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**TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FIELD OF DREAMS:  
A DISCUSSION OF GIUSEPPE CIVITARESE'S  
"HALLUCINOSIS, DREAMING, AND PLAY"**

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If, as I believe, the mind grows in proportion to the extent to which one inquires into it, then the relative proportions of what is known and what is unknown will be reversed the more the mind has evolved. Thus, at the end of a psychoanalytic treatment, we shall know proportionately less of this extended mind than we knew of it at the beginning.

— de Bianchedi, "Psychic Change: The Becoming of an Inquiry" (1991)

Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves and not anything else [— that is] by the immobility of our conception of them.

— Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1927)

Note: In the interest of confidentiality, all case material has been disguised or fictionalized. It is constructed of composites of several patients and multiple real-life scenarios with details altered to ensure anonymity. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

## **Introduction**

It is an honor to be invited to discuss the work of Dr. Giuseppe Civitarese and to dream post-Bionian analysis further. This is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of psychoanalysis in San Francisco, and, if we are still catching sight of new fields of approach, it is by standing on the shoulders of previous analytic generations. Thankfully, as Civitarese's work shows (Civitarese, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2016, 2017), our theories are in an intense state of generativity. Back in 1942 many of today's most visionary theorists, Bion prime amongst them, had yet even to put pen to paper. Even in the early '80s when I entered the field, the local analytic landscape was narrowly grounded in American ego psychology, and the British were yet to sail up over the horizon. Now, years later, not only have the British landed, but so have the French, the Latin Americans, and the Italians! The theoretical topography has opened up panoramically, and, to the arrival of Bionian thought, we are indebted to Los Angeles analysts such as Albert Mason, James Grotstein, and James

Gooch, who were closely connected with Bion and who visited Northern California frequently to teach. More locally, our gratitude goes to local explorers Tom Ogden (2004a, 2004b) in his writing and Peter Goldberg in his extensive teaching. Today, our thinking has overflowed the capacity of a simple scientific container and given rise to a multitheoretical meta-container. At the furthest edges of this container run the currents of the aesthetic sensibility in which we are immersed while reading Civitarese's paper. It is these currents that irrigate the "groundless ground" of the new psychoanalytic paradigm that Civitarese has so beautifully articulated.

These extensions of Bion may be as challenging to us as impressionism and abstract modern art were to followers of representational painting. Bion himself (1962, 1963, 1965, 1970) is notoriously abstract as he avoids the saturated language of midcentury analytic theory to discuss things in a fresh way in his "Language of Achievement" (1970). His writing is *indexical* rather than *iconic* — that is, like the best artists, his writing *points toward* the ineffable without trying to nail everything down as we are accustomed to with other theorists. The result is a conceptual skeleton that has to be fleshed out by each of us from our own experience. The literature demonstrates that the Bion "experts" themselves may do this quite differently. In fact, some years ago, it was incumbent on de Bianchedi (2005) to entitle a paper: "Whose Bion? Who is Bion?"

My own reading of Bion is deeply rooted in the work of Meltzer (1978, 1986) and Grotstein (2000, 2007), but also a reflection of my own interpretation of his work developed and reworked over the last 30 years. My intention is to contextualize Civitarese's evocative paper, to further explore the confusing concept of transformations in hallucinosis, and to look at the challenges as we follow his creative lead in reformulating the nature and function of interpretation.

### **Bion's Concept of "Transformations"**

Civitarese begins his paper by saying that "the concept of 'transformation' is found everywhere in Freud and in psychoanalytic literature." I do think this is true generally since we easily call to mind phrases such as the transformation of the instincts,

the transformations of puberty, or perhaps, “sublimation,” a term borrowed from chemistry when a substance transforms from solid to gas. It’s also true that in colloquial language we use the term to connote a major change in personality. However, while the term is everywhere, I do think Bion’s use of it is very specific and essentially distinct from these other uses, and I wish to elaborate this observation.

As students of Bion are aware, four books comprise the essential core of his work (1962, 1963, 1965, 1970). The first, *Learning from Experience*, uses the digestive metaphor ( $\alpha$ -function; container-contained); the second, *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, uses the metaphor of chemistry (periodic table of elements and grid); and the fourth, *Attention and Interpretation*, uses religious and mystical metaphor. The third, *Transformations*, makes use of metaphors from geometry and is a difficult read for therapists who find Bion’s attempts to mate math with emotion disagreeable. This is unfortunate because in between the sharp edges of geometry, the seeds of the aesthetic model are beginning to flower into soft, fluid shapes.

Bion begins as follows:

Suppose a painter sees a path through a field sown with poppies and paints it: at one end of the chain of events is the field of poppies, at the other a canvas with pigment disposed on its surface. We can recognize the latter represents the former, so I shall suppose that despite the differences between a field of poppies and a piece of canvas, despite the *transformation* [italics mine] that the artist has effected in what he saw to make it take the form of a picture, *something* has remained unaltered and on this *something* recognition depends. The elements that go to make up the unaltered aspect of the transformation I shall call invariants. (1965, p. 1)

A few pages later, Bion introduces his often-misunderstood concept of ‘O’:

The use of these signs may be clarified by an illustration: The patient enters and, following a convention established in the analysis, shakes hands. This is an external act, what I have called a “realization.” In so far as it is useful to regard it

as a thing-in-itself and unknowable (in Kant's sense) it is denoted by the sign O. (1965, pp. 12-13)

What the absolute facts of the session are cannot ever be known, and these I denote by the sign O... My mental processes, by which the phenomena were transformed to become the description I have given ... are represented by the sign T (analyst)  $\alpha$ . (1965, p. 16-17)

In these passages, we see that Bion is linking his new concepts of O and transformations with his pre-existing model of  $\alpha$ -function. A translation might be something like this:

In life, a totality of stimuli come your way from within as a creaturely being, and from without in the form of natural and social forces. You, as subject, are impinged upon by this as a condition of life. The impingements may be described as  $\beta$ -elements, which  $\alpha$ -function will convert into elements suitable for dreaming, thinking, linking, and learning from experience.

So, here we arrive at a very specific meaning of the term "transformation." Transformation here does not refer to the "transformations of the subject," but rather the "subject's transformation of the object," — the object being O, broadly speaking. Through  $\alpha$ -function, O is subjected to transformation. Bion's focus is on the *transformations we make of our perceptions of what is happening to us*. In another paper, I call this the "subjectification of O" (Rather, 2015).

It is said that experience is not what happens to you but what you make of it. This may be stated as a banal aphorism or as a profound truth. As a profound truth, the implications are potentially game-changing. Before Bion, we could confidently poise the pleasure principle against the reality principle (Freud, 1911) and refer to "reality testing" with a certainty that has now been cast into doubt. Bion always emphasizes that O designates an *unknowable* reality, which we are required to formulate through subjective

acts of transformation. Freud's tragic vision of humanity focuses on the discontents inherent in renouncing the pleasure principle in favor of the reality principle in order to gratify at least some of our desires. Bion's tragic vision is that we are fated by the epistemophilic instinct to search for truth with inadequate equipment and without the capacity to handle it fully. In fact, this is the core of his reading of the Oedipus myth (1963, p. 64).

One of the problems with the concept of  $\alpha$ -function is the implication that once  $\beta$ -elements have been " $\alpha$ -betized": mission accomplished! But this is not the case, and not all  $\alpha$ -function is equal. Unfortunately, there is virtually no literature that attempts to classify varieties of  $\alpha$ -function (Bandera, 2005; Rather, 2005). Fortunately, transformations are analogous to  $\alpha$ -function and the concept addresses this problem by giving us types and degrees of transformation that may be considered on a continuum of pathological to healthy-enough, depending on the dosage of "invariants" (Bion, 1965, p.1). As Civitarese has written (2015, p. 1092), Bion refers to rigid motion transformations, projective transformations, and transformations in hallucinosis. The first two correspond to transference in the Freudian sense and to transference in the Kleinian projective sense respectively, but the third, transformations in hallucinosis, is new.

### **Transformations in Hallucinosis**

Before going further, I would like to briefly summarize Bion's theory to orient the reader. In Bion's model, optimal psychic functioning requires tolerating frustration long enough to subject  $\alpha$ -elements to a container-contained process of  $\alpha$ -function, a series of transformations that create the potential for dreaming and thinking in narrative. However, when frustration tolerance is weak, for reasons of nature or nurture, evacuation is the cure. Evacuation takes the form of excessive projective identification, somatization, hallucinations proper (evacuation through the senses), or, at the extremes, attacks on linking. It's useful to remember that in the British lexicon the term "psychotic" is not a descriptive diagnostic term, but rather a psychoanalytic functional term for operations of evacuation rather than containing. In this sense, anyone may have a "psychotic part" of the personality, and this does not mean "being crazy."

According to Bion, all of this takes place both consciously and unconsciously in dreaming. In Freudian theory, while the interpretation of dreams holds a lofty place, the originating function of dreaming is relatively banal — namely, to protect sleep. Freud’s dream-worker pulls a soft blanket over otherwise disturbing wishes and memories through condensation, displacement, symbolization, and other creative disguises. Clinically, one works backward through the disguises of manifest content to harvest the latent meanings and emotions that need to be worked through by the observing ego.

Bion’s theory of “dreaming” is quite different. First, dreaming in Bion’s world is not the limited dreaming of REM sleep, but is instead a broader process he calls “dream-work- $\alpha$ ” (Bion, 1992, p. 62). This dreaming is continuous night and day, awake and asleep. It is the mode by which raw emotional experience is subjected to  $\alpha$ -function and processed. It is like a high-tech unconscious operating system for collating and synthesizing emotional experience in order to learn from it. As I have discussed elsewhere (Rather, 2015), the processing is carried out according to what Matte-Blanco calls the logic of symmetry (1975, 1988), which is the phantom thread linking the elements of Freudian primary process (Freud, 1911, 1915). In optimal functioning, dream-work- $\alpha$  also creates a semi-permeable contact barrier that simultaneously connects and separates unconscious and conscious processing. This barrier is like a dam: it prevents flooding, but allowing irrigation for both systems (Matte-Blanco, 1975, 1988). To use music as a metaphor, dream-work- $\alpha$  is the process by which the impersonal musical notes of O coming at us from the written pages of life are *subjectified and made personal* by the unique harmonic overtones of our individual voices. As such, it is a deeply creative process with its own aesthetics and beauty.

Bion’s skeletal and unsaturated concepts constitute imaginative conjectures (Bion, 1992), which require us to do the fieldwork necessary to discover clinical phenomena that approximate the theory, and, in this regard, transformations in hallucinosis has been more elusive than his more user-friendly ideas. If we find it difficult, we are at least in good company. Meltzer (1986), for example, wrote:

I confess without shame that the concept “transformations in hallucinosis” left me blank for years, while Bion’s more specific ideas about the phenomenon of hallucination proper seemed immediately to link with my clinical experience. (p. 105)

The principal field guides to Bion (Grinberg et al., 1971; Etchegoyan, 1991; Symington & Symington, 1996; Lopez-Corvo, 2003; Sandler, 2005; Grotstein, 2007) are rather unsatisfying when it comes to transformations in hallucinosis. Generally, they harmonize with regard to etiology by referring to mental catastrophes in containment, fueled by the usual suspects of envy and greed, and associated unconsciously with superiority to and rivalry with the analyst’s world view (i.e. Grotstein 2007, p. 226). However, clinical examples are few and far between and one is left to wonder how this might present clinically.

I find Sandler (2005) helpful in commenting that the term “hallucinosis” is generally applied to hallucination or delusion in a more or less normal personality, and the phenomenon can be so subtle as to escape attention.

Let us consider a professional who is unable to detect the presence of hallucinosis. He or she will see that some patients are able to “do the trick” to utter the words, to imitate a rationally oriented colloquial discourse. This professional will not realize the occurrence of a bizarre reaction to his or her interpretations, because the reaction is clothed in wording familiar to the professional. (p. 785)

Meltzer (1986) emphasizes three factors: the incapacity to reflect, the tendency towards a paranoid disposition, and the absolute certainty involved. He writes:

The meaning of things just seems to be given — that is, the perception of data and the meaning are not differentiated, things *mean* what they *seem*.... But although transformations in hallucinosis are within the world of symbol formation, thought and meaning, there is something disordered about the quality of thought that has

gone into them. And this produces something similar to poverty of imagination and rigidity. (pp. 106-107)

In his case example, Meltzer describes a rather “normal” academic residing in England on sabbatical from another country. The sessions are filled with complaints of the dirtiness of the English atmosphere, its presumed causes in industrial pollution, atmospheric inversion, and so on. Meltzer, conducting this analysis not in London, but in the heart of rural Oxfordshire, is struck by the analysand’s unquestioning acceptance of his own observations and explanations, always presented as factual scientific judgment, never as opinion. It is only when Meltzer begins to comment on this absolute certainty that the patient begins to produce dreams that began to reveal the unconscious internal atmosphere polluted by family tragedy that had never been processed. Meltzer proposes that the patient had partially alpha-betized these tragedies, but a reversal of alpha-function had then taken place. The disowned and denuded alpha-elements, later termed “balpha” elements by Ferro (2005, p. 3), were then projected out through evacuation and only to be then re-introjected as concrete external reality.

My own case example would be another rather “normal” patient who presented with mild depression and a chronic lack of meaningfulness and zest for life. Although obsessional in character, he appeared to be psychologically minded and thoughtful. He generally responded to my interpretations by drawing connections, finding patterns, reflecting on underlying meanings, and developing plausible insights. He was in a four-times-a-week analysis for more time than I’d like to admit before I noticed how little was actually happening. I began to observe that my interpretations rarely disturbed him, surprised him, or caught him off guard. Instead, I saw how they were subtly denuded of vitality and otherness, then translated into a register of familiarity, and finally absorbed into his psychic waters where they disappeared without a trace. As you might imagine, interpretations about this process met with a similar fate, and when I then commented on *that* interesting process, his conscious disinterest was quietly stunning. But there was a clear *unconscious* response. Up to this point, his memories of childhood had been lackluster and matter-of-fact. But, gradually, a progression of dreams began in which his



parents were first represented as two-dimensional cardboard cutouts in front of a movie theater, then as mysterious shadows gliding along the ceiling out of reach, then as transparent figures whom he could pass his hand through as he reached for a glass of milk, then as flesh-eating zombies of the walking dead preying on the living, and, much, much later, as the desolate and forlorn figures of Edward Hopper paintings. At the same time, his sense of the external world evolved along similar lines and an anxious vitality returned. Eventually, his parents were dreamed as tragically sad figures who had been crushed and flattened into pseudo-normality by circumstances of their lives, and it was too painful for him not to join them.

I have emphasized the aspects of subtlety and normality (Bollas, 1987) in these examples because I believe they are crucial factors in establishing the clinical utility of the concept of transformation in hallucinosis. Civitarese notes that transformations in hallucinosis are, in effect, waking dreams (p. 2). Elsewhere, Civitarese also discusses “transformations in hallucinosis as the psychosis of everyday life” (2015, p. 1097). I would propose that these are far more ubiquitous than we might believe. We need to reconsider what we might ordinarily think of as “non-psychologically minded” patients, “overly concrete” patients, and patients whose world-view is highly opinionated or even fundamentalist in spirit. A transformation in hallucinosis may be very subtle and it may take a good deal of time to register. To return to painting as a metaphor, it is “as if” the therapist is viewing one of Seurat’s pointillist paintings but standing too close rather than at a suitable distance. At first, one sees only a myriad of small colored dots, not the full gestalt. In analytic work, distance is replaced by time as the micro-moments (the dots), begin to cohere into a more three-dimensional picture in which we can begin to perceive transformations in hallucinosis.

There’s a saying that “A neurotic builds castles in the air. A psychotic lives in them. A psychiatrist collects the rent.” But I want to stress the extent to which we are all actors upon our own stages, casting others in our core dramas, directing the action with projective identifications and repetitive enactments, and lighting up the stage sets with the hues of the internal “total situation” (Klein, 1952, p. 5). At some point, this may

become sufficiently evacuative to earn the title “transformation in hallucinosis”! Meltzer’s patient does, indeed, externalize the total situation, not just in the analytic field but in the world at large, including the British atmospheric conditions. My own experience has been that interpreting more broadly at this level has produced in many patients a sense, not so much that they have changed, but rather that the world itself seems to have changed.

To shift the frame of reference slightly for a moment, one wonders how robust and elastic this concept might be for analyzing larger social and group phenomena including the American patchwork quilt of New Age Shamans, fundamentalists, evangelists, charismatics, scientologists, spiritualists, left- and right-wing conspiracists, faith-based thinkers, Satanists, extraterrestrial abductees, compulsive video-gamers, apocalyptic survivalists, and mass-shooters.<sup>1</sup> Analytic thinkers would do well to look deeper and perhaps apply the concept of transformations in hallucinosis to our national and international groups dynamics.

To return more directly to Civitarese’s paper, he makes an especially unique contribution in painting the concept of transformations in hallucinosis into the countertransference. He moves beyond the patient’s dynamics to noting the analyst’s micro-moments of transformations in hallucinosis. Although he credits Bion for this in the latter’s discussion of the “married or not married” patient, I think we should recognize that his own elaboration is highly original. He is a pioneer in considering transformations in hallucinosis as a phenomenon that may overtake the properly relaxed and regressed analyst operating with a minimum of memory and desire. Thus, transformations in hallucinosis become a new variety of countertransference response: a waking dream from which the analyst awakes to discover new information about the field. I think this an important new contribution to field theory, and if I am unable to call up examples from my own practice, it is because I’m still waking up to the usefulness of this perspective myself.

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt Andersen (2017) provides an interesting historical examination of the social forces at play in his work of *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire*.

## **The Field, the Observing Ego, and the Nature of Interpretation**

Psychoanalytic clinical theory began with an observer-observed premise characteristic of the sciences of the time, and, with this clear differentiation in mind, Freud was concerned with separating psychoanalysis from therapies of “suggestion” that would tarnish the “pure gold” of interpretation (1955). The participant-observer model was to arrive only much later, although I always had the impression from senior supervisors that this was truer in the literature than on the ground, where analysts were too smart to believe their own personalities had no effect on the field.

Nonetheless, the earliest seeds of field theory glimmer in Freud’s alertness to unconscious communication (1955, pp. 115-116), in the ideas of Ferenczi on the confusion of tongues (1932, 1933), which were so unfortunately suppressed, and in the gradual rehabilitation of countertransference from obstacle to opportunity. Bion’s theory of container-contained is another seed, and it wouldn’t be stretching it at all to think of him as one of the first intersubjectivists in field theory. The Barangers really kicked things into gear in the ’60s, Robert Langs continued largely ignored in the ’70s (1976), and, beginning in the ’80s, the Relational and Intersubjective schools, with their focus on the dyad and “the third,” had a huge impact that continues today (Gerson, 2004; Ogden, 2004a). However, none of the aforementioned has gone so far as Civitaresse in reconsidering the nature and function of interpretation.

Consider a question: *To whom* is the interpretation directed? Freud seems to speak to the conscious observing ego translating derivatives of manifest content into latent content. Klein, as one can see in the case of “Richard” (1961), seems to speak to what we might think of as the unconscious ego, interpreting its deepest current anxiety albeit in a different idiom. For example, when Richard is playing and drives trains into stations, Klein leaves the metaphor and responds in her own language of babies or penises inside of Mommies, looking for a positive reaction from the play rather than from the observing ego of her 10-year-old patient. With Bion, the clinical material in his own writing is rather scarce and obscure. From his experience being analyzed by Bion, Grotstein

describes him as wavering between Kleinian idiom and his own idiosyncratic language. Certainly, in the various transcribed seminars (1978, 1980, 1990, 2005a, 2005b), Bion has left the Kleinian idiom far behind. Here he speaks to the clinical vignettes presented to him like an original artist, a sort of existentially oriented “Picasso-man” who’s just fallen to earth, shares few conventional preconceptions, and sees everything from an often startlingly original point of view.

In what Civitarese calls the “archeological-circumstantial paradigm,” “interpretation” aims at being an objective-as-possible statement meant to convey the true meaning of the derivatives being expressed so that difficult feelings, wishes, and defenses may be brought to the attention of the observing ego for the purpose of working through. By contrast, in what Civitarese calls the “aesthetic-intersubjective paradigm,” “interpretation” becomes something that elaborates and responds to the derivative material within its own metaphor with the hopeful result being to “convey the method” of alpha-function to the analysand, so that simple realities become increasingly nuanced and multileveled. Again, to whom are these interpretations addressed?

Civitarese follows in the tradition of theorists such as Meltzer (1978, 1986), Langs (1976), Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988), Grotstein (2000, 2007), Ogden (2003, 2004, 2008), and perhaps most vigorously Ferro (1999, 2002, 2005, 2006), who all follow Bion in suggesting that we do our most important emotional processing unconsciously. It’s these unconscious processes that need kickstarting and refueling in analysis. The function of psychoanalysis, then, is no longer so much to create a better-informed observing ego. Instead, the purpose is to keep dream-work- $\alpha$  flowing forward rather than getting caught in undreamt rock formations and pools of stagnation and symptom. (When asked what he thought of ego psychology and the goal of strengthening the ego, Lacan is reported to have quipped: “Why would they want to strengthen the problem?”) Ferro has gone so far as saying that dreams themselves don’t need interpretation once they have been successfully dreamed. What needs *attention and interpretation* is the dream that has failed to flow and instead is unfinished, interrupted, or pools into an unthinkable

nightmare. It is possible to think here that, in the modern, post-Bionian era, the experiencing ego is privileged rather than the observing ego.

What is unique about Civitarese's discussions of field theory is not that the condition of the field can be grasped by listening to derivatives and translating them into the analyst's language as most of us do these days, but that it can be *responded to* within the world of its own metaphor, and this will get it flowing again. Interpretations in this mode are no longer representational à la Freud, or Gothic à la Klein, or merely interpretive renderings of the patient's "field of poppies" (Bion, 1963). Instead, Civitarese is actually out in the fields picking poppies along with his patient! As in avant-garde theater where actors and audience sometimes commingle in the staged drama, this form of psychoanalysis is something of a passion play (or a "play" of passions) with shades of improvisational performance art.

### **Challenges in the Practice of the Art**

Grotstein often spoke of the discipline that Bion demonstrated in sticking to interpretations of the field, but, once, in an informal discussion of his personal analysis, Grotstein shared the following amusing exchange, which I paraphrase to the best of my recollection:

Grotstein: Dr. Bion, since you're a British citizen, I just wanted to ask whether you're planning on being here Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup>? As you probably are aware, it's Independence Day, one of our national holidays.

Bion: (long pause) It is feared that mother/father analyst may be hostile to the baby within, perhaps hating to celebrate its separateness and independence and wishing instead to impose upon it a dreadful and taxing colonization.

Grotstein: (longer pause). Dr. Bion, that is a beautiful interpretation. It resonates deeply. But, still, I have to ask whether we'll be meeting or not!

Bion: Oh, very well then, let's talk about the schedule if we must.  
(Grotstein, personal communication, 2006)

My purpose in recounting this humorous anecdote is to illustrate that, even in the most illustrious of analytic dyads, the “aesthetic” is, of necessity, fated to commingle with the “circumstantial.” The would-be artist/analyst must not only paint the field of poppies (Bion, 1963), he or she must also blend the paints, care for the brushes, keep the palette tools in good order, and frame the canvas properly in order to create the space for the process of transformation.

The challenges of shifting from the archeological-circumstantial mode to the aesthetic-intersubjective mode are complex. To begin with, most of us have generally trained first as archeological-circumstantial therapists who have been taught to pay close attention to the circumstances of the analysand's history and current day-to-day life. In teaching, and especially in consultation work, I've seen how difficult it can be for therapists to move past this training and look beyond the reality content of the narrative material. In trying to do so, the therapist may feel unmoored, no longer anchored but “equally-hovering” (Freud, 1912) over the “groundless ground” Civitarese discusses. The therapist may prefer conversing with the observing ego of the analysand because this feels more pragmatic, “related,” and like “real” psychoanalytic work. Also, like our patients, we may subtly privilege the conscious ego and have less faith in a creative collaboration with the derivatives of the “Unconscious Other” (Rather, 2001). Trafficking in metaphor, metonymy, and simile may not feel “scientific enough” to justify our training and our professional service. We may be wary of the specter of “suggestion” that Freud warned us about (1919). Furthermore, the analyst and analysand may also feel strong pressure from the primitive social capacity of the individual as a political or group animal to connect and relate in the experience-near register. This renders the degree of detachment necessitated by this method emotionally arduous. As Bion (1963) warns:

The detached personality is in a sense new to its job and has to turn to tasks which differ from those to which its components are usually more adapted, namely

scrutiny of the environment excluding the self; part of the price paid is in feelings of insecurity. (p. 16)

Certainly, we will have to bear greater uncertainty and even a degree of performance anxiety to operate more artistically in the moment-to-moment clinical encounter. After all, in this sensibility, an “interpretation” no longer claims to be an objective statement concerning its object that explains and translates its meaning. Instead, as in the arts, “interpretation” means a subjective narrative response to the subjective narrative of the patient, which puts the analyst on the line as a much more creative and playful clinical participant.

Civitarese’s interpretations are beautiful, but how do we continue to move toward the artfulness of his approach? The subjective abstraction of meaning and narrative — the analyst’s transformations — represent a cognitive and emotional challenge necessitating the unfolding of the inner poet rather than the scientist-historian. Perhaps we should reconsider parts of our training and curricula. I bear in mind Freud’s wise opinion that we have more to learn from the aesthetic eminence of writers such as Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Dostoyevsky (here I would add Proust) than from the psychologists (Freud, 1928). And on a more irreverent note, I’ll always remember an interview with the waggish Adam Phillips (2014) in which he quipped that he learned more from the Allman Brothers’ album *Eat a Peach* than he did from reading Melanie Klein!

### **Concluding Comments**

Psychoanalysis has a long history of discussion about the nature of its discipline. Is it *Naturwissenschaft* or *Geisteswissenschaft*, natural science or humanities? Is it a branch of medical psychiatry treating “mental illness” or a humanities discipline dealing with problems in living? Is it science, philosophy, or even aesthetics (Bion, 1970; Bettelheim, 1983; Grünbaum, 1984; Makarai, 2008)?

As we reflect upon these questions, I return to the two contrasting epigraphs at the beginning of this paper to ask these questions: Will our psychoanalytic minds continue to

expand, or will they be curtailed by the immobility of our conceptions? Given the current Zeitgeist and the relative decline in the popular appeal of psychoanalysis, will we be able to use the aesthetic-intersubjective paradigm to revitalize our institutions and avoid ending up “confusing a scientific society with a convent” (Civitarese & Ferro 2015, p. 46)? Can we bear the complexities of the aesthetic-intersubjective model, or will we retreat in “apprehension” of its mysterious beauty (Meltzer, 1988)?

I will end with a quote from Bion’s seminar in Paris (1978), which Civitarese holds in high regard (Ferro & Civitarese, 2015), where Bion says:

We have become used to the idea that psychoanalysis is an attempt to make a scientific approach to the human personality. It is a view which attaches great importance to facts, to the truth, to the real thing. If that is so, there are plenty of people who are scientists without that official categorization. A painter, for example, may believe that a painting should be true to truth, should show you some aspect of reality which you might otherwise not notice. He is not a psychoanalyst, but he paints a picture. Look at this picture and then you may see what a tree or a face looks like. If an author writes about imaginary characters like Falstaff, Lear, Othello, Macbeth, they ought nevertheless to remind us of real people. Does the last scientific article that you read in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* remind you of real people, or doesn’t it? ... I come across a lot of what is thought to be scientific psychoanalysis, but it doesn’t remind me of anything except boredom....

It is very important to be aware that you may never be satisfied with your analytic career if you feel that you are restricted to what is narrowly called a “scientific” approach. You will have to be able to have a chance of feeling that the interpretation you give is a beautiful one, or that you get a beautiful response from the patient. This aesthetic element of beauty makes a very difficult situation tolerable. It is so important to dare to think or feel whatever you do think or feel, never mind how un-scientific it is. (pp. 29-42)



I want to thank Dr. Civitarese for his inestimable contributions to the new aesthetic-intersubjective paradigm in psychoanalysis. His work is creative and stunningly beautiful. It moves far beyond the *transmission* of Bion into the actual *transformation* of Bion. The “field of poppies” (Bion, 1963) will never be the same.

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