

Juan Campos Avillar: A Personal Tribute

I met Juan in the autumn of 1974 or 1975. He was both my group and individual analyst. I would like to write a brief picture of Juan as I knew him during a period of almost thirty-four years.

I remembered him coming into the room where our group session was due to take place, dressed in black and wearing a bowtie. Unusually for him, on that occasion he was relatively reticent. One of the members of the group dared to ask him why he was dressed in that old fashion way. Juan answered very quietly saying his father had died the day before and he had just come from the funeral in order to be on time to conduct the group. We were absolutely shocked. Nobody wanted to say anything, except for a woman who asked him why he had not cancelled the session. Juan, again, answered very calmly affirming that he wanted to be in the company of the group. I realized for the first time the huge love Juan had for groups and for being in groups.

On another occasion, we heard through a group member that Juan had accompanied a patient's relative in her dying days, right up to her death. This was how I discovered Juan's great tenderness and compassion and, more importantly for me, that he was a very special analyst, far removed from the common stereotype.

The group ended in 1982. I then asked Juan if he could give me individual analysis. He accepted and I spent the next few years lying on the couch twice a week. In my opinion, Juan was not only a gifted group analyst, but also a very talented psychoanalyst. All the intuitions I had had of his friendliness, empathy and respect were confirmed during that period of time. Above all, Juan was a good and extremely generous man.

Once I had finished my analysis, I decided that I wanted to be a group analyst and I started my training in Barcelona. After several months, I began to collaborate with Juan. I learned about his close relationship with S.H.Foulkes and his training in psychoanalysis and group analytic psychotherapy in the Postgraduate Center For Mental Health in New York.

I became aware he was an outstanding figure in group analysis and group psychotherapy and was a guiding force in both national and international associations. To him group analysis was much more than psychotherapeutic theory; it was an attitude to life and a key to its understanding.

Back in Spain after his years abroad, Juan was one of the founders of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Later on, Juan became Professor of Medical Education and, among other activities, he ran the Psychiatric Department at the San Juan de Dios Hospital.

He actively participated in some Spanish group associations particularly in The Spanish Society of Psychotherapy and Group Techniques, later becoming its president.

The first project we embarked on together was a pioneering group program at San Pablo Hospital, to help people to stop smoking. We conducted several groups composed of doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

We also ran some other groups of people who had had a heart attack and were asking for a psychological support in order to stop smoking. The results of the experiment were very worthwhile and satisfactory.

The most ambitious enterprise to which Juan dedicated a lot of energy and effort was the launching of "Grup d'Anàlisi Barcelona" a cooperative association composed of a small group of related professionals (his wife Hanne, Susana Jover, Isabel Admetlla, Mercè Martínez and myself). Its aim was to promote and exchange communication among professionals interested in analytic principles and to serve as a nodal point in the group analytic network all over the world.

Another aspect of "Grup d'Anàlisi Barcelona" was to publish important work by writers in the field of the group such as Pat de Maré, pioneer in conducting large groups, and Trigant Burrow who coined the term group analysis. Juan was very fond of Pat and he rescued Burrow's works from oblivion.

Among other works, "Grup d'Anàlisi Barcelona" published "The Large Group Phenomena in relation to Group Analytic Psychotherapy" by Pat de Maré and "The History of The International Association of Group Psychotherapy: Facts and Findings" by Juan himself.

Juan believed that the group was an important tool to alleviate the perennial problems of society. He was convinced of the necessity of establishing groups in order to discuss, elaborate and overcome the difficulties we have as social beings, rather than attempting to solve these problems as individuals.

He saw new technologies as an opportunity to facilitate communication and understanding and he spent the last ten years of his life exploring new ways of virtual communication, calling himself the "knit weaver".

Juan had a warm and emotional nature, expressing his ideas very passionately. He did a lot to democratize group analytic institutions and the group analytic movement. He not only thought that institutions do not change, but that, worse still, they resist change by erecting barriers. Juan always fought against social and individual resistance that impeded communication and dialogue among people.

I had the privilege to be his patient, his disciple, his colleague and, most importantly for me, his friend. During the last years of Juan's life we were closer than we had ever been before. I have this impression from our conversations. He talked to me a lot about what would happen after his death. He was worried about who would continue his work. When this kind of conversations took place he always looked at me very gravely and said: "It's up to you. It's your time..." I always promised him that I would do my best.

I would like to say two more things in order to conclude this tribute. One has to do with the great impact his friendship made on me. Meeting him changed my life. I will miss him a lot even though I will keep him alive in my memory forever. The other thing has to do with a fragment of a Brecht poem which I read a long time ago. Brecht said that people who make an effort during difficult times are very

valuable to society, but that people who make an effort every single day of their lives are essential. Juan was one of those.

Pere Mir