



Vigelandanlægget

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## The 5<sup>th</sup> Infant Observation Workshop in Oslo 5.-7.September.2019

The fifth infant observation workshop organized by the European Federation for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (EFPP) took place in the beginning of September, 2019 in Oslo. There were about fifty participants from ten different countries all interested in infant observation, mainly psychotherapists and psychoanalysts. Many eager to participate were not able to attend due to the limited size of the workshop. The theme of the workshop was *Observing Early States of Mind, The Application of the Classical Method to Clinical Practice and Education*.

The workshop took place at a charming three-story Art Nouveau house, built in 1899, named Villa Sult, which means hunger. For five years there has been a psychotherapy unit specialized in eating disorders, also named Villa Sult. Also the Norwegian child and adolescent psychotherapy organization, Institutt for Barne- og Ungdomspsykoterapi (IBUP) has its office in Villa Sult. IBUP is a member of EFPP, and organized the workshop together with an EFPP working party with members from

Greece, Italy, Estonia and Poland.

Psychoanalytic child and adolescent psychotherapist Margaret Rustin and professor Gerd Abrahamson were the main speakers at the workshop

The title of Rustin's presentation was *Observing the turbulent early months of the relationship between baby, mother and the wider family: how does this impact on the observer and the seminar group?* Margaret Rustin has a wide experience of observing early relationships and teaching it in the United Kingdom

at the Tavistock Clinic and the Institute of Psychoanalysis as well as internationally. She is the former leader of the Tavistock Clinic in London. She has been teaching, writing and supervising psychoanalytic psychotherapy, infant observation and toddler observation in many places around the world for decades. Infant observation has usually been a part of the psychotherapy training, but training in infant observation can also be part of the psychoanalyst education or done afterwards. Training periods vary from one to two years. However, in her presentation she focused on a new way of working as an early interaction observation trainer



Villa Sult

and supervisor via Skype with for exempel an Iranian group. This new experience was also gained as a consultant of infant observation group leaders in Moscow and in Teheran. The cultural effect in these groups is significant, but Margaret Rustin emphasized in her presentation "the disturbing impact of infant observation on many of the observers and the question of how best to help them to learn from observing". It is very important to distinguish which problems are born from the family itself, which are from the observer's own challenges, her influence on the family or are rising from the dynamics of the observation group, but which are more centrally connected to the observer's own personality, anxieties and defenses.

Margaret Rustin gave several examples of her

thoughts in her presentation. First, she talked about the development of the relationship between the observed (the mother) and the observer by using as an example of the first meeting of an observation at a café. This advanced too quickly into excessive curiosity and crossing the boundaries in the beginning of the observation. In her second example Rustin described a hostile attitude, present even before the beginning of the observation, related to the political orientation of the family. In the third example Rustin described the collapsing effect of a twin pregnancy for the mother who was nevertheless able to comprehend the experiential world of her infants and to recuperate together with her husband.

Margaret Rustin has noticed that in the infant observation seminary groups it is not at all rare that one or more of the members of the group get pregnant. The observer's own childlessness can also be touched in a special way by this experience and it may give an opportunity to mourn the unborn child. The significance of seeking personal psychotherapy in these situations cannot be emphasized enough.

In relation to the Iranian infant observation group Rustin gave an example where a male observer was working with the family with the support of his seminar group in order to establish a contact also to the mother and to observe the interaction between mother and infant. It was not a common thing to be able to observe the mother nursing her baby. As a result of the collaboration it became possible to observe the triangular relationship in the family, where a new, more lively side of the infant made an appearance. Her own role as a supervisor via Skype Margaret Rustin described as especially important precisely because of the physical remoteness. Students collaborated in a special way in order to establish a connection.

In the final part of her presentation Margaret Rustin described in more detail the visits and work of an observer who lived in London but belonged to the Teheran seminary group. Through this example we were able to listen to the thoughts of the theorists related to early interaction such as Melanie Klein, Esther Bick and Wilfred Bion, thereby expanding our understanding. Essential in the example was also how the extended and precise notes of the observation function as an inspiration to

the discussion in a seminar group. There was room for mentalization and the group remained lively. The observer's identifications with the mother and baby became alive to the group and they were able to study together the sustenance and containment of difficult emotional states. The effect of mother's own good and bad experiences on the infant were seen through the illustrations. These moods were transferred also to the observer and that way were carried and contained by the group.

In terms of the supervision of infant observation via remote connections Margaret Rustin emphasized the importance of carefully estimating *the*



Margaret Rustin

*need of support* even before the beginning observation process. The possibility of the group members supporting each other and on the other hand, possible rivalries in relation to each other, need to be examined before beginning to work together.

On Thursday afternoon, after the coffee break, it was time for the first infant observation material which was presented by Matias Bals from Norway. After the presentation we were divided into three groups led by Bidy Yoel and Trudy Klauber from Tavistock and Effie

Lingous from Athens. These three groups continued working with different observation materials during the workshop for part of the time to discuss the thoughts and sensations called forth by the observational material. The purpose of the small groups was to facilitate and replenish the reflection, but this succeeded in only some of the groups.

In addition to the day program it was possible to do some sightseeing in Oslo on Thursday evening when we walked in groups towards the Oslo harbor for dinner. We were granted an opportunity to admire the vistas of the royal palace and gardens as well as the lively cultural life of Oslo.

The program on Friday included a presentation by Angela Salina of an Italian small child case, supervised by Margaret Rustin. After lunch we heard

Kristoffer Høiland's paper based on his infant observation titled *"On Absence"*. Lunch was enjoyed at the Villa Sult, by familiarizing with the art exhibited at the halls, by sitting in cozy therapy rooms or discussions with colleagues, in most cases beforehand unknown, but soon familiar. Daily meetings at breakfast together with travelling companions or participants dwelling in the nearby accommodations offered also an opportunity to hear about infant observation as a part of psychotherapy training in Poland or Greece, for example. As often happens in international conferences or seminars, it is refreshing to meet professionals of a similar line of work, but coming from different cultures or traditions.

On Friday afternoon we were privileged to hear the other main speaker, professor Gerd Abrahamsen's experiences of teaching small child observation in Norway at the University of Stavanger. The title of the presentation was: *"When the eyes begins to see and the ear begins to hear. Teaching infant observation at University level"*.

In this lecture the second theme of the workshop became alive: applying the classical infant observation method to clinical practice and education. Gerd Abrahamsen has succeeded in developing small child observation to be a part of the nursery school teacher training at the University of Stavanger. The message of the lecturer emphasized the contribution of infant observation for those working with early interaction and small children even if they do not have a direct therapeutic role in their work.

On Friday we dined at Villa Sult, without hunger, having active discussions and enjoying the local traditional dishes.

In the last day of the infant observation workshop the small group discussions continued in the morning session with the presentation of Lena Brekkå from Norway, where the infant observation began in the family and continued when the child started daycare. Two psychotherapists from Greece, Vassiliki Vassilopoulou and Maria Tselika, described in a productive way in their presentation the psychoanalytic short psychotherapeutic intervention of a child-under-5 and her family. It was beautifully shown how the collaboration between two therapists was smoothly flowing and how a psychoanalytic working attitude can be helpful in

the families of small children even in a few meetings. Finally, we heard about establishing an infant observation seminar in Poland where this is not yet a regular practice in psychotherapy training. The convener of this workshop can surely be named Effie Lingous who has been as one of the carrying forces in the earlier infant observation workshops. She is supervising the two Polish child and adolescent psychotherapists, Monika Jakubowicz and Monika Jaroszyńska-Szymczuk, who together with Effie Lingous presented the starting up of infant observation seminars. It appears that in Poland it is not necessarily natural for an unknown

in different countries and societies are in relation to carrying out infant observation and also perhaps to interpreting its psychoanalytic meaning.

When planning the themes for the next workshop these themes come to our minds: The meaning of observer's own psychotherapy; The differences in infant observation as a part of psychotherapy training in different countries; The training of infant observation supervisors.

### **The training supervision of infant observation by the Therapiea Foundation Finland**

At the Therapiea Foundation Educational Center in Helsinki, Finland there are four child psychotherapists attending the internal training program where training supervision of infant observation is part of the training program. Two trainees from this group, as well as their teacher, training analyst and training child psychotherapist Pirjo Lehtovuori, attended the workshop as a part of their two-year infant observation supervisor training. All four trainees have already previous experience of infant and toddler observation which they have done during their child psychotherapist training. The training consists of supervision of infant observation supervision. After completing the two-year training, the child psychotherapists have an opportunity to teach and supervise infant observation in psychotherapy and psychoanalyst training programs. In the first year of this training two supervisor trainees observe an infant and the other two will supervise them. In the second year the roles are reversed. The trainee supervisors switch the supervisee in the middle of the year so that the experience would be as versatile as possible for everyone. The training supervisor examines together with the supervisor trainees and the group the themes which the supervisor trainees bring up from the infant observation material, as well as the way the supervisor trainees have done their supervision. A few of the training sessions are so called theme sessions where no observation material is presented but during which some of the central points that are essential and problematic related to infant observation are discussed. At the end of the infant observation supervision training every



Room in Villa Sult

person to go to the home of a family to observe an infant. The next infant observation workshop will be arranged in Poland, inspired and guided by these two Monikas. Of course, they will not be the only ones responsible but they will have as their backing the infant observation committee of EFPP, as was the case in Oslo, too. They all deserve our thanks for a very productive and lively meeting on the brink of early states of mind. Although this year's infant observation workshop did not fulfill all the goals set for it, like enlivening bounty for the psychotherapeutic everyday work, and the discussion atmosphere was at times too critical or somehow distant towards the observer, inspired the workshop organized in Oslo towards new thoughts. It is also interesting to notice how different the cultures

trainee prepares an assignment based on the theme given by the supervisor. In relation to this infant observation supervisor training this workshop in Oslo functioned as a thought provoking and inspiring addition.

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Photo of Margaret Rustin: Anne Okstad  
Photo of Villa Sult: Riikka Tolsa-Saloheimo  
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