

From Jung to Bion: an infinite bridge

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Abstract

Jung's thought has underground and profoundly influenced Bion's work. Ostracized by the mainstream of the more traditional psychoanalytic discourse, the creativity of Jungian research has forcefully re-emerged in Bion's thought in his revolution of psychoanalytic theory and technique. The Jungian transcendent function, the synergy of conscious and unconscious, has become in Bion's "binocular" of the mind: the search for synchronicity between conscious and unconscious processes. Jung's collective unconscious has merged into the conception of a substantially groupal and intersubjective "protomental". Jung's emphasis on waking visions allowed Bion to consider how our mind dreams night and day, both in sleep and wakefulness. Then, alongside the analytic interpretation, the constructive interpretation, the analyst's capacity for reverie and at-one-ment came to assume an essential therapeutic significance; that is his capacity to dream with the patient to develop the dream potential of the session and the analytic couple, as it is the non-dream that is responsible for the most severe forms of psychopathology. Furthermore, psychoanalysis is not a noun but a verb: it is psychoanalyzing. These creative matrices, present in the thought of Jung and Bion, have contributed to the transformation of contemporary psychoanalysis into an actual method for the cure of life.

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It changes the atmosphere altogether. He is no longer the little patient who crawls on his stomach to the grand authority to get his pills. He is now a co-worker, and I am a co-worker, and we share all the risks of the situation.

C.G. Jung, (1928-30), p. 634

It is important to work on the assumption that the best colleague you are ever likely to have – besides yourself – is not an analyst or supervisor or parent, but the patient; that is, the one person on whom you can rely with confidence to be in possession of the vital knowledge.

W.R. Bion (1977), p.286

Possible permutations of projective identification

Countless bridges – like invisible *filis rouges* – connect Bion’s thought with Jung’s (Manica and Oldoini, 2018; Manica 2020). So I would like to begin my discussion by following the arc drawn by the Kleinian concept of “projective identification” and considering it as one of the possible connecting bridges.

Melanie Klein arrived at the formulation of projective identification in 1946 with the publication of *Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms*. And she was proposing a fundamental idea which made an indispensable tool available to theory and clinical practice, for understanding both primitive psychic functioning and the mechanisms and dystopian dynamics of psychotic experience.

Klein’s paper takes as its starting point the description of primary object relations, conceived in terms of the relationship between part-objects (breast, penis) and the Self (one’s own and the other’s), in which parts of a person can be very concretely located inside another person and identified with them (with the object).

It is well known that for Melanie Klein it was essentially a defence mechanism in which, although “good parts” can be projected and identified, it is mostly bad, aggressive parts that are expelled and experienced as intolerable, and the Ego is inevitably weakened and impoverished, being unable to assimilate good internal objects and finding itself threatened by everything it has expelled.

In fact, back in 1932, Ferenczi, investigating early experiences of abuse (physical as well as emotional), had identified a pathological form of identification, *identification with the aggressor*, which in several respects could represent an intuition, if not an actual anticipation, of the idea of projective identification. Unlike Klein, however, Ferenczi had emphasised the projective impulses of the caregiver into the baby, rather than the other way round as the Kleinian hypothesis predicated.

And Jung had also described the process of *empathy* in 1921, indicating a phenomenology of psychic events which can in many ways be likened to projective identification (Gordon, 1965). Indeed, he wrote that

Empathy is... a kind of perceptive process characterized by the fact that, through feeling, some essential psychic content is projected into the object, so that the object is assimilated to the subject and coalesces with him to such an extent that he feels himself, as it were, in the object.... He does not, however, feel himself projected into the object; rather, the “empathized” object appears animated to him, as though it were speaking to him.... As a rule, the projection transfers unconscious contents into the object, for which reason empathy is also termed “*transference*” in analytic psychology (Jung, 1921, p. 270).

Jung's definition goes on to consider how, alongside negative aspects, positive elements may also be projected and identified with, becoming capable of leading to an "aesthetic animation", to empathy, and to a profound imaginative search for processes in the object.

This movement clearly does not rule out the possibility of projecting some 'radioactive' psychic material which would generate confusion, weakening of consciousness, and loss of identity, but it does nevertheless hint that projective identification might have a communicative function and that this communicative function could involve past and present modes which manifest themselves in the here-and-now of the transference relationship.

And in the same year that Melanie Klein published *Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms*, in *The Psychology of the Transference* (illustrated with a series of alchemical images) Jung had again devoted himself to observing some unconscious processes which occurred during the course of therapeutic treatment and especially their "inductive action" (Jung, 1946, p. 176). What Jung is describing is again a psychic phenomenology which offers striking analogies with that of projective identification, although it apparently leads to very different consequences, to the activation of the unconscious and to what he called "archetypal transference". Indeed, he observed:

The transference, however, alters the psychological stature of the doctor, though this is at first imperceptible to him. He too becomes affected, and has as much difficulty in distinguishing between the patient and what has taken possession of him.... The activated unconscious appears as a flurry of unleashed opposites and calls for the attempt to reconcile them, so that, in the words of the alchemists, the great panacea, the *medicina catholica* may be born (Jung, 1946, p. 193).

And the *medicina catholica* is by no means a panacea sought through religion, for all that religion is a serious matter within the sphere of the psychic (see, for example, Lacan 2005). The *medicina catholica* is the *Philosopher's Stone*, the Universal (*καθολικός*) Medicine, the *Subject of the Sages* capable of curing all ills, not only those of men, but also of animals, and even of minerals: perhaps that "ineffable subject of the unconscious" (Grotstein, 2000) which may free the "gold from its base metal" or the chaos of an undifferentiated β , transmuting it into the dream-work α .

As Nathan Schwartz-Salant (1982) maintains, Jung was using the images of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* in 1946 to explain projective identification and archetypal transference, viewing the engravings in the alchemical text as a series of representations of the unconscious process which comes into play between two individuals: Self and other, subject and object, mother and child, or patient and analyst.

The *Rosarium Philosophorum (sive pretiosissimus donum Dei)* is an alchemical work from the XIII-XIV centuries which, alongside the written text, contains twenty illustrations representing the foundational moments of the *opus*, the procedure which leads to the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. The title *Rosarium* does not refer to the recitation of the rosary but to the symbology of the rose which, from antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, remained associated with, among other things, the idea of perfection and the infinite.

Even though most of the linguistic codices that were used in its composition have been lost, the *Rosarium* re-appeared at the start of the twentieth century as part of the research into symbolic and mystical thought initiated by the Viennese psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer (1). Here, for the first time (we are in 1914), links were hypothesised between alchemy and the psychology of the unconscious.

It is via this route, and by way of Freud's circle, that the *Rosarium* reached Jung and inspired his attempt to found his own psychological hypotheses on similar linguistic, historical, and philological traces. And based on these traces, he seemed to convince himself that (besides being a taxonomy of chemical knowledge from that period) alchemy was also the representation and projection of unconscious psychic processes by manipulating and transforming material elements. Thus, like the alchemical *opus*, the analytic *opus* is engaged, by means of laborious, risky, and profoundly mutative procedures (Grotstein [2000, 2007] talks about *psychoanalytic exorcism*), in overcoming internal psychic oppositions or the dissolution of fusional states between subject and object (Jung, 1929/1957, pp. 85 and 123-124).

As can be observed throughout his work, Jung was generally aware that the mechanisms of projection (of *participation mystique*) have both constructive and destructive aspects and that, by transposition, projective identification has positive and negative aspects. And the intuitions offered by Jung's alchemical (and archetypal) rêverie seem to have been a subterranean inspiration for Bion's thinking about the formulation of the communicative function performed by projective identification as well as the idea of the relationship between container and contained (♀ ↔ ♂).

For all that Bion's reflections (Bion, 1992, 353) seem to indicate a "contrast" between *unconsciused* and *identijected* – perhaps between "transformed" (or "transformable") and "expelled" – in reality he removes the phenomenology of projective identification from a merely defensive context as the generator of the most serious psychopathologies. With Bion, projective identification also becomes a primal and preverbal mode of communication which lasts throughout life and offers itself as the background fabric of any relational field (and therefore also of the analytic field).

The first clinical intuition about the mother's *containing* function in regard to her child's anxieties of death had been proposed by Bion in 1959 in the article *Attacks on*

Linking in which, referring to Kleinian theory (Klein, 1946), he speculated that projective identification might be the only form of link by which some patients could be, and tried to be, understood.

Essentially (albeit reductively) the ♀↔♂ model therefore develops and expands the Kleinian concept of projective identification in a communicative direction. Indeed, Bion (1959) considers that, for the infant, “projective identification makes it possible for him to investigate his own feelings in a personality powerful enough to contain them” (p. 314). Unlike the earlier Kleinian formulation, which had emphasised the essentially defensive and evacuative features of projective identification, Bion’s recovers the dimension in which it is a deep unconscious communication, regarding the ♀↔♂ relationship, along with PS↔D and the links L (*love*), H (*hate*), and K (*knowledge*), as fundamental psychoanalytic elements extending into the field of sense-impressions, myth, and passion (2).

In fact, a few years later, Bion (1962) devoted chapter 27 of *Learning from Experience* to the concepts of K, ♀, and ♂, and development of ♀ and ♂. Starting out once again from Melanie Klein’s description of projective identification, he abstracts the idea of a container (♀) into which a more or less differentiated psychic element is projected, an element he calls the contained (♂) (3). If they are connected, or rather, if permeated by emotion, ♀ and ♂ transform each other and evolve in a way that is customarily described as ‘development’. And in particular, the development of ♀ happens by means of specific emotional experiences (Ferro, 2002): repeated experiences of intimate contact, successive micro-unisons, micro-experiences of being in *O*; the child’s emotional truth becoming *O* in the mother: the patient’s emotional truth becoming *O* in the analyst.

Jungian matrices of Bion’s thought

From Freudian thought, first of all, Bion seems to extract those indications that are necessary for defining a method and a discipline.

Here the *method* concerns the “way” to access unconscious psychic processes, with the aim of integrating them as objects of study with those apparently better-known processes of conscious mental life. The discipline, by contrast, becomes a fundamental element of the analytic set-up.

Whereas for Freud the psychoanalyst’s “neutrality” and “abstinence” were the fundamental aspects of his discipline, for Bion (1970) it becomes essential for the analytic discipline to be able to rid itself of memory, desire, understanding, and sensory perception. As Freud had intuited, confiding in a letter to Lou Andreas Salomé, the analyst must “blind [him]self artificially in order to focus all the light on one dark spot” (Freud, 1916) the unknown (the *Unerkannte* (4), thereby avoiding the risk of a predominantly epistemological view.

Bion, however, proposes a mode of listening which pushes beyond the Freudian technique of “free-floating attention”, adopting an ontological position in which he supplants *making-conscious* from its central role in the analytic process and in its

place installs the analyst's *unconscious psychological work* which is directed towards intuiting the unconscious psychic reality of the present moment in order to become one with it as a single thing (Ogden, 2015).

And in the background, a similar *ontological* perspective (that is, one that concerns not what the analyst *knows*, but what the analyst *is* in the *hic et nunc* of the session) had been glimpsed by Jung in *The Psychology of the Transference*, when he had written:

Even the most experienced psychotherapist will discover again and again that he is caught up in a bond, a combination resting on *mutual unconsciousness*. And though he may believe himself to be in possession of all the necessary knowledge concerning the constellated archetypes, he will in the end come to realize that there are very many things indeed of which his academic knowledge never dreamed. Each new case that requires thorough treatment is *pioneer work, and every trace of routine than proves to be a blind alley*. Consequently, the higher psychotherapy is a most exacting business and sometimes it sets tasks which challenge not only our understanding or our sympathy, but *the whole man*. The doctor is inclined to demand this total effort from his patient, yet he must realize that this same demand only works if he is aware that it *applies also to himself* (Jung, 1946, §§ 366-367, my italics).

And so it can no longer be the metapsychology of the drives that is posited as the exclusive foundation of psychoanalytic theory and technique: it also becomes necessary to integrate – as Ferenczi had said in 1928 – a “metapsychology of the analyst's [affective] (5) mental processes during analysis.”

It is the links – H (*hate*), L (*love*), K (*knowledge*) – which animate the bipersonal field of analysis. And it is their positive (+) or negative (-) quality which determines its evolutions or regressions. Psychoanalysis expands its own objectives by transforming itself from a simple *talking cure* into an outright *being cure*, a caring for and cure of life.

And in an absolutely enchanting passage from *Cogitations*, Bion indicates with crystalline clarity what caring for life means:

concern for an object precisely because that object has the quality of being alive. It means distinguishing between objects because one is alive and the other is not. It means that the difference is an important one. It means being curious about the qualities that go to make up what we know as life, and to have a desire to understand them. Finally, concern for life means that a person must have respect for himself in his qualities as a living object. Lack of concern means lack of respect for himself and, *a fortiori*, of others,

which is a fundamental and of proportionately grave import for analysis (Bion, 1992, pp. 247-248).

And once again there seems to have been a substantial imprinting of Jung on Bion's thought. For both men, concern for life corresponds to the possibility of staying in profound contact with the psychic truth of human experience as a necessary premise for guaranteeing mental health and, *a fortiori*, the analytic experience.

And so Bion also seems to absorb the idea of "binocularity", of the *coniunctio oppositorum* (Jung, 1955/1956), from Jung's reflections. First of all, the *binocularity* of mind and matter, of body and soul. This is why no caesura exists between psychic and somatic phenomena, just as no caesura exists between primary and secondary processes.

For Bion, it is impossible to make an impartial and "monocular" record of the Self's psychic qualities, and he writes:

For these reasons... I find the theory of primary and secondary processes unsatisfactory. This theory is weak in the need to postulate two systems at the point where, in my theory of an *alpha-function*, an emotional experience is transformed into *alpha-elements*, to make dream thought, unconscious waking thinking and storage in the mind (memory) possible. I attribute the appearance of *beta-elements*, the closely associated bizarre objects and the serious disturbances ordinarily associated with excessive obtrusion of the psychotic elements of the personality, to the failure of alpha-function (Bion, 1962, p. 54, my italics).

And for Bion as much as for Jung, mind and body, conscious and unconscious seem to constitute different viewpoints from which to observe, and give meaning to, the "facts" of any human relationship and hence the facts of the analytic session. And these facts become an object of experience when they are "transcended" in the unification of conscious and unconscious contents (Jung, 1957/1958); or they become somatic when it is the body that observes them; or else they become psychic when it is possible for the mind to experience them directly.

By contrast, in the dimensions of the proto-mental they are still indistinct, just as the individual is undifferentiated from the group.

Indeed, Bion (1961b) wrote that the *proto-mental system* is:

one in which physical and psychological or mental are undifferentiated.... It is from this matrix that emotions proper to the basic assumption flow to reinforce, pervade, and, on occasion, to dominate the mental life of the group. Since it is a level in which physical and mental are undifferentiated, it stands to reason that, when distress from this source manifests itself, it

can manifest itself just as well in physical forms as in psychological (p. 102).

In a similar way, Jung seemed to have identified the seat of the group in the collective unconscious and in the archetypal unconscious. And perhaps he had anticipated Bion's thinking when he applied the term *transcendent function* (Jung, 1957/1958) to the essential binocularity of conscious and unconscious. But maybe, being still too wrapped up in a topical conception of the psychic, he had been unable to regard the unconscious definitively, not as a place, but as a function of the personality.

The unconscious is *infinite* (Bion, 1992) and cannot have a location in space or time. It is a function of the mind in which one can get lost, but it is also a function constantly engaged in the attempt to transform the traumatic *finite* (the "conscious") of proto-sensory and proto-emotional experiences into something dreamable, thinkable, and thus liveable.

We may get the feeling that Jung's archetypal/collective unconscious is the creative product of the reverie of an analyst constantly in search of her/his own personal *O* and that *O*-ness which are continually and unpredictably generated in the relationship with her/his patients.

In this way, the *Liber novus* and the *Red Book*, like all Jung's "alchemical" writings seem to constitute a set of training manuals for developing the analyst's capacity for reverie and maintaining her own mental apparatus. And in the same way, Bion's trilogy *Memoir of the Future* seems to represent a stimulus, a challenge to the capacity for dreaming and "unconsciousing" in the analyst, in the author/reader couple and, lastly, in the patient/analyst couple.

And here we have a demonstration of how scientific language can reveal all its limitations in describing and comprehending the psychic. In order to speak about the soul, the spirit, and the mind, Jung assimilates the esoteric language of the alchemists, while Bion relies on the ecstatic language of the mystics and seems to have no doubts about the inadequacy, not only of our scientific language, but even of our equipment for thinking thoughts:

We assume that the psychotic limitation is due to an illness: but that that of the scientist is not. Investigation of the assumption illuminates disease on the one hand and *scientific method* on the other. It appears that our rudimentary equipment for "thinking" thoughts *is adequate when the problems are associated with the inanimate*, but not when the object for investigation is the phenomenon of life itself (Bion, 1962, p. 14, my italics).

And, in 'Spirit and Life', albeit in a differently framed discussion, Jung had expressed a similar puzzlement about the possibility of science knowing the psychic:

Science can only be invoked when the content [a given content of consciousness] claims to be an assertion about something that can be met with *in the external world*; we can appeal to epistemological criticism only when an unknowable thing is posited as knowable. Let us take an example familiar to everyone. Science has never discovered any “God”, epistemological criticism proves the impossibility of knowing God, but the psyche comes forward with the assertion of the experience of God. *God is a psychic fact of immediate experience*, otherwise there would never have been any talk of God (Jung, 1926, p. 328, my italics and parenthesis).

So, psychoanalysis cannot be a “hard science”, it also needs poetry and myth. Maybe it’s a mythical and poetic science: or *mytho-poietic*, in the sense that its goal is the possibility of making the traumatic unknowability of the Real (Kant, Freud, Lacan) liveable.

In any case, Freud himself had grasped the mythic nature of his metapsychology when he declared, “The theory of the instincts is, so to say, our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness” (Freud, 1932, p. 95).

So, even the instincts, being so “indefinite”, cannot offer themselves as the product of epistemological research, but come to represent the experiential effect of an ontological intuition. As Jung would say, “I do not contest the relative validity either of the realistic standpoint, the esse in re, or of the idealistic standpoint, the esse in intellectu,” but would “like to unite these extreme opposites by an esse in anima, which is the psychological standpoint” (Jung, 1926, p. 328).

And from his reading of Jung – like Melanie Klein (1961) after all – Bion picks up the idea of *intuition* as an analytic tool, like that indispensable ‘sixth sense’ which activates the psychoanalytic function of the analyst’s mind. And in that direction, Bion (1970, p. 7) expressed himself clearly and decisively:

The physician can see and touch and smell. The realizations with which a psycho-analyst deals cannot be seen or touched; anxiety has no shape or colour, smell or sound. For convenience, I propose to use the term ‘intuit’ as a parallel in the psychoanalyst's domain to the physician's use of ‘see’, ‘touch’, ‘smell’, and ‘hear’.

Is this a paradigm shift? Perhaps. Or perhaps it is the imaginative, creative selection of those elements that can make psychoanalysis into a genuine instrument for the care of life, as well as being – as Freud (1922) had claimed – a method for investigating unconscious psychic processes and a theory developed on the basis of that method.

The poetry of clinical practice: from the identijected to the unconscioused

“Unconscioused” = unbewusst. Oh, for a similar word for ‘projective identification’; ‘identijected’, as contrasted with ‘unconscioused’”

W. R. Bion (1992), p. 308

In the early Seventies, aged a little over forty, a hugely successful man who had apparently achieved personal and professional fulfilment (6), decides to start an analysis. He is a director, an actor, a film producer, and also a skilled composer of music.

The patient I am telling you about is Clint Eastwood, a protean, chameleon, but undoubtedly brilliant icon of American cinema, the actor who, thanks to Sergio Leone’s ‘spaghetti westerns’ and, especially the ‘Dollars trilogy’ – *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966) – has gained enormous popularity and international success. In fact, from 1968 onwards his career had begun to take off: he had been cast in *Coogan's Bluff*, directed by Don Siegel and co-starred with Richard Burton a year later in *Where Eagles Dare*.

Also in 1969, he had played in *Paint Your Wagon*, a western based on a musical comedy shown on Broadway a few years before. And even though the musical parts that Eastwood performed, alongside Lee Marvin and Jean Seberg were well received by the critics, they had disappointed the actor’s fans who now saw him as forever tied to the role of antihero, the hard, just man without scruples, the ruthless avenger: “the man with no name”, “the Texan with eyes of ice”; until in the Seventies he came to create the controversial “Inspector Callaghan” (*Dirty Harry*); and later still, the “Pale Rider” (1985).

For all the varied new opportunities that fame had brought him, it was now difficult for Clint Eastwood to free himself from the role of “hard man”, the cold actor who talked in a monotone, whose charisma was solely merciless. The answer that Sergio Leone seems to have given when asked why he liked Eastwood as an actor is now legendary: “I like Clint Eastwood because he’s an actor with only two expressions: one with the hat, and one without it.”

But was that really the case? Did the actor Clint Eastwood have only two expressions? And how many did the man Clint Eastwood have? A man whose love life was always tortured and turbulent, with a variety of relationships from which seven children were born to five different women whom he fascinated and then betrayed, left and picked up with again, and then left once more.

And this man who seems hungry for life, who seems to devour every moment before running away from anything that might really be able to sustain him, seems insatiable in professional terms too. He tries to escape the commercial role in which he has been typecast by *Dirty Harry*, but keeps falling back into it; from 1971 he also starts a

career as a director, beginning with *Play Misty for Me*, as a producer, and as the composer of his film's soundtracks.

What mental pain, what dissatisfaction, or what nameless dread (Bion, 1961) did Clint Eastwood Junior try, at a certain point in his life, to transform without being able to give up a series of identifications, actions which were in some ways dysmetric and led him to be unable to feel and live the real emotions of his life?

The analysis with Wilfred Bion

C.E. At the start of the Seventies I was very dissatisfied with my film-making. In 1969 I had worked on a musical film called Paint Your Wagon. It didn't make much money... I got bad reviews and some people even told me I should see it as the end of my career. It was a wake-up call, and the idea of never escaping from the violent films with which people identified me was depressing. I was just seen as a kind of bad boy, a macho type, and other ugly stuff of that kind.

I talked about this with my friend Jane Fonda, and she confided in me that she had had an analysis for the same reasons and, from then on, her life seemed to have changed direction. I asked her who this analyst was because I doubted I'd be able to find a good analyst here in California. She told me he was called Wilfred Bion and that he was an English analyst, quite famous in psychoanalytic circles, and he'd just arrived here.

I decided to fix up an appointment right away, but oddly, when I called the number Jane had given me, he told me I should send him a letter explaining why I wanted an analysis. I found this strange, and I got the weird idea that he wanted to analyse my handwriting. So I wrote him on a typewriter, just a few lines and giving the barest reasons. Only two days later I got the call giving me an appointment time.

I arrived punctually and was met by a very serious man, about seventy years old I think, and the same height as me (1,93 cm). He was dressed in a very English way, a pale beige jacket, a white shirt, and a dark blue bowtie. He showed me to a chair and sat in his armchair, with a light brown couch to his right. I looked at him and noticed that his thick eyebrows were raised as he asked me, "What the devil are you doing here?"

"What the devil are you doing here?" This expression, though unusual, could be uttered by an analyst who is wondering why on earth a man of such achievement and success has decided to undertake an analysis. But, considering that this is Bion, I don't think we can make do with such an off-hand explanation. First of all, the language is striking: the words seem to have been taken not from a handbook on psychoanalytic conversation, but from the screenplay of an Inspector Callaghan saga, something like the catchphrase from *Sudden Impact*: "Go ahead, make my day." (7) So, what demon could have been intuited by Bion? The devil possessing the patient?

The devilishness of the analyst? The fact that the analysis will have to pass through an infernal dimension? A sort of *nekya*¹(8)?

Maybe we could make the imaginative speculation that Bionian *at-one-ment* had caught the drama of a man constrained by success, maybe “constrained by omnipotence” (Grotstein, 2007), prisoner in a mask that allowed him only two expressions (“with and without the hat”), suffocating his soul and his true Self.

In 1939 Jung had written

an unconscious desire for power confronted him in the form of the devil. Both sides appear here: the light side and the dark. The devil wants to tempt Jesus to proclaim himself master of the world. Jesus wants not to succumb to the temptation; then, thanks to the function that results from every conflict, a symbol appears; it is the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven, a spiritual kingdom rather than a material one. Two things are united in this symbol, the spiritual attitude of Christ and the devilish desire for power (p. 267-8).

So, is it an “idea of the Kingdom of Heaven” that Clint Eastwood was unconsciously seeking from his analysis with Bion? Put another way, could we think that he was looking for the possibility of achieving a *transcendent position* (Grotstein, 2007) after passing through the drama of PS and D; or that he was looking for the possibility of transcending the alienation forced on him by the (traumatic) hypertrophy of a false Self (Winnicott, 1965).

C.E. *It seemed a good moment to tell him again, “I’m Clint Eastwood Jr., I’m an actor, director, and producer in Hollywood.” In a seemingly sarcastic tone he replied, “Where else could you be all those things at once?” I kept quiet for a while, trying to decide where to go next, and he broke the silence by asking me, “Have you thought about doing something else with your life?”*

And in this very brief exchange what is most surprising once again is the question of the language. While Clint Eastwood reiterates the function performed by the characters holding him hostage, what language is Bion using? Is it a dream-language? Is it that of Achievement (Bion, 1962)? Or is it instead the language of O?

Hollywood may indeed be the only place in the world where a person can allow themselves to be “all those things” at the same time: an actor, a director, and a producer. And Hollywood is undoubtedly the place of fiction and the American Dream. And yet, Bion also seems to be evoking different realities and mental states, and analysis could also become the “place” where “all those things” can be housed: the session as a place where Clint Jr can bring all the “characters” who compose, complicate, torment, or coerce his personality.

¹ A *nekya* is a journey to Hell.

And the analyst does not seem interested in what the patient does, or says he knows, or really does know about himself; he does not concentrate on K but orients the vertex of his listening towards O, the O that is still unknown, perhaps still too impersonal, as much for the patient as for the analyst. Bion demonstrates that he has instant faith in the words he utters, lets them arise from the emotions which the patient is communicating to him, and makes direct use of a language of Achievement in which words do not replace actions but become the presaging of an action (Manica, 2020): “Have you thought about doing something else with your life?”

C.E. I admit this question terrified me and made me happy at the same time. In my letter I'd made no mention of work-related reasons for an analysis. I answered, “Well, that's why I'm here. I think some conflicts – but I don't know exactly what they are – are making me ask for this.” Then I couldn't resist what seemed like a moment of clairvoyance, and I said that an image had come into my mind, of being inspected at an airport with a metal detector. Raising his eyebrows again, he said, “It's very important for the analysis that this image has come into your mind. It's to do with freedom and safety. I'll let you pass my inspection and undertake the analysis with me. But will we pass your inspection? We can't know that. Only time will tell.” Whatever he might have said, I felt that my analysis had started at that moment. I found myself in the presence of a sensitive and reflective person to whom I could say whatever I wanted. “Dr Bion, thanks for taking me on. I've always thought that the cinema gave me freedom because I work with visual images and music. I'll do whatever is necessary to help myself.” He said, “Carry on being sincere and saying whatever comes into your mind. Don't worry about hurting my feelings or anyone else's. We'll devote ourselves to meeting Clint Eastwood.” Then he paused, and added, “Junior.”

So, besides the fundamental rules, this is Bion's way of understanding analysis: the focus is on the emotions of the encounter, and the analyst is an artist (Bion, 1978); he is a painter or a poet who must be able to catch the musicality and colours of the analysis so as to become the patient's truth and thus enable him to meet and discover himself, the person he has been and the person he has not been able to be. So Bion is interested in meeting Clint Eastwood and in Clint Eastwood meeting himself, *Clint Junior* included. Bion's pause before pronouncing that “Junior” is an actor's pause, a theatrical, almost Shakespearian pause. And it doesn't seem to derive from an intention to cut the possible grandiosity of Clint Eastwood's Self down to size, so as to reduce the risk of an idealising or mirroring transference. On the contrary, Bion seems to be attuning himself to the *junior* part of Clint in order to save him from being endlessly constrained by his success, by the hard, violent cliché, but also from the archetypal dimension of the *puer* (Jung, 1940) who has been prevented from growing, whose creativity and vitality have been taken from him, but how has also been deprived of the right to let his own emotions mature.

Jung (1940) had written

Consciousness hedged about by psychic powers, sustained or threatened or deluded by them, is the age-old experience of mankind. This experience has projected itself into the archetype of the child [*puer*], which expresses man's wholeness. The “child” is all that is abandoned and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful; the insignificant, dubious beginning, and the triumphal end (p. 178-9, my parenthesis).

C.E. *I was again struck by his sensitivity and I said what I had been thinking a moment before: “But can you read thoughts? If you do, you’ll know I just thought that, besides being sensitive, you’re a real thinker.” “Look more closely, Clint... May I call you Clint? We are both freely thinking about and analysing each other. There is a point between us where it is impossible to say who it belongs to. That point, about which we know nothing, is where an evolution can occur.”*

Is that really how it is? In an analysis do we freely think about and analyse each other? Maybe not. Or maybe yes. At least, it is what should happen in an analysis in the way Bion has begun to understand it. In his view, the mind is not an isolated monad. On the contrary the mind is intrinsically intersubjective; it does not exist except in the presence of another mind that may give rise to passion (Bion, 1963). This is true: we are seen as our gaze sees us when it is seen by someone else. And this does not mean that every act of our subjectivity is illusory, but that in every act of our subjectivity, we are *entangled*. This is what quantum physics makes clear to us (Rovelli, 2020); Husserlian philosophy had intuited it. The subject is completed in a transcendental intersubjective matrix; it is born out of that *inter-subject* which biology incarnates in the intervillous placental space. There, mother and foetus are in a state of entanglement and the maternal unconscious begins to create the unconscious of her little child. She creates that primal oneiric screen which will make emotional experiences visible and imaginable, experienceable and dreamable, which would otherwise be made intolerable by the traumatic immanence of their reality. And it is very probably true, as Prospero/Shakespeare claims at the end of *The Tempest*: “We are such stuff as dreams are made on/And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

This is why psychoanalysis cares and cures by *transformation in dreaming* (Ferro, 2009). It is *unconsciousing* – as Bion (1992) said – it is in the *dreaming ensemble* of patient and analyst that the mind’s intersubjective (placental) matrix, which the primal trauma may have broken into and torn apart, can be put back together.

C.E. *I remained silent, thinking: “Look... I have to bear not knowing how to make the right decisions in my life. I have to tolerate this appointment with my uncertainties.” But our conversation is over, as he tells me, pointing to his watch.*

Since I like watches, I immediately recognised the English brand Burberry. I looked at the watch and saw that 45 minutes had passed. He picked up the diary from a table beside him and asked me if I could come back on Monday at 13.00. I told him that time was fine, but I was very agitated.

Talking to him some time later, I heard him say something that made me really curious: "There's an emotional storm going on because of the contact between the two of us. It happens with anyone who lets himself reveal his personality, his mind, his soul, or whatever name you want to give it. There is no activity where it happens more than in analysis. It's a difficult business from which we'll try to derive some benefit."

Bion (1987 [1976]) has drawn our attention to the fact that, although the consulting room might seem to be "a transparent, calm, mirror of water," it may instead be a place where only *turbulences* happen. Every decision, like every caesura (such as birth, adolescence, old age, or death) provokes turbulences. And in order to put one's choices into effect it is necessary "to be able to tolerate facing the emotional tumult" (p. 217). It is inside the turbulence that the events of an unknown situation can be identified without avoiding emptiness and uncertainty by filling them with what Freud called "false memories" or paramnesias. And both the patient in his perturbation and the analyst in the exercise of her profession must decide whether to renounce curiosity and go on posing questions or resort to fillers (which might also be theories) that are indistinguishable from a paramnesia. Of course it is a "difficult business" but we can try to derive some benefit from it. As we recalled earlier, Bion (1992) had said, "The only point of importance in any session is the unknown. Nothing must be allowed to distract from intuiting that. In any session, evolution takes place. Out of the darkness and formlessness something evolves" (p. 272). And he had shown us how it was this very evolution that the analyst must be ready to interpret.

And still on the subject of "difficult business", from a different perspective Jung (1940) had observed:

The first manifestation of the "child," is as a rule a totally unconscious phenomenon. Here the patient identifies himself with his personal infantilism... Further transformations run true to the hero myth..... At this stage there is usually another identification, this time with the hero, whose role is attractive for a variety of reasons. The identification is often extremely stubborn and dangerous to the psychic equilibrium..... Once the reef of the second identification has been successfully navigated, conscious processes can be cleanly separated from the unconscious, and the latter observed successfully. This leads to the possibility of an accommodation with the unconscious, and thus to a possible synthesis of the conscious and

unconscious elements of knowledge and action. This in turn leads to a shifting of the centre of personality from the Ego to the Self (§§ 303-304).

C.E. *It was an absurdly fundamental point in my analysis. Deriving a benefit from nasty businesses involved making decisions where I had to keep certain things and get rid of others in order to go on being creative.*

I went into politics for a while, becoming Mayor of the city of Carmel. This kept me busy for some years, I was getting better and I took the risk of doing some difficult things, but they bore fruit. Facing my sadness, I discovered what happiness might be. Observing my ignorance, I discovered what it might mean to be wise. I discovered my gentleness by seeing my violence.

By passing through “dark nights of the soul” – sadness, ignorance, violence like St John of Cross to whom Bion (1965) refers in *Transformations* – Clint Eastwood seems to discover and also become the other half of his own soul: that O he’d always run away from in the fear that he’d end up involved in “nasty business”.

We don’t know if the analysis with Bion really cured Clint Eastwood. But we can reasonably suppose that it cared for him. In the second part of his life, his films become more intense and tragic, but also more poetic and resonantly intimate. For example, in 1995, he directed and performed in a touching love story, *The Bridges of Madison County*. In 2003, he directed, produced, and wrote the music for *Mystic River*. In 2005, he won four Oscars for *Million Dollar Baby*, where he dramatizes the desperate attempt by an old boxing trainer to make reparation for his failure as a father figure. In 2008, he directed, produced, composed the score, and acted in *Gran Torino*, where he is once again a solitary old man, a racist, curmudgeonly veteran of the Korean War who nevertheless redeems his life by sacrificing it to save a family of Asian immigrants.

Finally, in 2018, at the age of eighty, after directing and acting in other successful films, he decided once again to produce, direct and act in a film that is perhaps the most emotionally (and oneirically) autobiographical work of his artistic career: *The Mule*. Now, Clint Eastwood is no longer just an actor, but is turning into an artist (9): in other words, he becomes the authentic author of his own emotional life; his own sadness and joy; his own ignorance and wisdom; his own violence and gentleness.

And in *The Mule* (taken from the true story of Leo Sharp) he is again a Korean War veteran, solitary and misanthropic, consumed by a narcissistic and obsessional interest in horticulture. Apart from driving his pick-up, this is the true passion that fires his life and alienates him from more genuine links: with his wife and daughter, and essentially with his whole family.

And so, when his business is expropriated, he lets a friend almost randomly get him involved in the Sinaloa drug cartel for whom he becomes a courier. Untroubled by any ethical concern, he crosses America in his beloved pick-up until his ex-wife’s illness brings him back home to look after her during the last days of her life and to

attend her funeral. Perhaps for the first time, deep authentic affects make a crack in his autarchic obsessionality. He misses a drug delivery and is in danger of being killed by the criminal gang, but the cartel's boss somehow forgives him and entrusts him with delivering the biggest deal ever made. But the FBI are on his trail and Earl is arrested. In prison he rediscovers familial affection and can once more devote himself to growing flowers.

In the metaphor of the epilogue to *The Mule* is Earl the image of a Clint Eastwood placated and healed at last? Are his Selves, still in dramatic conflict in *Mystic River* (the mafia boss, the cop, and the fragile, abused man), finally able to coexist in peace, albeit with a certain degree of dissociation? Maybe in the metaphor of the narcissistic and social "prison" (Bion, 1992), egoistic and altruistic urges, narcissistic nuclei and anti-narcissistic, relational aspects (Racamier, 1980), guilt and reparation can achieve a form of tolerable cohabitation. Perhaps even a "bad business can bear fruit." Besides, both Ogden (1989) and Greenberg (1991), while following different theoretical and clinical paths, were coming to the same conclusion: that at the end of the analysis, the patient has a richer, broader, but not necessary more homogeneous and cohesive, experience of himself (Manica, 2020).

C.E. *I summed all this up in a recent conversation with my friend and song-writer Toby Keith, who I play golf with. I told him I was going to be 88 next week and he asked me what I was going to do. I answered, "I'm going to start on a new film." "Are you serious?" he said, as if it was a mistake to be taking on such a stressful project at my age. I told him, "I'm not going to let myself turn into an old man." It seems that my answer generated one of those turbulences that Dr Bion used to talk about. Toby composed the music for my film The Mule. I miss Dr Bion so much.*

Notes

1. *Probleme der Mystik und ihrer Symbolik* (Leipzig, 1914).
2. As Grotstein (2007) observes, Bion always held that during analysis, the analyst should make use of 'sense-impressions, myth and passion' (Bion, 1963, p. 14). By 'sense-impressions' he meant the analyst's observation and perception – I would say, his being-present – in a dimension which also involves his corporeality; by 'myth', the entirety of unconscious fantasies and myths, both collective and individual, as well as the body of theories dependant on them (the Oedipus myth, for example); and by 'passion', the experience of emotional suffering, the analyst's reverie, and his receptiveness to the personal and original emotions stirred up by intimate sharing with the patient.
3. On Bion's decision to resort to abstract models indicated by mathematical icons, Grotstein (2000 1981?) writes: "Mathematics had the advantage of being a language of signs and/or symbols which could conveniently represent objects in their absence and therefore facilitate a language useful for abstraction without the penumbra of associations [the saturation] typical of words."

4. The *Unerkannte* is the unknown, “the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown” (Freud, 1900, 525).

5. My parenthesis.

6. Clint Eastwood talks about his experience of analysis (whether real or pretended) with Wilfred Bion (4 Aprile 2020). Source: *Espacio Psicoanalítico de Barcelona – EPBCN*. English version by the translator of this article.

7. In the Italian version, the expression was translated as “*Coraggio...fatti ammazzare*” [Go ahead, get yourself killed] and this also became the film’s title.

8. A *nekya* is a journey to Hell.

9. I think we all remember the famous exchange of witticisms exchanged by Bion and Resnik during the Paris Seminar (1978):

Bion: [...] What sort of artist are you? Are you a potter? A painter? A musician? A writer? In my experience many analysts don’t really know what sort of artists they are.

Dr Resnik: What if they are not artists?

Bion: Then they are in the wrong job. I don’t know what job is any good because even if they are not psychoanalysts they need to be artists in life itself (p. 186).

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