out for slaps, punches and verbal assault, while always idealizing the other children.
Doris had left home as soon as she was able and had grimly worked her way through college and
into corporate culture where she steadfastly climbed the ladder of promotions. She was now a
senior manager in a large corporation and had no personal life at all. She dressed in muted
colors and had a grey colorless pallor. She always spoke slowly and rationally, and often with
great insight. She was always unruffled by the storm systems that might break out in the group.
Other group members were outraged with Greta and her work situation. They expressed anger
with the manager and the colleague, but most predominantly with Greta herself for “taking it”.
Peter, who had grown up watching his mother bullied and beaten by his alcoholic father, was
furious with Greta. “How could you let this happen? You have to stand up for yourself”. He
became agitated and Greta herself complained that she actually felt bullied by Peter as he
assaulted her with his frustration. Anthony, who grew up bullied and traumatized by his older
siblings took a more conciliatory tone with Greta but also agreed that she had to stand up for
herself. The tension in the room heightened. It was as if the group was dividing itself into two
gangs who were readying themselves for an all-out confrontation: the rational-appeasers versus
the stand-up-for-yourself-and-fight proponents. As these two groups became increasingly angry
with each other, Greta herself slipped more quietly into the back-ground. She tried to get a word
in, to clarify this point or that, but to no avail: the energy was firmly located in the stand-off
between the two sub-groups and the atmosphere was becoming very heated, even somewhat
threatening. Peter brought up past confrontations with Doris and each became accusatory about
the other. Finally, Greta turned to me with a “can you believe this?” look. I asked her to speak her thoughts. She said to me and to the group that she couldn’t quite tell how she felt but she was certainly aware that everyone was fighting and that she felt like she had become invisible.

I was aware that Greta had become quiet but I did not fear for her. I did feel that even if she did not “stand up for herself” right now in the group, she was able to survive. I found the aggression intense, but not unsafe. This is a sense that I recognize. It is as if the group is displaying a narrative that has yet to have meaning. It is a zone where the emotions are real, but at the same time cannot be taken as literal. On one level one can say that in this long-term group where all the members have known each other for some years, that there is sufficient safety and holding such that they can enter into areas of real pain and aggression and know that everyone will survive and come back to work together regardless of the degree of contention and abrasion.

From another perspective, I have come to regard these altered transitional group states as transformative and revelatory. They are real and not real at the same time. A story, or a number of stories are being told between and amongst the group members. I can be unobtrusive and allow the narrative to unfold, to let the work of the narrative take its own place and unfold as it needs to. My work is to hold the environment, to be sure that it is safe and to respect this flow of enactive engagement and to not obtrude (would “intrude” be preferable here?) with interpretations or questions as to how a member is feeling and so on. I wait for the point of contact with me, and this came when Greta turned to me with her questioning look.

So I asked her to say more and said to the group that I was not sure how to understand this tension and aggression but that some very powerful emotions and interactions were under way. In saying this I hope to endorse and support the group members in whatever they might be
feeling, and also to offer the holding that comes with the idea that there is meaning here, even if we cannot connect to it yet.

Doris took the lead and asked Greta what she meant when she said that she had become invisible. Greta said that when she was a child her brothers and parents would fight. Things would become unbearably terrifying for her. There would be violence between the father and the brothers and often pushes and shoves would escalate to violent fights. Knowing that Doris had abundant knowledge of family violence, I asked Doris to stay with Greta. Doris said that she understood how invisibility was the only solution when the environment was so dangerous. The others now joined in the conversation and the stand-up-for-yourself sub-group and the rational- appeaser sub-group began to talk to each other and to understand each other. This is a sure sign of the maturing of the group process and opening of deeper levels of communication. The group session ended and I reassured the group that although this was a hard session it felt as if we were a part of a number of stories that were being told in the group. Anthony replied with “no kidding!”

Over the next few weeks, amongst other group dynamics and other members’ work, the group returned a number of times to the zone of this enactment. The feelings and sub-groups would re-emerge and the conversation pick up as if time had stood still. As time progressed there was more and more room for perspective and thought. The group and the sub-groups were not as vulnerable to becoming completely immersed in the experience. All agreed with me when I suggested that the group became Greta’s family for a while. Doris helped Greta with the idea that when the men in the family engaged in their violent and aggression-fueled dynamic she

---

would become invisible. Doris ruefully related this to the “equation” of her own life where she has subordinated herself fully to the demands of work. The group talked with her at length about the degree to which she has erased any passion and vitality from her own life. During this discussion, Doris sighed and threw her head backwards. In doing so her hair fell away from her forehead revealing a completely new aspect to her face. Anthony spontaneously commented on how he had never seen her look like that before, and other group members joined in saying that yes: Doris is indeed a beautiful woman. They had never quite seen her so. She is always so covered up. Moments like this are signals of a group process and transformation. The unobtrusive relational analyst allows this process to continue unimpeded, at times embellishing the ongoing dynamic. In fact I did chime in at this point and said that I too had felt the grey clouds part when Doris made that gesture.

All agreed that Anthony and Peter had come to be Greta’s brothers and father in the group. Anthony and Peter agreed that they had lost track of Greta when they were so forceful in their views about her standing up for herself. Greta related the issue of invisibility and safety to her work situation and connected to how scared she actually felt at work, even though her manager and colleague were so much younger than her and she mainly felt contempt toward them. Peter talked about how much he had dreamed of being able to save his mother from the violent attacks of his father and with great pain connected to how enraged he had been with her, his mother, for not standing up for herself. He related this with great anguish and sorrow. He began to see how he repeatedly positioned himself as savior in his relationships with women. None of these relationships endured. Anthony related the urgency he felt toward Greta’s passivity to his own fear of his own passivity and vulnerability, both in his own work environment and in his relationships with women where he would most commonly find himself
avoiding any semblance of his own needs or fragility. And for him too, no relationship had endured.

To return to Greta: she was moved, energized and at times confused by all these events and seemed to cycle from a receptive mode where she could take a perspective and think about the group dynamic and how it replayed her childhood, and a return to the pressured, evacuative mode that we were all so familiar with. All the members agreed that they had become Greta’s family for a while repeating the very dynamic of danger, acrimony and splitting that she had survived by becoming invisible. I suggested that we should also think about how her pressured mode was also a part of that dynamic. Greta agreed saying that she actually feels safer when she talks incessantly even if she knows she can lose people when she does that. Anthony related to this and said that it was probably a way of keeping her numb and disconnected. Greta agreed and talked about how she has always felt that she and Anthony have a special bond, both having been bullied as youngsters. Peter, still immersed in the anguish in relation to his mother said that he was realizing that the emotion he felt when Greta would become pressured and insistent, was fear. This surprised him and the group, but together they talked at length and figured out that when his mother succumbed to the father’s abuse, he felt utterly abandoned by both parents. He had always dealt with that fear by the fantasy that he could protect and save his mother. Peter cried deeply as he spoke about the layers of complicated emotions he was in touch with.

**LIVING AN EXPERIENCE TOGETHER**

When discussing the development of the child’s self, and what we would now call, subjectivity, Winnicott emphasizes that the mother and young infant come into meaningful relation with each other when “the mother and the child live an experience together” (his italics) and this
experience promotes the “first tie the infant makes with an external object” (Winnicott, 1945, p.152). This is the crucible in which relatedness and the comprehension of external reality grows. When the mother and baby are harmoniously in synchrony there is a moment of illusion – “a bit of experience which the infant can take as either his hallucination or a thing belonging to external reality” (p. 152). The mother does not challenge the illusion, but unobtrusively lives within the illusion with the baby. The baby finds his or her way to reality and relatedness through living in the illusory world with the mother and the mother “enriches” the illusion rather than dispelling it.

Likewise, the unobtrusive relational group analyst follows the group as it enters this transitional area that is both real and hallucinatory. The idea is, as Winnicott suggests, to not “challenge the illusion” but to “unobtrusively live within the illusion” with the group. In this way the group and its members find their way to “reality and relatedness through living the illusory world” together. Like the mother, the group analyst “enriches” the illusion rather than dispelling it. For instance, I chimed in when the group responded to Doris’s transformative moment when she threw her head back and the hair fell away from her forehead.

The group is always enacting and narrating. I did not view Greta’s pressured speech or the enactment of emotional trauma and erasure as issues to be dealt with via interpretation or any attempt to promote a higher level of relatedness. Rather, I regard these as enactments that call from non-recognized and non-represented self-states for recognition and companioning so as to make them real (Grossmark, 2016). I include here behaviors and occurrences that are often regarded as resistances or treatment-destructive acting-out. For instance, I have described how I understood a patient who missed sessions as conveying the devastation of abandonment (Grossmark, 2015), an experience that had no form in his mind and therefore could not be told in
words. It was via the narration and incarnation in the group enactment that the experience began to have a form and therefore could be approached as an emotional reality.

Hence, I do not seek to interrupt this narrative emergence while it is flowing and arising. The therapeutic action derives from the group members living through this experience together, rather than reaching a precipitous “understanding” of what is going on. For this reason I wait to engage until the group signals to me that they need contact, as when Greta looked to me and expressed her need for my felt presence. Likewise, I hold onto many thoughts I have about the group dynamics that are unfolding, preferring to respect the group’s ability to titrate it’s own levels of stimulation and connectedness. For instance, I understood that not only was the group enacting the story of Greta’s family, but there was also an embodiment of Greta’s internal worlds. One could regard the adversarial sub-groups as manifestations of the warring parts of her own mind, her internal object world where passions and aggression (embodied by Peter and Anthony) were at war with her self-protective, traumatized self (Doris). I hold these thoughts and formulations in my own mind and understand that the therapeutic action derives more from my containing and metabolizing these thoughts rather than interpreting them to the group at this time.

Whilst it would not be incorrect to understand this group process according to the unfolding transferences, such as Peter reacting to Greta as if she were his mother, I tend to feel that such understanding can flatten out the rich multi-layered process that was unfolding. A transference interpretation emanates from the logic of projection (Bollas, 2009), whereas I am seeking to allow the emergence of the “logic of enactment” and the work of the narrative where many stories come to be lived through at once. In the logic of enactment, the whole group rather than just two members were involved in this narration or incarnation of Greta’s family.
Furthermore, as Aron and Atlas (2015) suggest, enactments can dissolve the linear trajectory of time. In this enactment with Greta the group not only incarnated the dynamics and trauma of her early years but also contained the presence of the psychic healing which, one hopes, presage her future health. Greta had not repressed the trauma of her upbringing. She could, and indeed had, told the story of her violent and terrifying family, on many occasions in the group. It was not out of awareness. However, as her erasing and invisiblizing herself attests, she had dissociated and removed herself from the emotional and intrapsychic dimension of the trauma whilst it was happening and in any further telling of the events. She was condemned to endlessly repeat rather than to truly remember the experience (Freud, 1914). One of the hallmarks of families where there is so much abuse and violence is the absence of containment, the inner mental processes that foster the making of experience and thinking itself (Bion, 1962). Rather, such families are characterized by a proliferation of evacuation of emotion, conflict and of the mind itself. Hence no one can think, and everyone reacts with intensity. Such environments are always emotionally and often physically dangerous. Greta was continually showing this aspect of her own mind and that of her family with her signature pressured talking that never seemed to contain meaning itself and would typically evoke anger and less contained feelings in the group. All along, she had been showing the group, telling if you like, the story of the absence of containment. And this telling involved all the members of the group, including me. Recall that I too would feel so very agitated when she would go into evacuative mode. This is the logic of group enactment, the work of the narrative.

The healing grows, I suggest, not from interpretations from a knowing group analyst or from the orchestration of greater relatedness between group members (Ormont, 1992, 2001), but from the group members living through this experience together. As Balint says, much of these
experiences “cannot, need not, and perhaps must not, be expressed in words” (Balint, 1968, p. 174). It is the work of the unobtrusive relational group analyst to allow the flow of enactive engagement and to companion the group in this living through together. There is consilience between Winnicott’s work on the development of the infant’s subjectivity and “unit status”, the subsequent work of developmental psychology (Trevarthen, 2001), the current emphasis on implicit relational knowing (BCPSG, 2007, 2010, Lyons-Ruth, 1998) and the recent psychoanalytic emphasis on Being-with mentioned above. All would suggest that it is the group members’ being-with each other and living this experience together that fosters the growth of the inner structures of mind, in Bion’s language, the apparatus for thinking and containing. This is the foundation of self-continuity, relatedness, mentalization and reflective function, all of which Greta began to grow in this work with the group. It is these qualities that provide the foundation for a more healthy processing of the trauma which had persisted in a dissociated self state and that had hindered her development at work and in relationships. Of course, this is group analysis, so everything that is said about Greta also applies to all the other group members themselves.

I would also point out that this enactment did not only transcend time and place in that it embodies the past, the present and the future simultaneously. Furthermore it embodied both the positive and the negative aspects of the trauma. In other words it contained the incarnation of what had happened as well as the embodied presence of what had not happened: a mother and family’s containment. Many patients can describe in words at least some of what did happen, even if traumatic and damaging. Patients can rarely tell what did not happen. This is the work of the negative (Green, 1999), and the presence of the absence, of states that have no form due to the absence of recognition, companioning and attunement that would have made them whole and
coherent experiences (Levine et al, 2013). It is in enactment and the work of the narrative that such non-represented and non-cognized states and absences come to have shape and form and can be experienced. Hence Greta and the group enacted both the absence of containment and the growth of the presence of containment. It is via the continuous living through of these states in group as one or another member struggles with their issues that psychoanalytic healing and the growth of mind and emotional capacity develops.

CONCLUSION

I have spelled out how an unobtrusive relational group analyst can allow the flow of enactive engagement and the work of the narrative such that group members can companion each other and live experiences together so that containment, mind, and relatedness can grow in and between group members. The group process is healing in and of itself and the group analyst is unobtrusive yet deeply engaged in this process.

REFERENCES


Austin, J.L. (1975) How To Do Things With Words, Harvard University Press


241 Central Park West

Suite 1A

New York, NY 10024

e-mail: rgrossmark@verizon.net