

Feedback from Meeting at Societat Espanoyla Psychoanalisi (SEP)

(26/27 June 2014)

Friday Night Lecture Meeting On the whole, both the lecture and clinical experience in Barcelona were quite productive while at the same time challenging because of my somewhat limited Spanish language skills. On Thursday night, I was hosted at a private dinner by a small group of analysts who have for years had a Bion study group, one that is contained within a basically Relationally-oriented institute. As a small group, they had done a tremendous amount of work for months, having translated all of Bion's 3rd Los Angeles Seminar into Catalan; and translating the various versions of the lecture as well, not to speak of the clinical material into Spanish. In particular, Antonia Grimalt had spear-headed the interface and application process to CAPSA, and it was clear that the group wanted to have Bionian orientations represented at SEP. There was also a very good turnout for a Friday night meeting, when some 60 candidates and members attended; this included also a few individuals outside the immediate SEP community.

There were various issues that needed to be considered: how to lecture on Bion's ideas, while attempting to strike a balance between highly informed students of his texts and those relatively unfamiliar with his ideas. As it was, the Bion's 'Notes on memory and desire' struck a good balance as it is one of his easier to understand pieces. I also set the context for the paper by presenting the first few pages of my text in Spanish; and I think this effort was appreciated. The bulk of the text was then read in English, while the audience followed along in Catalan. I sensed that the directness of the paper and the straight forward nature of Bion's ideas about the analyst's disciplined receptivity struck a responsive chord in the audience. They also seemed especially struck by being able to hear several minutes of Bion directly discussing clinical material. Having the audio available struck some attendees as informing, as they remarked on his 'sonorous yet calming voice,' his plain and direct manner of understanding psychotic and near-psychotic patients in tremendous psychic distress.

Among the questions asked: since many were new to the idea that there had been conflict in Los Angeles in the years after Bion moved there, why did this

atmosphere of strife seem absent in his Los Angeles Seminars? I discussed the profound interest the medical community of psychoanalysts had in the treatment of psychosis in the 1960s, (e.g. Greenson's misguided and failed treatment of Marilyn Monroe in the early 1960s). There was a keen interest in hearing Bion's ideas about the treatment of psychosis; and he aimed many of his remarks in a cogent but plain English summary of what he had learned about treating very disturbed patients, but with the distinctive additive of copious clinical examples. To those fairly unfamiliar with Bion, this seemed to strike a resonant chord, as I made it clear that so much of his writing *is* difficult to understand. The plainness of Bion's speech in the Los Angeles Seminars by contrast resonated with those who wanted to access his ideas in a way that might interest them to read and study further. Towards this end, the small Bion group was pleased not only with the attendance but the feedback they received from appreciative colleagues.

As a way to bridge between those more and those less familiar with Bion's work, Rafael Ferrer, the President of SEP, who presided over the meeting, asked for a plain way to understand what Bion meant by Transformations in K and O. Here I hit upon a fruitful strategy: since the question and answer period was conducted in Spanish, I was only able to respond in an un-complex Spanish, so I first of all discussed Freud's idea of 'free-floating attention,' and then said that Bion expanded his notion with some of his ideas about K and O: K related to what the analyst can apprehend by way of his senses, while O related to the clinician's use of his own intuition, or listening to the experience he or she has while listening to the patient. To another query where the audience member had read in the *IJP* about the split between analysts who favor K and those who favor O, I responded by saying that Bion's texts do not suggest that he saw the two as necessarily opposites, but more as binary opposites. Here I used Jim Grotstein's analogy of the thumb and forefingers: aside from being different, the two are complementary. I also pointed out 'Notes on memory and desire' is a central text for both K and O-link analysts.

Saturday Morning Clinical Seminar This event was attended by 25 candidates and members, again a good turnout for a Saturday morning. This 4 ½ hour meeting consisted of two parts: the group listened to over an hour of Bion's 3rd Clinical Seminar in Los Angeles, again having the translation available in Catalan. It was clear that the listening to the audio elicited a lot of audience

reaction, as the added complication of listening to Bion's English while they read along in Catalan produced some rather intriguing results. One audience member who followed along with the English text, said that she heard references implicit in Bion's remarks that needed to be taken into account: at one point, Bion discussed how a borderline patient reviled him and the group he belonged: that the whole lot psychoanalysts were bad, with some as 'more equally' bad as others. She thought Bion here referred to Orwell's famous phrase from *Animal Farm*. I responded by firstly agreeing with her, then mentioning that at another point, Bion used the phrase 'good enough,' one that I thought related to Winnicott's idea of the 'good enough mother.' This seemed of interest given Bion's general disinclination to cite his sources; so that these embedded references give some idea of authors and analysts he was implicitly citing.

There were a host of reactions to Bion's clinical material: if psychotic patients communicate in the 'infrared/ultraviolet' zone of experience, then it seems that these elements can and are often experienced as quite confusing to the analyst. He complicates in a very informing way how the analyst can be confounded by a patient who is themselves confounded by his own experience. This led to a discussion of how delicate a line it is to draw a distinction between patient attacks that come from a comprehending but maliciously intentioned patient vis-à-vis those who have very restricted comprehension of what they are communicating. Still another respondent saw it in terms of verbally communicable vis-à-vis pre-verbal and incomprehensible experiences.

Still another audience member, one new to Bion's ideas, wondered if when Bion discussed the analyst's own dreams, was he also recommending that they be shared with the patient. I made it quite clear that Bion recommended such practices for the analyst's own self-edification; he would not have countenanced self-disclosure and the sharing of one's dreams with patients.

Another audience member, trained in one of the Argentine Societies, raised the issue of primitive symbiotic states of mind, something he associated with the work of an Argentine analyst, Jose Bleger. I linked these ideas to Rosenfeld's own ideas about a 'pre-splitting' frame of references, but thanked this individual for pointing out other variants and off-shoots of the Kleinian development in London.

In the last segment, there was an 1 ½ hour clinical case presentation that I did in 3 parts: (I) I read a session from an on-going analytic case of mine, all with barely any orienting ‘background’ information. From this material, the group constructed its own ‘lateral communication’ of the material. (II) I then handed out a 3 page summary of 4 major themes that I had isolated in the work with the patient; and we compared the group’s reactions with what I had written about the clinical themes of enduring interest in this case; and (III) where I then shared the results of a ‘Grid’ analysis with the group, attempting to answer the question: does Bion’s ‘Grid’ help us understand more clearly any of the patient and analyst’s communications in the session presented? Although the hour was late by this point, again, there was an enthusiastic discussion. Given the confidential nature of the patient material, it will not be summarized in this document. Suffice it to say that the meeting was extended by almost a ½ hour, as many participants ventured forth their experiences of the clinical material.