

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

Bion's Journeying in Italy*

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Bion held his last seminar in Rome on 17th July 1977. Francesco Corrao, on behalf of all the participants, expressed his gratitude for the lessons which had been given.

Bion thanked the participants for their gratitude and added that he hoped he would not seem rude if he compared Corrao's description of his contribution to something of which he was aware but did not much like - the nearest image he could give was of a leaf falling from a tree without our being able to tell on which side it would land. At first I didn't perceive the fact that he was expressing perplexity about, how his contribution would be received and worked through. I was more struck by the image he was using than by the content. In 1977, Bion was getting on in years and although in good health, he did not know what the future held for him. The image of the falling leaf remained in my mind as a farewell: his goodbye to the people with whom he had spent a week of fervent work.

Continuing with his speech, Bion quoted a few lines by Yeats, "And when at last that murder's over/ Maybe the bride-bed brings despair/ For each an imagined image brings/ And finds a real image there" and a short passage from Shakespeare: "Journeys end in lovers' meeting, Every wise man's son doth know."

At the very moment in which we were to part, Bion was pointing out the need to look ahead, thinking about the possible outcomes of the meeting, which had taken place.

In fact, he ended his speech by saying that he did not think that journeys ended in lovers' meeting, but that they began at that point, asking further on what the group might give birth to, what thought or action.

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To my mind, three of Bion's theories have been developed in an original way in our country, they are:

1. the "container - contained relationship" model.
2. the notion of "PS-D oscillation."
3. the intuition of the existence of "thoughts without a thinker."

Furthermore in Italy, Bion's particular view of psychoanalysis has been understood and his model for promoting the thinking activity has been assimilated.

I will deal with this theme straight away, because of its more general aspects. I will then develop his treatment of "container - contained," "PS-D" and "thoughts without thinker."

* This paper is an expansion upon a previous publication: Neri, 1998.

A way of conducting a discourse

The particular model of thinking and talking which Bion called “speculative imagination” was introduced into Italy, enhanced by the brilliant light of Sicily and the Mediterranean, by Francesco Corrao. I am referring to the colors and intensity of the light in Sicily, but above all to the intensity and depth of Sicilian culture, a culture that is directly descendent from Greek, Arab and Norman traditions. Francesco Corrao identified deeply with Bion through a connection of a common object of love: psychoanalysis. If the statement “one can love the mind of a man” is true, it is true that Corrao loved the thought and way of Bion’s thinking. Corrao (1998, 1998 b) placed Bion’s thoughts into his mind and when he brought them to the Italian psychoanalysts’ attention, they were transformed for having lived in his mind.

The primary function of speculative imagination is to give the germ of thought an opportunity to come to life. The second function is to allow it to be communicated, to pass through the barriers of conformity, hypocrisy, cynicism and apathy.

Speculative imagination - as far as I have understood - is made up of a third of courage, a third of dramatization and the remaining part of observation and scientific method. Courage lies in saying exactly what one thinks and feels at the moment of the session, making only slight adjustments which may help the patient (or the members of a group) to a better use of communication. An illustration of courage is Bion’s saying to the participants at the Romans Seminars that he didn’t know how they would work through his contribution.

Dramatization consists in privileging the use of images and in suggesting that an intervention be a cue for a dialogue (of two or more voices), which is open to unpredictable developments. The reference at the beginning of this paper where Bion quotes from Yeats and Shakespeare is a fine example of dramatization. The scientific component is offered by the relationship the analyst forms with the facts of the session and by the genuineness with which he accepts that his hypothesis be open to discussion.

Speculative imagination can be used not only in meetings of analyst and analysand (and between the analyst and members of a group with analytic aims), but every time there is a meeting among psychoanalysts, too. Several examples of this are shown in the interventions in which Bion tells his colleagues of the discoveries which are progressively giving weight to his “psychoanalytic anthropology” and represent as many different expressions of it.

Firstly, I want to give a brief definition of “psychoanalytic anthropology.” Anthropology is a compound term which is derived from two Greek words, “ánthropos” which means man and “lògos” which means reasoning, discourse and word. Anthropology therefore, is a reasoning upon human nature, or more precisely, a reasoning on man. The specific task of psychoanalysis according to Bion, is to develop a discourse on the most primitive and archaic aspects of man, which goes together with the more evolved ones (language and thought).

These aspects of the nature of man persist in civilization as living animal and ancestral remains. Remains that may manifest themselves in various ways and reawaken suddenly, without warning.

I would now like to present the illustrations taken from Bion’s seminars.

In *Italian Seminars* (1985), he says that the suffering and limitations of capabilities that the patient suffers can actually be sited in aspects of his personality that are not removed or denied, but are living archaic residuals that have never emerged. He also says that there is evidence of survival, ‘gill slits,’ and that if these residuals (remaining from when man was an aquatic animal) exist as far as the body is concerned, why should there not be, somewhere, something that concerns what we define as our mind.

Still with the course of “Italian Seminars,” Bion sketches a portrait of man, using a science fiction form: war between “man who is dominated by the assumption of base fight/flight” which is dramatized in the figures of “adrenal gland” (“adrenalists,” “adrenalin producers”) and “man dominated by the basic assumption of coupling.” This is shown in “gonadic” figures. This war may lead to complete destruction, so it is necessary for Homo Sapiens (“Man who is able to think,”) to intervene. As Bion wrote:

“[...] Adrenal glands [...] might emerge inside the human mind [...] and so [...] find expression, aided by the film business, by film projectors and by mass advertising, [in] a modern presentation of fleeing and fighting. [...] Perhaps someone would like to write the scene of a war film between the Adrenalists and the Gonads. Maybe we would all end up by being impotent and sterile or maybe we could make the world impossible to live in as we become overpopulated. [...] Perhaps it will not be just a film, perhaps in this very same moment we will have to prepare ourselves mentally and mobilize our capacity to face up to future dangers. These future dangers will seem to be so enormous, as compared both to our current and past dangers that our present dangers will appear to be just a trailer. One must feed the capacity to think in a way which becomes more able and more robust than it currently is.”

Courage

Freud (1920) knew about this type of problem as we can see from his note on the prehistory of analytical technique where, regarding free association, he spoke about creative writing, making reference to Ludwig Borne, “The art of becoming an original writer in three days.” Borne spoke about the necessity of jotting down notes on “everything that came into one’s head” for three days in a row, as the method for becoming a writer. He then said that in reality it was moral courage that an individual lacked, not ideas.

The feeling of risk is an unavoidable experience for anyone using speculative imagination. The analyst can perceive either a personal risk or a risk concerning his patient. The risk that: he may waken a sleeping tiger, triggering forces beyond his control. Therefore, one must be rather courageous to face up to such an unpredictable event.

In the example I have shown, courage (the primary component of speculative imagination) lies in Bion’s way of expressing his thoughts openly to colleagues who might misunderstand or mock him.

Dramatization

Dramatization is evident in the use of the “remains of the fish” image on which the sufferings and limitations of the patient might depend.

According to Bion, dramatizing doesn't mean just describing but giving a shape to that which is in dynamic evolution. Dramatizing doesn't mean recalling something that had already been lived, but letting that part of the past which was made up of trauma and not recallable, live. (Cavalletti 2000, p. XXI)

I will relate a short account. Sometimes, when there is a new member in a small therapeutic group, it may happen that the old members speak about an episode which is unknown to the newcomer. He may ask: “What are you speaking about?” Very often the others answer: “Everything that happened a long time before your arrival.” We may interpret the refusal of giving explanations as rivalry of the siblings toward the newborn baby. We may also follow a different line of interpretation, which focuses on a real difficulty. Such a difficulty can be better explained if the answer of the old members were formulated in the following terms: “We could tell you about the facts, but that would not give you very much idea as to what was happening in the group. To do that we would have to let it happen again.”

Dramatization is a way of re-enacting something that happened at a different moment or in a different place, something that can be recalled, but recalling is not sufficient to convey all the emotions, feelings and turmoil. To do so, one would have to recreate the same situation and atmosphere. Bion was conveying emotions, feelings and turmoil to the participants at the Romans Seminars, through his use of poems and images.

The scientific aspect of speculative imagination

In the example I have given, the scientific aspect lies in the suggestion of a hypothesis, which differs substantially from Freud's hypothesis of the Unconscious. This hypothesis takes on part of Ferenczi's theory (1924) in a new form. The form in which the hypothesis is given, however is closer to Galileo's and Einstein's method than to Ferenczi's.

I'm referring to “mental experiments,” which are crucial to some moments of the history of Science. An example of preliminary “mental experiment” is the question that the adolescent Einstein asked himself. He was rowing a small boat on a lake surrounded by high hills. The sun rose over the edge of the hills and Einstein asked himself how fast he should row in order to prevent the sunlight from touching him.

The most famous mental experiment was the “platform experiment.” One can see how this mental experiment is closely linked to the theory of relativity and to the idea that privileged observers do not exist. Einstein imagined a railroad station with a very long platform. Two people were positioned on the platform, observer A and B. A train passes through the station at a certain speed. In the train there is another observer, C. In a certain moment, Tx, a gun is fired on the train. The observers hear the shot at different times: T1, T2, T3, because of the speed of the train and of the speed of the sound. Einstein assumed that there is not only one privileged referral time, but all were at the same level. Now passing to the solar system, in accordance with the theory of relativity, it is not correct to assume that the earth only goes around

the sun. It is not correct to assume the sun as the only one privileged point of reference, we can also consider the earth, or even Mars as a point of reference.

Getting back to Bion, it is important to underline that in his use of the image of “something in the mind, which is the correspondent to the archaic residuals of the gills,” the metaphoric thickness is very thin. Bion’s aim is not to evoke a scenario, but to conduct an “analytical mental experiment.”

“The peculiarity of mental experimentation (or thought experimentation - Gedankenexperiment -) is in such that while “freedom” of imagination has to lean towards the extreme (indeed, to see links which were not previously seen, as in Poincaré’s descriptions), at the same time, thought must be “self-disciplining,” limiting the spectrum of the imaginable to the planning of future experiments [...] and/or to the compatibility with the “corpus” of theoretical hypotheses which are deemed to be relevant. [... It is this type] of “mental experiment” that Bion tries to set in motion through the use of faculty or “non-logical” acts even though they are self-regulated by thought (as “imaginative conjecture,” “rational conjecture,” and speculative imagination [...] or even “idea generators, or as Joyce called them, “mother ideas.” (Di Paola 1995, p. 104).

Speculative Imagination in Italy

Speculative imagination, in its Italian form, has become richer in images whilst the dramatization part is of lesser degree. Furthermore, it has improved by taking the needs and vulnerability of the patient into consideration. Great store is held in these in the formulation and choice of moment of intervention, which the analyst makes. The necessity of being authentic and courageous for the analyst remains unchanged. Beyond the close circle of those who have been into Bion’s work in great depth, there are many psychoanalysts in Italy today who lean towards the interpretation as invention or trace of an image or hypothesis which is able to activate both a response of the analysand’s and a transformation of that which is taking place in the session. I believe that this way of viewing interpretation, at least in part, is an effect of the impact of the idea of Bion’s “speculative imagination.”

A particular view of psychoanalysis

The theory of speculative imagination acquires even more sense if seen from Bion’s point of view of psychoanalysis.

I spoke previously of Bion’s “psychoanalytic anthropology.” I shall now better explain what I meant by that with the aid of an analogy. Along with many psychoanalysts, two artists continue to come to mind when studying both Bion’s view of psychoanalysis and recalling his ties with Italy. Alberto Burri and Pino Pascali were rather anomalous compared to other post-war Italian artists as they were not “intellectuals” or “left wing,” and while being on friendly terms with other artists, they did not belong to any particular artistic movement. Burri - who is also regarded as the major Italian painter of the period - was a doctor and had started painting during the last years of the 2nd World War while he was a prisoner of war in Texas.

Some paintings - such as the famous "Sacks" - show cuts and stitches in the cloth - stitches put in by an expert surgeon's hand, but which leave the wound visible. Of his other works, "The Clays" create cracked earth on the surface of the painting - earth or clay that has cracked when dried in the sun because of the drought. Other works by Burri were created by ripping a part of the smooth layer of a sheet of plywood to show two adjacent surfaces - one smooth and the other rough. Looking at them, one gets the same effect as when contemplating the countryside where a large field is composed of brown ploughed clods on one side and green, newly sprung waving wheat on the other.

Pascali loved motorcycles and speed. He produced several works, entitled "anthropology." They are more like do-it-yourself, (D.I.Y.) than proper sculptures - "nests" made of straw, "tree-houses" made of nets, wood and ropes. These are nests, houses and passages in which a primitive man might have moved about. Another piece of work, "32 sq. m of Sea" was made by colouring a large quantity of water with blue aniline. In a short film, "Measures of the Earth", shot on the beach at Fregene, one can see Pascali measuring sandy areas with a tape and other tools. (Cf. Christov Bagargiev C. 1997)

Like Burri and Pascali, Bion uses the simplest and most precise tools. Like them, he searches for a measure for man. Man who is not alone or isolated, but part of a flock. That means, man who is subjected to the forces, which are active in the flock. Moreover, Bion is interested in measuring man under extreme conditions, when the flock is subjected to very strong pressure and in turn exerts powerful constraints on man: - man subject to the drive to be part of the flock, to attack or to run with the crowd, man faced with terror and stupidity, a thinking man.

Work-group Mentality and Primitive Mentality¹

What I just said may remind us of Bion's hypothesis of rational or work-group mentality as opposed to primitive mentality.

The terms "rational group" and "work-group" correspond to two chronological moments and two stages of Bion's development. To begin with he speaks (1943) of a "group with a rational structure," referring to those aspects of collective mental life which maintain a level of behaviour linked to reality such as the awareness of the passing of time and the ability to follow methods which may be roughly called scientific. Such methods may still be rudimentary (like that of the monkey using a stick to reach a banana) but they are different from simple motor activity (like that of a monkey flinging itself against the bars) and from the automation of actions promoted by primitive mentality.

Later Bion (1961) replaced the name "rational group" with "work-group." As he himself says: "In some groups with which I was concerned, what I had called "rational group" was spontaneously called "work-group." The name is concise, and since it expresses well an aspect of the phenomenon which I wish to describe, from now on I shall use this term." The term "work-group" used by Bion makes it clear

¹ Those readers who are familiar with this concept or who have read my book *Group* (Neri, 1995) can go directly to the next section on page 8.

that a learning activity is necessary if a participant is to be able to make a contribution to the achievement of the group's aims. This term also shows that participation in the work-group implies having developed some skills which Freud had indicated as characteristic of the individual's Ego i.e. attention, verbal representation and symbolic thought.

The second group mentality described by Bion is primitive mentality. Primitive mentality corresponds to the tendency to give automatic replies. It is a dimension in which it is hard not to become completely involved. To illustrate this characteristic I shall tell the tale of a friend with a sense of humour: "My first contact with politics was one day many years ago. Nationalism and fascism were just beginning. I was at Middle School and I was very proud to have had this first contact with politics, and anxious to tell my family all about it. When I went home to lunch, I met my brothers and my father, an old gentleman with a liberal education. Full of enthusiasm, I began to tell them that the High School boys had arrived, and that we had gone to the other schools in a procession to get the boys to come out. We had gone all round the town. My father asked me: "What were the reasons for the demonstration? What did you want?" I replied: "I don't know, but we were all shouting "Fast-belt, Fast-belt."

My brothers burst out laughing. It took me some time to understand that I had joined the procession out of step. In fact they were shouting: "Bel-fast, Bel-fast."

The more the group functions according to primitive mentality, the more limited the space for the individual. It is important for the therapist to be aware of this, and in particular of the fact that the group can limit people's liberty by requiring them to adjust to a certain collective functioning. This adjustment is demanded both regarding thought (through the elimination of dissonant thoughts) and emotion. For instance, the group may exert coercion in the sense that everyone must be happy and show themselves to be so. If those forces, which tend to limit freedom to express oneself and to think prevail, then individuals lose their uniqueness and become interchangeable. Therefore, the group therapist's task is not to force individuals to form a group (as in the case of a mass group) but to slow down processes that are too swift and disruptive, and to underline the peculiarities, differences and rights of the individuals.

According to Bion, primitive mentality is supported and pervaded by three phantasies which alternate in the group. Bion defines them as "basic assumptions" to indicate how fundamental and indisputable they are. In a recent paper (1991), his daughter Parthenope Bion Talamo speaks about them as follows: "In a broad outline of Bion's theory [...] he declares that the attempts made by human beings united in a group to develop creative conduct (in whatever field) may be disturbed and even completely broken off by the emergence of thoughts and emotions as rooted in unconscious phantasies concerning the "true" motives for the foundation of the group."

There are three main classes into which these fantasies fall. 1) "Religious," the phantasy of depending totally on an absolute and dominant figure. 2) That of "coupling" according to which the group is said to be formed with the sole aim of reproduction, a class which merges into the religious one when the product of mating, whether it be a person or an idea, is seen as a Messiah who is still to come. 3) Fight/flight, a basic fantasy according to which the group gets together in order to

deal exclusively with its own preservation, and this depends exclusively on attacking the enemy in mass or in fleeing from it.”

In *Experiences in Groups*, Bion describes the two mentalities (work-group mentality and primitive mentality) as co-present and opposing. In other words, primitive mentality and work-group mentality do not constitute a sequence. This is a very precise point in Bion’s work. It is necessary to clarify three points. Firstly, in Bion’s thinking, both primitive mentality and work group mentality are a genetic endowment of human beings and thus cannot be annulled. Secondly, there is real growth only through conflict of that which is primitive and that which is mature. Growth occurring only on the developed side is only apparent and is built upon a sandy foundation. Thirdly, development of technology doesn’t coincide with growth of man. Quite often, it is just the opposite. Technological development may conceal the fact that man (as someone who is responsible for his primitive drives) has not developed. Evolved man (expression of the work-group) and regressed man (expression of primitive mentality) are present in both the caveman and his modern descendent, technological man. Actually, in technological man, the primitive mentality - if it does not meet adequate opposition in the work-group - is all the more dangerous in so far as it is masked by a sophisticated logic and endowed with immeasurable power. Adequate opposition to the primitive mentality could be the expansion of a worldwide movement which for example, opposes a nuclear war or destruction of the ecological environment.

The active presence of the work-group mentality and primitive mentality, both in the group and in each of the participants, puts the individual in a situation of conflict, which can not be resolved. If he participates in the work-group, he feels deprived of warmth and strength, if he adheres to the group as a basic assumption, he knows he may find it impossible to pursue his own ends as a thinking and reflecting individual. Participating in a group dominated by primitive mentality is revitalising, even when it leads to catastrophe, while when we detach ourselves from our herding nature, we suffer a sense of limitation, we realise how deeply dependent on others we are and we feel alone.

On the other hand, this conflict between work-group and primitive mentality is also essential, and it is the origin of transformations. In Bion's opinion there is no true growth where the evolutionary aspect is detached from the primitive aspect. It is only when what is evolved comes into resonance with what is primitive and drags it out of its isolation, that there is real development of the group and of the personality of the individual.

More about Bion`s particular view of psychoanalysis

Returning to Bion’s particular view of “psychoanalysis as anthropology,” and completing this quick sketch, I should like to mention two more characteristics.

The first lies in the belief that the analyst’s (and the analysand’s) acceptance of responsibility implies overstepping the boundary of the horizon of knowledge that had previously been laid down. In other words, the ethical duty of a psychoanalyst is not to adjust to certain norms of behaviour, but to expand the fields of knowledge and accept responsibility for the new point of view which has been reached. According to

Bion, psychoanalysis is a tool for research, a probe exploring the unknown, not a container for what is already known.

Another important part of Bion's view of psychoanalysis is in considering it a "truth-verifying process." A process, through which a person becomes him/herself whoever that may be. Bion believes truth is "reality," "food for the mind." For him, truth is also "what evolves," "the non-finished." Truth has a general, or rather, a universal character, there is one truth, which evolves in multiple forms.

In the truth verifying process, different forms of truth, even though contradictory, do not exclude one another, but on the contrary, are linked to each other. We might say, for example, that without the conception of truth A (Freud's theory of the Unconscious), the expression of truth B (the theory of living archaic residuals) would be insufficient or might even never have been able to emerge. The relationship between two truths can perhaps best be compared to the love of Tristan and Isault: in the sense that they are the protagonists of a "truth-verifying novel or process" in which they are linked to one another in life and death in an indissoluble way (cf. Reale, 1997).

Entering psychoanalysis is like entering a truth verifying process which does not only concern what becomes known, but also concerns the people (the analyst and the analysand) engaged in the research. We become truth, we do not possess it.

It follows that Bion's "truth-verifying process" hypothesis, spotlights the transforming effect, the active character of truth. (cf. Gargani, 1996)

I would now like to examine the impact of these two characteristics of Bion's view on Italian psychoanalysts. The assumption that psychoanalysis is a probe exploring the unknown promoted an original temporal conception. One may say that a patient is anxious because he underwent a trauma when he was an infant. Taking advantage of the image of the probe, one may also say that he is anxious because of something that still hadn't happened. That is, the votes are in the ballot-box which is waiting to be opened.

A second consequence is the accent on a particular aspect of the interpretation of dreams and other clinical material during the sessions. That is: interpretation is seen not as much as clarifying underlying unconscious or pre-conscious meaning, but as a contribution to a very special dialogue. A dialogue in which the two parties become more and more involved, in the sense that it becomes ever more important for each person and increasingly related to what is essential.

Container - contained relationship

I will now move from a general to a more detailed view and briefly consider some of Bion's other ideas which have been developed in Italy in an original way.

The first one is the "container - contained relationship" model.

Pierandrea Lussana (1998 and 1999) pointed out the difference between the notion of Melanie Klein's "projective identification" and Bion's "container-contained relationship" model. The Kleinian theory assumes that the position of the two parties who are engaged in the analytical relationship is a fixed one. The patient "launches" the "projective identification content" and the analyst receives it. The analyst takes it on board, works through its implications and responds through verbal interpretations.

In the Kleinian view, the analyst is the only agent who is capable of transforming the content of projective identification. On the contrary, when considering the analytic relationship from the point of view of Bion's "container-contained relationship" model, the stress is on reciprocity and the mutual undertaking in which analyst and analysand, who from time to time, take the role of container or contained. In Bion's model, the mind of the analyst is not the sole performer of the transformation. The transformation is carried out mainly through the interchange of the analysand and analyst, both as container and contained.

Luciana Nissim Momigliano (1984) goes even further, developing an original idea of psychoanalysis as "two people talking in the consulting room." The analysand is considered as having a complete active role in the course of the analysis.

"PS-D" Oscillation

The major contributions to the development of the "PS-D Oscillation" theory in Italy have been provided by Giovanni Hautmann (1981 and 1999) and by Bion's daughter, Parthenope Bion Talamo (1981).

Before entering into this matter, I would like to give a short definition of Bion's "PS-D Oscillation" theory. PS is the initial for the Paranoid-schizoid Position. D stands for the Depressive Position. Bion takes the two terms from Kleinian theory, but he puts new wine into an old barrel.

Melanie Klein worked through the notions of both paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions in quite considerable depth, in connection to the evolving process that a child must pass through in order to reach a more stable relationship with an object. That is, for Melanie Klein the only worthy movement is from paranoid-schizoid towards the depressive position. Any movement in the other direction is considered as being regressive and in fact, pathological. In numerous sections of his work, Bion declared complete acceptance of Melanie Klein's formulations and further, considered them as a mile-stone within the psychoanalytical world. However, to one side of Klein's theory, Bion developed his own model.

For Bion that is: oscillation is not between paranoid-schizoid and depression, but between dispersion and integration. For Melanie Klein, as I said before, there is evolution from the paranoid-schizoid position to depressive position, whilst for Bion there is oscillation between PS and D. For Bion, remaining only or too long in "D" leads one to a stereotyped form of mind and at the end, to stagnation of thought. To continue functioning, it is necessary to oscillate once more from D to PS.

Of course, dispersion is accompanied by some feelings which are usual in a fragmented state of mind, and integration is accompanied by a slight depressive mood. "Bion [...] said that following an effective interpretation, both patient and analyst felt sad. [...] Feelings of sadness associated with separation and loss were the inevitable consequence of an effective interpretation and would always be mutual, however gratifying the analytic process may be." (Mason, 2000)

Bion's theory also considers the existence of a principle, which is able to bring order and shape: a "Chosen Fact," a "Significant Configuration." This principle, when one is able to grasp it, activates the oscillation from dispersion to integration.

Giovanni Hautmann and Parthenope Bion Talamo agree on the fact that the PS-D Oscillation should be considered a fundamental mechanism of thought, just as the systolic and diastolic mechanisms are of the heart. They also agree on the need for the analyst to “contemplate” void and chaotic confusion, which are typical of the paranoid-schizoid position - while maintaining his ability to think and dream. Their opinions differ with regard to the analyst’s bringing about a crisis of crystallized beliefs, and therefore triggering D-PS oscillation. Bion Talamo takes a more “wait and see” stance, whilst Hautmann a more active one.

As for myself, I believe that - in certain circumstances - these interventions are useful and desirable. Even in these cases, the analyst, however, must limit himself to using the tools offered by the setting.

I find Giovanni Hautmann’s precise descriptions of how Bion was able to activate “thinking,” thus causing D-PS oscillation, particularly fascinating. Hautmann also demonstrates how Bion repeatedly and actively questioned all the situations in which he himself, the analysand or the group had reached a finished formulation and a point of emotive equilibrium. The “thinking” process is presented as a series of moments, where every safe moment is followed by a fracture and a consequent need to face painful instability in a ‘to and fro’ game which lends importance to the becoming rather than the being, to thinking rather than to thought (understood as what has already been thought).

An illustration of PS-D oscillation ²

I would like to present an illustration using the notes taken by one of the participants in Bion’s seminars in Rome.

Bion sometimes began his seminars by making general considerations, and more rarely, he just waited without saying anything. Then after a little while, someone from the audience would ask a question.

On asking the question, the interlocutor put himself in front of a thought which organized itself and, in turn, became the “question.” A field of interest was set up. Emotions and thoughts which were up to that point rather vague, would begin to take shape within a cognitive and affective condition that was characterised both by the intense expectation of verifying one’s own convictions and by the desire to receive confirmation and support from Bion (oscillation from PS to D).

The characteristic trait was that apparently, there wasn’t any reply given. Bion developed his discussion, which seemed not to have anything to do with the question that had been asked. In this way he shifted the emotional and theme context which had been set up in such a way, that the participants were taken by surprise. The designated interlocutor and the group of participants underwent the effects of the destruction of the emotional and theme field into which they had set themselves (oscillation from D to PS).

Nevertheless, at the same time Bion’s discussions produced new seeds of thought which brimmed with core significance that he had been able to seize upon from the question that the interlocutor had asked, but was not aware of. This core had been

² This illustration has already been published in Neri, 1999.

enriched by Bion's thoughts and expressed through a verbal form which was poetic and enriched with images.

Further, using a silence of either longer or shorter duration, the group assimilated the deception. The participants managed to master the confusion and the corresponding tormenting surprise blows. Once more, "seeds of thought" gathered in another "question" (oscillation from PS to D.) Once again, the audience were exposed to the frustration and emotional swirling of contact with Bion's spirit (oscillation from D to PS.)

An uneasiness spread through the participants, there was almost a cocktail of both negative and positive elements. The dominating reaction was to grab desperately onto the need to understand. "To understand" meant struggling to pick up on the way in which Bion, in his answer, had elaborated upon the "manifest contents" of the question.

This was the exact opposite of what Bion was aiming at. In his Rome seminars he wanted to show that one had to free oneself from codified language and thought forms in order to be able to pick up on something that, although being inseparable from those forms, went beyond them. Thought then, freed from "institutional language," would have looked for, and found, other efficient forms of expression and communication.

Thoughts without thinker

Bion upheld that thoughts exist both prior and independently to the subject who thinks them; the thought function, then, comes only after the thoughts. If one wanted to propose the first reference from a purely philosophical point of view, it would be Plato, or whilst regarding contemporary philosophy, *World 3* which Popper (1963) spoke about, "a world of thoughts without a subject who does the thinking." The difference between Popper's *World 3* and Bion's thoughts without thinker is that the latter are active and evolve. (cf. Dazzi, 1987)

Once again, I think it opportune to make reference to Bion's seminars. Bion started the seminar, which was held in Rome on 15th July 1977, by saying that he was thinking that when there are many individuals present, there are also many thoughts without thinkers and that these thoughts without thinkers were, therefore, in the air somewhere.

This proposed consideration, which was sparked off by the idea that in the room, "in the air," there could be a lot of "thoughts without thinkers," led to the formulation of an original model of "Field," which has been developed mainly by Antonello Correale (1991), Eugenio Gaburri (1997) and the members of the Group Research Centre "Il Pollaiolo," in Rome and Palermo.

According to this model, the "field" is the place (both mental and theoretical), where emotions and sensations are accumulated and shared by the members of the group.

The people forming a group are immersed in the field, which is limited by links (L, H, K). The field is the third element, which exists between the "thoughts without thinker" and "the thinker."

Another starting point of the Italia psychoanalyst is Kurt Lewin's (1935) fundamental work. However, it is important to point out that only the more general methodological

ideas of Lewin were incorporated by the Italians, not his specific model. More precisely, I am referring to Lewin's approach for observation of psychological phenomena. Lewin doesn't search for regularities, but for interaction of a set of elements within a field. Whether an event "occurs often or seldom has nothing to do with the [sought after] law." (Desilet, 1999). In following Lewin's approach, the Italian's are searching for the interaction within the "field" which is represented by the group and the group session. However, differently from Lewin, they have not tried to state these interactions in terms of forces or dynamics.

Another important researcher who made an important contribution to the "field theory" from a very original point of view, was Foulkes with his idea of "Matrix." Foulkes' ideas have been assimilated by Italian psychoanalysts, not directly, but through inter-subjective psychoanalysis.³ Mitchell (1988) "considers relationships with others, not drives, as the basic stuff of mental life." He goes on to say that from his perspective, people are portrayed as being shaped by and are inevitably embedded within a matrix of relationships with other people, struggling both to maintain their ties to others and to differentiate themselves from them. In his vision, the basic unit of study is not the individual as a separate entity whose desires clash with an external reality, but an inter-active field within which the individual arises and struggles to make contact and articulate himself. Analytic enquiry entails participation in, and observation of, and uncovering and transformation of these relationships and their internal representations. (Wright, 2000)

Although, these two streams of ideas made important contributions to the construction of the Italian model of "field," the latter have kept his originality: the fact that field is seen as something between the members of a group or the analytical couple (the thinker) and emotions, feelings and non thought thoughts (the thoughts without thinker). A second original point is, that working through implies the fact that thoughts stay for a long period in an undefined reservoir (the field) before they can really be worked through. We believe that good wine is not just pure fermented grape juice but one that has to rest for a period in wooden barrels in well controlled temperature and humidity conditions in a cellar.

Bion between past and future

In conclusion, I will say a few words about the topicality of Bion's teaching.

Bion is not a pre-modern but a post-modern thinker. "Post-modern," not in the chronological sense, nor in the sense of a removal and relocation of modernity. That is, not in the sense of an impossible return from the modern point of view, but in as much as it implies that many routes that had previously been followed seemed to be blind alleys. At the same time however, through modernity, possibilities of comprehension, which are radically new have appeared. (Bauman, 1993)

Bion is not a psychoanalyst belonging to the period of crisis in psychoanalysis, he is a psychoanalyst of the new beginning of psychoanalysis. Bion sees the limits of

³ The idea of Matrix was regarded both as too vague and too ontological. Foulkes' ideas were assumed as being opposed to Bion's, the reference for the Italians was to Bion. Nowadays, however, these preconceptions don't exist anymore.

psychoanalytical practice and technique, but he also announces its fundamental value: the things that make it unique.

He writes that an activity like psychoanalysis can in certain periods be fashionable, and that fashion changes. He added that he had lived long enough to have had the experience of recognising a situation in which psychoanalysis had been very fashionable among the intelligentsia - as he was sure that many of us could recall moments in which particular points of view and beliefs were fashionable. He remembered when it had been very fashionable to read the Forsythe Saga, then the book had been forgotten until later on, when there had been a revival thanks to the dominance of television and of seeing with our own eyes. Thus history is renewed, or so it seems. However, Bion continues, admitting that this was a difficult point to write, what was really important was the true Saga of the Forsythes, the fundamental history, the facts and the reality. The only name he could give to these was 'truth,' which is not influenced by a fashion or by anything at all we might happen to think about it.

Bion invites psychoanalysts to widen the cracks in the surfaces of customs and beliefs, and starting from the concrete experience, to take care to leave more room for the fundamental history, for the truth that exists in a particular psychoanalytic setting or in a group analysis.

An analytical approach - such as Bion's - sustains the analyst and gives him the security he needs when required to stand his ground, which I believe often occurs.

Moreover, an approach to analytical work such as Bion's, guarantees a stimulus. It makes both the analyst and the patient aware of the fact that despite endless doubts, even if sometimes everything may appear worthless, and we may feel worthless ourselves, there is an answer. The answer is: "that you are here - that life exists and identity, / that the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." (Whitman, 1855)

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