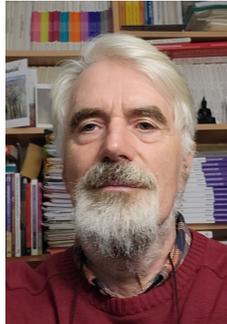




ARGO Associazione per la Ricerca sul Gruppo Omogeneo
la Rivista, Gruppo: Omogeneità e differenze

Psychoanalysis of group: 50 years of work report



**The history of group psychoanalysis in France
and the methodological problem of the 'setting'
Interview with Denis Mellier**

Edited by Stefania Marinelli

1. Question: From your knowledge of groups and group psychoanalysis in France, could you say whether there is a specificity - for example with regard to parallel research in Italy, Argentina, England?

1. Answer: France has developed an original and fruitful perspective on group psychoanalysis. Around Didier Anzieu and René Kaës in particular, psychoanalysis has found a foundation for its practice in the direction of the group. The influences were of course diverse, the processes of transformation and elaboration multiple. It is impossible to account for all this complexity. The specificity could be the place of "the word" taken in the groups, but I prefer to emphasise a question that is often less underlined, and which nevertheless seems to me to be very, very important, it is a methodological question, it is the problem of the setting. This problematic is, I believe, the "mark" of what could be called the "French school" of group psychoanalysis because it has instilled the different movements, the different associations that promote and transmit the psychoanalytical approach to the group in France.

Let us attempt a brief outline of the history of all these associations. If the practice and theory of the group developed from the 1950s-1960s in ways that

were very different from each other, it was gradually 'fertilised' by psychoanalysis, and it diversified, as we shall see below, by integrating this methodological base.

Can you explain this historical sequence?

In 1958 Anne Ancelin-Schützenberger (trained with Moreno) created, with Juliette Favez-Boutonier, Pierre Gounod and Claude Ouzilou, the "French Group of Sociometry Studies", which then took a more psychoanalytical orientation with Jacqueline Falguière, Dubois and Laxenaire, to become the "French Institute of Group Analysis and Psychodrama". The contribution of psychosociology has been very important, note the foundation in 1959 of ARIP-ICS (Association pour la Recherche et l'Intervention Psychosociologique), in 1972 the creation of the review "Connexions" with Jean-Claude Rouchy and E. Enriquez. In 1995 Jean-Claude Rouchy created "Transition", its president since 2016 Jean-Pierre Pinel has just passed away suddenly (on 30 September 2022) and we are still in shock at his death. On the initiative of Jean-Claude Rouchy, René Kaës and his colleagues abroad, the "European Association for Transcultural Group Analysis" (EATGA) organised the "Maastricht seminar" in 1985 with an original device to put cultural differences to work,

The group around René Kaës was, I think, important?

Yes, fundamental. The psychoanalytical approach of the group was more directly promoted with the foundation in 1962 of the CEFRRAP (Cercles d'Études Françaises pour la Formation et la Recherche: Approche Psychanalytique du groupe, du psychodrame, de l'institution). Didier Anzieu, Geneviève Testemale-Monod, René Kaës, André Missenard, Joseph Villier etc. have further developed this perspective, which is also reflected in a series of works published by Dunod. Since 1962, the French Society of Group Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy has brought together clinicians and researchers who apply psychoanalysis in different group settings. In 1995, it gave birth to a federation of associations, the FAPAG, to develop the clinic and training in psychoanalytic group psychotherapy. Since 1985, the RPPG has been the reference journal for all these associations. Issues have thus focused on groups for children and adolescents, family therapy, psychodrama, analysis of practice in institutions, and mediated groups.

This diversity and evolution of group psychoanalysis is closely linked to the place that the analytical setting has taken in our reflections. This notion has been worked on a lot in France in the psychoanalytical milieu, the problem of the group thus posing a radical question to psychoanalysts.

2. Question: Do you think that in France you have particularly emphasised this problem of the setting? The problem of the setting is however very much associated with Argentina and Bleger?

2. Answer: Yes, the knowledge of Bleger's work represented an essential turning point in this reflection, but it occurred in a "soil" where psychoanalysis was ready to "hear" the formidable methodological revolution that it implied, moreover well beyond the groups.

A look at the history of psychoanalysis in France shows that the question of the setting of analysis was very early on the subject of controversy with Lacan and the introduction of shorter sessions, punctuated by the analyst's interpretation. It is the 'field of speech and language' that should structure the psychoanalytic technique. Subsequently, its third-party function between the analyst and the patient has been emphasised, as a protection but also as a constraint that it imposes on the analytical process. In 1987 Jean Laplanche developed a theory of the analytic process based on the image of the 'psychoanalyst and his tub': the analytic situation is a real enclosure, watertight, it brings into play differences in potential, it heats up the stakes of seduction and the enigma of the sexual drive between the patient and his analyst. Winnicott also had a great influence in France. For him, the analytical setting must respond to the needs of the ego for certain patients, so as not to be experienced as an encroachment.

This is for individual psychoanalysis, how does it look for the group?

Indeed, these reflections, which first concerned individual psychoanalysis, had effects on group psychoanalysis with the diffusion of the work of José Bleger (1967). We must not forget the major role that René Kaës played in the introduction of his ideas. If Bleger highlights the idea that the 'non-process' constituted by the setting is linked to the psychotic parts of the patient deposited on the material elements that characterise it (money, schedule, particularities of the setting of the practice, etc.), he positions this question at the group level. Syncretic sociability (constitutive of the setting) is opposed to sociability by interaction, where a process can take place. This text was published in the book that is a reference in France, the one edited by René Kaës R. in 1987 "L'institution et les institutions. Études psychanalytiques" (Dunod). This emphasis on the "symbiotic" or "syncretic" opened the way to understanding archaic processes in groups and institutions.

The influence of Bion, more recent, has underlined the place of the processes of containment in the analytic process. The same is true of Esther Bick's influence, which in France has focused on the methodological aspects of the approach to observing babies in their families (Delion, 2004). Contacts with

Italian psychoanalysts, via Jean-Claude Rouchy and then René Kaës, have also updated the place given to the "non-verbal", to the atmosphere of the group and to its transformation (Neri, 1995).

3. Question: You have studied several psychoanalytical perspectives and themes and you have recently dealt with psychic envelopes, in the tradition inaugurated by Didier Anzieu. Can you say that they have a determined importance in the field of group research?

3. Answer: All these influences would not have been able to "federate" without the theorisation of the development of the setting proposed by Didier Anzieu, parallel to his work on envelopes.

In 1974, influenced by D.W. Winnicott, he started from the observation that several patients could not benefit from the classic rules of the "couch/chair" analytical treatment. Face to face therapy allows for a narcissistic restoration. The archaic registers of the psyche prevent the installation of associative thinking that functions according to the logic of the free association of words specific to language. His research on the ego-skin and the ego-envelopes goes hand in hand with a thorough reflection on the development of the treatment. For the subject to be able to think, speak and associate, he or she must already have a 'skin' or envelope, a consistency, an organisation and a sufficient limit.

He first developed the idea of a 'transitional psychoanalysis' in 1979: when the flaws in the ego-skin do not allow the subject to accept the conventional setting of the treatment, variations in the device are imposed: 'a new setting must be found-created by the two contracting parties' (p. 203). The psychoanalyst, following the perspective of D. W. Winnicott, must first be able to hear and take into account the "needs of the self". He recommends a setting to be arranged.

D. Anzieu (1986) then analysed more precisely these arrangements by putting in correspondence the two analytical rules - abstinence rule and free association rule - and the two main psychological envelopes that he distinguished, the excitation screen and the inscription surface. The progressive differentiation of these two envelopes, constitutive of the development of the psychic apparatus and of the ego, allows the neurotic to use the classical setting and its rules, whereas the disturbances in the differentiation or the establishment of the envelopes require other conditions to be symbolised. The setting of care must take into account the containing functions of the self, if they are defective, it must adapt. For the group, a similar reasoning could be held. The practitioner must adapt his device to the possibilities of symbolization of the subject.

Has his work been a school?

Yes, it has been followed a lot in France. Moreover, R. Roussillon (1995) pursued this perspective in order to think about the setting of the analysis, that of its arrangements and, more broadly, the devices of clinical practitioners. The idea of a 'made-to-measure setting' is thus advocated by this author when the analytical demand is not sufficiently supported by the language apparatus, when 'primitive agonies' dominate. The setting must then contain within itself the possibilities of symbolisation of the subject. The 'mediation' introduced between the patient and the analyst (games, the various materials of the plastic arts, music, literature, etc.) meets this need. Therapeutic devices must be designed to actualise elements of the past, to make them present, so that they can then be transformed. In the transference, the therapist must ensure that the mediation is really invested by the patients. In other words, it is necessary to consider that there is a "transference on the setting" for the patient, it is this transference that will allow the deployment of a process.

4. Question: Do you think that in France there is a new position in group psychoanalytic research?

4. Answer: I would say that for the "French group psychoanalytical school", for Didier Anzieu and René Kaës, the taking into account of the hypothesis of the unconscious which characterizes the group psychoanalytical approach has as a consequence a specific identification of the transference in group. It has multiple directions (central, lateral, the frame, the group, the mediate, the outside of the group), it has the characteristic of 'diffracting' and the analysts who work together must take into account their 'inter-transference'. This process can only become the motor of psychic work if we take into account

- a distinction between the setting and the process, as Bleger taught us, which leads to a more explicit identification of the place of the 'devices' in relation to the 'setting',
- the different functions of this setting which correspond to the taking into account of psychic envelopes

How do you define the problematic of the setting for group psychoanalysis?

Let me explain, let's go back to the history and to 4 propositions that characterise for me the methodological problem of the setting:

1. The psychoanalytical setting can be applied to the group:

In the 1960s, psychoanalysis could only be considered in an individual way. The foundation in 1962 of CEFFRAP (Cercles d'Études Françaises pour la Formation et la Recherche: Approche Psychanalytique du groupe, du psychodrame, de l'institution) was a milestone. It was the first time that a group methodology was put into practice, with analyses coming from different psychoanalytical schools. This association contributed to the analytical training of the group and by the group. Within this team, Didier Anzieu and René Kaës had the objective of identifying the specificity of a psychoanalysis in a group situation. From the outset, the emphasis was placed on the methodological 'breakdown' necessary for any group training, with alternations between large group/small group, talking group/ psychodrama group, time with the participants/time for inter-transference work between the psychoanalyst facilitators. Each therapeutic modality has thus elaborated its own definition of the setting according to its objectives and rigorously declined its devices accordingly.

2. The devices carry out the adjustments of the setting.

At the institutional level, there has been a great advance in practice and theoretical reflection, even if the current context is very unfavourable to any analytical intervention. It results in highlighting the importance of the 'device' of the 'analytical setting' in relation to an 'institutional setting' which is considered as a priori given. Historically, the different conceptions are all marked by the presence in the background of Cornelius Castoriadis (1975). He was able to identify the weight and consistency of institutions at the level of a society. His knowledge of law, his involvement in the critique of the Soviet model and his psychoanalytical training enabled him to establish the 'social-historical' dimension of what we might call the institutional setting. Subsequently, we note the fundamental place of institutional psychotherapy: the "institutional setting" became a modality "in itself" of care. Originating from the work with psychosis, this conception has gradually permeated the carers in institutions, even if they could not develop this project as such (currently, few institutions function explicitly on this model). The 'institutionalist' current, which emerged from sociologists who intervened after May 1968 to 'change the institution', highlighted the relevance of the difference between the instituting (the movement) and the instituted (what is established). There is no longer any confusion between the 'institutional setting', historically constituted, and the 'analytical setting' which presupposes a project and an adjustment of its 'devices' according to the suffering to be symbolised.

3. The devices allow the setting to have different functions

In the 1970s and 1980s, a great deal of work brought the question of the setting to the fore. In the light of the experiences of some and others or of their disciplinary tropism, the setting appeared in very different, sometimes

even completely contradictory, lights. This can be summarised by exploring the different functions attributed to the cadre. The analysis of the cadre has thus been refined, notably with the establishment of a group psychoanalysis. René Kaës has particularly highlighted the different functions of the frame. In his introduction to transitional analysis (Kaës, 1979), he distinguished six functions of the frame, which he took up again in a more recent article (2012). The frame has different functions: scaffolding, deposit, protection, limitation, tierceisation, transitionality, containment, holding, symbolisation etc.

4. The development of the frame depends on the quality of the subject's envelopes

The different functions that qualify the setting testify more or less explicitly to a broader consideration of the problem of envelopes, the limits of subjects and their possibilities of thinking. These functions have been taken up by more than one author according to theorisations and practices. In my opinion, they correspond to the necessary adaptation of the devices to the clinical situations and to the symbolisation capacities of the subjects. Their possibilities of containing anguish, their psychic envelopes are more or less solid, language can be more or less directly solicited as the only way of elaboration. The problem of the 'setting' and its devices at the group level has been coupled with the development of the problem of the 'psychic envelope' (Mellier, 2023). Indeed, the setting is always arranged according to the quality of the psychic envelopes of the subjects.

The development of the different paths of group psychoanalysis has been accompanied on the one hand by a methodological concern about the definition of the psychoanalytical setting and on the other hand by the importance of the place taken by the variation of the devices.

5. Question: Would you like to add a few words on the themes touched upon or others, give examples of all these particularities?

5. Answer: Yes, this is in line with the "proliferation" of group practices in France and yet a relative homogeneity of these practices in terms of their methodological references, linked to the setting and the transference issues that it implies. Let's mention a few directions of work that have taken off in France:

- Psychoanalytical psychodrama. This is the "royal road" that has been theorised to envisage the rules and specificity of the group analytical setting. The theorisation of organising fantasies, of the group associative chain, of the diffracted transference was realised in this setting. With regard to Lacan's work, the place of the word was initially particularly emphasised in France. In addition to its use in analytic training, psychodrama has become a widespread

group therapeutic mode for adults, children and adolescents (Duez, 2014). Let us mention here the singular contribution of Ophélie Avron (1996) on non-verbal: having known Bion's work very early on, she subsequently highlighted the question of the 'valence' of each individual in relation to the others.

- Psychoanalytic family therapy. Founded by André Ruffiot (Ruffiot 1981; Joubert, 2012) around the concept of the family psychic apparatus (a variation of the group psychic apparatus, Kaës, 2007), it was able to differentiate itself from the systemic approach and benefited from the contribution of psychoanalysts of Argentinean origin such as Alberto Eiguer or Rosa Jaïtin. Let us underline the very active review of its associations, Le Divan familial, as well as their investment at the international level (AIPCF).

- Child group therapy. Positioned in a particular place in relation to adult psychoanalysis, child group psychoanalysis immediately highlighted the central place that the psychoanalyst, as an adult, has in relation to children (Decherf). This 'attraction' was worked on and gave rise to a particular modality of taking charge of the groups. It is now a training "school", the Centre d'Information et de Recherche en Psychologie et Psychanalyse Appliquée (CIRPPA) with Pierre Privat and Jean-Bernard Chapelier (2000). Since 1988, she has organised an annual congress on group psychotherapy for children and adolescents

- Mediated analytic groups. The place of "art" in the treatment of patients is a very old practice, particularly in psychiatry. There has been a great temptation to cancel it out by considering it as simply specific to a few patients or, on the contrary, to turn it into a "technique", like art therapy. The reflection on this place of art has been deepened jointly with psychoanalysts who are very sensitive to the group and to this dimension of art, such as Bernard Chouvier (2002), Édith Lecourt (2007) or Anne Brun, with Claudine Vacheret (2016) who used photos for training groups in companies and with René Kaës who allowed us to perceive how the group could be considered as a 'group psychic apparatus'. It allowed us to consider the transference phenomena in these groups and the place that the 'medium' took for the symbolisation processes.

- Practice analysis groups. The group's clinicians very early on invested in the work of supervision for professionals. The influence of Balint (Missenard, 1986; Lagueux (20021) is often underestimated. This practice, which has not developed much in the medical field, mainly concerns the medico-social, care and educational sectors (Blanchard-Laville, 1996). The risk of denaturing these groups is very high. There is a risk that the group and transference dimensions will be put aside in favour of normative, pedagogical, educational or medical aims.

- Intervention mechanisms in institutions

With Eugène Enriquez (1992), Jean-Claude Rouchy (1998), Paul Fustier (1999) and René Kaës (1987, 1996), the psychoanalytical approach to

intervention in institutions has been clarified on the basis of a wide variety of mechanisms: practice analysis groups, supervision or team regulation, institutional analysis, institutional practice in a team or individual or group therapy in an institution (Mellier, 2018; Pinel, Gaillard, 2020). These intervention devices are in an "interlocking" relationship with the institutional setting.

- Devices as a 'container offer

When there is no psychological demand, the setting is set up to receive and accommodate the suffering of the subject in distress (Mellier, 2005). The devices become "container offers", the work of attention and containment is primary. Networking" is developing. Different teams and institutions are joining forces to ensure continuity of care between different fields: medical, educational, judicial, educational, psychiatric, etc. For these "distressed" subjects, the request is not clear and arises in a wide variety of situations.

- In order to go further, it is necessary to take into account the topicality of the debates around the societal "meta-setting" which implicitly allows the implementation of psychic work within a society. Postmodernity abrades differences (Kaës, 2012) and thus tends towards a 'de-institutionalisation' of care and therapies, but that is another debate.

The last word in the final ?

I thank you very much for giving me the floor, but this contribution must be put into perspective. At the end of this "panorama" it turns out that psychoanalysis has no borders, successive borrowings, exchanges, weave a mesh that can at a given moment identify a person, a current, a country as more "bearer" of a conception, but in fact it is a question of currents which, as we know, are more underground and are potentially present in different places and which cross us all.

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Psychoanalysis of group: 50 years of work report

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