THE TAVISTOCK CENTURY

2020 Vision

Edited by

Margot Waddell and
Sebastian Kraemer

PHOENIX
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Preface

Margot Waddell

A spirit of hope permeates this book; hope that we might succeed in communicating something of the spirit, passion even, with which the whole Tavistock staff, that is receptionists, secretaries, porters, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, social workers and nurses, trainees and consultants alike, have been able, over the years, to bring about a cohesive working relationship—one that could embrace the changing post-war social and political conditions, and also to embrace a new world within the NHS structure of 1948.

In the following pages, we have sought to unite a multiplicity of our own voices—each speaking, and in our own idiom, about what it has been like to be a part of the formation and sustaining of an institution dedicated to taking in, bearing and working with the intensity, for so many, of the pain of being alive, who could—despite all—hold onto the decency, thoughtfulness, and non-judgemental reality of what that work required.

Some have written at length, some very briefly, about the spirit of innovation that was involved; about the capacity to sustain contradictions and to risk change. In the early days, work in the NHS attracted people who found it worthwhile to struggle with issues of "insight and responsibility", an aspect of Erik Erikson's work that had so struck Anton Obholzer, whose conception this book is, when Erikson visited South Africa to think and write about the work of Gandhi.

A favoured metaphor that, implicitly or explicitly, runs through these pages is a horticultural one, a reference point for Anton—that of the relationship between the "rootstock" and the capacity to grow into, and to share, a common orchard. The rootstock, may, with time, bear quantities of varieties of, say, apples, but the basic tree remains at the core. The disparate and, in a creative sense, maverick contributions that follow epitomise something of the daring and dedication of this Tavistock institution to do things differently, to be able to trust in some kind of central graft while yielding so many and such distinct fruits.

To trace the history of a single institution over 100 years is no mean undertaking. We have chosen to concentrate on the later years of the Tavistock's being—the years leading up to, and expressed by, its place in the NHS, a history based in the personal memories recounted by those who have contributed to this volume. The early years have been formally and beautifully recorded by Henry Dicks in his "Fifty Years of the Tavistock Clinic" (1970). Many of those who were involved in these Second World War years speak of their lasting respect for the men and women who led the way, and we can celebrate, in this volume, what that legacy really amounted to. For example, the choice of publisher for this book, Phoenix Publishing House, evokes for us the band of war psychiatrists—Jock Sutherland, Wilfred Bion, John Rickman, John Bowlby, Eric Trist, and others—who carrying forward certain beliefs about what constituted mental health and how to work with that on the traumatic battles lines, were the same psychiatrists and social scientists who formed "Operation Phoenix", as the founding characters of what became the NHS model of Tavistock thinking.

One of the most lasting aspects of the thinking of this group had been characterised by Wilfred Bion, an army psychiatrist who had fought as an adolescent tank commander in the First World War, and had worked for the pre-NHS Tavistock during the 1930s until he was called up. Bion made the crucially important distinction between something he called the "work group" by contrast with the "basic assumption group". This distinction is central to our story. What was it that allowed, indeed fostered and nurtured the capacity for a disparate body of workers genuinely to cooperate together for the good of all? What was the nature of the forces that undermined that capacity, the ones that favoured some fantasy of an "ideal" saviour and an "ideal" couple who would produce a solution, or who would flee from responsibility? This was by contrast with those who could work with contradictions, with splitting, negation, denial—in other words, the stuff of group processes, either as staff or as general group members.

To take full account of the extensive and diffuse undertakings and innovations of this group, as it extended over the years, would require many volumes and we have had to limit ourselves, painfully, to an indicative selection. In general, the book traces a developmental path from the wartime psychiatric forces that played such a formative part in the thinking of Operation Phoenix. This group of thinkers drew on the societal and psychological changes of the following years, and took the original thinking forward into the post-war territory of the new NHS. As will become evident in the following pages, that progressive tradition was a powerful, even inspirational one.

We begin with some fairly lengthy pieces which cover aspects of the early history. There are two in particular: on the one hand, the legacy of the innovative thinking that shaped insight into the nature of leadership and group participation that was so fundamental to the clinic's formative thinking, and, on the other, the inspiring work of John Bowlby and James Robertson in relation to the preconditions for the psychic development of children who needed medical care, or were separated from their parental base. Those longer contributions also include accounts of post-war developments in psychiatric, social, psychoanalytic, systemic, and group thinking and the central importance of combining aspects of all such areas in order, collectively, to develop a new institutional base. It soon became clear that such a base required the

emotional watershed steps that need to be understood in the course of making one's way across the life cycle.

If we started this book now it would no doubt be rather different. We would have given more space to current social injustices which, while always present, have rapidly become mainstream in possibly hopeful ways. Following its long tradition of working with the effects of personal trauma, abuse and neglect, the Tavistock's increasing concern during the twenty-first century with people disadvantaged by migration, racism and sexual prejudice could be the starting point for a second volume.

* * *

Margot Waddell

Biographical details are hard for those, like me, who need to go back to the very beginning. My external biographical story is relatively simple, but the inside story is not. In terms of my adult life and the strength of my commitment to the Tavistock, something of the background story does need to be told.

From an early age, I wanted to be a clever and effective person, like my wonderful father (a working-class scholarship boy from Edinburgh whose own father had fought in the trenches and whose grandfather had regularly driven the Flying Scotsman in four hours from London to Edinburgh). My mother had been brought up, much like Bion, under the Indian Raj. It was she who taught me how to speak and to engage with the literary qualities of life.

She was, however, slow to realise the extent to which I suffered at the ghastly girls' day schools to which I was consigned (while the boys went to posh boarding schools) and I desperately wanted to go to a local state high school. Finally, I prevailed, was properly taught, and ended up at Cambridge, loving the experience and going on to do a PhD on George Eliot and her intellectual history background.

Halfway through my research, however, I suffered a crisis of conscience: what was I doing in academe when some of my close and talented friends were in the local psychiatric hospital and two of them had committed suicide? I wanted to leave and become a psychiatrist, but my parents couldn't afford that. A good friend suggested that I ask her godfather for advice: "His name is John Bowlby and he works in London at a clinic called the Tavistock." That was the beginning of the rest of my life.

Much later, at Anton Obholzer's suggestion, I applied, soon after qualifying, for a job in the Adolescent Department at the Tavistock, where, I had, effectively, grown up. I was not even shortlisted and it was only thanks to the intervention of Lydia Tischler who, not knowingly at the time, had insisted that I be put on the shortlist, "out of principle", as she told me at a chance encounter with her recently. This was the key that opened the door to my future.

Not surprisingly, then, all the seeds of my lifelong devotion to the work of the Tavistock were sown very early on. In brief, my birth in 1946 meant that my already traumatised brother, having lived with his equally traumatised mother through the London Blitz, then suffered the

experience, so vividly described in Mary Lindsay's chapter on Bowlby and the Robertsons' work, in this book, of being effectively banished and abandoned during my mother's "confinement". He never really recovered. Yet at eight years old he was sent to boarding school, as was the custom at the time.

In the post-war years, the boys tended to be sent to boarding school and the girls hung around hoping to be air hostesses or to marry and settle down after attending a finishing school. My own trajectory, however, was different. Fresh from academe, two things immediately mentally and emotionally knocked me over. I asked my then tutor, Martha Harris, what I should read before embarking on two years of infant observation, as a prelude, possibly, to training. She paused before saying: "Don't read anything. Preconception blocks observation." Shortly after that I met Wilfred Bion at a summer seminar at the Tavistock. He was talking about the plethora of theories involved in any kind of psychoanalytic training—so much so, he said, "that sometimes one cannot tell the wisdom for the knowledge". My "real" learning, as opposed to my academic aspirations, began here.

For it was "here" that I started to have the courage to learn from my own experience and not from any excessive ambitions of an academic kind. Despite knowing that my research was closely related to George Eliot's perception of precisely that skewed picture of what "success" looks like, I had not taken it in, personally. The rest of the story is short and simple. I worked my way, devotedly, through the adolescent training. I learned from my students in our many deeply reciprocal encounters. I became head of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy in the Department and tried my best to extend what I was learning in the many published works and lectures that I managed to produce. In 1978 I took on, together with Nick Temple, editing what became known as the Tavistock Clinic Book Series. We have just published the fifty-sixth book. These, along with the Tavistock's other accomplishments, extended across the world. What I felt that I had learned from the quality of the Tavistock's attitudes was fundamentality informative.

So, for now, my legacy is the three books (1998, 2004, 2018) and many journal articles and book chapters, that I believe to be reaching readers far and wide and in many different translations. There were some truly inspirational figures in my background to whom I shall be forever grateful, my parents above all. My mother offered me a crucial gift, alongside her emotional generosity and selfless care for others. As alluded to earlier, she taught me how to communicate, how to speak, how to love literature and to express that in my own idiom. This legacy is one that the Tavistock continually fostered and, hopefully, will be passing on. As these few details attest, both personally, politically, and professionally, "growing up" is a central issue and one with which we all need, urgently, to engage.

Inside Lives: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of Personality, Duckworth, 1998 (Karnac, 2002).
Understanding 12–14-Year-Olds, Rosendale Press, 2004 (Jessica Kingsley, 2005).
On Adolescence: Inside Stories, Routledge, 2018.

Foreword: The Tavistock enigma

Anton Obholzer

Dedication: To all members of Tavi families, not only the so-called "stars" but everyone who has contributed to our existence—thank you.

This book could easily be mistaken for a Festschrift of a pop group instead of what it really is. The idea of celebration is very much on the mark because the contents cover the first 100 years of the work of the Tavi. The fan club element is, however, far off the mark because little could be a more serious contribution to our present-day society's personal and work practice than the narratives detailed in these pages.

The Tavi is a worldwide community of people with states of mind that have in common a wish to be in touch with what really goes on in the actual world as opposed to the make-believe one that is so commercially peddled in the media and elsewhere. It is devotedly multidisciplinary in its membership. There are many differences, but they all have the same intellectual "bone marrow" of believing in observation and subsequent hypothesis building, rather than the usual, reflex "flight into action".

What the book sets out to do is to record societal and psychological change, growth, and development over the past century from a Tavistock perspective. A process led, in part, by the Tavistock taking up social and psychological ideas that were already present in the wider society, and ripe for application (see Stokes, Chapter 39).

A constant in the field of individual, group, and institutional dynamics is to ensure that the work undertaken by both client and consultant does not fail on account of our falling into states of hopelessness and despair, or of omnipotence and dishonesty. To achieve this balance requires regular monitoring, as well as thought and humility. These same principles apply in specific industries and tasks. Under "personal industries" we might place family and child

rearing, from infancy, through childhood, adolescence, parenthood; education; workplace roles; midlife; retirement; and death.

There are many forefathers and some foremothers of the Tavi who need to be retrieved. The mothers are nowadays coming to the fore again, given the greater awareness of women's contributions in society. Melanie Klein and Anna Freud always had key places in the front rows of analytic institutes, but there were many others. Inevitably there are many men to be mentioned, premier, of course, being Freud and Jung. A further one is Erik Erikson, a Danish-American who described the life cycle in which a series of emotional watershed steps need to be mastered in the move from birth to death. Many of these steps are there in the various sections of the book (though Erikson was never knowingly connected with the Tavistock).

By contrast, Wilfred Bion, one of the "Tavi greats", made crucial observations about groups and the adult workplace, in particular the existence of work and basic assumption groups. In the latter the individual "gave up" their personal identity and operated as part of the unconscious "slipstream" and thought of the group and its direction of travel. These were the basic assumption "fellow travellers" of whom there always are many. By contrast the "workplace state of mind" members mostly retained their individual identity and functioned accordingly, whatever setting and application they were in. These two states of mind—basic assumption and work group—obviously play a key role in organisations, particularly in the public sector and in the workplace. Bion began to conceive this distinction when working with other army psychiatrists and psychologists in the War Office Selection Boards (WOSB) during the Second World War. These colleagues went on to create the revived Tavistock—Operation Phoenix—after the war was over.

Basic assumptions are associated with all of human activity, creating a social defensive system that protects us from the "fallout" of anxieties in groups of any kind. So the health system is there to shield us from death, the army from uncontrolled violence, the education system has its own defensive role, and so on. The names of Eric Miller, Isabel Menzies Lyth, Elizabeth Bott Spillius, Pierre Turquet, Bob Gosling—all key Tavistock senior staff—come to mind. As has often been said by philosophers, "mankind can but little cope with emotional pain". We therefore create the above-mentioned social systems—the "unbearable detritus" being handed to the office bearers of these systems, to doctors, teachers, police, and so on.

The Tavistock approach is strongly anchored in observation and thought, as opposed to flight and denial. Only a few decades ago young hospitalised children in long-term orthopaedic wards were allowed one parental visit a week, if that. Nowadays it would be hard to find a paediatric ward that does not cater for the mother or carer to stay overnight, if the child is admitted as a patient (see Lindsay, Chapter 5). What we now know from research and observation is that, besides protection from psychological harm, the time taken for post-operative healing is reduced when children in hospital have mothers or carers with them. Not surprisingly there are many other conditions which "lurked underground" without their disturbing effects on everyday life being noted. For example, abortion or stillborn babies were not often acknowledged as significant emotional triggers affecting family and personal dynamics, sometimes for

life (see Bourne, Chapter 11). These changes in our understanding of our basic, evolutionary human need for protection are due to the research work of the other "Tavi great" John Bowlby, and his co-workers at the Clinic, James and Joyce Robertson, Mary Ainsworth, and their successors.

Until the later part of the last century, little attention was paid to the unconscious dynamics of group and institutional processes. Disturbances were either seen as "individual issues" and sometimes treated as an individual, or else dealt with by attempting to "manage them away". These approaches still have a considerable ideological hold in psychology and in business schools. They are presented as the one and only way of diagnosing and treating problems rather than one of a handful of possible approaches. The danger, then, is to stick to one's theory about the problem and pursue its pseudo-solution without considering other options; in fact to pursue the pseudo-solution with more and greater energy until one finally hits the ultimate brick wall. Wilfred Bion encouraged the consultant/coach to be "free of memory and desire", a useful reminder when entering a foreign system to keep an open mind without a preconception as to what might be going on. The response to be avoided is to be stampeded into a solution which precisely parallels the problem brought for discussion. The result being that coaches are pushed into the role of "snake-oil salesmen".

So what is this book about? Not surprisingly, a question is what should be included and discussed and what not; where are the boundaries of the various Tavi "tribal" units? What is true Tavi and what is, as a colleague pithily put it "the wrong side of the blanket"? I am often struck by the parallels that happen in religious organisations—Shia or Sunni, Catholic or Protestant. The Afghans annually hold a Durga (meeting) which invites all tribal subgroups to attend. The first day is all friendship and help, the second work, on the third day it is all fight, difference, and AK47s. And so it often is with Tavi-style meetings. The narcissism of small differences and the wish to convert others to one's own way of thinking by contrast with listening, and agreeing that *there are many different ways of seeing things.* We fully recognise that we cannot satisfy and acknowledge everyone and their perspective, and, in fact, might please no one. But that is the reality of the everyday Tavi in the world today, so it is no surprise that in writing about the phenomenon, we are also re-enacting the various behaviours we are writing about.

The Tavistock was founded in 1920 in Tavistock Square, London as the Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology. This organisation still exists and is the rootstock and original trunk of the structures that exist today. To continue with the horticultural image, it is the trunk from which all the so-called Tavis branch off. The original trunk, when the NHS was created after WWII, led to the development of the *Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust*, a UK National Health Service (NHS) public sector structure. A main branch leading from the original trunk is the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations—the Tavistock institute which deals with socially concerned organisations, government policy, research, and consulting. The Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology continues to exist and remains as sponsor of the marital institute now known as Tavistock Relationships. There are many other related family saplings, some called "Tavistock", others by their original names, for example the Portman Clinic.

What in all of this can be specifically identified in the emotional and professional DNA of the Tavi? Respect, careful observation, co-workership, the risk and avoidance of hubris, omnipotence, and burnout issues.

How does one preside over and lead a creative organisation with all its difficulties, rivalries, and prima donna type behaviour? To quote from a chapter on the role of the administrator in a recent book, *Turning the Tide,* about the Tavistock Fitzjohn's Unit, "You can tell immediately it's a Fitzjohn's patient by the expression on their face—they quickly want to pass it on" (Lane & Nicholls, 2018, p. 38). Receptionists in GP surgeries—and any GP will readily concede how valuable their receptionist is to their practice—frequently have to contend with people whose behaviour may become distorted under the pressure of pain and anxiety. The role of their receptionist, known as "Ibi", rightly occupies the whole of Lane and Nicholls' chapter in the Fitzjohn's Unit book (Meyerowitz & Bell, 2018). As acknowledged in the dedication to that book, it is the administrative staff who make for the fertile and rich soil in which the Tavistock tree can flourish. If the soil and tree are neglected, the crop will be small, ordinary, and not distinguishable from the bland, tasteless commercial crop which meets the requirements of auditors and accountants. If that happens creativity is lost, as is learning and innovation. The product becomes indistinguishable from everyday routine products. This, in turn, puts creative institutions at risk of becoming as sterile as the industrial products they produce. As Oscar Wilde said, "they know the price of everything and the value of nothing".

What follows are chapters on inducing and fostering professional technical creativity which include warmth, pleasure, fun, and a degree of delinquency.

* * *

Anton Meinhard Obholzer

I was born in 1938 of Austrian parents in Stellenbosch, Cape Province, South Africa. My father had been recruited by the University of Stellenbosch to head the Department of Physical Education which was in its early stage of development. His tenure was short lived, as was his early role of father, since all "enemy aliens" were interned by the South African regime. After some time, he was repatriated to Austria, leaving his wife and child to cope as best we could in South Africa. He was not able to return until 1948.

I grew up in the care of my mother who struggled with her abandoned situation and also by my aunt who, I later realised, did most of the missing parenting role and loving of me as a child. We spoke German at home, English at school, Afrikaans with the neighbours, and my nanny was Xhosa. After many years of reflection and analysis I've come, not surprisingly, to the conclusion that this early dynamic "stew" I grew up in provided the raw material for much, if not all, of my adult life and career.

I matriculated from St Patrick's, the Christian Brothers College in Kimberley (the diamond mining town) and after that took a gap year in Europe. This was my first contact with my extended family about whom I had heard so much from my mother but had actually never

met on account of the war. Returning to South Africa I enrolled at Stellenbosch University for a degree in forestry. It did not take long for me to realise that I was more interested in people than in trees and I managed to switch to Cape Town University Medical School where I qualified in medicine in 1963.

After a hectic period in casualty departments in the Cape slums and in general practice, I felt the need to have more contact and insight into people's emotional/social lives and embarked on training as a specialist psychiatrist. The then head of department, Professor Lynn Gillis, to whom I owe a lifelong debt, encouraged all trainees to follow their own bent, so when at the height of political troubles in the mid- to late 1960s Erik Erikson passed through the Cape to research his book on Gandhi (1969), I was blown away by his "Insight and Freedom"[1] lecture that he gave to the University (Erikson, 1968). A combination of this, and some time spent in a mix of farming and antique dealing on the side, led to a bursary to explore the European roots of some aspects of Cape culture.

In retrospect it's not hard to make links between my early life and a subsequent search for my identity.

So we, my wife, Annabel, an artist, and our three young children arrived in England in the early 1970s. Instead of returning to the Cape as originally planned, we found our way into the rich opportunities for life and work in London. When the bursary money ran out, my first job was in a psychiatric "bin" on night duty and on call to the elderly demented patients who had fallen out of bed. From then onwards I had a foot on the more compelling psychiatric/psychoanalytic ladder and trained at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Tavistock Clinic, and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

It is likely that it was my early experience, living in a complex societal system, that allowed me to enter and appreciate complicated systems of interaction, particularly in the mental health field. I had learnt not to take denial and repression as a given, but that it was quite possible to turn such matters on their head and, more likely, to thrive. This quality became particularly necessary at certain key points of the Tavistock's history, for example when the Tavistock was part of the same management group as neighbouring NHS units that were determined to asset strip our resources for their own benefit. With the collective efforts of colleagues and with the positive attitude of the members of the Tavistock and Portman Trust, we managed to achieve our independence and to preserve an atmosphere of research and adventure which was sadly lacking in much of the rest of the NHS. The pressure to conform to standards that are laid down for solely financial and political purposes remains a threat to our future to this day, yet it needs to be robustly defended against in confirming our ongoing work and existence. Conforming to measures of uniformity and survival are likely to lead to the death of the organisation, but as ever, the battle continues.

Note

1. Based on Erikson's *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytical Insight* (1964)