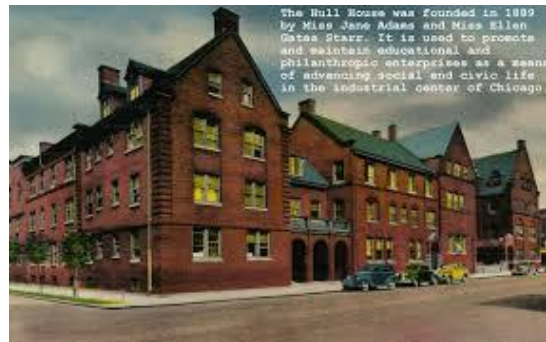


## Holotropic Breathwork and Group Process, January 2015 Syllabus



Group dynamics represent a largely subtle aspect of Holotropic Breathwork, but they are fundamental to its process. Because they are so subtle, they require a facilitator's very careful attention. This workshop will consider concerns about group dynamics that are significant for understanding how groups work and how to manage them effectively in the context of Holotropic Breathwork. We will explore the history and various instances of group process as well as practical details of their use. Breathwork sessions will offer participants opportunities for developing the self-understanding required for effectively facilitating group process.

The modern development of group methods and theory began in 1889 with Jane Adams' famous Hull House model of social service to the burgeoning waves of immigrants. Development proceeded from social to psychological concerns through the twentieth century, with rapid growth blossoming in the countercultural era of the 1960's and providing important inspiration to the Grof's development of Holotropic Breathwork.



Underlying the modern phenomenon of group process is its long evolutionary history, with our origins of animal grouping and our achievement of upright walking, which created the need for assistance in giving birth. Needing assistance enhanced the social cohesion at the heart of the tribal behavior that has been critical to our human survival. Complex copying behavior at the core of our group behavior is evolutionarily embodied in mirror neuron activity in our brains. Aristotle, very early in the history of reflection on human nature, characterized humans as *politikon zoon* (pronounced zo-on), animals of the *polis* or community.

Holotropic Breathwork derives much of its efficacy from the supportive power of group process evidenced in our evolution. Effective facilitation avails the power of group process by attending to all its details – from initial contact with participants to screening to setting management to follow-up.

Aside from the therapeutic power of group process, the group can be a profound resource that mitigates against a facilitator's being seen as an expert. The misconception of facilitator as expert undercuts the basic principle of Holotropic Breathwork that healing comes from within. It is one of the major shortcomings of mainstream psychotherapy, and one of the profound ego traps.

Holotropic Breathwork is a very robust method. It doesn't require perfect implementation for effectiveness. Nonetheless, the quality of participants' and one's own experience is enhanced to the extent that implementation is skillful.

Freud addressed group phenomena terms of mass psychology, but the key theorists of group process as concerns Holotropic Breathwork are [Jacob L. Moreno](#), [Kurt Lewin](#), and [William Schutz](#).

Moreno introduced group psychotherapy to the American Psychiatric Association in 1932 and developed the method of [psychodrama](#). He designed tools for the social sciences to counteract what he saw as "the economic materialism of Marx, the psychological materialism of Freud, and the technological materialism" of our modern industrial age.



Moreno's threefold credo enunciates principles intrinsic to the purposes of Holotropic Breathwork (*The Autobiography of J. L. Moreno*, Moreno Archives, Harvard University, 1985):

1. Spontaneity and creativity are the propelling forces in human progress, beyond and independent of libido and socioeconomic motives [that] are frequently interwoven with spontaneity-creativity, but [this proposition] does deny that spontaneity and creativity are merely a function and derivative of libido or socioeconomic motives.
2. Love and mutual sharing are powerful, indispensable working principles in group life. Therefore, it is imperative that we have faith in our fellow man's intentions, a faith which transcends mere obedience arising from physical or legalistic coercion.
3. A super dynamic community based on these principles can be brought to realization through new techniques.

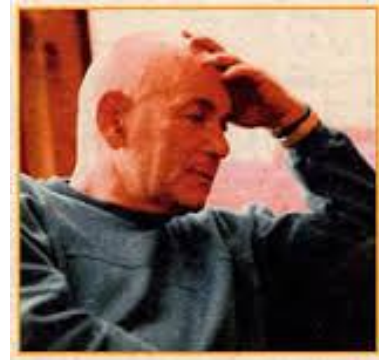


Lewin began his career with work in behavioral psychology after WWI, but later affiliated with Gestalt, moved to England to escape Hitler, then America. While in England he inspired the development of Tavistock groups, and in America, while at MIT, he founded the [National Training Laboratories](#) (NTL). NTL became famous for T-group sensitivity training, the significant precursor of group process in this country. Lewin coined the phrase *group dynamics*.

[T-Groups](#) do not have an explicit agenda, structure, or express goal. Under the guidance of a facilitator, the participants are encouraged to share emotional reactions (such as, for example, anger, fear, warmth, or envy) that arise in response to their fellow participants' actions and statements. The emphasis is on sharing emotions, as opposed to judgments or conclusions. In this way, T-group participants can learn how their words and actions trigger emotional responses in the people they communicate with. Many varieties of T-groups have existed, from the initial T-groups that focused on small group dynamics, to those that aim more explicitly to develop self-understanding and interpersonal communication.

Schutz taught and did research at Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley, and other institutions. He focused on psychology but also studied philosophy—in particular, the scientific method, the philosophy of science, logical empiricism, and research design.

Schutz was an avid student. He learned T-group methodology (“T” for training) at the National Training Laboratories (NTL) at Bethel, Maine; psychosynthesis, a spiritually oriented technique involving imagery devised by an Italian contemporary of Freud named Roberto Assagioli; psychodrama with Hannah Weiner; bioenergetics with Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos; Rolfing with Ida Rolf, and Gestalt Therapy with Paul Goodman. In his own words, “I tried everything physical, psychological, and spiritual—all diets, all therapies, all body methods, jogging, meditating, visiting a guru in India, and fasting for thirty-four days on water. These experiences counterbalanced my twenty years in science and left me with a strong desire to integrate the scientific with the experiential.”



Schutz’s book, *Joy: Twenty Years Later*. (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press. 1989), is a classic. The first version was a comprehensive review of group techniques in the 1960’s, many of which were practiced at Esalen Institute during the era that Stan and Christina resided there and developed Holotropic Breathwork.

Stan has important references to group therapy and its relation to the development of Holotropic Breathwork in *Beyond the Brain* (pp.183 ff., 389 ff.). A discussion of the benefits of group versus individual Holotropic Breathwork sessions can be found in his *Holotropic Breathwork*, pp.47-9. Group process not only operates in the context of Holotropic Breathwork, but it also has significance for creating the context of Holotropic Breathwork generally. Bodywork, for instance, done in the group context avoids significant concerns that limit touching in mainstream psychotherapy.

Process in group therapy and sensitivity training generally has a cognitive and ego orientation. Holotropic Breathwork, implemented effectively, operates on a deeper level.



In addition to general historical and theoretical discussion, some of the specific, practical topics this workshop will address include:

- Meeting, putting oneself in the space of (a) participant(s).
- Setting
- Meals
- Introductory circle
- Sharing information
- Group context for bodywork
- Mandalas
- Naming



A useful overview of the topic of group process/group dynamics and some of its history is provided by Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group\\_dynamics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_dynamics)

*Models of Group Therapy & Sensitivity Training*. Shaffer, J. and Gallinsky, M.D. (Prentice Hall, 1974) is a solid and useful background reference relevant to this workshop.