

Synopsis of Day 4, April 27, 2008, morning session Subgroup 3: Working on our personal and collective history of war and trauma using sound as a channel of expression

Preparation and Facilitation

Preparation and designated facilitation-Team: Reini Hauser and Lukas Hohler

Preparation support: Mark O'Connell and Lane Arye

Facilitation morning session: Lukas Hohler and Lily Vassiliou (who volunteered to fill in for Reini who had an eye-emergency. Reini was also present in the session.) Lily helped with the final tweaking of the format.

Setting

Mark O'Connell, Gareth Williams and Sonja Slany were with us and recorded all the sounds.

Synopsis

Introduction

We introduced ourselves and the idea of doing a group process on the issue of trauma and abuse using sound as a means of expression (without verbal content).

Before introducing the topic we asked everyone to take responsibility for themselves and decide if this is the right time and the right context for them to work on issues of trauma and abuse. We encouraged people to feel free to take the morning off if they needed to, or to observe the process rather than participate if that was what felt best to them.

Inner Work

We then introduced the archetypal roles of victim, offender and bystander and asked everyone to go inside and think of situations that came to mind when they experienced themselves in one or more of these roles.

We set up a space in the room for each of the three roles – victim, offender, bystander – and asked people to let themselves navigate to the role they felt pulled by or interested in exploring in the moment. It was interesting that the three groups were about the same size.

Finding the Sound of Each Role

After having set up the three subgroups we worked with each subgroup individually (while the others were holding the space and observing) taking them through the following steps with the purpose of each sub-group/role finding its sound:

1. Each person, go inside, feel into your momentary experience of that role and express it in sound.
2. To begin with, stay with expressing your individual sound while others are expressing their individual sound.
3. Now, begin to listen to the sounds of the other people around you, and notice how these sounds influence you.
4. Allow yourself to be influenced and continue to interact through sound until a collective sound emerges.

The processes that each subgroup went through were very similar. First people started making their individual sounds (often with closed eyes) the expression of which led many almost immediately to experiencing and expressing stronger and stronger emotions: tears, shaking and movement emerged along with the sounds. Out of these individual sounds a group sound eventually emerged in an average of about five minutes. Once the collective sound had emerged we conducted the group to fade out and moved on to the next group. We began with the group standing in the role of the victim, and then proceeded with the group standing in the role of the bystander and last with the group standing in the role of the offender.

Facilitation on our part was minimal:

- When we were working with the group that was exploring the role of the victim, as well as with the group that was exploring the role of the bystander we supported the expression of emotions that were emerging by standing near them.
- When we were working with the group exploring the role of the offender, we noticed and followed our tendency to stand between them and the group of people standing in the role of the victim, forming a protective barrier with our bodies. This seemed to give more freedom to the people exploring the role of the aggressor to go deeper into their experiences, as they were expressing them through sounds.

All the groups seemed to go through a similar phase of expressing the emotions they were experiencing in the role they were exploring (moving from consensus reality to dreamland) and then sinking deeper to a common ground beneath these feelings (moving from dreamland to the realm of the essence), which was expressed in a different sound/tone¹.

After all the groups had found their collective sound (sound files # 1 (5:30-10 from audio file #0089), #2 (11:40-15:18 from audio file #0089), #3 (16:47-21:09 from audio file #0089)) we asked all three groups to make their sound simultaneously for a couple of minutes without interacting with one another (sound file #4 (24:44-25:48 from audio file #0089)).

Interaction of the Three Roles

We then encouraged the three subgroups to begin making their group sounds again, but this time, begin to interact with one another (sound file #5 (27:26-28:42 from audio file #0089 and 00:00-5:30 (? not sure how long to make this part) from audio file # 0091)). The subgroup representing the experience of the victim began making its sound first. The group representing the bystanders followed, and last the group representing the offenders.

The victims formed a circle and fenced themselves off against the offenders who, at first, tried to interact with the victims. Since they all had their backs turned against them and were focussing on one another going deeper into their sound and essence, the offenders could not interact with the victims. Meanwhile the bystanders approached the offenders and started to interact with them (based on their group sound). Dances emerged between bystanders and offenders that expressed theatrically that the bystanders were taking action and challenging the offenders, who in return interacted with the bystanders. In this challenge of the offenders by the bystanders there was a matching of the energy of the offenders. After a while the two subgroups started to dissolve and mix in movement as well as sound.

In the meantime, the victims who had remained focused inside without interacting with any of the other subgroups had dropped collectively into a lower octave sound, which now began to strongly influence the scene and the diversity of sounds around them (sound file #6 (6:50-9:40 from audio file #0091)).

Based on that sound the whole group moved into a collective sound (sound file #7 14:00-18:45 from audio file #0091)). People were moving, standing or sitting. Different sound patterns (rhythm, pitch) emerged and disappeared again. The group eventually formed a

circle at the center of which a man from an Eastern European country was dancing face to face with a man from an African country². The sound culminated in intensity and then quieted down and in the end there was a spontaneous cheer, laughter and then a silence... All of us were sitting in a big circle. It was a deep moment – hard to describe... The process of the interaction of the three roles in sound completed itself in 18 minutes.

Sharing the Experience

After sitting with the silence for a few minutes a woman who was exploring the role of the victim shared her experience with the group. At first, as she reported, she felt deep pain. Staying with her experience, feeling the pain and expressing it through sounds she found herself sinking deeper and deeper into the pain, and from there into a deep peacefulness which was expressed through a deeper tone. When the rhythmical clapping started, toward the end of the sound interaction, it instantly triggered the pain in her, and she thought to herself, “oh... here we go again...” feeling attacked by the loud sound. And then she realized there was a moment of choice. Though the clapping sounded to her like a whip slashing a body, she realized that slashing was on the surface, and couldn’t really harm her. The peace was still there. She could choose to stay connected to the peace. From that deep place within everything felt connected – even the clapping, it was the energy of life³.

Another woman shared her motivation behind exploring the role of the offender, sharing with the group that she was in the position, as a social welfare worker in her home country (Mexico) of having to tell people there would be no more housing provided for them by the state. This was the beginning of a new group process. There were still many experiences, histories, agonies needing to be voiced and listened to and they were begging to emerge. We framed this and led the group to a break for some tea to make space for the momentary resolution that had just occurred and for all the feelings we had just experienced to sink in before we dived into the next group process.

Soundbath & Inner Work

After the break we asked everyone to find a spot to sit or lie down and played back the last 8 minutes of sound before the break, which was the culmination of the emerging of the collective sound and encouraged everyone to notice their body experience, as they were bathed in this sound, move with it, find a figure that moves that way, become this figure and look through its eyes at the abuse situation they had thought about in the inner work at the beginning of the morning. Then we asked them to bring this figure's perspective into that abuse situation.

After that we gathered for a sharing – curious to hear some of the experiences that people had been having.

Feedback

This is some of what was said:

- Non verbal expression helps you to get past blocks of the mind, and get to feelings much faster, which you usually stop yourself from experiencing, like for example the pain that was underneath the anger of the hurter role
- Fast transitioning from dreamland to essence level through sound (for example, in the victim role the sound transformed quickly from cries and screams of what felt like pain and agony to a deep hum that made you feel somehow a deep peacefulness; in the offender role, the sound transformed relatively quickly from angry sounds to a rhythmic “marching” sound of what felt like pure life force, or life energy)
- Healing body experience to bath in the sound of the essence.

- Sound bath of the “essence” sound (i.e., the sound that emerged toward the end of the interaction of all three group sounds) brought for them a different perspective on the whole experience. For example, a woman reported that when she listened to the playback of the collective sound she had a different experience than when she was listening to it as it was emerging. She noticed that she was more able now to allow herself to experience the sound than when it was emerging, when she was resisting going with it.

Our thoughts / De-briefing

The structure of the morning of day four emerged from a disturbance: the large room was not available that day so the organizing team came up with the idea of splitting the large group into three sub-groups, each of which would work on the same “umbrella” theme using a different modality – theater, sound and movement. The theme was “Our personal and collective history of war and trauma”

By the end of day three it was apparent that a lot of issues were pressing to come forward and a lot needed to be expressed. Based on our observations, and what we heard from the other subgroups, it seems that in spite of the great pressure for issues to come forward participants:

- went along with the idea of working in three subgroups instead of the large group for one morning;
- welcomed a change of channels – a switch from verbal to non-verbal communication
- welcomed the opportunity to choose a channel of expression;
- followed a structured approach to do a group process around a pre-defined “umbrella” theme that everybody has personal experiences with.

Exciting is the notion of deep democracy:

- All the voices, feelings and people are important and needed: in all of the three subgroups, literally everyone was able to participate and express themselves in the group process, and experienced a transformative way to work on a simultaneously personal and collective issue. Everybody was actively involved.
- All dimensions of experience are valuable and need to be addressed: it seems that channels such as sound and movement provide fast access to the experiences in the realm of “dreamland,” and allow for a quick transition from the realm of “dreamland” to the realm of “essence”

In our view this format seems to be very useful and worthy of further research and application at future worldwork seminars or group processes.

May 2008, Lukas, Reini, Lily

¹ Our observations on the sounds:

- In the sound file (#0089) with the exploration of the role of the victim sounds from 5:30 to 8:00 are sounds expressing the realm of dreamland, while at 8:00 an essence sound began to emerge.
- In the sound file (#0089) with the exploration of the role of the bystander sounds from 11:40 to 14:24 are sounds expressing the realm of dreamland, while at 14:25 an essence sound began to emerge.
- In the sound file (#0089) with the exploration of the role of the offender sounds from 16:47 to 19:22 are sounds expressing the realm of dreamland, while at 19:22 a base sound began to emerge and from 20:30 to 21:09 an essence sound emerged.

- In the sound file (#0091) containing the interaction of the three roles in sound it seems to us that at 5:30 a base sound is beginning to emerge from the group representing the experience of the victim, which as it turned out became the base of the group sound that emerged. At 6:50 a jamming around that base sound begins and a "Native American" sound emerges. From 8:00 to 9:40 a jamming around the base sound and the "Native American" sound emerges. At 12:00 a clapping begins bringing in a different energy. At 14:00 it seems like an essence sound is beginning to emerge.

² Interview with Eastern European man on his experience can be heard in sound file #8 ([interview eastern European man](#))

³ Interview with this woman on her experience can be heard in sound file #9 ([interview Kristy](#)).