

I negotiated a lot about what I should say today at this honorary seminar for Katia Charalabaki and Fotis Kotsidas, where I was told I could say whatever I wanted... Should I talk about you, my teachers? About the Unit? About myself? In the end, I decided to speak about the impact of this four-year training on my journey so far...

FROM THE UNIT (I) TO THE GROUP (WE) ¹⁰

I will explain my title by reflecting on the past...

My personal retrospection: Up until 2007, when I joined the Family Therapy Unit, my five years of experience in the field of psychology were connected to psychoanalysis. I worked in psychoanalytic settings, I did personal work, and I was in psychoanalytic therapy and supervision, and I focused on individual therapeutic practice. However, I had always been interested in groups, and was curious about how one works therapeutically with more than one person. So, I began to search, ask, and listen with a desire to see things differently, to work with different populations, and to enrich my early psychoanalytic knowledge. That's how I ended up at the Family Therapy Unit, knowing that I would be one of the 21 people in training. I will return to this point later. There, we would be trained in a systemic way of thinking within a group of fellow trainees, guided by a team of instructors-teachers, with the prospect of working, in the future, with the "family group." In the very second lecture, after receiving an article from Ms. Thanopoulou titled "From Psychoanalysis to Systems" from the book Milan Systemic Family Therapy, I felt relief, as it resonated with me: From the unit to the group of the unit!

¹⁰*This paper is based on a lecture given at a conference held in October 2024 to celebrate the 30 years of operation of the Family Therapy Unit of the Attica Psychiatric Hospital, and a farewell to the founders of the Unit.*

The group is a space where the unconscious is expressed, as Anzieu (1975) and Kaës (2007) said, where specific psychic phenomena are manifested. The desire to work in a group has roots in both conscious and unconscious motives, and beyond the transference and countertransference with the therapists, the trainers – in our case – we could also talk about the concept of "intertransference," which refers to the transferences occurring among group members. This is what I am going to talk about, bringing to mind our own group, which over these four years has had an evolving trajectory, and was able to hold and contain both the difficult and easy moments of each person, not leaving anyone out. On the contrary, everyone found their place within it, creating a dynamic that withstood the test of time. Seventeen years later, we continue to have our online group, where we continue to share, entrust, and wonder. Some have moved abroad, others have moved outside Athens, but anytime one of us comes back, it is a reason for us to meet up in person. Thus, inspired by today's seminar, I invited the group to reflect on how we experienced our time here to reach an insight, much like we had done during our first two years of training. I would like to share with you - representing my former classmates and now precious friends - our current reframing of our past experience here: "Through our valuable training at the Unit, our thinking shifted to a new perspective, a new way of interpreting things. Over the years of family therapy training, we also became a group/family. The experience of sharing our genograms connected us forever."

The genograms allow a connection between the present, past, and future, through which it could be said that one connects with their roots, thus enabling the proper functioning of consciousness. We can also mention that the function of genograms resonates, as we learned from Ms. Kati, with the description of the function of myths that form the history and memories of a people. The genograms from the third year of training, with their symbolic interpretations by Ms. Charalabaki, represented a pivotal sharing among the members of the group, but also a passage from sharing each person's family history to a professional sharing of the stories of our clients during supervision. That year, through descriptions and

frequent references to myths, we tried to make assumptions and constructions to help the people who came to us overcome obstacles and rediscover something on the side of life. Could we, Mr. Kotsidas, recall here the myth of Alcestis, who, although condemned to be sacrificed, managed to escape from the darkness, with the help of the mythical figure, and thus avoided being led to the oblivion of the underworld?

Having completed three plus one years at the Family Therapy Unit and having primarily recognized and realized, following my experience as a trainee, the importance and significance of the group, I joined another group, that of “Our Big House”; an innovative early intervention and socialization space, which at the time aimed to welcome children aged 0 to 4 years and their adult companions. Looking back now, I realize that it wasn’t by chance that I committed to this, as the significant elements were multiple: The 4 years—four years of my training here, but also the fact that children can stay at “Our Big House” until they turn four. There was also a team of colleagues in the training program of the Family Therapy Unit, and it was from a group of colleagues that “Our Big House” was conceived and created. From that time until today, my interest in systems that have the power to evolve and move forward, with the fundamental condition of desire leading to a “growing up” - similar to the process of a small child at “Our Big House” - remains unwavering. And ever since my training here, coupled with the solitude of having a private practice, I wish and strive to be in some group, to share, to coexist, to be trained.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that, upon reviewing my notes, I found a phrase from a presentation by Ms. Charalabaki about rituals in families. I wrote back then: A group, a culture needs rituals, not only as a process but also to have a core, a symbol, and meaning so that it can encompass its transitions. Paraphrasing this, I would say that this honorary seminar for those that conceived the Unit is a valuable process —perhaps even a ritual for the Unit and for us who were trained in it, helping in this symbolic manner with our own transition.