

Contexts Digital Discussion Group

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Carla Penna
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Haim Weinberg
Rob White (moderator)
Peter Zelaskowski (organiser)

WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER

1. [posted on separate thread]
ROB (VIA PETER)

At the Foulkes Large Group in London this year there was a palpable sense of anxiety around talk of the GASi Forum in particular, and social media in general. I have participated in other median or large groups, including the London Quarterly Members Group, where there has been a similar feeling of unease in this area. As soon as group members mention specific Forum posts or topics, the discussion immediately gets bogged down. One recurring difficulty arises when group members who aren't on the Forum explain that they don't know the details of what was said online. But there is also the problem that the specific issue which came up on the Forum quickly gets forgotten because people start talking about how un-group-analytic the whole business of Forum argument is. The Forum lacks physical immediacy, distinct time boundaries, the nuances of the spoken word and above all a certain politeness. As one of the people who isn't on the Forum, I have to take other group members' word for all of this. But what comes through clearly in what I have heard is, on the one hand, the fragmenting impact of this "other scene" of the Forum in the background, interfering with conventional groups; and, on the other hand, the experience of feeling bullied or silenced online (and indeed inevitably being silenced by not being online).

There is a poignant subtext to all of this, the melancholy and frustrating and disorienting experience of ageing. As far as I could tell, no one in the Foulkes Large Group grew up with social media. Everyone there had had in the previous decade to adjust to a New Digital World, more or less successfully, but always as an outsider rather than a native. I imagine everyone in that room had therefore had their own experiences of perplexed observation: seeing for the first time a baby in a buggy happily playing with an iPad, marvelling at a four-year-old's intuitive mastery of touch- screen interfaces, noticing that everybody on a commuter train is looking at a smartphone. It isn't easy having to be the outsider-witness of cultural change, but it is an inevitable part of growing older. Perhaps the emergence of the Internet is in its own way as disturbing for our era as war has been at other times. Maybe it is even more disturbing because it is less obviously catastrophic while still changing everything.

This ageing-as-an-outsider is, I suspect, the shared experience underlying the anxiety the Forum evokes in groups, and when the unease crops up it is tempting to retreat into

the past. This happened during the Foulkes Large Group when someone longingly recalled a politically charged large group forty years earlier: by contrast, he said, the disappointing Foulkes Large Group seemed futile. I would go further and say the group felt imprisoned and lifeless, so great was its anxiety. No wonder nostalgia was therefore offered as a remedy -- and no wonder it didn't work. For unease and even "nameless dread" is the very stuff of life today, in and out of groups. Anxiety is how our civilisation's (digital) discontent expresses itself. There is no getting away from it, and no going back to how groups were before various forums and online other scenes started undermining them. Does this mean the end of group analysis as we know it? Perhaps group analysis can pragmatically adapt to the new age? Or must it learn to live with a perpetual anxiety eating away at whatever is left of the way things used to be?

2.
ROB

Thank you for convening the group Peter. Welcome to this experiment in group writing. I invite you to "break the silence".

3.
MARIA

Hello Peter, hello Rob and all!

I'm breaking the silence and I'm glad to be part of this experiment. I think it's very important to talk about the relationship of online and face-to-face groups and how they influence each other. I was in the Foulkes large group this year and I also had the impression that many people were irritated when the GASI Forum was mentioned.

Of course I'm curious who is in this group here. I'm Maria Puschbeck-Raetzell, live and work in Berlin, Germany, I'm a psychologist, psychoanalyst and training group analyst at the Berlin Institute of Group Analysis (BIG). In group analytic terms I belong to the young generation I guess.

Who else is here?

Tomorrow I will fly to London to be at the Autumn Workshop. Let's see what happens there. For me, online and personal communication is naturally connected and form a carpet that is continuously growing.

Warm regards to everyone!

Maria

4.
LIAT

Dear Peter, Maria and everyone, Thank you, Peter,

for inviting me to this discussion and thank you, Maria, for your introduction.

My name is Liat Warhaftig Aran. I am a clinical psychologist, group analyst and staff member at the IIGA and a candidate at the Tel-Aviv institute contemporary psychoanalysis.

I am curious how our discussion will develop taking into consideration we will discuss in the format of a small group about the large group of the forum, and maybe some characteristics of the large group won't be enacted in our discussion.

Unfortunately, I cannot attend the Autumn Workshop.

I wish you a nice time there!

Best Wishes,

Liat

5. [posted on separate thread]

BOB

Hi, everyone,

I'm a psychiatrist in Chicago. I'm not a group analyst. I'm not young. I've hosted an online support group for 20 years. I'm intermittently active on the Forum, but I've never been to a Foulkes Large Group, so I don't know what's been said there and have to take your word.

Is there a subgroup that expects / wants the Forum to be a group-analytic group? For it to be a space in which group analysis takes place?

I see the Forum as real in the sense of reflecting the real world, or at least the disinhibited world of the Internet. And I see (some) Forum members as real in the sense of being present as their real selves, not their group analyst selves.

In the real world, people aren't always polite. People sometimes feel bullied and silenced. And I agree with Peter, there's certainly plenty of anxiety in the real world.

And, is the Forum the unconscious of GASi? Which can interfere with and make the conscious anxious?

Bob

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER

6.

HAIM

Hello all,

My name is Haim Weinberg. I am a licensed psychologist (in Israel and California), a group analyst and a certified group therapist. My experience with online forums begins in 1995 when I opened the international group psychotherapy (g-p) online forum. It is still alive and goes on after more than 20 years, with 400 members. Following this experience I wrote a book about the dynamics in online forums using group analysis as a frame of references ("Alone in the presence of virtual others"). In the last 3 years, I also gained experience in online process groups using video (zoom) and I am now editing a book about online therapy, which includes a section about online groups. I hope we can discuss the difference between f2f and online process groups as well.

As some of you know, IMO the difficulty in the GASi forum lies in the fact that it has no group leader. My understanding of online forums (expressed in my book) is that they are large groups disguised as small groups. A large group without a leader can easily become a mob, or fall into difficult dynamics of splitting, projections, bullying and projection identification.

Enough for a start.

Haim

7.

ROB

Let us all stay on this thread if possible. I should have originally replied to Peter's opening post but, being inexperienced on Google Groups, I started a new thread instead and thus immediately "split" the discussion without intending to. (I might as well draw attention to my procedural mistake because it is a real hazard for some of us.) Bob replied to the original thread but to keep us all together on this thread I am pasting his contribution below.

Here I am trying to prevent fragmentation, and we have only just begun.

Bob, you attribute the remarks about anxiety to Peter because, as the group "owner" (as he is called by Google Groups), it was he who posted my introduction. So we are already seeing in this perfectly understandable misattribution the very issue of (mistaken) identity which you raise. Already our online discussion seems tricky and leaky therefore.

A related issue arises in the the fact that this group is operating in different time zones. I am writing this just before 8am; my day is still relatively undisturbed whereas some of you may be very busy when you receive this post or tired (or on a flight with no online access).

I am wondering about the politeness of these personal introductions. Are they an attempt to secure the identity which is always at risk of getting lost online? Or are they the social- professional masks which Bob suggests can be cast aside online (to reveal the "real self" not the "group analyst self")?

Carla and Peter, would you like to introduce yourselves?

8.

CARLA

Dear all,

Yes it will be ver good to discuss the proposed topic.

I just arrived in London and tomorrow is the Autumn Workshop.

I am Carla Penna, psychoanalyst and group analyst from Brazil. I work with groups since 1982, so I might say since the cradle... or since 20 years old...

Meet some of you tomorrow,

Best wishes, Carla

9.

MARIA

Hello everyone,

thank you, Rob, for talking about the technical issues and the different time zones. That is part of the setting in group analytic terms. I would like to add that we are from different nations and speak different languages. English is not the mother tongue of everybody (it's not mine).

I'm also not sure if we should consider the forum as a group analytic endeavor. Maybe there is a wish that it should be like that. But it could just be something else. I think your idea, Bob, that the GASI forum could be the GASI unconscious, very interesting. A colleague and friend of mine who is not on the forum - but I told him a lot about it and sometimes I forward him some posts (is that allowed?) - said that the forum is a defense mechanism against feelings of separation after GASI events like the Symposium, Foulkes Lecture, Workshops etc.

I think I know now what it means to have a moderator or a convener in an online forum. It feels safer to have somebody (you Rob) with an overview who relates different post, opinions and people to each other. The sense of a community is stronger although I already had similar feelings from time to time while being on the forum.

Another aspect I'm thinking about is that the forum makes me curious to meet the people who post there in person. And when I meet them we have something to talk about: the forum, like anice breaker. And when I know the people in person who post on the forum it feels closer and more personal to me.

And Liat, I think we danced a lot at the Gala Dinner in Berlin last year - that was fun.

Enough for now, boarding the plane to London now,

warm regards,

Maria

10.
PETER

Hi,

Just now catching up between clients in my private practice. Thanks to all of you for responding so positively to the invitation to become involved in this discussion/group writing "experiment".

Some very interesting ideas have already been generated. The forum as GASi's unconscious, or a means for defending against separation, or a leaderless mob... No doubt we'll go further into these perspectives.

I've been a member of the forum for many years and was also for some years a member of Haim's G-P forum. At some point I'd like to say something about my experience of these two very similar but very different virtual spaces... but not just yet. For the moment just glad we've started and looking forward to what emerges.

Tomorrow I'm flying to London for the Autumn Workshop where no doubt these dynamics will be felt and explored further. Unfortunately, due to a work commitment in the morning, I'll be arriving late and will miss the lectures. I look forward to seeing those of you who'll be there... like Maria, I find face to face encounters all the more strange, surprising and intriguing if the the relationship started in text.

Best,

Peter

11.
ROB

Is the Forum like a mob? Is it a sort of unruly unconscious? A defence against separation? There have been glimpses already of a digital dark side but that frightening zone has been fenced-off, especially in the last three posts, by bonhomie. This warmth is distilled in two connected images -- Carla's cradle, Maria's (and Liat's) dance. What is the significance of these images of safety, intimacy, remembered joy? I invite you to consider the introduction again, with its contrasting emphasis on anxiety and nostalgia.

Today I found myself remembering Freud's ninety-year-old mournful thoughts about technology and loss in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. "If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if travelling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him." I know I am spoiling the happy mood, but perhaps a similar sadness is actually implicit in our bonhomie -- as though we were dancing on a sinking ship.

12.
HAIM

Hi Rob,

It is interesting that you ignored my point that a forum WITHOUT A LEADER can become a mob, just like any large group. A well-convened forum (or LG) is not a mob, and due to its small group's disguise, can become an important supportive community, especially in times of social stress. The GASi forum, IMO, does not represent the GASi at all. Many of the respected members of the association do not participate in its discussions and in fact, it is taken hostage by a minority of British colleagues.

Haim

13.
ROB

Can you say more about the idea of hostage-taking Haim? It seems potentially very useful in both specific terms (the Forum) and general ones (the relationship between social media and older forms of interaction).

14.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Is the Symposium itself a defense against feelings of separation? I see the Forum as a mechanism for connection. Is connecting a defense against feeling disconnected?

Speaking of defenses, I seem to be defending the Forum. I guess I'm in the pro-Forum subgroup.

Bob

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER

15.
BOB

Hi again, everyone,

I'm drafting a post about technical issues, but skipping for now the specifics, one difference between meeting in a room and meeting by email is everyone grew up with rooms, but not everyone grew up with email.

And the way we use rooms now is the way we used rooms a century ago, while new email software, and new versions of old email software, come out all the time.

Progress, old ways, nostalgia, new ways, anxiety, aging, loss of competence, mourning, sadness: Is the Forum a scapegoat? Is a subgroup sinking while the ship sails on?

Bob

16a.
MARIA

Hi Bob,

I agree with you and defenses aren't necessarily a bad thing as we all know. I also think the Forum is about being connected.

Like recently, when there was the election in Brazil, I thought of Carla and I wanted to let her know that I'm with her. The Forum is a vehicle for getting and staying in touch. Of course, I could have sent Carla an individual email but I thought it's nice to do it "in public" on our "market place". And others reacted as well.

I guess I'm also in the pro-Forum subgroup.

Maria

16b.
MARIA

Hi Bob and everyone,

I also think about what Rob wrote, "the digital dark side" and "the frightening zone that is being fenced-off". I wonder that is so frightening since I don't feel anxious while being on the Forum. Maybe I have good defense mechanisms.

I'm also not sure if that is a matter of age and generation, maybe it is, but there are certainly differences. I wouldn't say I'm a digital native. I got my first cell phone when I was 16, actually only for one reason: I wanted to receive and write SMS in order to be with my volleyball team. They were meeting to play and without a phone I didn't know about their plans. So I wanted to be or stay in that group, so had to jump on the ship or I would be left behind (fear of exclusion).

When I'm on the ship / on the Forum I feel good and included. I can participate or not, I have a choice. But of course, I was never openly attacked on the Forum like Haim for instance. And I can imagine that it can be very difficult.

Warm regards,

Maria

17.
LIAT

Hi everyone, I am trying to catch up between patients. I like the personal links that bring nice memories about the dancing party in Berlin where I danced with Maria and I remember to be with Peter in the same small group in Foulkes lecture. Those personal links are not only nice for me but also essential to find my voice.

The forum is a space for communication and connection, but in my experience a quite frightening space in which attacks can easily happen and they certainly are more frequent than attempts for understanding.

In what sub group am I? I am thinking of the participants in our group. How were we chosen? One from each country? I find my self emotionally identified with Haim, being hurt by attacks he suffered, in my eyes. At the same time I don't want to be identified only by national and personal identifications (Haim is a friend). If I do so I close myself the possibility for communication.

Best

Liat

18.
BOB

Hi again, everyone,

Rob, thanks for introducing technical issues. You asked that we stay on this thread, so I am, but threads make it easier to discuss in depth more than one thing at a time ("multitask"), and I was tempted to start a new thread for the topic of technical issues.

1. A plug for "message boards" (forums on web sites): If someone splits a discussion on my web site without intending to, I can move the post to the intended thread. Which maintains structure.

2. Most email programs allow users / group members to "filter" posts from various groups into separate "mailboxes" and then to display them sorted by subject ("threaded") or by date ("unthreaded").

I think of threads as subgroups, and sorted-by-subject as "subgroup view" and sorted-by-date as "group-as-a-whole view".

Viewing this group as a whole = this mailbox sorted by date, my original post is where it "belongs".

3. On the topic of politeness, since we're keeping everything in one thread ("Welcome", speaking of politeness), Rob did say the Forum lacked politeness. Is there a desire to keep this group from turning into another Forum? I'm not worried about that, since this is a SG and the Forum is a LG. Size matters!

Bob

19.
HAIM

Hi Rob and all,

Trying to answer your question about the forum being taken hostage: This is my personal feeling, and I am not sure whether everyone joins me. It seems that a small sub-group of the same people flood the forum with their messages, focusing on topics that interest them, despite protests from other members (e.g. cricket), and sometimes attack people who do not agree with their political views.

It resembles the phenomenon of "the monopolizer" that Yalom mentions in a f2f meeting.

Best Regards,

Haim Weinberg

SATURDAY 10 NOVEMBER

20.
ROB

How serious are Forum attacks? And are there different kinds of attack? Scapegoating (an attack on one or few by many) is not the same as hostage-taking (an indirect attack by a few on the many), though both would appear to be asymmetric. Bob suggested that "disinhibited" conflict is part of real life online. But Liat and Maria expressed concern that Haim might have been really hurt on the Forum. Are we in this group relaxed about online aggression or actually nervous and angry about it? Or maybe very confused about how even to define it?

SUNDAY 11 NOVEMBER

21.
MARIA

Dear everyone,

I think Forum attacks or aggression in online groups can be very serious. The consequences like feeling hurt or wanting to leave are very real.

Maybe the threshold for showing aggression is much lower since one cannot see the other one being attacked. That reminds me of war technology when you see a target on a screen, hit a button and you have an abstract idea of someone getting hurt or killed but it's so far away you don't have to deal with the pain you are causing, to really face death, to face yourself as the perpetrator and killer.

Following these thoughts, aggressive emails on an online forum can be like missiles you fire. They certainly can hit hard. And when everyone is watching like bystanders the damage is much greater as well.

Maria

MONDAY 12 NOVEMBER

22.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Maria, yes, when people aren't polite, other people can feel hurt and want to leave -- and wish someone else would intervene.

I'm reminded of the "bystander effect". If no one intervenes, the damage could be greater because the bystanders could be experienced as complicit, and therefore also aggressors.

Bob

23.
PETER

Dear All,

I've just received a message from Tiziana, the GASi Forum moderator, that she would be interested in joining in our discussion - I invited her originally but have only just heard from her. What do you think about her joining us at this point?

Best,

Peter

24.
MARIA

Hi everyone,

since the Forum is filled with more life (Markus started a conversation about Social Dreaming) I'm thinking about what we are doing here "in secret".

Do we need a small group to figure out what's going on in the large group of the Forum?

Warm regards,

Maria

25.
MARIA

Nice. Then we would have four men and four women. :)

26.
ROB

I support Tiziana joining. If and when she does join, it would be a good time to mention again the task, not an easy one, which is to create a piece (which will inevitably have to be edited down from the full transcript) to be published (with the consent of the co-authors) in Contexts.

27.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

The Forum has a moderator? :-)

Bob

28.
LIAT

Dear all, I support Tiziana to join us.

My association to Maria's comment about our group that is composed of four men and four woman is about fertility.

I ask myself how much the discussions in the forum are interesting? For me, rarely. Sorry to bring negative experiences in regards of this space, but my experience is that liveness and innovation can develop when people are more curious and ask each other questions. Informative exchange is frequent on the forum but the creation of new thoughts is in my view, rare.

However, maybe large groups aren't supposed to create new thoughts? I am not sure.

How do you feel about it?

Liat

29.
HAIM

I have to admit that I do not feel comfortable with adding Tiziana to the conversation. I know that she is officially "the moderator" of the GASi forum, but as she does not write on the forum she actually emptied this role. I am not sure how she will contribute to our discussion more than any other participant.

I am also uncomfortable that we base our discussion only on the evidence of the GASi forum. There are many other Internet forums and the GASi one is, in my opinion, a problematic example. As I told Peter, I would also like to discuss online group therapy and not only forum discussions.

Haim

30.

MARIA

Hello everyone,

I understand you, Haim, and I think we should ALL be okay with Tiziana joining the conversation. If you, Haim, feel uncomfortable we shouldn't do it.

We can also talk about online group therapy which I know nothing about. I'm curious and it raises a lot of questions for me.

But I thought we would talk about the GASI Forum here as well since it had or has an impact on GASI face to face events, our group analytic culture and so forth. At least this is how I understood the purpose of this temporary group here. Maybe I have to read the introduction again Peter sent at the beginning. Will do that.

And Liat, I think you have a valid point that the Forum is boring - for me only sometimes. To me it's an experiment and I'm curious how it develops and evolves (or not). I remember joining the Forum in December 2017 just before Christmas. I introduced myself like it was recommended by Tiziana or David Glyn (I don't remember), she had her baby soon after. Then I asked how the Forum works and the answers were funny actually because nobody could really tell me. I thought, well, let's get on board and see where the journey takes us.

And I would like to know why you, Haim, think the GASI Forum is a problematic example. I understand the dominance of the British colleagues and I agree. GAS became GASI - when exactly was that? As it was said at the Autumn Workshop in London last weekend: London is not the world's center of group analysis anymore and that hasn't been properly integrated and mourned about.

Good night,

Maria

31.

PETER

I agree with Maria that we all need to be comfortable with Tiziana joining, now we have started, in order for it to happen. Although, I think it would be really interesting to have her join the discussion. I think there are important and interesting questions about the moderation of a space like the forum. The issues of safety and strong or weak leadership were very present in the GASi Autumn Workshop over the weekend and I can't help but think that the forum was present there in that discussion. There is a significant interest in GASi world in the leaderless group, for example the Shadow workshops appear to favour a movement away from hierarchy, although only in the context of an organisation like GASi, made up of peers, colleagues, professionals.

I agree Haim, it would be interesting and relevant to not just focus on the forum. For example, working with students, in experiential large groups, one constant theme in recent years has been around what students bring to the group and what is split-off and

communicated in the Facebook and WhatsApp groups that the students set up for themselves. As staff we often find ourselves saying "bring to the group what belongs in the group" but we know that much is taken outside and communicated in these asynchronous 24/7 virtual spaces away from teachers and group conductors, with the effect being a diminishing of the intensity of the f2f encounter. This is exacerbated by how students feel unsafe opening up in an academic evaluated context. I have the impression that the LGs I conduct are a main topic of conversation in these student virtual online spaces.

I also think the growth of online group therapy is a relevant theme for us here. In particular in connection with groups composed of members living in different countries with different ethical, licencing and legal arrangements. I myself conduct an online supervision group in which 5 people attend from 5 different countries. Given the boundaryless freedom of the internet, it's hard to imagine how this could be regulated. In addition, working online through Skype, Zoom etc could not be more f2f given that often the face is all one sees of a person. Is this a movement even further away from including the body in our work? At a time when I think "talking" therapies are increasingly trying to pay more attention to the body.

Best,

Peter

32.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

I see this as an opportunity for our leader (here) to lead. :-)

I'm strongly in favor of Tiziana joining. My guess is Haim sees the Forum as problematic because it doesn't have a leader. (1) But it has a moderator. And the Forum might benefit from "moderation" in the sense of "lessening the intensity". If she joins, maybe she'll then take up her role (differently). (2) It strikes me as ironic to see not having a leader as a problem and then not want to have the moderator present. (3) Of course the moderator, whether she posts or not, is different from other members. And in fact unique. Because she has that role.

Is there anxiety about Tiziana joining? Might we not stay polite?

Also, Internet forums in general and online group therapy are huge topics. I'd prefer to keep our focus on the Forum. That feels more manageable to me.

Bob

TUESDAY 13 NOVEMBER

33.
ROB

agree with you Bob. Tiziana is a fellow member who has been invited to join the group in the same way as we all have been. We have a responsibility to find a way to include Tiziana without excluding Haim.

34.
LIAT

Hi everyone.

I support Tiziana joining as well. What is the reason not to join her? because she has emptied her role as a moderator, as Haim Mentioned?

It would be interesting to discuss what is the role of this moderator, also with her.

I support an attempt to get a full agreement of all of us as to Tiziana's inclusion or the opposite, but in case of final disagreement, I support the decision of the majority of us.

As to other online groups or forums. I wanted to ask Peter why do you think that exchange about the LG groups you conduct are being cut off the group's formal discussion?

I am a member of the board of the IIGA and part of our meetings are held online, on zoom and some are face to face meetings. I have noticed that more personal disclosures were usually shared on zoom. I find it interesting how the online format gave maybe more safety than the face to face meetings.

Best,

Liat

35.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Haim didn't say he would leave if Tiziana joined. He might, but I'd be surprised. What he did say was he didn't feel comfortable with her joining. So if you ask me, the real issue is whether we (as a group, and as individuals) can tolerate discomfort (or as Liat said, "final disagreement").

Which is an issue, and maybe "the real issue", in the Forum.

Bob

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER

36.
HAIM

I can live (not leave :-)) with Tiziana joining. I just do not see how she can contribute more than any other person.

Bob, I do not see the purpose of this forum as helping Tiziana doing her job better.

Haim

37.

PETER

OK, I'll let Tiziana know that the group has approved her joining.

Best,

Peter

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER

38.

BOB

Hi, everyone,

Peter, great, I'm looking forward to welcoming her.

Haim, thanks for tolerating some discomfort. I agree that that's not the purpose of "this forum", but it may be an outcome.

Bob

39.

TIZIANA

Hi all,

Thanks for allowing me to join this group.

I will start from an introduction as the others did:

I am a clinical psychologist, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and a group analyst.

I had my trainings in Italy, where I used to live up until three years and a half ago, when I moved to London.

I work both in private practice and in the NHS, in an outreach service of the Tavistock clinic which focuses on psychosomatic, medical unexplained symptoms and support to the GPs. At present I am still on maternity leave from my NHS job though, working from home and enjoying my daughter!

And, of course, I am also the GASI Forum administrator, as you all know. :-)

40.
MARIA

Welcome, Tiziana!

Nice to have you here. So you can see our previous posts and you are up to date to our discussion?

Enjoying your daughter - I very much like that expression. My son just turned 3.

Administrator sounds different to me than moderator of the GASI Forum. Maybe that was or is not clear to everybody. That might have an influence on the problems that occurred there.

Kind regards,

Maria

41.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Tiziana, welcome! I imagine your daughter enjoys being enjoyed. People talk about mother-child attunement, what about Tiziana-Forum attunement? Does the Forum's need / desire for you depend on its stage of development? Or maybe the Forum is more like a group of children / subgroups at different stages of development, some needing / desiring you more, some needing / desiring you to stay out of their way.

Bob

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER

SATURDAY 17 NOVEMBER

SUNDAY 18 NOVEMBER

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER

42.
ROB

So the group has stalled. Can we reflect on what has gone wrong? If so (I hope so) perhaps what is contributing to the difficulty is the insistence on epistolary conventions. Starting posts with "Dear", signing off with good wishes and the poster's name or even an email "signature" (the name comes up anyway, it isn't needed in the body of the post)

etc. If we can't (yet) talk about what has gone wrong, can we think about why there is this need for *outdated* or even *overcivilized* conventions. After all if we were in a real-life group we wouldn't keep saying our names...

43.

CARLA

Dear all,

I am back from London and a so wanted holiday. Now I am now overwhelmed by work, but did not want to give up on saying few works to the group.

I think one of the most difficult topics for this discussion is to find our voice and the aims of this interaction.

I understood that one of the aims is to discuss about face to face relationships and virtual relationships, how they interfere in the way we connect to each other and which is the impact on group analysis .

I learned much on virtual communication in Haim Weinberg's group psychotherapy list which I am member since 2006. Moreover I learned much from his book "Alone in the presence of virtual others", which was based on much of our interactions on line. I published a review of his book at BJP.

I learned from experience the importance of leadership / convener/ conductor / in virtual groups to somehow guarantee integrity under the so fragile virtual boundaries. GASi forum has a different frame and in my opinion much of the misunderstandings are related to the fantasy of an unbounded space where people can say whatever comes up to the mind. We already discussed much of this online at the GA forum, but i think it important to discuss ethics in our virtual environments which is somehow close to the ethcis in our own small groups.

I was wondering if you would like to share here what we long for on internet groups? to me it is a way to meet people from different places , to discuss work and to learn about life and difference...

All the best, Carla

44.

ROB

It is good to hear from you Carla!

I think your question (about what we hope for online) is a very good one. However I wonder about "the fantasy of an unbounded space where people can say whatever comes up to the mind". Is this a fantasy or in fact the reality? Certainly it seems that the Forum is sometimes experienced as *actually* disturbing and attacking.

I also wish, perhaps in vain, to hold onto the issue of modes of address here ("Dear ... All the best").

Of course the group must be free to ignore my topic, as the group has mostly ignored my introduction.

I am struck by how *unimportant* I feel in my role in this group and that makes me also question, via my own experience, the emphasis being placed on the importance of leadership.

45.

MARIA

Hi everyone,

I also needed a break, like Carla, plus we had three large group sessions last Saturday in our group analytic institute in Berlin. Gerhard Wilke was our LG convener. Next weekend I really need two days off.

The GASI Forum also came up in our LG sessions and I asked why many Germans aren't actively posting on the Forum. Here are some statements: the Forum is not GASI; the quality of postings differs enormously; it's too much; it's too close.

The comparison of the GASI Forum and Haim's g-p list came up, too, and I wonder what you think. Peter, you wanted to elaborate on this. Carla, you have also experience, and others probably, too. It made me curious and the wish emerged to be included in the g-p forum as well - the wish to belong is strong.

One BIG (Berlin Institute of Group Analysis) member who knows the g-p list said that the g-p list is more polite, more thoughtful, people think a lot before posting anything. The GASI Forum in turn is more impulsive, less respectful and more aggressive also. But the GASI Forum has potential - that's what I think.

Now I'm thinking about how to end my post. I mean it is an email like a letter and one includes "Hi" or "Dear" at the beginning and wishes at the end and one's name. It's a convention, yes, but it's a frame, something like a secure setting and I personally think it's important in online interactions. In between "Dear" and "best wishes" can still happen a lot. Don't you think? I could also not write it. That feels appropriate when there is a fast interaction with many posts and not a lot of time in between.

Cheers,

Maria

(Ha, I did it again)

46.

MARIA

I wanted to react immediately to your post, Rob! I just read your introduction again that Peter sent us before setting up this temporary online group.

I think we have already addressed several issues here that you raised and I don't think at all that you are unimportant. I said before that I feel much more comfortable here with you connecting posts, channeling the discussion, repeating questions, our task and purpose here. I do wonder now how that happened, why you feel that way.

Leadership is important. Politeness also. And what Carla said, "the fantasy of an unbounded space where people can say whatever comes up to the mind" relates to what my colleagues in Berlin say: what happens in the GASI Forum is sometimes aggressive, impulsive, disrespectful and so on. I agree and I wrote about missiles fired with hitting hard in distance - except Bob, nobody has reacted to that either. But I don't feel unimportant in this group here. It makes me think and I enjoy my thoughts. And I'm very much looking forward to reading your write up of all this :).

How much time do we have left? Two weeks?

I also wonder about how it is for you to not be on the GASI Forum and setting up this group and wanting to write a paper about all this.

47.
LIAT

Dear all,

I am glad Carla to hear your voice!

Thank you Robe for your self-disclosure about feeling unimportant. Until this disclosure, I felt you involved and in charge, but in a polite and almost impersonal way.

Maybe your role is more important than you think because now I feel that your disclosure as the conductor of this group is especially important for me as an invitation for a more personal or open contact here.

As to the "politenesses" such as signing with our name and etc. Those are acceptable modes of communication in IIGA internet forum as well and I never wondered about them, but now it seems to me that maybe it is an attempt of establishing personal communication in the absence of eye contact and face to face encounter.

Another thought is that "politeness" can be a cover-up for aggressive communications because this form of signing can be found also when the content of an email is aggressive.

BEST,

Liat

48.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

I wonder if a parallel is Tiziana feeling unimportant, but being more important that she thinks.

And I still like the brave experiment of a leaderless group. Are GASi members really so dependent on a leader? Or, does an individual need to be designated the leader? Can't members share in leading?

What "an unbounded space where people can say whatever comes up to the mind" reminds me of is analysis. But maybe not group analysis?

Bob

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER

49.

MARIA

Dear Tiziana,

how do you think and feel about all this? I'm really interested in hearing your perspective.

Maria

50.

CARLA

Dear all,

Yes Liat, politeness is important in all relationships and I think it is easier to be unpolite in virtual spaces... People feel more free to say what he/she has in mind. Yes Bob, similar to a face to face meeting, self disclosure is easier in virtual spaces. To me when you write a letter to someone is easier to express feelings of love, appreciation and hate.. of course we find the barriers of language. Today I discovered that not bad and not so bad has a different meaning in English. It is synonymous of appreciation...

I don't see how or why Tiziana could feel unimportant here. In fact a virtual space gives the opportunity for a democratic space... this is one of the tasks of the convener, guarantee the free speech, space for all, preventing monopolizers.

Maria, could you tell us a bit about the LG experiences in Berlin?

Best, Carla

51.

BOB

Hi, everyone,

Carla, I'd argue that online, a convener isn't necessary, at least not for those purposes. Free speech is automatically guaranteed, people just have to click "send". There's automatically space for all. Space is unlimited. And being unlimited, can't be monopolized.

What I kept running into in my online group was the difficulty of / resistance to simply co-existing. Which I expected to be easier online, where people have the power to simply not open posts from "monopolizers", or people who are rude, or whatever.

Speaking of co-existing, and democratic spaces, could the Forum be like a Roman forum?

- > a gathering place of great social significance, and often the scene
- > of diverse activities, including political discussions and debates,
- > rendezvous, meetings, et cetera

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forum_\(Roman\)#The_functions_of_a_forum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forum_(Roman)#The_functions_of_a_forum)

Did Roman forums have conveners / leaders / moderators?

Bob

52.
ROB

I feel a strong hope that, Haim and Tiziana, you will join us in this group's coexistence. Both of you have been invoked by members of this group specifically as important figures in other, larger online groups (the Forum, the group psychotherapy list). Perhaps you two most of all among us can help this group think about these similar-but-different terms: administrator, moderator, convener, conductor, leader, list-owner (etc.). It seems we may need your help to define the care-taking role and the longings projected onto that role. Or maybe we just need to know you are still here with us: that you haven't abandoned us or been driven away.

53.
HAIM

Hello Rob and all,

Sorry for not writing for a few days. We are preparing for hosting my kids, their spouses and our granddaughter for Thanksgiving.

From my experience, the online forum leader's presence is of utmost importance (see my Foulkes lecture about "impossible groups"). The leader/convener/conductor can compensate for the unsafe boundless environment in many ways, from dynamic administration (which has a specific meaning online), to interpreting the material. The leader's intervention cultivate a culture and an atmosphere of tolerance and multilogue. I don't think you are unimportant here, Rob. I see your interventions as very helpful.

As for politeness, I do agree that over-polite communication is fake and distances people, but so does crude aggression.

My automatic signature says "best regards", but I am aware that this is not the suitable one for more intimate communication or specific cultures.

Best Regards,

Haim Weinberg

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER

54.

TIZIANA

Hi all,

Yesterday evening I posted two messages (the first one here above), but I didn't notice that on my iPad our thread lacks the "reply to all" button... As I wrote I was half asleep, or was it an unconscious acting out (fostered by a mysterious technological glitch)?

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Tiziana Baisini
Date: Tue, 20 Nov 2018, 21:56
Subject: Re: Welcome
To: Rob White

Hi all,

Yes I am here!

Rob, this message of yours made me think about the impact of asynchronicity on the Forum's (both this and the GASI one) dynamics. We write something and we launch it in the internet space, not knowing if, when and who will listen to it - as well as if, when and who will reply. Not having a reply, or not in the expected timing, can be an anxiety provoking experience - as many highlighted, from time to time, on the GASI Forum.

You wrote previously about the possibility that the GASI Forum is a defence against separation anxiety (do I remember right)? I heard few times from different colleagues a joke about the GASI being an organisation where people love each other and (but also because) they don't see each other often, while in the IGA people see each other even too often and, well, don't really like each other.

It is a matter of fact that we are spread across Europe, north and south America, Asia and Africa and many people see the Forum as a way to keep connected.

I wonder how this can go together with the asynchronicity of the communication there, if the latter can exacerbate separation anxiety and fear of loneliness (and in the place

designated as a response to them), and how much of the separation anxiety/fear of abandonment is evacuated and projected onto the Forum and/or the administrator?

I hope what I wrote is understandable, I am sort of free associating while already half asleep... :-)

55.
TIZIANA

And here is the second one.

Thanks again Bob for pointing it out!

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Tiziana Baisini
Date: Tue, 20 Nov 2018, 21:59
Subject: Re: Welcome
To: Robert Hsiung

Bob, the last image of subgroups of children asking for different things at the same time captures precisely my experience of the role.

A sort of parenting as an impossible profession, only made it even more impossible! :-)

56.
ROB

Haim stresses leadership and aggression whereas Tiziana stresses organisational dynamics, companionship and ... love. I am remembering Maria and Liat's dance, and also the mentions of motherhood (not gender-neutral parenting) in this group, and my feeling that mothers talk to each other in a certain way. Does online group interaction accentuate gender differences? I am thinking about this in group terms, how men interact when they are together (competing?) as opposed to when women are together (sharing?). This is obviously a simplification (what about female aggression, what about male kindness?) but still what is coming up prompts me to ask: is there a "gender culture clash" that is especially difficult to manage online?

57.
MARIA

Maybe gender stereotypes (there is always some truth to be found in and around them) give security, something that is well-known, they feel familiar (although not always comfortable), helps men and women to relate, to relax, to trust. Accentuated gender differences could have that function in online groups. Interesting...

Maria

58.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Interesting how much it took to get the Forum mother into this group.

My guess is there are fewer gender differences online. (1) People don't see each other, so it's less apparent what gender they are. Which is the case here for me, anybody else? (2) It's harder to monopolize / for men to marginalize women because there's always room for everyone.

I'd also guess that asynchronicity diminishes separation anxiety. If we were meeting in person, the meeting would come to an end and we'd be confronted with separation. But online, the group is always "here". It may not always be responsive, but it's 24/7, always at least "there".

Bob

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER

59.

MARIA

Dear Carla,

I would like to tell you more about the LG in Berlin but I'm not sure if it is relevant to the discussion here. In a face to face group I would look at Rob now and wait for his response.

Warm regards,

Maria

60.

ROB

There seems to be a cluster of difficulties in this asynchronous online small group: caution, deference, distraction, avoidance, competing topics, offline personal commitments (Carla's holiday, Haim's family gathering for Thanksgiving). Also, I think, the inhibiting force of professional decorum throughout. Liat suggested one remedy for the difficulty: a more self-disclosing approach. Perhaps that is something to consider. Maybe it would be good to take more risks in what we say, whether that means being more polemical or being more personal.

61.

CARLA

It's ok! I understand Maria... I was curious to bridge the AW and the event in Berlin.

Moreover you are touching a difficult topic in online discussions. What can we share in terms of reports on events?

What can be touched or discussed without crossing boundaries?

thank you, Carla

62.

MARIA

Well, Rob,

I'm now risking a self-disclosure.

When Tiziana said it was you mentioning the aspect of the GASI Forum being a defense mechanism to avoid feelings of separation I was a little upset since I brought it into the discussion here.

I guess that happens in online and face to face groups and it happens to me, too. Sometimes I also don't remember correctly who said what. Then the group becomes a whole, a mass maybe, with moments of less differentiation. But of course, we all want to be different, special, we want to be seen as unique individuals.

In addition, when questions that I ask aren't being answered directly, then I feel a little angry and ignored. But it has happened that later, someone picks something up that I said or refers to my question and then I think: I'm not ignored and I'm very well an important part of the group.

I hope this makes sense.

Maria

63.

ROB

It does make sense Maria, very much. It is easy to feel lost online or be forgotten about -- and to oneself lose touch or forget about someone else -- in all the commotion and fragmentation. Maybe those who go on the attack in the Forum, or take it hostage, are desperate to avoid this danger of "disappearance".

Staying offline risks getting lost in another way. I myself have no social-media presence, no Facebook or Instagram or Twitter, not for more than five years. It is a decision I have made and I do not regret it. It is perhaps a kind of self-exile. But also it seems to me sometimes that while I stay the same, people around me are being changed by the new technology, becoming slowly a new kind of person. I am fascinated by the childlike delighted smiles I see sometimes on people's faces when they looking at their phones in a public place. What is happening to make them smile so happily? Texting, looking at their "feeds", what? But still to my eyes there is something strange about an adult entranced by their handheld device. The theorist Franco Berardi has said that now a child can learn more language from a machine than a mother. Maybe that is an exaggeration but I think the technology is changing what a person is, and though I just said I stay the same, the change does affect me because I become more lonely, more aware of the difference between myself and the majority. (Perhaps my feeling of falling

behind is like what nonparents feel when it becomes clear to them that there will be no child.)

It is the theme I keep coming back to, and it could be the group just doesn't resonate, but maybe it is worth thinking more about the problem of loss and hurt in this area, and whether it can be overcome or must rather be adjusted to.

64.

MARIA

Thank you, Rob, I can resonate a lot with what you are saying. I think you are paying a price for not entering the social media channels or the GASI Forum. I on the other hand, decided to be part of facebook (no Twitter, no Instagram though), although I'm not very active on it, and I'm on different email lists such as the GASI Forum.

One thought that made me do that was - besides my fear of being left out, forgotten about or just missing out - that I want to understand my patients. Since they are usually engaged with these technologies and it is part of their daily experience and inner world I even felt and feel the need to do it as well in order to be able to identify with them. And also as a parent: I can stay away from social media but my child will not. So if I want to be in touch with him or her I need to keep up, right? Maybe patients and children aren't that different. :)

Maria

65.

HAIM

Dear Maria,

I completely understand your feeling upset for not being mentioned correctly for your contribution.

I see it as another feature of the large group dynamics of an Internet forum, as such a mistake easily happens in large groups.

As I said and write: an Internet forum is a large group disguised as a small group (in the dark!). As for self disclosure, surely it will increase the intimacy and the connection in the forum. The paradox is that in order to self disclose people should feel safe and intimate.

Haim

66.

ROB

Carla, does the issue of safety/intimacy connect to what you were thinking about boundaries?

67.

TIZIANA

What you write makes sense indeed Maria.

I am sorry to have misquoted and misattributed your contribution.

I agree with you that this happens also in f2f groups, but in my experience it is even more common in internet groups.

I think the disembodiment of the experience plays a huge role in it - we are all typing and this flattens how we can express ourselves. We can't hear our voices (in a f2f experience I would have probably linked the concept to your voice), we can't see each other's eyes/faces or have any experience of the bodies nor of the non-verbal communication of the other members of the group. It is true though that I do know in person some of the members of this group and this creates a mixed experience for me from this point of view: while I read Rob's, Carla's, Peter's and Haim's posts I imagine them saying things - I have an image in my mind, while I can't have this experience with Maria's, Bob's or Liat's posts since I don't know them in person.

I wonder if my mistake was the expression of a desire to link with something/someone familiar.... Rob, I do agree that technology is changing ourselves and I think that this disembodiment of communication has an impact. I jumped on the chair when you mentioned Franco Berardi and that a child can learn more languages from a machine than from a mother. I don't want to deny how much technology can be useful, but I do think that the exquisitely human musicality of the dialogue between mother and baby can't be replaced by any machine, as well as the attunement fostered by mirror neurons in a face to face encounter.

Texting has replaced in-person-meetings hugely, particularly among the youngests, and I wonder about the impact of this on empathy and on the ability to intimately, emotionally connect with the others.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER

68.

BOB

Hi, everyone,

The "cluster of difficulties" here (and presumably in the Forum) are difficulties in group life everywhere. And maybe here we see the effects of "the inhibiting force of professional decorum", and in the Forum the inhibiting force of lack of professional decorum.

Slightly differently than Haim, I see an Internet forum as a LG that feels like a SG. "Disguised" to me feels a bit paranoid.

The medium is just a medium. After the telephone (version 1, the "dumb phone") was invented, did people slowly become a new kind of person? Did it make people less able

to empathize and to intimately, emotionally connect with others? If we see someone talking on the telephone with a childlike delighted smile, we don't wonder if they're entranced by their telephone, we know they're entranced by the person on the other end. This isn't the first time people have started to communicate in a new way.

Let me try GA lingo. The foundation matrix changes over time, yes? It's not the same now as it was a century ago? Some people change as their FM changes. What about those who don't? They're out of sync with their time. Maybe this is what Rob is in touch with. Is there a GA term for this? If not, I propose "foundation asynchronicity".

Bob

69.

MARIA

Hi Bob,

I like your GA lingo and your new term "foundation asynchronicity" very much.

So, Liat, I guess creativity and new thoughts do come up in online groups. Maria

70.

ROB

Is there a danger of shutting down what is frightening, even terrifying about new technology? Bob, sometimes there isn't another person at the end of the line, just a "feed" (or an advert or maybe just a shopping site), and many think the medium isn't just a medium it's even the message. Are we rushing too quickly to find reassurance in, for example, the thought of creativity and fresh ideas? Popular culture -- for example the movie Avengers Infinity War -- is full of destruction and invasion, and surely this is an expression of what many people feel at the moment about everyday life, consciously and unconsciously (Bob you suggest this theme in another way). When I mentioned professional decorum I was thinking in particular of the desire to rely on group-analytic concepts to define contemporary psychosocial phenomena. This is a group-analytic discussion so it would be surprising if we didn't reach for such concepts, but I keep thinking about the pain and panic in the real-life large groups I have been in recently, and I wonder if such concepts can often be wielded as shields against the sense of invasion both of everyday life and group-analytic life. Does anyone feel that the usual concepts may not be sufficient, that there might actually be a crisis for group-analytic theory here? I was struck by Tiziana telling us that she "jumped on her chair" at the mention of the idea of technology replacing a mother. I understand jumping on a chair to be an instinctual response to shock and fright, and it seems to me that this image is "in the room" among us but we want to chase it out as though it were just a little mouse or a Halloween spider.

71.

CARLA

Rob and all

Yes in a way. I think that when we write a letter, an email to a far away person the tone of the communication naturally involves more intimacy. It is a different way of putting thinking and feelings in words. So naturally we disclose. How many months it would take in a face to face communication to talk about feelings...

What I said about boundaries involves what Haim described as a paradox on internet communications , we never know who is reading our posts on a large internet group, but when people post they think that the space is safe as a small group should be and has safe boundaries . However they are not aware of what will happen with their communication...

So we must always be aware that any online communication will deal with safety and intimacy in an environment with loosen boundaries...

Carla

72.

MARIA

I agree with you, Tiziana, that it makes a significant difference whether you know the people in an online group also in person. I'm like you, I hear the people's voices when I read their posts. You are the only one I don't know in person in this group here.

Referring to the analogy of GASI being a big family - and GASI people loving each other because you don't see them that often (vs. IGA for instance where you see everyone a lot) - reminded me of a postcard on my fridge:

"The best regarding having a family is: you are never alone.
The worst regarding having a family is: you are never alone."

A few years ago, I got this card from my aunt who is divorcing my uncle right now.

I don't know how this relates to our discussion here but maybe you can all help me with that.

Maria

73.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

The Internet is a disruptive technology. But so was the telephone. Disruptive technologies / innovations are "simultaneously destructive and creative". The destructive side is frightening, even terrifying. Thank goodness there's also the creative side:

<http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/everyday-tech/what-is-disruptive-technology.htm>

I suppose disruptions are also traumas, and the disruption of the Internet may evoke earlier traumas in the FM, both technological and social, since the Internet is a social technology.

Innovation, invasion. There's plenty of anxiety / xenophobia in the developed world these days about invasion from / disruption by the less-developed world.

Rob, people have emotional reactions to newspapers, and newspapers are just older-fashioned "feeds". People have emotional reactions to / in shopping centers, and shopping centers are just older-fashioned shopping "sites". If the medium is the message, that message is that the FM is evolving:

- > Time keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin'
- > Into the future

The ultimate foundation asynchronicity is when the FM evolves beyond us, when we die. Or when it evolves beyond us-as-a-whole, when climate change, or nuclear war, or something else, makes us extinct? In between, there's when the FM starts evolving faster than us:

- > the Singularity is a theoretical point in future history when
- > artificial intelligences exceed the power of the human mind, become
- > self-aware and dramatically change the balance of power on the planet
- > while simultaneously transforming the very nature of humanity itself

Why 'Her' Is the Best Movie Ever Made About the Singularity

<http://mashable.com/2014/01/15/her-singularity>

OK, time to go shopping. In person!

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Friday_\(shopping\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Friday_(shopping))

Bob

74.
ROB

Bob posts two hyperlinks, Maria posts a highly suggestive but antique image. Let it be said simply that both these offerings are *not conventionally possible in a traditional real-life group*. Add that to the synchronicity and the distance already mentioned and it is a struggle to maintain the analogy with either a classic large or a small group. There is something unfamiliar here.

One of Bob's links is (inevitably!) to the mass-authored Wikipedia. It reminds me that at the London workshop Carla cited Ortega y Gasset's book *The Revolt of the Masses*, which laments the loss of traditional moral authority in Europe between the wars. I don't know the date of the image Maria sent but I guess it shows a bourgeois family from the late nineteenth-century or early twentieth (the kind of family our German founders would have belonged to: Freud, Foulkes, Klein...).

What do these offerings tell us about a clash between the traditional and the new; past and present; the world of the nuclear family and the decentralised "social network"?

And is their appearance -- this sudden, unplanned, coincidental arrival in the group of symbolically contrasting texts from the outside -- an indication of some sort of online unconscious process in this group? Can there be an unconscious process in an online group?

75.
ROB

(Freud and Klein were of course Austrian, only Foulkes was actually German -- is there anything more to my mistake than simply a misremembering?)

SATURDAY 24 NOVEMBER

76.
CARLA

Dear Rob and all,

Yes the links, photos, images are part of virtual groups, but once in a while people bring photos to f2f groups.

I was glad to know that you like Ortega Y Gasset , a so important author who perceived the shifts that early 20th century was facing regarding the rise of the culture of mass men through industrialization...

Now there are new revolutions taking place and the virtual one is one of them...For sure there are unconscious processes taking part in online groups. Haim already wrote about it. Being sincere this is one of the features that make GASi forum so complex and difficult to digest. It mirrors by equivalence the outside world, but also the power relations and struggles between countries...

Best wishes, Carla

77.
LIAT

Dear all,

I would like to join you now, but in order to follow I read a few previous emails, you wrote that I didn't read before. Therefore, the online group is always there as Bob mentioned, but in my feeling the online group (which doesn't have fixed meetings) isn't waiting for me. However, It was pleasant for me to find my name mentioned in some of your posts, I felt it like an invitation to join again and that I am not forgotten, maybe in a similar way members like to be invited in a face to face group.

So, mentioning the names of members of the online written group and reference to previous communications can compensate for the absence of fixed times for meetings and maintain an experience of familiarity and continuity.

Maria, I certainly find some new ideas that were generated by this group. I am certain online group can be creative. My comment about unfruitfulness of internet forums referred to my experience with the GAS forum. Can a large group be innovative? on-line and face to face large groups? I am sure they can, although in my experience not so often.

Another question I asked myself is about the visual image of an online group like ours. Foulkes highlighted the special meaning of the circle and **VAN DER KLEIJ** wrote as well about the unconscious meaning of sitting in a circle in a group. In my group, I feel the circle as round or small in connection with feelings of intimacy in the group, or looser or a fragmented circle when a sense of detachment prevails in the group.

I tried to imagine this group as a circle but it didn't work out. Do you have a visual figure for our group?

Best,

Liat

SUNDAY 25 NOVEMBER

78.
HAIM

Thanks, Carla, for mentioning my book about Internet forums again. Here are some long paragraphs from it about the Internet Unconscious:

Knowing how the internet is perceived as a boundless space, and how online forums exist beyond time limitations, it is only natural to wonder whether the Internet becomes a fertile ground for the creation of a new kind of unconscious: The Internet Unconscious

2.2 So What Is The Internet Unconscious?

Looking from another perspective, we can describe "the Internet Unconscious" and analyze its unique features. However, if the concept of the Social Unconscious is prone to misconceptions as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the idea of the Internet Unconscious is much more confusing and generates both misunderstandings and resistance. As some of the arguments against the use of the term 'the Social Unconscious' come from the fact that society is not a living organism and as such has no brain, relating an unconscious to the Internet, with its disembodied features, at a first glance seems more than puzzling. More than that, the Internet is not a country, neither a state nor a nation, and it is questionable whether we can relate to it as a society.

Relating to the Internet Unconscious does not mean that the Internet itself is an entity that has an unconscious, but that the people who use it, belong to its communities, think about it, and imagine what it looks like, have shared thoughts and fantasies about it, of which they are unaware.

The second argument, that the Internet is neither a country nor a society, ignores the fact that the Internet did develop a culture of its own. If a culture is typified by its language, then the culture of the Internet contributed many new words to the spoken language: Hoaxes, chain letters, flaming, spam, Google, hackers, netiquette, lurker are all new terms or terms with specific meaning in the newly developing folklore of the net. In *Cultures of Internet*, Shields (1996) describes the main features of this culture: The Internet is supposed to be *the* ultimate democratic, egalitarian, freedom of speech culture. No one controls it, and its structure is not based on class. This is one shared fantasy people have about the Internet, and as such it is part of the Internet Unconscious.

If we look for an "Internet Unconscious", one possibility is that the Social Unconscious on the Internet reflects the unconscious of a specific forum of people who share a common field of interest. But this definition will restrict our discussion to a specific forum and a limited number of people, while we are looking for a phenomenon that reflects the foundation matrix -- the deep hidden ties and assumptions connecting people wherever they are. If we elaborate on the definition of the Social Unconscious at the beginning of this chapter, we can say that the Internet Unconscious is *the co-constructed shared unconscious of members belonging to Internet communities and cultures. It includes shared anxieties, fantasies, defences, myths, and memories about the Internet.* Brown (2001) suggested a systematic way for analysing the Social Unconscious of a specific society. In order to analyse the Internet Unconscious and describe the ways it expresses itself, we will use his four ways of the Social Unconscious manifestation.

2.2.1 Assumptions:

- a. The Internet is a free democratic society -- Shields' (1996) description of the Internet culture mentioned above is actually a set of assumptions about the Internet. These assumptions are taken for granted and shared by most people who think they know this media. For many, the Internet offers the hope of a more democratic society. By promoting a decentralised form of social mobilisation, it is said, the Internet can help us to renovate our institutions and liberate ourselves from our authoritarian legacies. The Internet does indeed hold these possibilities: The quick spread of demonstrations around the world in

2011-2013, in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Brazil and other countries, largely supported by social networks and bringing hundred thousands of young people to mostly quiet demonstrations, sometimes changing the regime, is a sound proof of this potential

On the other hand, some countries, such as Iran and the People's Republic of China, restrict what people in their countries can see on the Internet, especially unwanted political and religious content. Authoritarian societies will attempt to suppress the cultural practices of networking, and democratic societies will promote them. The Internet can become a tool for social progress, but it can also become a tool of oppression or another centralised broadcast medium.

The Internet Unconscious contains an illusionary belief that ultimate freedom of speech is achieved in Cyberspace and that forum members always show respect and tolerance to different opinions.

- b. Internet forums are similar to face-to-face small groups -- In the virtual environment on Internet discussion lists and forums, the communication might look like the kind of interaction we are used to in small groups, but the participant's fantasy creates an intra-psychic process. As we discussed earlier, virtual groups on cyberspace are Large Groups with an illusion of small groups.
- c. People and machines are essentially different -- Turkle (1995) claims that as human beings become increasingly intertwined with the technology and with each other via the technology, old distinctions about what is specifically human and specifically technological become more complex. The more people spend time in Cyberspace and create technologically enmeshed relationships, we might ask to what extent they have become cyborgs, transgressive mixtures of biology and technology. Haraway (1985) explored the interfaces between human/machine/animal/ information and deduced from them to the politics of the Other - whether that other is defined in terms of race, gender, species, or technology. She focuses on the metaphors which science uses and how those metaphors subtly determine the networks of power that control our world. The old traditional distance between people and machines has become harder to maintain and our assumptions about the clear distinction between human beings and machines collapse. The fact that disembodied relationship can feel as deep and intimate as face-to-face embodied ones is a shocking revelation undermining our common belief that only what we can touch, smell and taste is real. We discussed this issue in length in chapter 4.
- d. The multi-self -- We usually see ourselves as bound by our boundaries, identity, physical features, gender, etc. Our personal, professional, religious and ethnic identity seems like something fixed, unchangeable and unquestionable. The Internet shows us that our self-definition is a matter of self-decision and inter-personal agreement. The fact that I can introduce myself as a male while biologically I am a woman, or write as an adult when outside cyberspace I am an adolescent, or pretend to be a religious Jew while holding atheist beliefs, is much more than deception. Relationships over the net are potentially identity transforming relationships. What we find out is that we have more control than we have ever imagined around constructing our identities. These experiences on the Internet can only be understood as part of a larger cultural context. It is the context of the post-modernist era, with its eroding boundaries between the real

and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self (Haraway, 1985; Turkle, 1995).

- e. The Internet is "for free" -- From its inception, Cyberspace became an environment where generosity prevails. Freeware (software distributed for free) and shareware (software that can be used after paying a small amount for registration) became common. One could find the most advanced word processors and spreadsheet programs for free on the Internet. It seems as if people enjoyed sharing their creative products with others whom they have never met and mostly with whom they had no other connection whatsoever. This strange generosity, uncommon in most Western industrial societies, manifests itself in Internet forums too. Request for information or for assistance coming from forum members are usually answered quickly and with a lot of good will. Total strangers will give up hours of their time to send one another research data. In my field of expertise, group-psychotherapy, I could spend time looking for references in response to requests from people I have never heard of.

Behind this assumption lies the question of whether the virtual environment is going to be a capitalistic society or a utopian socialist one. There is a paradox between the so many Internet uses common for a capitalistic society (from commerce to banking) and its so many communitarian uses (from support groups to connecting communities).

- f. The Internet connects/disconnects people: For each of these two assumptions we can find evidence. It is true that time spent online is inevitably time we could have spent with others in our physical surroundings. We can also say that the connection to distant others is a form of detachment in itself (Turkle's book from 2011 is titled "Alone together"). On the other hand we cannot ignore the fact that the Internet connects people from different cultures, countries and ethnic origin. So the conclusion is that both are true: Although the Internet is bringing us together, it also keeps us apart. The question is how we use it. In point of fact, this is the main subject of this book.

2.2.2 Disavowals: Intimacy or E-ntimacy©?

In chapter 6 we saw that Internet forums are actually Large Groups. Participants in the Large Group usually look for the intimacy they are used to in small groups - and become disappointed. The Large Group is not capable of creating the warm-accepting-containing atmosphere that is easily built up in a small group. On the contrary, the Large Group is usually characterized by lack of face-to-face and mirroring interactions. Sometimes, both in Large Groups and online, we look for intimacy, hoping for compassion, yet often get the cruelty of strangers. As written in the introduction to my co-edited book about the Large Group (Weinberg and Schneider, 2003), this, in effect, categorises the dynamic understanding of the Large Group: such large numbers do not allow for intimacy but rather can engender feelings of difference and alienation. The crowd is not the place to establish close relationship with people. A typical short vignette from a Large Group of school psychologists, hinting to the search for intimacy: *someone hesitated whether to share with the group what she wanted to talk about, and when "seduced" by other member, she suggested talking about love. She was sneered at verbally following her suggestion.*

Popular wisdom describes intimacy as "into-me-you-see". If we look for this kind of intimacy in the Large Group we are sure to become frustrated and disappointed. But maybe another kind of intimacy is possible; an intimacy based on belonging, confluence and influence? Surely, this is not the intimacy praised by the "let's talk about it" Western cultural norms and Hollywood movies. Neither is it the deep feeling of close encounters evoked by Buberian I-Thou relationship. It is more the feeling of togetherness, being a part of a community. Turkle (2011) points out that traditionally, the development of intimacy required privacy. Clearly, privacy is not available in Cyberspace, so we should rethink of intimacy in new ways: "*Intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means*" (p. 171).

On Internet Large Groups (forums), intimacy is usually based on the creation and development of a core group that carries on group norms of tolerance and openness, and an atmosphere of cohesion, "we-ness", and belonging. The core group consists of members that are more involved in the exchange of messages, post more often and become more salient and important in this virtual Large Group. Sometimes this togetherness moves to its extreme manifestation of the fourth basic assumption of oneness (Turquet, 1974), where the individual merges with the crowd, losing his identity (the Massification pole in Hopper's [1997] assumption), being endangered by a non-verbal mimetic engulfment mirroring (see Weinberg and Toder, 2004). When this kind of togetherness prevails, the Large Group massifies and a denial of differences appears creating the illusion of uniformity (Kernberg, 1989).

This is exactly what happens in Cyberspace. The fantasy of "we are all the same" in this virtual environment is very strong. Anonymity on the Internet enhances this fantasy because it seems as if there are no presumptions about the writer based on colour, age, or even gender. Even in forums based on professional interest (such as my group-psychotherapy discussion list, see chapter 6) it seems at first that generally the voice of the junior, young and inexperienced has the same weight and is heard just the same as the voice of the senior expert. The Internet seems to replicate the ideal flattened hierarchy suitable for post-modern global organisations. The reality on the Internet is different, which hints to a common denial and disavowal of differences. Although it seems that equal space and opportunity is given to both young and older, experienced and junior, very quickly the old differentiation (and sometimes discrimination) takes over. Playing with selves is a nice game, but as this game lasts, older identities emerge, as people bring their self-image and status into Internet communication.

As mentioned above, one of the major criticisms of outsiders who do not belong to Internet forums and community is in relation to intimacy. The assertion is: "Relations on the Internet cannot be real relationships with real intimacy". However, anonymity online - which can have the negative effects of de-individuation and alienation - can have positive effects too. McKenna and Green (2002) mention that anonymity on the Internet helps members express how they really feel and think, and encourages the emergence of healthy group norms.

We can also say that the quest for intimacy in Cyberspace denies the fact that on the Internet another kind of intimacy develops, for which I coin the term E-ntimacy©. This E-ntimacy© is based on fantasy and idealisation. It is a deep relationship between two (or more) non-bodies. But whereas Freud and classical psychoanalysis saw fantasy as opposed to and clouding reality, post-Freudian psychoanalytic authors (especially inter-

subjective and relational ones; see Aron, 1996; Mitchell, 2002) regard fantasy as enriching and enhancing reality. And whereas idealisation has been considered as a dangerous illusion, inimical to stable long-term relationship, it can also be regarded as a process of bringing alive features of the other that are hidden and masked in ordinary interactions (Mitchell, 2002). In every era, certain ways of relating come to feel natural. In our time, the need to continuously be in touch, always connected to Cyberspace, does not in itself seem problematic or pathological. Similarly, on the Internet, a person's playing with multiple selves (Turkle, 1995) - which holds the possibility of exploring deeper layers of the selves beyond those bound to reality testing - meets well with the fantasy of the other, as long as both members in this bonding remember that Internet rules are different from face-to-face rules. The problem starts when people forget that Cyberspace is not a day-to-day space and try to enforce Internet rules on the reality outside, confusing intimacy and E-intimacy©.

2.2.3. Social Defences:

Projection is the most obvious defence mechanism on the web. It is used massively, probably because we only have text data and no other cues. The lack of facial expression, tone of the voice, or any other embodied expression leaves the reader with many gaps in information s/he is trying to fill. Projection on the Internet leads to many misunderstandings and therefore conflicts. People interpret written text according to their fantasy and their own perception of the world, and not according to the author's world. True, it can happen outside Cyberspace too, but when we have other clues to the speaker's intention, such as the tone of her voice or his smile, misperceptions are minimized or more easily worked through. In face-to-face interaction people rely on the combination of textual, visual and auditory cues to interpret the meaning of the speaker's sentences. This is so common that people do not notice how important each of these dimensions is to (what they think is) an exact understanding of the speaker. The Internet leaves the written word as the only source of interpretation and this leads to many misunderstandings. Suller (1996) writes that because the experience of the other person often is limited to text, there is a tendency for the user to project a variety of wishes, fantasies, and fears onto the ambiguous figure at the other end of cyberspace.

Usually projections lead to a negative interpretation of the writer's intention, and might start word- wars ("flaming") when a comment that was meant to be humorous is conceived as insulting by the reader. But projections can also lead to idealisation. At other times the reader projects benevolent intentions upon the author, and develops idealised fantasies. It might be related to the current needs of the reader and to the written text that fits these needs. Idealisation on the Internet can be very strong, leading to infatuation and virtual romances on one hand and to leaders' idealisation on the other.

The shift between negative projections and idealisations can create splits, when some objects are perceived as "all good", while other are perceived as "all bad". These poles are evident when conflicts in Internet forums arise, splitting the members into two parties, causing "flame wars" and the discharge of crude aggression. This is one of the possible dangerous dynamics of a Large Group, and the Virtual Large Group is no exception (Weinberg, 2003).

2.2.4 Structural Oppression:

At first glance it seems as if the Internet is providing an equal opportunity environment. There is no discrimination on the basis of colour, gender or ethnics. Everyone is welcome to write whatever is in his or her mind. It is the most egalitarian society because social status does not pertain and the same space is given for the black and the white, the Jew or the Moslem, men and women, the rich and the poor, young and old, expert and novice. Cyberspace seems to eliminate differences and inequality.

If we examine the use of the Internet distribution by gender, for example, we will find out that there is still a difference between modern countries to traditional ones in this matter: In 2009, male and females Internet users in the USA were almost equally spread. However, in Morocco, while 75% of the men used the Internet, only 50% of the women did (<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/Gender/>). A significant gender bias toward men still exists in the adoption of modern information and communications technologies in less developed countries.

The same illusion exists regarding the use of the Internet all over the world. Theoretically it is the World Wide Web, but practically in poor countries many people cannot access the Internet either because the cost of computers and Internet connection is too high for their income, or because no service provider is available. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a poor country in Africa with a population of 68 million people there are only 290,000 Internet users (0.45%), while in North America there were around 230 million Internet users in 2008. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8552410.stm>). Talking about globalisation and the “global village” in regard to the Internet is ignoring the fact that the growth of the Internet has been anything but even, and large areas of the world have scarcely been touched by the internet explosion. The barriers to technological development are exactly the same as the barriers to any economic development: market restrictions, lack of contract law, state controls, customs duties, bureaucracy, corruption and so on. With these barriers still in place, diverting resources to information and communications technologies is just another distraction from other real structural differences.

A stable society develops where there is some assumed general agreement between its members or where a set of values can be identified which define the limits of both the social order and of individual contributions to social groups within that society. Most conventional territorial societies exhibit a hierarchical structure between the governed and the government, and power is exercised within certain constraints, which are usually imposed by the government and related to its ideology. In Cyberspace, a hidden structural hierarchy that resides in the Internet Unconscious replaces the governmental ideology of established states. This structural oppression, with its inequality (related for example to gender and the distribution of financial resources) is well disguised under the common Internet illusion of "we are all the same".

As said earlier, the basic assumption of "one-ness" (Turquet, 1974) is ubiquitous in Cyberspace, and is responsible for this illusion of equality and equity. It is interesting that at the same time, in other Internet communities, the opposite assumption of "me-ness" (Lawrence, 1996) can work as well, when people forget or choose to ignore that on the other side of the screen there are other human beings too, indulging in destructive acts, from sending viruses to becoming verbally abusive.

Best Regards,

Haim Weinberg

79.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Liat, like when you move away from home and then after a long time go back and are walking down the street and someone says hi, where have you been?

Your home, that community / large group, has been there, and hasn't been waiting for you, but you're in its foundation, you still belong.

Bob

80.
ROB

I do not understand why you have flooded the group with all this text Haim. Is it your assumption that the group members need to be educated?

81.
CARLA

Thank you Haim for bringing us parts of your book. It is a nice learning...

I realize that you, Haim, Rob and Peter share the same curiosity regarding the impact of new forms of communication in group analysis...Contexts also provides a very interactive form of communication, a free space where a volume on poetry can be published.

Haim tried now Rob are trying to figure out what happens in online interactions and here we are... helping them...

Best, Carla

82.
ROB

It was as if someone in a real-life group stood up and proceeded to read several pages from his own book and expected grateful silence. Such a thing would never happen in a group-analytic group, large or small, except perhaps if a collective decision had been made to permit this imposition. Yet Carla you leap forward to call this help. I perceive here a reiteration of a problem which came up at the workshop in London and is everywhere in the world around us. The problem, that is, of a "ruling class" determined to protect its power. To be clear: I am identifying you Carla and Haim as the representatives of a group-analytic ruling class.

83.
LIAT

Dear all,

I realise Haim has a great contribution to the subject were coping with: online groups. However, I felt like my email is deleted under Haim's flood of quotations from his book.

Thank you, Bob, for your reference to my communication.

It would be important to share why was it important for you now, Haim, to quote so much from your book?

It might be an enactment of power differences between us, but since I know Haim I think it isn't so typical for him. Is it related Haim to a personal tension between us?

Best,

Liat

84.
ROB

Liat I welcome your post. I think I made a mistake by bringing in group-analytic institutional politics so emphatically. I apologise to Carla and Haim. I think though that it is important that we stay in this area. It seems very important.

85a.
CARLA

Dear Rob and all

Unfortunately I was using my tablet when I answered Haim's post and only after sending my message I 'saw' /read yoursposted one hour before mine. So following the flux of communications it seems that my post was an attempt to justify Haim's communication and to neglect yours. It wasn't it was a recognition of Haim's pioneering work with online groups, since 1995! What we were doing in our professional lives by that time?

Rob, I am sorry if somehow my post made you feel bad or think on social class struggles, it was not my intention. By the way social class is deep concern that pervades the British matrix, but class struggle is not so prominent in other countries...

I see that Liat expressed better than me her knowledge about Haim's behavior. He is a teacher ,so he naturally brought us his knowledge. This is something that I appreciate, IMO he did not want to rule us but brought us something that he learned over time through us, including myself who participate on his experiment for long years...

Rob, I saw on you the same curiosity and critic spirit that Haim has and agreed to join this group because it is an experiment and I really wanted to collaborate . Sorry but I don't think that there is a ruling class here, only different people, with different training and background... different generations I suppose....but to me the most important is to learn from/with different people. This is what I felt!

Liat I heard you....

Carla

85b.

CARLA

Rob,

I just saw your last post, after posting mine. So the same mistake that I mentioned before happened now. So I must change the configuration of my tablet or not use it for this group! It is a new tablet which substituted the one that, believe me or not, saved my arm in the accident. The former was destroyed and acquired my arm shape protecting the arm under the car! A miracle indeed!

You don't need to apologize... we are talking and trying to find ways to learn more about virtual communications. What I learned today is that our devices might be tricky and we must read and look for all the posts before posting !!!

Have a nice Sunday!

Carla

86.

LIAT

Dear all,

I didn't interpret Haim's act and Carla's support as an expression of political power,

But I felt hurt by Haim's act which was right after my email because it felt to me as aggressive.

Best,

Liat

87.

CARLA

Oh Liat I see... I misunderstood your post too. Sorry...

Virtual vehicles upset me because they have limitations and is easy to misunderstand or hurt someone without noticing...

Hugs Carla

88.

BOB

Hi, everyone,

I'm feeling impatient. And I imagine Haim's in that subgroup, too. Email groups have been around for a long time now. Yet what to me is common knowledge about online communication seems to be new to others of you. Which does reflect the state of the Forum, and GASi, and the world. We're all in different places, both geographically and in our learning. It's another type of asynchronicity, asynchronicity of knowledge of / facility / familiarity with a medium.

Bob

PS: I quote Carla's post below not to single her out, it's just the most recent to evoke this response in me.

PPS: Which BTW is why I quote posts at all. Since you all of course already have the exact transcript / history, I don't need to "flood" you all with that.

89a. [posted on separate thread]

BOB

Hi, everyone,

Rob, maybe it wouldn't happen in a group-analytic group meeting in a (physical) room in "real" time, but don't confuse the medium with the approach to understanding what's done with it.

In a traditional setting, we'd have limited "space" (time). Here, our time is less limited (we're still going to end, but we're 24/7 until then), and our space is unlimited.

It would've been an "imposition" in a traditional setting because we would've waited for him to finish. He would've had / we would've given him the power to "take over" the group.

But that's not the case here. I can post before I finish reading his post. I don't even have to finish reading it ever. In fact, I don't even have to open it, if for example I'm tired of hearing from the ruling class. :-)

Of course in a traditional setting I don't have to wait for him to finish, either. I guess another way to put this is that here I can "talk over" him and we can both be heard. We can co-exist.

I see some of the reactions on the Forum as similar. Members bring to its novel setting their assumptions about traditional ones. Locational transference? Or to try more GA lingo, the social unconscious?

Bob

89b. [posted on separate thread]

BOB

Hi, everyone,

First, I'm experimenting with different discussion "threads" about different subjects. Each post here does get its own subject line. This medium anticipated / facilitates talking about more than 1 thing at a time / multi-tasking.

I associate multi-tasking with traditional LGs more than traditional SGs. In a traditional SG, I try more to continue in the direction "the group" is going. In a traditional LG, I feel more free to go my own direction.

(If any of you would prefer not to experiment, just change the subject line to reply back to the main thread. Or don't reply at all. I don't mean to impose anything on anyone.)

Second, Carla gave me an opportunity to give some more thought to the issue of the here-and-now online. My here-and-now is when I check my email / this group and am presented with what's been posted since my last visit to / meeting with / experience of this group. Plus the time it takes me to formulate my responses. "Now" in "group time" isn't a point in real time, but rather a period of real time.

Asynchronous communication refers to how when something's read isn't when it's posted. In a traditional setting something is heard when it's said. This is yet another form of asynchronicity. I'm "here" (in this group) "now". "Now" in real time none of you is "here" with me physically, and you may or may not be "here" with me in this group:

- a. You might not be "here" with me in this group because you're not online or you're doing something else online.
- b. You might be "here" with me in this group, but your "now" (in group time) is likely different than mine.

We could call this dynamic asynchronicity. Or, non-GA, experiential asynchronicity. This group's DM evolves in real time, but we experience this group not in real time, but when we visit it, and also our experience of its evolution is different than that of another member even if they visit it at the same (real) time.

Haim, if you have a take on the here-and-now online, I'm not familiar with it, and would welcome a few paragraphs.

Bob

90.

HAIM

Interesting observation: if you send a link to the forum that leads to an article, it is not considered flooding the forum or needing to educate the members, but if you copy the article into the email - it does.

I've already seen people standing up in a large group and reading a long poem (didn't it happen in Berlin as well?).

Reflecting on my need to quote my book, I assume that I got tired of seeing topics that I've researched and written about being discussed as new revelations and I wanted to avoid repeating what I've written. I've spent years thinking about Internet forums dynamics and writing my book and articles. I thought that I was invited here because of this expertise

Best Regards,

Haim Weinberg

91.
ROB

Haim and Bob, is your "expertise" really more valuable than what others in this group offer? Do you not wish to engage sympathetically with what has been said about the "flooding" in the past twenty-four hours? Or do you insist on still "teaching us a lesson"?

And Peter, where are you?

92.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Rob, I'm not in the subgroup that felt flooded by Haim. But I can sympathize with not having expertise, I'm a newbie when it comes to GA, and have felt flooded by GA veterans on the Forum. But I'm open to learning more about GA (and even about cricket). When one's flooded, it's sink or swim. Do you not wish to swim?

Bob

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER

93.
ROB

I am saddened and angered in my awareness that Tiziana and Maria and Liat have fallen silent, that the men (whether newbie or not) in this group (including myself perhaps and Peter in his absence) are spoiling the possibility of creative exchange. (Sink or swim indeed! A slogan for our neoliberal times if ever there was one.)

I would like to learn from the women in the group but fear it's not going to happen because of something like ... patriarchy! The turning point was when Maria and Liat began to "dance" with images, and invited the group to join in. That was when Haim slammed his book on the table and demanded that the group respect his expertise.

As I write this I am feeling guilty about something that happened in the large group at the London workshop. Someone brought in a dream and I intervened to say that I felt that it was a flight from "real life". Even in the moment I sensed that I had created a

false split in my own mind between the "father" reality and the "mother" dream, and that I was defending my own father, who was in fact a scientist but also a troubled and haunted man (who died tragically, as they say, a long time ago). I think now that in defending my own idea of a fragile father I may have been colluding with a more tyrannical paternity.

Does this have anything to do with online groups? Maybe or maybe not. As I said before I am not much of a leader, just a childless middle-aged man who is in many ways an outsider to the group- analytic world but whose career doesn't depend on the older generation's patronage, which gives me a kind of freedom to speak out (and learn from my mistakes).

94.

MARIA

Hi everyone and good morning!

I would like to join the discussion again after the storm of the weekend. Or maybe we are still in it.

Liat, I understand you very well, that you felt upset when Haim posted his text after your very thoughtful email. I still think about your question: how do we visualize our group? I also don't see a circle, more like a snowflake which dynamically changes - when people post there are more in the middle; when they are silent they are more distant on the periphery but still there.

Carla, I'm so glad that your tablet saved your arm. I have to admit I am still moved by your accident and you sharing it and your recovery on the Forum.

And Bob, I agree with you when you say, the technology around us and especially the internet is not new at all, but it's still new and challenging for some of us. It offers new possibilities like posting photos, pictures, links to articles or videos. Everyone can decide whether to click on something or not. Of course, when there is the wish to follow the conversation there is the need or pressure to have a look.

And I agree, Carla, that people bring material to f2f groups, too. One patient of mine (individual analysis) on the couch always wrote down her dreams in her phone. So everytime she took it with her onto the couch I knew she had a new dream to tell. At first I thought about it as resistance and compulsive, she didn't want not to miss any detail. I was happy my supervisor was very open to new technology and didn't come up with wild interpretations. Because I think it's very smart. You have your phone around you a lot and you can take notes whenever you like. So I copied her behavior and also write down dreams in my phone and brought and bring them to my analysis. (I don't read from my phone though, I tell them freely)

Rob, I liked your passionate response to Haim's and Carla's Post and I still think about it. Yes, we want expertise and we want to understand. I also see that Haim has great knowledge about online groups but maybe something new can even emerge here for him. But are you open for that, Haim? I have to admit when I saw your text I thought

"oh that's a lot, can't read that now, maybe later" and I still haven't finished reading it although I see myself as an interested person.

Flooding, sinking or swimming - of course I like to swim, nobody wants to sink, right? I think it makes a difference whether you post the text into the email or you have a link or an attachment. With a link or an attached file the receiver has a choice or at least it feels that way. I might be wrong.

I remember when I joined the GASI Forum. There was a fight between you, Haim, and Dick Blackwell and was very weird to watch that as a new member of the list. And I didn't know any of you in person. I also mentioned the heated argument and asked about it and nobody in the Forum answered. I might be taking a risk now, but in my impression, maybe Dick and you both like to teach, to share your expertise, which is good, of course, but I had the feeling of two competing rivals. I'm sure there is more to the story. But when you fight in a public space like that people have fantasies about what is (really) going on.

And yes, I am sure Tiziana is lovely in person! A baby learns a lot from the mother, especially in the first year. But later new influences are inevitable. My son loves little videos and since he has to inhale a lot (in order not to get seriously sick) we let him watch them. He also learns words and expressions.

And Peter, where are you?

Kind regards,

Maria

95.

MARIA

Rob, I was writing my response and just saw your recent post now. I like your courage to speak up very much and yes, there is dependency in the GA field when you belong to the new generation.

Gotta join my team meeting now in the psychiatric clinic I work in.

Talk to you later,

Maria

96.

LIAT

Dear all,

Thank you, Maria, for playing with my image about the group. A snowflake is a very interesting idea. This image is may be also connected to the metaphor of the storm we had here last week. It is a good question what brings a member to the centre of the

circle, is it his expertise or something else? I believe like you Maria that the invitation to join this group wasn't about expertise only or at all.

Although I objected Rob's idea about classes and power, now I feel differently and I feel that there is a serious question in this group, who will be in the centre and will influence the direction of this group?

I wonder Rob why you apologised quickly to Haim and Carla?

There are maybe other polarities here-personal disclosures vs. reflection and insights. Women here engage in emotional and personal disclosures while men reflect more? Rob, you perhaps represent a third opportunity.

Those polarities or splits are similar to non-online groups, I believe.

I would also like to know, more Carla about your accident and how you feel about it?

In regards to technology in therapy. My patients, especially individual patients send me sometimes videos of lectures to watch. I admit I find this new opportunity provided by technology as quite demanding and usually I don't watch them before the session and of course, it is an issue that patients reflect on or are unhappy with. It happened in past with books that patients asked their therapists to read, but technology makes such requests easier.

And like others, I would like to invite Peter to join us...

Best,

Liat

97.
ROB

Liat, I think I apologised because I suddenly felt afraid. Afraid that I had gone "too far" in challenging seniority. Afraid that I might have failed as the moderator by "taking sides". Afraid perhaps that the group would break up. Yet now, looking back, I think that my statement was justified. I allowed the anxiety which followed to undermine my own instincts and convictions.

I also do not want to lose Carla's recollection of the tablet which protected her. It confronts us with *vulnerability*.

98.
PETER

Where am I? I was on the point of writing that I've been out of town, but of course, where is that?! I've been reading and re-reading posts with great interest but haven't fought to create a quiet uncluttered moment to write. I've noticed myself feeling like a dinner party host, grateful that people are here and engaging with the conversation, working on the task, generating stimulating copy for Contexts, perhaps even wondering

about seating arrangements. I notice myself visualising all the people here, usually located in a f2f group (some small, some median, some large) in which I was there with them... this makes for a strange imagined not quite circle.

The wish to learn and the wish to teach appear equally present. Do the teachers, and we have some of the most experienced and informed here with us, feel they have something to learn? And the pupils something to teach? The needs to be heard and to relate also feel strongly present. I think we can feel particularly alone with what we say in a virtual forum when it isn't responded to. I'm directing what I'm saying at the group but, as Liat suggests, if I'm not mentioning names it can really feel like no relating is going on at all.

Carla, the image of your now arm-shaped tablet protective shield is extraordinary. Do we internally shape the virtual online experience, as Haim suggests, to protect ourselves from the dangers of disembodied online LG engagement?

This is the second version of this message... the first I thought I'd saved before getting on a flight... But it was gone on arrival!!! Another flight to catch.

Hasta luego!

Peter

99.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

I felt tentative about my reference to what goes on in the Forum, but now feel joined by Maria. I'm surprised it hasn't come up until now (but I can be impatient). (Where are we actually in our group "life"? I haven't been looking at the clock. But let's see, we started Wed. 11/7, so we finish Tue. 12/4? We're about 2/3 there.)

I was also taken aback by Dick when I joined. And I'm pretty sure I posted something about it. I don't remember how that went. Maybe some of what's coming up here about male power is displaced from there.

Eventually I did learn more about cricket. Then that lingo became less foreign, but that wasn't enough to gain me entry into that club. Here we have exclusive "country clubs" for golf, is there something like that for cricket there?

Speaking of exclusionary, was Dick invited? If not, why not?

Peter described nicely one of the challenges of online groups: they require multi-tasking, because we don't set aside time in our "real" lives for them. I've actually been suggesting to members of the Continuous Online Group that they schedule time for it. And I sympathize with those who struggle with time management.

Peter also reminded me of something I'd "set aside": we've referred to this as a SG, but there's also a LG aspect: it's a Contexts project / "fishbowl" SG in the Contexts readership LG. Any teaching / performing / whatever for you is also for them.

And the Contexts readership overlaps with the Forum membership. If we were in a circle now, I'd be looking beyond it. In a way, we're talking behind their backs, because they're not "here", but later they'll "hear". Contexts, indeed.

Bob

100.
ROB

Perhaps we should avoid speaking of anyone who can't respond. Maria mentioned Dick, but only in order to contextualise a response to Haim. The point was to reach out to Haim, I think.

Haim and Carla are both being called on today, as Peter was being called on yesterday. There is a fear of hurting and being hurt involved in the call, or so it seems to me.

101.
MARIA

Yes, Rob, exactly, I wanted to reach out to Haim. I know that mentioning someone not being in this group here is a risk. "Ich lehne mich aus dem Fenster", we say in German (I'm taking a leap or "I almost fall out of a window"). But it has been on my mind for a long time now. You see, online groups are powerful and fuel fantasies and even dreams.

The fear of hurting and being hurt is here, but that's the case in every group. Rob, I was moved by your self-disclosure:

"I would like to learn from the women in the group but fear it's not going to happen because of something like ... patriarchy! The turning point was when Maria and Liat began to "dance" with images, and invited the group to join in. That was when Haim slammed his book on the table and demanded that the group respect his expertise.

As I write this I am feeling guilty about something that happened in the large group at the London workshop. Someone brought in a dream and I intervened to say that I felt that it was a flight from "real life". Even in the moment I sensed that I had created a false split in my own mind between the "father" reality and the "mother" dream, and that I was defending my own father, who was in fact a scientist but also a troubled and haunted man (who died tragically, as they say, a long time ago). I think now that in defending my own idea of a fragile father I may have been colluding with a more tyrannical paternity.

Does this have anything to do with online groups? Maybe or maybe not. As I said before I am not much of a leader, just a childless middle-aged man who is in many ways an outsider to the group- analytic world but whose career doesn't depend on the older generation's patronage, which gives me a kind of freedom to speak out (and learn from my mistakes)."

I guess I was especially moved because I was also in London at that workshop you mentioned. Your statement there makes more sense now and I can relate to you more. Thank you for sharing that.

This is something I said at the very beginning: f2f interactions and online communication after events like our GASI Workshops form a continuum, a carpet weaving together different threads, and it gets richer. At least for me. That has happened in the GASI Forum before. Not very often but it did happen.

But what is going on now? We talk about an event where not all members of this group were present. How does that make the ones feel who weren't there? Is it ok to talk about it?

And Rob, why do you feel as an outsider in the group analytic world? For me, you fit perfectly.

Good night,

Maria

102.
LIAT

Dear all,

thank you Rob for honest your disclosure about your confrontation with Haim and Gila. I was touched.

I am following you all and will join you tomorrow again.

Good night,

Liat

103.
CARLA

Dear all,

i'll write you tomorrow... Today was a busy , crazy stormy day!! Carla

104.
TIZIANA

Dear all,

What a change of pace today....

Up until this morning, when Rob wrote about patriarchy, I had the feeling that the med in the group started running and I wasn't able to keep the pace.

Then Maria's and Liat's messages gave me a different feeling, as if I could move slower and breath deeply again.

I also had the impression that we as a group were going into a polarized functioning: the ones who felt flooded by Haim vs the one who didn't, the ones who are open and curious about technology vs the ones who are against it....

I was about to write to specify that I am not a technophobic at all - I use technology quite a lot both in my personal and professional life - even though I had that strong reaction to the quote from Franco Berardi.

Then, when Maria this morning mentioned her child I realised that I misunderstood the meaning of that quote: I got it in a completely black-or-white way, as if the machines should substitute the mother instead of offering further stimulation. I had the image of a sort of robot invented in order to soothe crying newborns - a truly grotesque thing whose advertising was forwarded to me as an horrific curiosity.

So, I was definitely immersed in the polarised dynamic and functioning in that way as well.

I now feel different, as if we could be all more present (hi Peter! :-)).

I am not attending GASI events this year but I like to hear about them: it makes me feel more connected and close to the association and the colleagues that I used to meet regularly!

Good night,

Tiziana

105.

HAIM

Dear all,

I am lagging behind reading the exchange of emails due to Thanksgiving and hosting my family here. I will read the latest communication soon. I understand that Liat was hurt that I had sent my long "educational" email after hers. If you read that email of mine, you will see that it was sent after Carla's message and before I've read Liat's email. This is another difference from f2f groups, where the time sequence of the speakers is clear. Anyway, I want to apologize to Liat and explain that I have read your message only after sending mine.

I also understand that it was not helpful to send such a long quotation from my book. However, it puts me in a real dilemma. I do have a lot to say about the topics that we discuss, but sometimes I do not have enough time to write in detail. It is easier for me to copy some sentences that I have already written. The question is whether the purpose of this forum is to discuss things theoretically or to connect personally. I am not sure that this purpose was defined well enough at the beginning (an important topic to discuss, btw).

Here is a message that I prepared immediately after reading Liat's message a few days ago. I did not send it because I thought that it will be too much in addition to my long

message (I am totally insensitive :-). Now it seems too late, and it also includes a paragraph from my new book that relates directly to what Liat said. If you think that it is redundant, please ignore:

Here it is:

Right now, I am almost at the end of co-editing a book about online therapy. This book will be published with Routledge in 2019. Contrary to my book about online forums ("Alone in the presence of virtual others"), this book deals less with Internet forums dynamics and more with online therapy, especially by using video conferencing (such as Zoom). It includes sections about online individual therapy, couples therapy, GROUP THERAPY and organizational consultation. Here is what I have written in my chapter about online group therapy regarding the absence of the circle (the idea that Liat has mentioned):

the online group loses its classical format of people sitting in a circle. In a face-to-face group, when the group therapist arranges the chairs for the group in a circle (at least in private practice), this closed circular form, with its archaic associations of a womb, conveys the unconscious meaning of a perfect maternal container. Most of the group therapy theories cherish the availability of such a safe and good-enough container in order to work through deep unconscious psychological group processes. Moving from the physical reality to cyberspace tears this container apart. In text-based groups, no circle is evident at all. In video-conferencing groups (e.g. using Zoom application), group members are shown on the screen in boxes, one besides, above and below the other, with no specific order. Actually, we do not even have the same order on all the screens, as each computer is generating a different group composition.

Best Regards,

Haim Weinberg

TUESDAY 27 NOVEMBER

106.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Rob, was that a slip of the fingers? Did you intend "patriarchy"?

Maria, I agree, ongoing online groups can provide a space to continue processing events in "real" life that come to an end.

The only GASi events I've ever been to are the big Symposiums. I feel out of the loop / excluded / like an outsider / envious when other ones are talked about. Here and in the Forum. But it's a position I'm familiar with / have a valence for. I did after all put myself in it by joining / immigrating from so far away. Thanks for asking, and thusly including me. :-)

Can that really be a question, whether it's OK to talk about something that makes someone feel uncomfortable? I guess so, since a subgroup seems to want to avoid talking about an elephant that's not in the room. Is it an issue of being group-analytic? Or, as was mentioned at the beginning, polite?

Bob

107.
BOB

Hi again, everyone,

Haim, thank you, it occurs to me now that the perfect (if I may be so immodest) metaphor for an online group is a cloud, partly because of the reference to cloud computing:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloud_computing

which shares the qualities of not classical, not evident, and with no specific, and not even the same for everyone, order.

Yet a cloud is still a container. One with indistinct and shifting boundaries that sometimes overlap with those of other containers. And it can generate lightning!

Bob

108.
TIZIANA

Bob, I wonder if it's my presence here which makes difficult to talk about the GASI forum (is this the elephant that you meant?).

Or am I being paranoid?

109.
TIZIANA

Yes, I like it! And makes a lot of sense.

And it recalls something very creative - when you look at clouds and can see different shapes :-)

110.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Tiziana, I'm delighted you like the cloud metaphor. :-)

And I meant someone who's not present here, but very present (at least in my experience) in the Forum. Sorry to be so unclear, but I'm feeling unclear about the protocol / boundaries here.

Bob

111.

MARIA

Hi everyone!

I also like the cloud metaphor very much, Bob. And maybe it's even connected to the snowflake. Clouds are dynamically changing, have different shapes, bring rain or snow, have power (lightening)...

I'm also thinking about what you said, about what we are doing here "in secret" without the other GASI Forum members knowing - but later they read about it. I still wonder about the idea to come up with this group and how the members were recruited. Rob? Peter? Any insights?

And Haim, I can very well understand that you want to contribute and you have such a rich repertoire you can draw from. It's a good question whether we want to discuss something here theoretically or more personal. My experience of GA is that it never works without the personal ;). I didn't feel flooded by your email by the way, I just noticed it's a lot of text and a lot of work you have already put into the topic of online groups. I'm impressed also.

Off to work, looking forward to hearing from you all later,

Maria

112.

ROB

By chance this morning I was browsing online and I found a story about this YouTube video (link at the end of my post). It shows a baby entranced by a smartphone who is then very distressed when the carer (mother?) takes the phone away (repeatedly!). I am troubled not only by the video's content but also by the fact that the video was made and then posted online. It seems to show *the baby's preference for the phone over the carer*. It is good to hear from you Haim and I found your idea of the torn-apart maternal container helpful. I am afraid that, unlike Tiziana, I am afraid of this technology (technophobic), though I do not delude myself I can do anything to impede its advance. If I look back on my own life, I see that the Internet would have spared me many lonely and agonising hours as a teenager. But at what cost? Yes I fear what this technology is doing to us and I cannot share the pragmatic attitude to it that others in this group seem to have (though of course I respect the efforts made by those who wish to do therapeutic work in the new medium). I feel lucky not to have to sink or swim and I feel grief for people in their teens and twenties now, who have no choice but to submit to the technology, though perhaps because they are "natives" it is actually no ordeal for them and they would not understand my grief.

Bob, yes I did mean "patriarchy" -- I do not understand why you think it might have been a mistake! Can you explain?

Liat and Maria, thank you for your comments yesterday.

Maria, I will definitely explain the conversation Peter and I had at the beginning -- I will do so near the end (soon!), when I ask everyone to write their closing thoughts.

Carla, I hope we will hear from you!

113.
ROB

Sorry here is the link. It says "funny video" in the caption but I don't think it's funny.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_MNMKyI3j8&feature=youtu.be

114.
MARIA

The video is scary, I would say even sadistic. First causing distress, giving the phone back as consolation (not picking the baby up and actually hold it!) and then laughing. Just cruel. Not funny at all.

I'm now thinking about a research question: are there any studies linking attachment style to being able to deal with technology in a constructive and competent way? Maybe there are certain groups at risk who are especially vulnerable to the destructive potential in cyberspace just like real life challenges of course (getting addicted, getting isolated or depressed, criminal behavior, etc.).

And can parents and teachers teach how to communicate well and use new technology and social media in a healthy way? In German we call it "Medienkompetenz" - is it competence of using media?

Haim, do you know anything about that? Or anybody else?

I also wonder if our conversation here would be possible on the big GASI Forum. What do you think?

Maria

115.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Rob, because what you wrote was "paternity". Which reminded me of our German / Austrian / whatever founders. Paternity in an intellectual sense. As far as biological paternity, all I know is Sigmund begat Anna.

Bob

116.
ROB

Bob, I wrote "patriarchy" earlier in the post. I then used "paternity" because by that time I was talking of something less monumental, and more personal, about masculinity/fatherhood. But I think "begetting" is relevant to our discussion. Sigmund begat Anna who begat nobody (because women cannot "beget" and because Anna had no child).

117.
ROB

The (beginning of) the ending if this group is near. There are two topics that, in my opinion, we have not yet engaged with enough. Perhaps you will agree and anyway I bring them once more to the group's attention. First is the question of nationality (I think once more of Maria and Liat, German and Israeli, dancing, and I remember I was told that there was a lot of discussion on the Forum anticipating conflict between Germans and Israeli in Berlin, but it didn't happen, at least I didn't see it). The second is the image (and the actuality) of Carla's tablet like a piece of armour.

118.
MARIA

Aha! That's why you and Peter invited Liat and me! Gotcha :).

No, seriously, I felt a lot of tension at the Berlin Symposium but my small group was fantastic and challenging at the same time: four Israeli colleagues, two Germans (one was me), many other colleagues feeling strange and even threatened being in Germany. I don't want to go into details but we worked through a lot, I cried a lot, I had to take one complete afternoon off, slept three hours straight, then dressed up, got ready for the large group and the Gala Dinner.

At our Berlin LG one and a half week ago, my colleagues mentioned the Symposium as well and how people were stealing wine bottles from each other at the tables at the Gala Dinner. It happened at my table as well and we thought the waiters took it (not true) so that we order and pay more. So maybe aggression was acted out in that way, taking away enjoyment. Just a hypothesis. But dancing was a complete relief for me. When I dance I'm in the here and now, enjoying the music, my body and the people around me. I don't feel German, just human. And I remember Liat very well since she had the same energy in my perception, a fantastic drive, a passionate style of dancing, self-confident and sexy. For me, it doubles the joy when I meet people on the dance floor who I can share that with.

What I also said in the Berlin LG, also in my reflections on the Ljubljana Summer School (Peter has them already, they are going to be published in the next issue of Contexts) and in personal conversations at the London Workshop: sometimes I think psychoanalysts and group analysts forget that they have a body. Are analysts afraid of their bodies and their sexuality? I will keep asking that question because I think it's very important (for us and our patients) and it probably relates to our founding fathers. I'd be happy to hear some insights from you all.

Kind regards from Berlin,

Maria

119.

PETER

The image of Liat and Maria dancing here in this space causes me to think of how in virtual groups boundaries are somehow dissolved, old (patriarchal?) certainties in our identity made much less present and how this perhaps causes a kind of self-protective armour plated taking of hard positions, something very noticeable in the GASi forum. The absence of the circle as well as the absence of the soft fleshy embodied other further adds hard edges to the encounter. Furthermore, any hope of begetting is significantly diminished online. Is the virtual group, therefore, horribly sexually frustrated?

Peter

120.

MARIA

Yes, there is no looking at each other and very little flirting in online groups. Very frustrating. That could definitely cause frustration and aggression, less openness, politeness and patience. And maybe that's more difficult for men (gender issue again).

That's a very important point, Peter! And I think I understand some Forum dynamics much better now. Thank you! :)

Maria

121.

PETER

Maria,

I sent my message and a second later yours arrived. Intercourse of a kind.... So we nearly came together!!!

Peter

122.

MARIA

Peter, I just laughed out loud. Too bad you couldn't here me! Intercourse indeed and maybe a little flirting, too. ;)

Well, that was fun.

Maria

WEDNESDAY 28 NOVEMBER

123.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

Maria, at the beginning of the Continuous Online Group we usually have an "orientation phase" which is partly to give members an opportunity to learn how to use the technology.

As far as sexuality, this group is preoccupied by the image of two women dancing. Which is safe?

As far as bodies, my mind again goes to the movie Her. Being software, "she" didn't have a body (but did have a voice / wasn't text-based). Still, wow. It's a cliché, but you know what they say the most important sexual organ is:

<http://www.healthywomen.org/content/ask-expert/7789/brain-sexual-organ>

And there's intellectual as well as biological drive, passion, self-confidence, and libido. Biologically, Sigmund begat 6 children. Intellectually, he birthed how many ideas? What a joy it is to dance, perchance to procreate, with someone on a list.

Bob

124.
LIAT

Dear all,

I have very busy days, but it seems impossible to stay apart when "cloud flakes" (I found both Bob's and Maria's ideas innovative because they capture the ever-changing quality of the online group's form and their texture contain the possible softness of the group) turn into the energetic dancing floor.

I didn't dance with Maria in Berlin, we actually danced next to each other, but certainly, I noticed Maria and enjoyed very much to watch her beautiful presence and dance. Maybe we will dance together in the next symposium?

Thank you, Haim, for explaining your mail and your concern. I am not against technology and I have a few skype patients from different countries and I am curious to read your new book. About nationality. I am not sure I understand the topic. Do we want to discuss the encounter with nationalities in online groups or forums? I am not so sure I have a reflection on it. I can try and share my personal experience in regards to my nationality.

I have a lot to say about the Holocaust of course. My grandfather Zorach Warhaftig was a young lawyer in 1939 when the Natsis was about to invade Poland. He realised what is going to happen while many Jews denied the coming danger. He managed to get

6,000 phoney certificates from the Japanese ambassador in Lithuania, Sugihara, and escaped with this large group of Jews to Japan and after that to the states and finally to Israel in 1948. Sugihara was later condemned by the Japanese regime. My family is still in touch with his ancestors and he was recognised as a Righteous Gentile by Israel.

My grandfather's side of the family was saved but my grandmother's family was all killed by the Nazis. I was raised up with my grandfather's courage as the main message, while the presence of the dead was more in the shadow in my family. Usually, I am attracted to discuss the Holocaust with Germans in Symposiums. Those dialogues assist me in being in touch with painful experiences.

More complicated to me is discussing the Israel-Palestinian conflict in Gas forum, mainly with British people who seem to get biased information about the situation in Israel, from media. I am far to justify everything Israel does, but I know the situation in Gasa, for example, is much more delicate than it's described in Media. My daughter who is 21 just finished her army service in the IDF spokesman unit and her boyfriend is an officer stationed in Gasa. We heard from him many times how Palestinian use small kids to fight the soldiers who are prohibited from fighting them back while risking their own lives. I mean that Israel invests thought and efforts in maintaining ethics and the picture of Violent Israelis and poor victim Palestinian is very far from representing reality here. Another feeling here is that Israel is being easily judged while other countries' worst acts of self-defence are ignored.

In forms' ' discussions and in my personal analytic group which includes 6 jews and one Arab -Israeli participant is that dialogue is almost impossible. A few months ago the Arab participant declared that Israelis behave like Natzies. Other members felt mute, and in the next session, I found myself with very poor attendance in the group.

My experience with this topic on online groups is more of a battle and much less of a dialogue.

I hope I contribute to the topic of nationalities online.

Best,

Liat

125.
PETER

Liat,

It's very moving and fascinating to read something of your story. I was thinking how if I was to tell you something of my nationality it would be through a series of stories. I have lots to tell. But rather than do that I thought it a good moment to say something about the composition of this temporary forum. Here we have a complex global spread of nationalities for such a small group. However, when Rob and I initially discussed setting up the group, as I remember it, we thought more about gender and age/generation than nationality. I also thought it important to involve people who are currently present/active in the forum as well attend GASi events. I also thought about

inviting people who are clearly prominent in the field of online work. Not everybody took up the invitation - 2 people in fact, who simply didn't reply. I think it very interesting to have Rob, who is not on the forum but an active participant in GASi events, bringing a fresh and challenging perspective in the interviewer/moderator role.

One more thing, the cloud and snowflake images particularly moved me as earlier this year in January in a very cloudy Birmingham during the GASi Winter Workshop, just as the whole group was travelling to the Northfield Hospital from the workshop venue, it began to snow, the largest snowflakes I have ever seen... it was a magical moment, visiting a mythical place. Snowflakes are falling in the GASi matrix.

Peter

THURSDAY 29 NOVEMBER

126.

HAIM

However, such an intercourse and coming together in front of a group can be perceived as perversion (or an invitation to an orgy)☺

I am sorry that I could not follow the flood of emails in the last days, as I was busy with patents after the holiday vacation. One of the differences between online and f2f communication is that on the Internet responding to email after two days seems obsolete and too late.

Haim

127.

HAIM

List, thanks for sharing. Although I knew some of your personal history, it is still moving.

My previous email, joking about the sexual component, was written before I've read your email. It's the second that my email seems to cut Liat's message. However, I really think that it's part of the difficulty in online communication: you can answer emails from a few hours ago, while the exchange of emails continued and the topic to which you respond is old news.

Haim

128.

MARIA

Dear Haim,

of course you are right about the asynchronicity in online groups. Nevertheless, I think it is never too late to answer to a certain email.

Kind regards,

Maria

129.

MARIA

Dear Liat,

I like your idea of cloud flakes a lot and I think that it is unique (and should be published :)), the combination of cloud and snow flakes. And yes, we didn't dance together but next to each other. In my mind, that was always clear but probably not to the others here in this group. Thank you for clarifying. And sure, we will dance together in Barcelona! How can I say no to that. :)

Thank you also for sharing your family history here. I was also moved very much. Since your grandfather saved a large group of people maybe that's part of you becoming a group analyst. Just a thought that came to my mind.

And I agree that it's very difficult to talk about the Israel-Palastine conflict, in general and on the GASI Forum. I know that the Israeli government doesn't represent what the Israeli people think and feel. In my perception, there is violence and brutality on both sides and I truly wish this war would come to an end one day. Maybe, the inability or difficulty to openly talk and really listen to each other on the Forum represents some of the difficulties that are part of the political conflict. Just wondering. I think we all should try and keep on working to establish proper dialogue. Maybe an Internet Forum is not the best format for that. I'm not sure.

Thanks again for sharing.

Warm wishes from sunny Berlin!

Maria

130.

PETER

Never too late? Haim, how much of the history of an online group (remembering that it's an exact history) is stored and accesible to the group member? Potentially all of it I suppose.

Peter

131.

ROB

A reminder that the group is coming to an end soon. This weekend I will address the problem of reviewing the group history, among other things. So maybe this is my last post before starting to sum up.

I have been thinking about Bob's reference to Anna Freud and begetting (i.e. procreation considered as a paternal act). I raised an eyebrow before at both Haim's use of the word "flood" (which felt retaliatory to me) and Peter's characterisation of my moderating as "fresh and challenging" (which felt passive-aggressive). I am deliberately stretching the limits of politeness by pronouncing these responses, by "disrespecting" the "fathers" in this group (remember I have spoken more than once about not being a father or a leader).

What has this to do with Anna Freud? Anna was the "good daughter" who never became a mother (though she was a kind of stepmother). Foulkes likewise was a "good son": as far as I am aware he remained allied to the Anna Freud grouping at the Institute of Psychoanalysis. And though Foulkes was a pioneer, he was a conservative and uninteresting psychoanalytic thinker. (Note again my "parricidal" disrespect!)

Now I come to my point. Where are Melanie Klein and the Kleinians in all of this? When the great battle came at the Institute of Psychoanalysis after Freud died, the Kleinians had to plot and fight in order to survive and to advance psychoanalysis against the conservative faction led by Edward Glover and including Anna Freud.

Are the women of the younger generation of group analysts willing to do something similar? Would it even be possible -- is there the intellectual foundation and political will?

To sink or swim? To flirt or fight? To fight and actually have to take power...? And if it happened, whose side would a nonfather like me be on?

132.
TIZIANA

Talking about Kleinans...

Rob, I smiled while reading your message since just yesterday I handed in my notice at the Tavistock and I went for the last time to the service where I used to work to say goodbye to the team. It was an emotional day for me. Not that this is linked to what you meant but I found the coincidence amusing - and it feels good to share it.

I am in between sessions now, will link up to more posts later.

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER

133.
BOB

Hi, everyone,

When we were talking about joining the Forum before, I went back into its history to "remember" actually what I'd posted and how the group had responded. Speaking of nationalities, my being American was the focus. It must have been later that I posted about the elephant.

There's biological paternity, and intellectual paternity, and also what we might call treatment paternity. If I was psychoanalyzed by X, and X was psychoanalyzed by Y, and Y was psychoanalyzed by Freud, then I'd be Freud's psychoanalytic great-grandson. Do group analysts care about that? About who Foulkes group-analyzed, who they then group-analyzed, etc.? Do they take pride in their GA paternity?

Rob, I must say, your limits of politeness aren't the same as mine. It doesn't surprise me you're not on the Forum. You also seem to be holding childlessness for us, and possibly the larger system. Which represents not being generative / stagnating? At our beginning you asked:

> Does this mean the end of group analysis as we know it?

Is GA stagnating because it's too polite / respectful? Not flirting / fighting? I'm delighted that we've procreated / co-created the "cloud flake". I'm going to have a cigarette. :-)

Bob