

Donald Meltzer

Some late talks and papers

1 On thought disorders (1995)	1
2 Thought disorder: a distinct phenomenological category? (1995, published 2005)	12
3 Concerning signs and symbols (1995, published 1997)	24
4 Symbol and allegory (2000)	32
5 The decline of the male (1998)	39

On Thought Disorders

Talk given in 1995, edited by Robert Oelsner

I am impressed by the large audience we have tonight. It seems a shame to waste it, we could have a coup d'état with this number of people. I'm going to talk to you tonight about the things that have been on my mind recently which are mainly an outgrowth of Bion's Theory of Thinking, and the Grid, which – I heard from Elizabeth – everybody here hates but I rather love. I was going to talk about the Grid tonight but Elizabeth convinced me that I should talk about the clinical phenomena of disturbances of thought. So for a smaller audience tomorrow I will talk about the Grid.¹

It's very difficult to define what is a thought disorder. For the very reason that in childhood we learn to imitate the appearance of thinking. Our patients who come to us are largely experienced children and have learned the social forms that pass for thinking. Bion has made it very clear to us that the essence of thinking is symbol formation. Almost all of us as children learn to use the symbols that are current in our culture, they are seen symbols. We learn to use these received symbols really as if they were signs, as if they were pointing to objects. Whereas the capacity for autonomous symbol formation is not a very wide spread phenomenon. It is probably in a certain sense restricted to the poetic function. And the poetic function is of course not only restricted to poetry but is present in all the arts and the creative sciences.

The thing about poetry, is that it captures something. I am thinking about the techniques for capturing wild birds. You set up a net and you set up a means of throwing this net suddenly. You attract these birds to the area that would be covered by the net when it's thrown and then when they're gathered you suddenly arrange for the net to be sprung and to cover the birds. That seems to me to be a good metaphor for the way symbols are formed and the way they work: that they capture these wild birds of meaning. If you want to say, "Oh, but there's something cruel in that", I'm inclined to agree that there's something cruel in the whole process of symbol formation. There is something cruel about the way in which it surrounds the emotional experiences and captures them.

Now you can see in certain children that they react against symbol formation perhaps for this reason that it seems to them to be cruelly restrictive. That it captures their feelings and it gives their feeling a form. The words of Shakespeare to describe this are very particular. At the end of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, Theseus, who is about to get married, suddenly seems to understand about poets.

1 This talk on the Grid is published in *A Meltzer Reader*, ed. M. H. Williams (2010).

[*Much laughter*] This is the cruelty of symbol formation. [*More laughter*] What Shakespeare and what Theseus says is that he suddenly understands that the poet give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. He takes these airy nothings which are really emotions, and gives them both a name and a place. He fixes them like a butterfly is fixed with a pin. And there is something cruel about it. The children who react against this are the children who are known as hyperactive children, who won't have anything to do with it.

To study this problem clinically: it's probably so wide spread that you can study it with any patient that you have and, you can study it in yourself, in your resting reflections and so on. But to find evidence that you can show other people that doesn't wander off into speculation is rather difficult. Certain patients do attract your attention for the reason that they're particularly puzzling because they can't seem to think straight. When you gather together a number of instances of crooked thinking you are then in a position to possibly classify them and to see if there is anything they have in common. What I will do is tell you a number of such instances from several patients that I've had in the last ten years. Then we can see if you think and if I think if there is anything they have in common that one could call typical of thought disorder.

The first patient I will tell you about is an American psychiatrist and he has come to me off and on for years as his sixth or seventh analyst. There is something very crooked about his thinking. I'll tell you just an instance to begin with that alerted me to this problem. He came to one session and reported that he'd had a slight car accident. As he backed out of a car park and drove away he noticed that somebody was driving into the car park and placing his car in a place that said something to the effect of "Garage always in use" – that sort of thing. While he was busy complimenting himself on how he had been considerate and not parked in that place, he didn't notice that he had come to a T junction where he was supposed to stop, and instead he had proceeded across this T junction and run into a woman who was going in front of him. She got out of her car and was quite furious with him for just running into her and he got out of his car and examined the situation and decided it was her fault. The reasoning that he applied to the situation was as follows: he had hit her car at a point that was about one third between the distance between the front of the car and the back of the car. He reasoned that because two thirds of the car had passed him that she was going three times as fast as he was. Now you can see that if he had been pointing a gun at a partridge or a wild pigeon that was flying past him there would be certain logic in his thinking that he would have to aim his gun, assuming that the bird would fly at a certain rate and he would have to point in front of the bird in order to hit it in the middle. He seemed to be using that piece of logic about hitting a moving target as if he had hit a moving target and could judge the speed of that target by the point at which he had hit it. That was

about five years ago and in the intervening period I have had many opportunities to study his modes of thought when he makes mistakes of thought.

I won't take the time to tell you the whole series but I want to tell you two that culminate and that give one an understanding of the emotional dynamics behind this kind of thought disorder. One day he reported to me that the previous night he had a very interesting dream and he thought it was related to the fact that he had taken his wife dancing the night before: *There was an opportunity to dance the fox trot which she didn't know because she was some fifteen years younger than him and only knew rock-'n-roll type dancing. Well he knew the fox trot and she was a very enthusiastic student and kept him teaching her for about two hours until he got quite exhausted.* Now that night he had two dream images. In the first image *he was at a gymnasium doing exercises and sweating and sweating and sweating. He sweated so much that he lost half his weight, and he was a moderately fat fellow. He went from 180 lbs. to 120 lbs. He lost about 60 lbs.* The next dream image was simply of a fish aquarium, a little structure of glass and he knew the dimensions of it precisely. *It was 3' long, a 1.5' high, and about 6" deep.* I don't remember exactly the dimension but when we figured it out this aquarium held about 1.5 cubic feet of water which being weighed would come to about 60 lbs. of water. Well that was interesting enough, but the really interesting thing about this aquarium was that *it had a little thing he said was like a little nipple, that seemed to be secreting into the water some substance which he took to be a chemical to buffer the acidity of the water.* Now that seemed to me, from my experience with him, a perfect picture of his idea of the nature of his relationship with me, because he was always teaching me how to do psychoanalysis.

It was around this time that his mother died. In about three years of analysis, I had heard almost nothing of his mother. I had assumed he had a mother but I had heard nothing about her from what he had told me of his childhood. His childhood was all about his brother and father and so on. When he spoke about his mother's death I mentioned to him that I hardly ever heard about his mother. That became a source for tremendous grievance against me, that I hadn't recognized how shattered he was by his mother's death. This seemed to lead to an interesting dream – his most recent one, that I'll tell you, although there are lots of others. An interesting dream in which *he was looking over a little cabin and thinking now this would be really suitable for his parents. He went into this cabin and inadvertently stepped in some of the human excrement that was spread all over the floor. He didn't have any shoes on so he was stepping in it in his stocking feet. At the end of the room he found a tap with water and he was able to take his socks off and wash his socks and put them back on and go out of this cabin. When he went out of the cabin he saw that it was at a lake shore and there was a man down by the shore who seemed in some distress. He approached the man and he discovered that the man was in fact himself*

and that this man was trying to kill himself. He thought in the dream that he would help himself – this other self of his – to kill himself. What he did was to take a book of matches and to light these matches and throw them into the man’s mouth. But instead of killing the man, the man seemed to feel better. He thought this was really very strange. That particular item really does capture his whole attitude towards the analysis and toward his mother and his relationship with his mother. I thought these matches were a punning reference to the breast – the two breasts and their matching one another. It seemed to have a bearing on the paradoxical situation of the analysis: that he was always abusing me and always accusing me of being envious of his capacity for thought and his originality, but at the same time was saying I was the only analyst who had ever really helped him.

I just want to tell you one other little dream that seems to me to have a particular bearing on understanding this fellow’s incapacity to think clearly. In the dream *he woke up very early and decided to take a walk around the lake. He left the house before his wife woke up and started to walk the circumference of this round lake that seemed to be outside his house. After walking for about a half hour and being uncertain about how far he had got he met a man and asked him how far had he traveled from his home and how far did he still have to go to go completely around the lake. The man told him that he thought he had probably come about ten kilometers but he didn’t know how far it was around the rest of the lake. At that point he decided not to continue around the lake but to go back the way he came. On his way back in the dream he had all sorts of encounters that were unexpected. One of them was that a man asked him to move some furniture down from his house. A little further on he met his wife with another man, though in fact she didn’t look like his wife, and so on.* That dream seemed to me to be a rather perfect illustration of what Bion calls “alpha function in reverse producing beta elements with traces of ego and superego.” That is, on his way back the way he’d come, he had all sorts of encounters that seemed to be fragments; distorted fragments of his daily life.

If you go back to this aquarium and this little nipple that was secreting the fluid, and the way in which it represented his way of teaching me, like his teaching his wife the fox trot, you can see something of his fundamental ineducability. His relationship to the breast or to a teacher is always of the sort that he is making a great sacrifice and secreting just the kind of stuff that directly balances the acidity of the fluid in this little fish tank, and so on and so forth. In fact as a child he had been thought of as being mentally defective and incapable of learning, until he was about ten years old, when an extraordinary teacher took an interest in him and instead of trying to teach him to read and to write (which he’d hardly learned by that time), he set him a project of building a little sail boat. He kept him at that project for the whole year, making him fabricate every item of the little boat all by himself. And marvellous to say by the end of that year he was educable. He

went on to catch up with his education – to go to University, go to medical school, become a doctor and so on. Of course it is a commentary on our educational system that someone can succeed educationally without being able to think. His way of learning, I had discovered had a particular quality not just of mimicry but of stealing.

The model for it was his relationship with his older brother. He was his older brother's henchman and follower and this brother used to lead him on various kinds of forays. One of the forays he told me about was that they broke into a gambling club and robbed a gambling machine. Another project was that they undertook collecting scrap iron and appropriated other people's machinery as if it was scrap iron. So his model of learning was modelled on his older brother and was fundamentally criminal or delinquent. It consisted of a kind of stealing or appropriation, scavenging as we call it in England. Scavenging what other people have thrown away or seemed to have thrown away. Let's leave this fellow there with his ineducability, his tendency to scavenging, his inability to complete the circuit of his thoughts – tending to go back the way he came and to get everything wrong. Let's go on to another patient who illustrates a fairly similar process.

This is another psychiatrist [*peals of laughter*], who has also had previous therapies; she had been eight years with another therapist, and came to me when the other therapist, partly in finding her unbearable, had left her husband. [*Unclear translation from the tape.*] Like this first man she had an unbearable personality. She was argumentative, she was spiteful, she was accusatory and there was no pleasure in treating her. But unlike the first man, one had the impression that she was highly intelligent, and that if her emotional life could be somehow softened and straightened out she could be a credit to her profession and so on and so forth. The first fellow in his attacking and criticizing was always throwing up things that I was supposed to have said, with completely garbled reference to what I could have said. But with this woman, when she attacked me on the basis of the things I was supposed to have said, they had a fairly convincing similarity to things I might have said, although I couldn't remember having actually said them. My way of protecting myself and protecting the analysis from these continual accusations and argumentativeness was to say that I wasn't going to debate anything I said in any previous sessions. That I was not going to discuss with her anything that could be considered in the realm of memory. Well she more or less accepted this as a restriction on the kind of things she could argue about, but she didn't accept my implication that her argument was based on distorted memories or paraphrases of things that I had said but that contained a subtle deviation from the meaning that I had been proposing. I was in fact very puzzled about her argumentativeness because the points that she was making and the sense of triumph that she achieved from it seemed to be so inconsequential. Yet hours and hours of the therapy would

be wasted in this kind of attacking and then she would regret the time that she was wasting.

Well one day she brought a dream that I thought really made it clear. She dreamed that *she had done some laundry and she had a sheet to hang up on a clothes rack that was in the kitchen: the kind of clothes rack that you can let down and then pull up to the ceiling. It's a kind of drying rack that is common in old-fashioned houses in Great Britain. In the dream when she had to hang up this sheet on the rack there was a man who came to help her, and he pulled the rope and raised the rack up to the ceiling. But then he left and almost as soon as he left the sheet fell off the rack. She was presented with the task of doing it herself. She was able to let the rack down quite easily, and to drape the sheet over the rack quite easily, but the problem of hauling it up to the ceiling seemed to be in the dream too much for her.* In the dream she had two solutions to this predicament. *One was that the whole situation could be transferred in her mind to outside the kitchen and she could function as a young man herself and do the whole thing very vigorously and athletically. The other possibility was that she could bring over a stool and stand up on it and this would enable her in some way to lift the rack up to the ceiling and to fix it there.* These two solutions had an important reference to a very severe split in her personality, one of which was her masculinity which had led her into being very athletic and a fencer and to join the army and things of that sort. We had understood already that her argumentativeness was a form of sword play which she quite enjoyed. But on the other hand we also knew that she was very preoccupied with her body and with her constipation. And that her constipation was something which she could only relieve occasionally by manual extraction of her feces. Stool of course is an English term for faeces.

In the dream she decided to use the second method of getting up on the stool and leaving the rack on the ceiling and hanging the sheet over the rack. When she did that she noticed that on the floor there was something that had fallen from the sheet which she hadn't noticed before, which seemed to be a sort of coiled up thread or string or something of that sort. That item that she 'lost her thread', of course means in English she understood the words but didn't understand the meaning. So it seemed to throw a very clear light on something that happens to her memory: that her memory and her capacity to remember accurately was so tied up with her anal eroticism and her constipation that it resulted in the argumentativeness to cover her memory loss. This argumentativeness employed her masculine athleticism to cover the defects in her femininity.

I cite these two examples as a way in which I'm trying to use clinical material to get at problems of thought disorder. The thing that strikes me these two patients and their ways of operating mentally have in common is their rejection of dependence. In the case of the woman patient it doesn't seem very clear that she is rejecting dependence; it looks more as if some sort of intolerance to separation

results in her trying to do it all herself. Whereas the first patient, the man, seems much more grandiose and arrogant in his independence. That particular item of his trying to kill his other self – standing for his big brother – by throwing these lighted matches into his mouth seemed to me to capture something about his difficulty in understanding what it means to receive a new idea, someone to give you a new idea. His model for a relationship was always that an object has to be dependent on him and his marvelous little mouth that is secreting his saliva into the breast and enabling it to learn the fox trot as it were.

It seems to me that this has clarified for me the nature of the problem of dependence. The model of dependence which I think we have always assumed was the model of the baby's relationship to the mother and the breast and included also some role of the father of protecting this Madonna and child and so on. Whereas Bion has proposed this other function of the breast which is called "the thinking breast," that performs this alpha function and creates the symbols that makes thinking possible. This is perhaps the heart of the matter of dependence: that one is dependent on an object to perform this function for you. That it isn't simply a matter of containment or protection or comfort or pleasure and so on. It's a question of an object that can perform this particular kind of function that creates the symbols for which dreaming and thinking can proceed. That is represented in the first patient's dream, in this very peculiar way of throwing lighted matches into the mouth of himself or another representation of himself with the intention of helping it to kill himself. It seems to me that that image really bears some thinking about. It's not just a pun on matching and the breast matching. There's something about the ignition and the sudden lighting up and so on. We are so sophisticated about fire that we really don't remember what a precious thing it is to be able to make fire. I suppose we have to go back to Greek mythology to remember about this gift from the gods.

It seems to me if this is the role of the analyst – to strike fire in the mind of his patient – it is something that we would all feel fundamentally incapable of doing. We can't even carry on an interesting dinner table conversation, to say nothing of striking fire into people's minds. No, if it weren't for the transference we would be absolutely helpless to assist our patients. It's the transference from these internal objects which enables us to seem to perform functions for the patient that are essential to the development of their thinking.

Questions from audience

Q: I wish to ask whether we could not see in these dreams you have presented, both about the man and the woman, something about the poetic function of which you spoke, regarding symbol formation. Whether there is not a possibility of capturing something, just like you did with the dream production of your patients. That is

all the patient presents and simultaneously he has the chance to say something that in his everyday life he could not say in that way.

M: Is that a question? That is not a question.

Q: Yes, especially regarding the poetic function because they seemed poetic also.

M: There's no doubt that dreams are the fountainhead of poetry. As you do psychoanalysis you certainly do discover that dreams not only have the most creative imagination poured into them but that they also tell the truth. I suspect that everybody who values his dreams looks forward to going to bed and to sleep in order to dream. One of the things that patients complain about is that at the end of analysis they won't be able to remember their dreams and they won't be able to analyze them the way the analyst does. But that really is a complete misunderstanding of the situation because the important thing is the dreaming of it. It's the pleasure of remembering your dream but the important thing is the dreaming of it. The analyzing of dreams I don't think adds anything to their meaning. As I've illustrated here in this talk it adds to the knowledge and understanding of the analyst but it probably doesn't add – the analysis of it – probably doesn't add anything to the dreamer because the dreaming has the meaning in it. Now that's captured a bit in the paradoxical situation with this first man, while he's always abusing me he's also telling me that I'm the only analyst that has helped him and that he comes back regularly from the United States to get a few sessions of analysis from me and so on. And he continues to abuse me. [*Laughter*] I'll tell you something he said that was really very funny; he said: "Thought disorder, thought disorder, everybody knows about thought disorders, but you talk about it as if you had invented it! *Laughter*. You talk about it as if you were peddling a new type of ice cream, shit cream." More laughter. He's got a talent for abusing me.

Q: In the beginning of the talk I was delighted by the description you made about the use of symbols as a prison to the meaning. As a cruel prison, a cruel net. What I cannot get clear is whether this is proper to the dream in itself or whether it is related to the institutional character of the symbol in communication.

M: I think that if again you think about this man and the dream of the matches thrown into the mouth, that does capture something of the painfulness of receiving the kind of communication that contains a new idea. I mean Bion has much more grandly described it as catastrophic change.

Q: I felt intrigued about the patient whose teacher made him build the little sailing boat. The question is, what did he achieve to elaborate in the analysis with Dr Meltzer, and what did that experience of nine or ten years mean to him that it so much changed the life of his learning ability.

M: You touch on a rather difficult concept, this concept of working through. It's not a concept that I really embrace actually. It has too much of a feeling of

action in it, of something that the analyst does. If you were to say to me, is there anything this patient has done in his analysis with you that corresponds to what he did with that teacher making that little boat? I could say yes, he has begun to learn not to turn back half way. I can see it in a recent dream for instance in which there was a sort of monumental staircase and a line of people going down it. And in British fashion whenever there is queue people join and he joined the queue. The queue moved very slowly going down and he got impatient and left the queue and went back up, then he changed his mind and went back and joined the queue again. And I thought to myself, well he's learning.

Q: I want to ask Dr Meltzer a question. Namely, how can we explain that both patients with disorders or deviations in their symbolic processes, were, however, capable of symbolically representing their thought disorders in their dream.

DM: That is a very good question!

Trans.: It is the same question I was about to ask.

DM: If dreams tell the truth as I think they do, they can also tell the truth about a person's incapacities. Now it doesn't seem to me to be paradoxical that this patient can dream about hanging up the sheet, and losing the thread, and in that way can represent an understanding that it's no use repeating the words if you have lost the thread of meaning that the words contain. That understanding seems to be something that she is quite capable of. What she's not capable of yet is admitting that she can't do it herself. It seems to me that the dreams can represent what she can do but they can also represent what she can't do. Both of these seem to me to be within the capability of dreaming and the symbol formation that goes into dreaming. For this reason: that the symbols are formed by an object that can do both. Does that answer your question?

Q: It still presents a problem to me. Because what I was about to ask before he talked ...

DM: Let me see what he has to say, and you translate the whole thing, because I probably missed something (in the translation).

Q: No, you did not miss any part of my question, but where I see a paradoxical problem, is that I was about to ask which is the object that complies with the dreaming functions. That is to say, which is the internal object that enables the patient to dream. You just said that it is the same object that allows the patient to dream and to symbolize. So, here comes the question, and that is why your answer does leave me somehow dissatisfied: if it is the same internal object, why is it that it produces in him a thought disorder and not a dream disorder?

DM: Well you've introduced the word allow. You're talking as if there was a military government that had everybody's suspension you know on certain things. It is the function of the internal object informing the symbol to capture the meaning within the symbol; the function of the self is to make use of that symbol. You

have the dream of the sheet where the thread of the meaning can be thrown away. You have the dream of the matches where the power of the symbol can be misused or intended to be misused. They have a saying in America that submarines are created by geniuses to be operated by idiots. [*Laughter*] Well there's that same relationship in dreaming: the use of the symbols is in the hands of those who may be idiots.

Q: I would like to ask a question that is related to what Roberto Oelsner just asked. And that is that we are used to thinking that thought disorders are exclusively linked to the psychotic part of the personality and that it is the patients that have severe or important psychotic parts that have thought disorders. What Dr Meltzer is showing us or maybe elaborating to us, is that we may have to extend the conception of thought disorders to something that includes symbolic function, use of words. These two persons are obviously not psychotic, but professional that are better or worse in their jobs but one would not say they are psychotics in the least – so I would like you to say some more about this extension of the meaning of the concept of “disorders of thought”. I believe it is related to the meaning.

M: Well ... its original application to psychotic patients had to do primarily with the formation of delusions and delusional objects. That is really an entirely different problem from the problem of symbol formation and dreaming. I do think it is a part of Bion's genius that he did formulate that problem in a way that sets it alongside his amazing formulation about the reversal of alpha function. When I first read that formulation I thought that either he was crazy or I was crazy. It did take years for that formulation – traces of ego and superego – to sink into my mind, it's a marvellous formulation. That seems to me to be a real tribute you can pay to somebody: that you can say it took years for that idea to get into my head, and you can also say you realize it would have taken centuries for you to have ever thought such a thing for yourself. I do think that the genius really works purely from inspiration and that he therefore naturally doesn't know what he's talking about. For instance, in Mrs Klein's little paper, “Notes on some schizoid mechanisms,” she obviously didn't know what she was talking about. A modest little paper.

Trans.: before we close this meeting we hope that tomorrow we will be able to continue hearing more about these poetic things.

Note

Some of this material appears in the following paper “Thought disorder: a distinct phenomenological category?”

Thought disorder: a distinct phenomenological category?¹

(1995)

A meditation on the nature of thought disorder, including a review of aspects of Bion's Grid and a celebration of Rameau's Nephew.

A while ago an irritated analysand shouted at me, with some degree of amusement:

‘Thought disorder, thought disorder – you say that as if it were something new. But it is a term in common use and everyone knows what it means. But you say it as if you were announcing a new brand of ice cream of particularly delicious quality and special nourishment, like “shit cream”.’ Not very delicious, but food for thought. Is it something new and distinct?

My interest in it goes back a number of years to a particular incident with this same analysand (this was in the early 1980's). One session he came in in a very particular state of aggravation because he had had a car accident. Not a serious or costly one but complicated by what seemed to him to be the intransigence of the other driver. He had been coming out of a parking lot and was stopped at a main road but was looking in his rear view mirror at a man who was just driving his car into a place in front of a garage, signed ‘In Continuous Use’. My patient, feeling pleased that he had been more considerate himself, did not notice his own car rolling forward until it bumped into a passing vehicle. The woman was not angry but asked for his insurance and took down his licence number while he began to argue that it was not his fault, as she had been going too fast. The evidence he sighted was not one of direct view, as he had been looking in his mirror, but construed from the damage done. He pointed out to her that he had struck her car within a foot of the back of her wing while at least eight feet of her car had already passed. From this he construed that she had been travelling at least eight times as fast as his own rolling speed, or approximately eighty miles per hour. She and I were equally astonished by this calculation, which he defended vigorously.

What sort of miscalculation was this? I was reminded of the story of the man who dropped his camera overboard from his boat but was unconcerned because he had ‘marked the place on the side of the boat’. In the years that have followed I have become well acquainted with such anomalies of thought and feeling. Where does it fit into the model of the mind that has evolved from the mainstream of work leading from Freud, through Melanie Klein and Money Kyrle to Bion? If it

1 Published in the *BJP*, 2005, 21 (3): 417-28. Edited by M. H. Williams.

is truly a 'new idea' it will require a 'catastrophic change' in the way of thinking about the mind in order to accommodate it. Maybe it is a misnomer for phenomena already contained within the model, as the earlier concept of mechanisms of defence has found a place within the more general category of 'lies' generated by a 'Negative Grid'. Yet I do not think he was lying, as that seems to require at least two types of distortion: first of all, the truth must be recognised, and secondly, a delinquent attitude is invoked which shifts the burden of truth; 'I say it is so and it is so unless you can prove otherwise'.

Is it perhaps an example of Roger Money Kyrle's category of 'misconception', in which a perfectly good preconception has been mismated with an inadequate realization? There seems to be a perfectly good preconception, scientific in its methodology, that an event can be construed from its consequences. But is there a consequential connection between the dent to the wing of the woman's car and the number of feet of her vehicle that had already passed? Suppose she had applied her brakes but been unable to stop for, say, thirty feet – could her velocity be construed? Yes. Why not eight feet? But it was not his point that it had taken her eight feet to stop, but rather that eight feet of her car had passed, leaving only one foot more -which was taken as evidence that her vehicle was travelling eight times as fast as his nearly stationary one. This is not a mismating but an irrelevance. Are we then dealing with a failure of logic, a non-sequitur?

Yet there does not seem to be any possibility of making a statement that could be demonstrated as illogical. How would it go: if the car crossing in front of me is going too fast, it is impossible to hit more than one eighth of it? That might apply to shooting pheasants, where the emotionality of the situation would seem to be appropriate. Is that where the trouble lies – that we cannot locate an appropriate emotion and thus we cannot identify a misconception? Are we perhaps dealing with an action that is fundamentally meaningless?

Perhaps that is a lead: that we are not encountering communication but an action, the barking of a frightened dog, the tu-quoque of a petulant child, the automatic riposte of a fencer without an opponent, the mark on the side of the boat? We seem to be touching on the essence of the comic in some way. Is this man a clown? Has he learned to hold up a mirror of ridicule to the human race and its pretence of knowing the truth? Does he say outrageous things but escape our rage because there is a modicum of truth in what he says? My analysand, in his non-sense, seems also to say that there is no accident without fault on both sides. This may not be absolute but it is a fair generalisation to make.

How does such an idea fit with the experience of this man? Is he a clown? Certainly he is hard to take in some way because of his caustic attacks on the countertransference, very much the barking dog and the tu-quoque child. And yet there is something committed which mitigates anger. Above all his accusations

always have some cogency and give one pause. 'I think you have a very cruel streak in your character and misuse the analytic method to impose your mentality on defenceless and dependent patients.' It takes one's breath away but is food for thought – of course.

Even if we consider him a clown who has found a device for criticizing figures in authority without incurring punishment or rejection (he tells me that I don't realize how attached to him I am) it still leaves the problem about the sensible nonsense and how it is generated. Insofar as it is nonsense (in the sense of Bion) it falls outside symbol formation into the realm of beta-elements either with or without traces of ego and superego. In the sense of Esther Bick it would be in the two-dimensional realm of second-skin formation, what she called the 'gift of the gab'. It is true that he has this gift. It is also true that he demonstrates some of the Bionic qualities with regard to symbol formation.

For instance, the symbol formation demonstrated in his dreams consists largely of received symbols; there is no originality in their form, only in their incongruous arrangement. Then, his symbols are likely to be prematurely 'saturated', as Bion would call it, to become crystallized and thereafter treated as established facts. 'When I mentioned my mother's death you barked at me'. This premature crystallization or saturation is not open to inquiry but assumes the status of a primary perception or fact, but with 'traces of ego and superego' which makes them suitable for agglomeration as delusions.

But if this is clowning, it is surely of the *pagliacchi* variety, intended to hide ignorance rather than to reveal the truth. Would it therefore fall into what Bion originally called Column 2 of the Grid? I think not, for that was specified 'known to be untrue', which later became the cornerstone for identifying lies. It is not the sincerity of the man which is in question. Not only does he mean what he says but he gives every emotional evidence of saying what he means in a manner that he thinks of as fearless. And this unlikely estimate of himself is borne out in his dreams.

Are we then left with the idea that we are grappling with an honest critic of the social system who perhaps shares the world's uncertainty about the difference between signs and symbols, as people generally treat money? Bion's *bon mot* about the cover not being a reliable indicator of the contents of a book reminds us about words in general. In the realm of symbols we are not dealing with questions of reference to the outside world but with matters of substance containing emotional meaning. One need only look at the history of theological debate to realize that no symbol can have its content fixed by decree. The so-called talmudic debate in psychoanalytic circles is no exception. This is the fundamental reason for abandoning theories which explain, in favour of models which make no such claim. The naming – Bion's 'nomination' – is a critical step in the growth of the thought,

like Shakespeare's local habitation and a name. But it only demarcates in preparation for attention and inquiry.

Thus far there appears to be no cause for assuming the crouch position in preparation for catastrophic change to describe my patient's rather laughable phillipics. Have we located the nature of his sincere mistaken vituperation? I find myself still mystified and uneasy. I'm not even sure that it isn't 'shit cream' that I am peddling; and there is something mysterious in his 'riposte' attacks. The riposte is skilful and long-practised even though it may not succeed. Our problem is not just one of 'wide of the mark' but of 'wildly wide of the mark'. In terms of Wittgensteinian language games, is he playing the wrong game? Later we will see evidence to bear this out, but it does not get us very far. Nor can one demonstrate to him that it is the wrong game because, like the 'shit cream', he will claim that everyone but the analyst is playing rugby rather than whist.

Well, clearly we could go on reviewing our psychoanalytic model looking for categories to contain this phenomenon, but without conviction. We need to look inside this man, which means inside the transference and countertransference, to find the structure of self and objects which find their passionate representation in the analytic setting.

Methodological considerations

The idea of 'thought disorder' was not part of my conceptual framework at the time when the clinical experience described above (the 'accident') focussed my interest on it. Also at that time I was preoccupied with problems which eventually resulted in *The Apprehension of Beauty* (with Meg Harris Williams) and *The Claustrum*. Although Bion's marvellous Grid had been kicking about inside me for thirty years, altering my view of the world, I felt no need to assist its fight for survival. I could see that many people seemed to be interested in it as a template for thinking about thinking. But it was not clear from the literature, not even from Bion's later writings, that he or anyone else was concerned with actually using it clinically. Nor was it clear what using it would mean, leaving aside the 'analytic game'. What, if anything, was a thought disorder? I had no desire to spend my energies marketing a new brand of ice-cream, not even Bionic shit-cream.

So now, some while later, I wish to explore the idea, wandering through the material relevant to transference and countertransference experiences over the past years since the 'accident' episode, to see if a constant conjunction will appear. I cannot start that process without taking note of certain ideas already fairly crystallized in my mind, perhaps to discover that they are wrong or at least more fluid than I think. First of all I cannot agree that it is an area that 'everyone knows about'. My limited acquaintance with the literature of psychoanalysis and philosophy tells

me that it is an area of lip-service, obscure in its profundity and certainly in its application. Until Bion in the 1960's made clear his great Theory of Thinking, psychology and psychoanalysis had not focussed attention on thinking but only on personality functions. First of all it took many years to be established that the mind, as an object of study, could be confidently distinguished from the brain as an organ. The shift from mechanistic causality and consequent explanation of behaviour to the phenomenological description of states of mind met great resistance as psychoanalysts clung to their medical respectability and resisted the maelstrom of philosophical and theological speculation with its 'cloud of unknowing'.

Certainly Melanie Klein's discovery of the phantasy of projective identification, first with external objects and finally with internal ones, forced her followers to swim for it. Bion's Theory of Thinking hove in sight as a saviour, but alas it proved to be an Ancient Mariner's hulk on which each worker found himself alone and tormented. True, it floated, but a toy to the winds and currents of the analytic experience – 'nor any drop to drink'. Still, a magnificent hulk.

It is indeed a pretty watertight addendum to the Kleinian model of the mind. Its individual elements are well united: LHK and minus LHK, container-contained, alpha-function and its failures and reversal, and finally the Grid. Perhaps the Grid is a bit leaky and can be repaired without a drydock. From this central format laid out in *Learning from Experience* and *The Elements of Psycho-analysis* there flowed in successive work by Bion a rich fount: functions and factors, myth and passion, the role of attention, the differentiation of endoskeletal and exoskeletal structures, the distinction between adaptation and growth, and the role of internal communication. Perhaps the quasi-mathematical adventure into *Transformations* was a bit of circular maelstrom but he was 'depending on the diameter of the circle'. It is all so much the work of genius and beyond the scope of the ordinary that one is inclined to enshrine its as a Testament and be content with talmudic debate or ecclesiastical haggling. But that would do little honour to its potential inspiration.

To make my forthcoming struggles with this model clearer, I must try to patch up this Grid, even if only to discover that I have worsened the leaking. First of all, perhaps the conceptions of alpha-function and myth need to be brought together, for leaving myth conjoined to dream seems to miss two points. I think myth, or rather the process of mythologizing, is part of the process of recording and thus of making public the events of history. They say that the Golden Horde was so busy conquering that they had no time to record – with the result that we know so little about the events of that era. Mythologizing turns history into poetry, not by lying as Plato thought, but by processes of condensation. It belongs in the category that Freud included in dream-work. It is mysterious enough without being totally unobservable. Probably this process of condensation and poeticising produces the aesthetic mystery of symbols.

Next, with regard to the Vertical Axis: rows G and H, empty as they are, may be misconceived. The Grid is entirely devoted to the mysteries of induction, leaving deductive systems, scientific or otherwise, to the adaptational computations, unimaginative. I would need to check with a mathematical philosopher, but it is my impression that beyond arithmetic, mathematics is all imaginative, not only abstract. If G and H are replaced by more Kierkegaardian categories of aesthetic and spiritual, they will soon fill up. Bion has already removed Column 2 from the Grid to form, in prospect, the Negative Grid of minus LHK for the production of lies. The row I of Definitory Hypotheses seems to refer to the impact of constant conjunctions as the basis for narrowing the field of emotional impact to which intelligent attention may be paid. Probably Notation is out of place and belongs to the more secondary processes of Transformations, of which the transformation from dream image to language is only one of the possible forms serving the senses (Cassirer). I think that Bion himself overcame this prejudice in favour of language, unlike Freud for whom the distinction conscious-preconscious seems to have persisted.

But this patchwork on the majestic hulk would not be even tenable without Bion's own reevaluation of action, Column 6. Old age and perhaps the impact of the American culture seems to have helped the long-distance runner and tank commander of *The Long Week-end* rethink his life and the role of action in it. It brought about a shift in categories from the action/inaction paradox of *Experiences in Groups* to the Catastrophic Change confrontation of *A Memoir of the Future*. He seems to have decided that action was the great thought and conversation stopper. The intricacies and subtleties of the shift from communication to action contain the secrets of acting-in-the-transference, which brings the analytic cooperation to a halt. The concept of experimental action as a necessity when thought has reached its limit belongs to the computational world. In this sense, that thought is imaginative, the early Wittgensteinian optimism is revived, in which anything that can be thought can be said clearly – where clearly means beautifully, poetically.

This completes my tidying up of the published Grid and will doubtless result in being dismissed as 'Meltzer's Grid'. In self-defence I would plead that Bion was quite specific in wishing to stimulate thinking rather than in being understood himself.

Route map for the investigation

I may wish to explore my clinical experience of the past thirty years, yet I presume I am unlikely to find it laid out in chronological order. I must resign myself to something akin to Christopher Robin in the hundred-acre wood, a botanical ramble. We must have some guiding principle, probably a countertransference

bleep of some sort. Let us go back to the car accident. How to describe its impact on me? Would aghast amusement serve as our bleep? If I allow my mind to rest on the analysands of recent years in whom I would tend to identify elements of thought disorder, they all seem to have been fun to work with – their bark had little bite, their lunges were wide of the mark.

Suppose, then, in the time ahead, I work with this little bleep operating and write up episodes of thought disorder presumptive. And when I have recognised some item in one analysand and worked out a description of it, I use this as a pattern for examining other peoples' modes of thought. This should result in an itemized account that has little resemblance to the mind in action but is like a slow-motion film seen through a variety of filters. In all of this I will use the Grid (as modified). The final result should be primarily an elucidation of how to use the Grid to recognize thought disorders and their functional failures.

But it is not necessary to wait for new material. There are three patients already in mind whose modes of thought are very vivid to me and lend themselves to some degree to a dissection of common qualities. They are all gifted talkers with a vocabulary that bespeaks their basic intelligence but tends to make little or no sense. This gives the 'barking' impression even when not ostensibly attacking. They have a free flow of associations which are not always to the point but often tangential to the topic. The general impression is of strongly suppressed violence which takes the form of silent obscenities during or just after the session. While their material is very anecdotal, it is difficult to find the description of events, phantasies or feelings as they almost immediately generalize and in a sense pontificate, declaring their homogeneity with all mankind except the analyst (the 'shit cream' episode, for instance). The impression is of an overly hasty transformation into language in which vague, ambiguous and equivocal usages are interwoven without discrimination. The result is a premature 'nomination' – that is, the name given replaces the description of an event (my 'barking' when he mentioned his mother's death – the word bark has replaced all recollection of what I may have said). There seems to be a lack of sense of the interplay of relationships, in that they seem so intent on working out their plans involving other people that they have little awareness of being themselves objects of other peoples' desires, interests, plans. Their relationships follow a pattern of relentless repetition which they hardly notice as manifestations of other people's personalities. The overall impression is of children who cannot understand why their plans do not work. The result is a simmering disappointment and dissatisfaction with the world which does not obey them, for they are born teachers and disciplinarians with a stick-and-carrot mentality. It is most difficult of all for them to feel puzzled rather than frustrated.

I could go on like this for a considerable distance, but these examples serve merely to illustrate the descriptions of constant conjunctions in the encounter

which can then be used as a pattern to search the material of other analysands. It serves the function of naming the phenomenon so that a more penetrating inquiry can be instituted once the attention is thus focussed. The analytic step consists of describing these observations to the patient in the hope of eliciting a mutual inquiry and communication. At the behavioural level it seems impossible to get such cooperation, so intense is the threat. The phenomenon must await its representation in dreams where the pictorial representations are more precise. Their interpretation can be haggled over without destroying the evidence.

In considering my three current patients, and analogies they bring to mind with past ones, I shall not refer to notes made at the time but allow patients to become muddled up with one another, producing a compound phenomenon rather than a particular person, since the exploration is primarily into my experience and, basically, my thought disorder. At the outset, it is necessary to make clear not only the terrain but the quarry. It is not enough to spot deer prints: might they be sheep? Or evidences of the barking of young trees, or even a rutting circle. We are not concerned to get within gunshot but rather to be in a position to study at leisure the habits and relationships of these interesting guests in our forest.

The characteristics I have so far listed do not individually or together define a thought disorder (even if one added many more that could be cited). At best they alert us to its possible presence. They all belong to the adaptational spectrum of thought and behaviour that is characterized by a deficiency of imagination, by 'common sense' – in its ordinary, non-Bionic usage. (Its use in psychiatry, meaning the perception uniting the senses, probably goes back to Harry Stack Sullivan). 'Good practical sense in everyday matters', says the dictionary. The emphasis is on what people have or claim to have in common, and is used as a pseudo-argument, meaning that there is neither need nor purpose in thinking about it. The truth is obvious, what is obvious is true, and everybody (except you, of course) knows it. It is mistakenly called 'generalizing', but is more correctly a claim of ubiquity. Generalizing is an important operation in imaginative thought and will be discussed in connection with the Grid and catastrophic change.

But this claim of ubiquity is not the disguise in which thought disorder parades itself, for there would be no possibility of distinguishing it from ordinary adaptational invisibility. The stuff of adaptational disguise – received symbols – passes muster because these are indeed symbols and can be used for dream thoughts and thinking, were that the intention. Our language is rife with them and they are in constant flux, to the lexicographer's despair. They are not just signs. They have meaning, but it is used in a strictly conventional way that leaves it stranded between sign and symbol. They have become so emptied of emotional meaning that their faded metaphor is colourless.

No, the phenomenon we are on the trail of is much more colourful and in a

sense poetic – ‘shit cream’ for instance. It is packed with feelings and stops one in one’s tracks. What is wrong with it as invective? Well, for instance, he doesn’t mean to accuse me of foisting a filthy or dangerous kind of rubbish on him. Far from it: he is only attacking my claim that a phenomenon worthy of our interest and attention is in sight, by demonstrating its ubiquity. He is reacting against the idea of thought disorder as if it meant thought-shit, and hurling it back, tu-quoque style. He is accusing me of using him as an instrument of my ambition. Is it eloquent? Poetic? One cannot tell at the verbal level, however visually evocative the words may be. We haven’t reached the high-seat of the transference-countertransference for leisurely observation of the use to which it is being put.

When I yielded unwillingly to the compulsion to write about thought disorder, I was reminded of a book that had greatly impressed me some years ago – Denis Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew*. I could not find it in my much pilfered library and hastened to Blackwell’s for a copy, to be immediately swallowed up in delight and admiration. It is a peculiar type of literature, more like a Freud case-history, a new wolf-man. It is an account of a chance encounter in either a café or the garden of the Grand Palais in Paris in the year 1761, although probably touched up during the next seven or eight years. Diderot died in 1784 and in accordance with a financial arrangement with Catherine of Russia, his literary remains were sent to St. Petersburg. Up to that point *Rameau* was unpublished, and a brief scan of its contents reveals why. Not only is it scurrilous personally and politically, but religiously dangerous in those early days of the Enlightenment. It was not until 1891 that the original fair copy was found, revealing the many errors in the hastily copied version sent to Russia. Its existence became known in a strange way, for a copy had been lent to Diderot’s close friend Grimm, who lent it to Goethe, who made a German translation from which an unauthorized French retranslation was made and circulated privately. This must have been after 1767 and found Goethe recently returned from his eighteen-months’ great escape to Italy (which much later became his *Italian Journey*). For Goethe this marked a watershed, a return of adolescent passions almost, and produced the second part of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*.

This commentary on the literary climate of the time highlights the fascination of the *Nephew* from the historic point of view. But its literary value lies in its marvellous writing, and its psychological focus is extraordinary. When I first read it I thought the hero Philippe Rameau (a nephew of the great composer Jean-Philippe Rameau) a benign psychopath – and I will probably stick to that nomenclature although it tells very little. I must quote to do justice to Diderot’s wonderful prose:

He is a compound of the highest and lowest, good sense and folly. The notion of good and evil must be strangely muddled in his head, for the good qualities nature has given him he displays without ostentation, and the bad ones without shame.

He is a confirmed liar, seducer, cadger, poseur, troublemaker, fool, clown. He is greedy, incontinent of emotion, passionate or at least easily excited to extremes. He is a talented musician who does not develop or exploit his talents, but lives in grim resentment of mediocrity, envious of his famous uncle.

Philippe is fascinating in his own right and the account of him probably assesses him fairly correctly, if highly coloured. But the literary work is clearly a piece of self-analysis, for Diderot remembers well his early impecunious days and scurrilous toadying, fraudulence and ravenous yearnings. Throughout the ninety pages of conversation, while Diderot plays the angel's-disciple to Philippe, he is admiring and, above all, puzzled. What is wrong with this man, and by implication, with Parisian society of that era? The most pregnant passage involves Philippe's examination of the way in which his ardent love for his son, and his great admiration for his wife, results in complete neglect of them:

I: How is it that with a discrimination so delicate as yours and your remarkable sensitiveness for the beauties of the musical art, you are so blind to the fine things of morality, so insensitive to the charms of virtue?

HE: Apparently because some things need a sense I don't possess, a fibre that hasn't been vouchsafed to me, or a slack one that you can tweak as much as you like but it won't vibrate; or again it may be that I have always lived with good musicians and bad people. Hence it comes about that my ear has become very sharp and my heart very deaf. Of course there was something in heredity. My father's blood and my uncle's blood are one and the same. The paternal molecule must be hard and obtuse, and this wretched first molecule has affected everything else.

I: Do you love your son?

HE: Do I love him, the little scamp? I dote on him.

I: Then why won't you concern yourself seriously with checking the effect of the unfortunate paternal molecule on him?

HE: I should work to very little purpose, I think. If he is destined to become a good man I shan't do him any harm. But if the molecule meant him to become a ne'er-do-well like his father, then the trouble I should have gone to in order to make him an honest man would have been most harmful: training being continually at cross-purposes with the natural bent of the molecule, he would have been torn between two opposing forces and walk all crooked down life's road like a lot of them who are equally inept at good or evil and whom we call 'types', the most frightening of all epithets because it indicates mediocrity and the last stages of the contemptible. A great rogue is a great rogue, but he is not a 'type'.

The absent or slack string is a good metaphor for a musician and a good excuse for someone who clearly thinks that conflict is a bad thing. Nor is the trouble that he takes his metaphors too concretely; he probably does not. It seems to silence internal argument and restores his peace of mind. But that something is missing perhaps goes beyond metaphor. In the companion piece to the *Nephew* there

is *D'Alembert's Dream*, in which Diderot, again as conversation, works out his cosmology. Here 'fibre', previously the musician's string, is now one of a bundle of fibres constituting the nervous system, elaborated much as a spider spins his web, and with a mover, not clearly a prime mover, at its centre. Its special capabilities seem to be memory and correlation. An eighteenth-century Grid in the making, with a Diderot-as-spider at its centre. A very slippery materialism, indeed.

Of course, when we do reach our high seat for leisurely observation of the deer grazing beneath, we find it already crowded with people who take it to be the high ground of moral superiority, suitable not for observation but for pronouncement. Not poetry but philosophy, not clowning but cosmology now nullifies our efforts to understand. Again the gift-of-the-gab is prominent and the railroading of legislation makes your head spin. The key word now is not 'all' or 'every' but 'ought' and 'should'. The indubitable authority invoked is 'Nature'. It sounds, in its dismissal of evidence, as if we have been asked to make a Grid-leap to algebraic calculus, but no such flight of imagination is involved. We have slipped from argument to argumentativeness, from the positive to the negative Grid, from opinion to opinionatedness, from reserved judgement to scepticism. Again this does not in itself illustrate thought disorder, but the heaviness of the smoke screen suggests that such disorder is prowling about, as the blackbird that appears to have a broken wing suggests the proximity of a nest of eggs or chicks.

Again one could go on at great length particularising the 'disguises' which suggest the presence of thought disorder but do not actually reveal its nature. These would run the gamut of mechanisms of defence, functions of the personality, disturbances of logic, puritanical disguises, hypocritical disguises, philistine disguises – they are all present, as well as pseudo-cooperativeness that is always grabbing the ball and running in the wrong direction, or the growler who acts as if you were trying to take away his bone. But the point to be made is the vigour and intelligence with which these deceptions are mounted, and their countertransference impact. For we are not dealing with the ordinary resistances to the analytic investigation but something, I want to suggest, that inevitably throws the analyst into doubt about his own modes of thought and sanity.

My own sense in undertaking this research into my experience with various analysands is that I am pushing an area which may involve a catastrophic change in my picture of myself and the world akin to Kierkegaard's investigation of the story of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*. I cannot escape the often repeated accusations of the patients that I am doing something cruel, possibly lethal, and that I am intruding something into the patient that is potentially shattering. I cite *Fear and Trembling* because in it the author, while examining the problem of Abraham's relation to God and to Isaac, uses this conflict to examine the methods by which a baby is weaned from the breast. In pursuing the idea of a

thought disorder with my analysand, I think I am pushing him in the direction of a capacity for individual thought and judgement. I find him clinging to methods he has received, both of representation, emotion and logic which ensure him a feeling of being in good company with 'everybody'. I am perhaps encouraging him in a direction where he can be in company with no one, on his own.

This would perhaps quite deserve the suspicion of cruelty if he were being nudged towards independent thought and judgement. But that is not what I think is happening. I think, and I hope, he will find himself in the best of company, with the saints and angels of psychic reality, with his true teachers, with those aspects of his own personality which contain the aspects of genius that he can only aspire to. It does, indeed, sound like 'shit cream'.

Concerning signs and symbols¹

(1995)

This paper, which pairs with the later paper on 'Symbol and Allegory' given at the Florence conference in February 2000, describes the problem of sincerity ('meaning it') as one of distinguishing autonomous symbol-formation from the conventional symbols or signs which carry the culture. It surveys some of the social and developmental implications of the inherent difficulty of symbol-formation.

My paper on 'Sincerity'² was inspired by reading the later work of Wittgenstein in linguistic philosophy. In the *Philosophical Investigations* he spends quite a long time discussing meaning, the difference between 'saying it' and 'meaning it'. It drew my attention to the problem in analysis of both the analyst meaning which he says to his patient, and the patient meaning what he says to the analyst. In the course of investigating this problem I became aware that language is not a very disciplined way of 'meaning it' because language is so conventional. This led me on to a clearer differentiation in linguistic structures between signs and symbols, which tend to be equated with one another in the work of people like Saussure and Lacan. The thing about signs is that they are just a way of pointing at things; they use words to point. They consist almost exclusively of the conventional naming of things and functions. In so far as people use signs in communicating with one another, they cannot 'mean' anything, they are simply pointing to the world. Now symbols are entirely different and very mysterious, because they are utterly intuitive and are containers for emotional meaning. One would be inclined to say that when people do use symbols in communicating with one another they automatically 'mean it'.

But a difficulty arises because not all symbols are autonomous – that is, created in the mind of the speaker. Most of the symbols we use in our communication are conventional, *received* symbols – received from other people. Like the currency we use in our daily life, they become worn out. A received symbol is like an old coin in which you can make out the head, but not any features of the monarch. It is very difficult to convey any emotional meaning when using these worn-out received symbols. The emotions they convey are rather the shadows of emotion, emotional background, portraying very little that is particular or passionate. But language conveys emotional meaning not just through words but also through music. It is a striking thing that when you hear poets reading their own poetry

1 Published in the BJP, 1997, 4 (2), 175-81. Edited by M. H. Williams.

2 Published in *Sincerity and Other Works: Collected Papers of Donald Meltzer*, ed. A. Hahn (1994), 185-184.

they make a very peculiar music. They seem to drone. I'm thinking of T. S. Eliot, and the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas – they seem to drone a kind of incantation. It is the opinion of Susanne Langer that the origin of symbol formation, palaeontologically speaking, lies in the music of chanting and the rhythms of primitive dance. You can imagine when poets chant their own poetry they might also wish to be stamping their feet like flamenco dancers.

Ordinarily the music of speech is quite conventional from culture to culture. If you listen to somebody speaking across the room in a restaurant, you can identify more or less what country they come from. It takes a phonologist to identify the different sounds that are being made, but they are conventional, dictated by the culture and inculcated in early childhood. The lesson has long been learnt in the teaching of foreign languages that the first thing is to learn the music, perhaps using the vehicle of songs and poetry. Certainly this is the way that children learn to speak in the beginning, repeating the heard music by lalling, long before they learn from their mothers the names of things and the words to fit into this music.

This conventional symbolism is imposed on the child from the very beginning; he hears the music of his mother's language in the womb. The conventionality of language runs against the possibility of his 'meaning it' when he does 'say it'. Like bands of swaddling clothes, it restricts his development and the expression of his feelings, and lays upon him the task of venting his feelings in noises that are not language, yet they are the noises that show his formation of an internal discourse. These start in babyhood with crying and screaming and so on, and of course gradually turn into obscenities. These, I would suggest, seem to him the only kind of noises that seem to arouse some sort of emotional response from the parents. But at the present time we are seeing such a conventionalising of obscenities that there is hardly an obscenity left that has any emotional kick in it. It's therefore more and more difficult for people to express their emotions in words. In our present culture, it is not enough for the pop singer to scream obscenities, he has to act them out – and this already has also become banal. And that difficulty in expressing through words pushes people into action. Just as in psychoanalysis, the patient is pushed toward acting out owing to his incapacity to find words to express his feelings.

For the baby, communication with himself begins long before he either learns or desires to communicate with the outside world. Lalling and then playing are manifestations of an internal organization. The processes in analysis give fairly convincing evidence that (as with the baby) emotions are experienced in the first instance as bodily states: I have a tummy ache, I have a head ache, I have a pain in my heart, etc. Only gradually do these emotional states that are first experienced as bodily states find a way of forming themselves into symbols and can be dreamed about.

It is the dream that comes to the rescue of the patient, as it does for the poet. Our language is very rich in words for describing objects and functions, but very poor in words for describing emotions. The poet is very dependent on his dreams as the gold mine where he finds his autonomous symbols. He finds them in his dream life. The same with the patient: if he cannot remember his dreams he is in the position of feeling absolutely paralysed to convey his emotion to his analyst except by acting out or acting in the transference. His dreams come to the rescue of his incapacity for conscious symbol formation. The dream language begins to fashion a poetry of its own, that is special to that patient and that analyst in their particular and unique transference counter-transference relationship.

While it is true that the analyst may introduce into the discourse with the patient certain amount of his own poetry his own symbol formation – the discourse is largely (in so far as it is creative) of the patient's creation, through the symbol formation contained in his dream structures. One of the most important indicators of analytic progress, to my mind, is the progress in the nature of the patient's dreaming. The general development is from long anecdotal dreams to short condensed symbolic dreams. The one rather famous poet I had as a patient amazed me from the very beginning with the bombardment of autonomous condensed symbolic formations in his dreams. Patients who do not progress in analysis demonstrate this by the continuing lengthy anecdotal dreams which are hardly distinguishable from daily life.

To return to the original problem of distinguishing between 'saying it' and 'meaning it': the distinction seems to depend on the patient's capacity for symbol formation in his dream life. But it leads to another difficulty, which is that autonomous symbol formation, being in its nature idiosyncratic, can tend toward becoming unintelligible to other people. The great example of this to my mind is James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. This could not be just a joke or revenge on the public that ignored him for so long, because he worked at it for fourteen years and obviously put his heart into it. But it is unintelligible, owing to his idiosyncratic symbol formation running wild. You can see in any single page (and you can hardly get beyond the first page) that the music of the words has detached itself from the objects to which they refer. You can see quite clearly that the references are so private and unknown to anyone but the writer himself, that its relationship to the object world is absolutely unknowable or at best a kind of guesswork. If you put James Joyce's *Ulysses* at one pole of poetic prose, then at the opposite pole (of absolutely conventional language composed of received symbols that appear full of meaning but are in fact utterly empty) you will find the oratory of any politician you care to cite as an example. It is the language of propaganda and is devoid of emotional meaning, but is calculated to suppress any sort of thought in the listener. If you ask yourself, after hearing a politician speak, 'What did he

mean?', all you can do is quote him - you can't say what he meant, you can only say what he said.

This entire way of looking at language has a particular significance as you can see for the observation of the mother-baby relationship, because that is where the struggle between emotion and conventionality finds its origin. It is often noticed that the observer in the family of a new baby has a distinct therapeutic effect on the whole atmosphere, and it seems fairly clear that this therapeutic effect is the consequence of the mother having demonstrated to her how interesting is the baby. It helps her to move away from controlling and teaching the baby to listening and observing the baby, so that her attitude becomes one of saying to herself, 'What does the baby mean?' One of the things Esther Bick taught us was that the meaning of baby and child behaviour is not obvious. It is a matter of interpretation, and interpretation is something that grows out of careful observation. The meaning of a baby's behaviour comes as an intuition to the observer that grows out of noticing what is happening to the baby. Now this lesson of Mrs Bick's is one which she herself learnt first in psychoanalysis, and I think to some extent from Melanie Klein. The lesson is that the activity of the analyst is not primarily interpretation; it is first of all observation and description. When a description of what is happening in the transference and counter-transference can be agreed upon by patient and analyst, then its meaning or interpretation may gradually become apparent to both of them.

This orientation leads to certain difficulties which have been very apparent in the psychoanalytic movement: in particular, that people like Melanie Klein and Esther Bick who rely on careful observation for generating intuitions, develop a capacity to know what they think and what they feel, and to know it with great certainty. The problem is, when you know with certainty what your intuition is and you put it into words, it sounds as though you are speaking with omniscience, with great certainty of being correct. People like Mrs Klein and Esther Bick were always accused of being arbitrary, of being omnipotent, of trying to force their opinions on everybody by the degree of certainty with which they expressed them. But this was not due to their conviction of being right. It was due to their sense of knowing precisely what they thought and felt about a particular situation. This means that when they 'said' something they 'meant' it, and when they meant it they meant it was not there for negotiation. The negotiation of meaning is the usual way that people come to think that they think alike. These rather fruitless peace processes that we see going on all over the world are negotiations where everybody is trying to find some way of compromising by overstating their demands and being happy to settle for half. Now that kind of negotiating is not possible when a person knows with clarity what they think and feel.

The next difficulty occurs when you complain to Mrs Klein or Mrs Bick: ‘But you said something different yesterday!’ and they reply: ‘I changed my mind.’ How can anyone change their mind if they saw so clearly the day before? New evidence. Now of course the negotiator is always striving to be consistent and therefore he says the same thing today as he said yesterday, because it’s a negotiating position. He’s quite happy to yield an inch if his opponent will yield an inch and that is called achieving the truth. But if like Mrs Bick or Mrs Klein you are in close contact with your intuition and quite certain at this moment of what your intuition tells you, you are of course ready to change your mind the moment new evidence is introduced into your thought and experience.

No child patient is more alarming than the elective mute; and until you discover that the elective mute is eloquent in other ways than with his tongue you are completely baffled. Then you discover that the elective mute is clever with his hands and that his two hands are carrying on an eloquent conversation corresponding almost to a drama, a ballet, a demonstration of warfare; it’s all taking place through the hands, communicating with one another. Now when you have an adult patient who manifests this kind of elective mutism in the session it is extremely frustrating because you can’t see his hands. The eloquence that is going on is entirely internal. What happens with the elective mute child is that he begins to whisper and you discover that the making of sounds with his mouth is felt to be a terribly aggressive thing, and that almost any sound coming from his mouth is experienced as an obscenity and probably not much distinguished from gas passing from his rectum. This is one of the points of origin for children’s tendency towards obscenity, the making of anal noises.

The thing about negotiation is that it is based on a concept of truth by consensus – not by discovery but by consensus. It is part of our idealization of democracy that we think that one man one vote is bound to get at the truth. The negotiation is not a form of communication – it is a form of action, like a sword or a fist fight. Somebody is meant to win, somebody is meant to lose; it has nothing to do with communication and discovery of the truth of one’s feeling or thoughts, or of the other’s feeling or thoughts. In Bion’s last work *The Dawn of Oblivion* (the third volume of *A Memoir of the Future*), he seems to have described his ultimate concept of integration of the personality in the form of all the characters from the first two volumes coming together to form a ‘committee’, intended only to discuss and not to decide anything. This committee was meant to investigate anything that came on the agenda from all existing points of view (‘vertices’ as he called them earlier). The implication of this was important, because in Bion’s first drawing-up of what he called the Grid of thinking, the last column of the Grid was named ‘action’. He soon reconsidered this, borrowing a phrase from Poincare that ‘the answer was the misfortune of the question’, and concluded that action put a stop to thought.

The last column in the evolution of thought should not have been action but communication. Yes, but what do you do when you are confronted with an enemy that only acts and doesn't think; is there such a thing as a defensive war or is it a Christian problem that the moment you take up arms you are an aggressor? It is true that you can't communicate with somebody who only acts and is not communicating. In Northern Ireland the peace process is being stopped because the IRA will not give up its arms; but this is irrational because it means telling the IRA they can only come to the negotiating table so long as they promise not to make aggressive propaganda. But it is not a negotiating table in search of the truth; it is a negotiating table in favour of bargaining processes, and of course the IRA like every other minority discovered that the most powerful argument is to have a weapon. You cannot bargain unless you have a weapon in your pocket. We probably have to accept that we are still a very primitive culture that does not know how to communicate. Probably it is better at least to pretend to communicate because that opens the possibility of discovering that you can't do it, and peace negotiations are better than open warfare because they are a type of ceasefire. Plato's dream of a philosopher king is not likely to be realised in anybody's lifetime.

To go back to the internal discourse of the baby, and the process of lalling, it would not appear that it ever becomes a language, that it ever gets beyond miming for instance. But with identical twins, one often does find they develop a private language between them which arises from this original lalling. When a philosopher like Wittgenstein says there is no such thing as a private language I think one must assume that he has never experienced the psychopathology of identical twins. The invention of a private language is probably not really a very creative process; it is probably a matter of coding the heard language so as to be indecipherable. It is in fact a very easy thing to put something into a code, whereas to decipher a code (as in the story of linear B) is an extremely difficult task. There is a story of Edgar Allan Poe called 'The Gold Bug' in which he performs this feat of decoding a message of Captain Kid describing the location of buried treasure. When you first read this story you are tremendously impressed by the intelligence of the writer. Only after finishing it do you think to yourself, 'Wait a second – he's the one who created that code, it was no problem for him to decode it'. So I suspect that these private languages of twins are created by this type of coding of the heard speech. It is a favourite activity of children. When I was young there was a thing called Pig Latin, which was made simply by reversing the first and last letters, if I remember. This is greatly stirred in families where the parents speak a second language as their private language without realising that the children quickly secretly understand it.

While it seems to me that children first express their thoughts in a primitive way through noises and movements that are the equivalent of chanting and dancing, I think that the movement from noises to obscenities comes from peers not

from parents. When it comes from parents it has a different meaning, a celestial music. It probably means the music of parental sexuality. But what they learn from peers is the language of rebellion, the expletives of revolt. Not that parents expose restrictions – they impose classes. Children do not belong to the class of sexually literate, they don't have a vote and they can't use dirty words – only the adults can do that. The revolt against this class structure is called terrorist.

The ability to find the words to express what you mean is not widespread. The most amazing facility I know of is that of Joseph Conrad, whose native tongue was Polish and who learned to write the most marvellous fluent English. Yet his fluency was hard work really. Apparently he could only write about 350 words a day, and this because his wife locked him in the attic until he had done them. As for neologisms, as I suggested in the case of *Finnegan's Wake*, I think that in the ordinary course of events they are a confession of verbal impotence. We have plenty of words to choose from if you know them. I doubt there is any reason for neologism except for scientific purposes; when new phenomena are discovered they really deserve a new name. By contrast every drug company is continually inventing neologisms not to describe new drugs but in order to create a monopoly through a brand name.

Now to get back to the point, which has to do with parents and their children as well as analysts and their patients. The point is the choice between teaching and observation. Parental anxieties and anxiety in the countertransference are severe. We all have in our mind a concept of progress, like a roadmap from A to B, depicting the story of our peregrination in life, at least the story we have told ourselves. We can hardly resist the desire for our children, and our patients, to follow the yellow brick road to see the wizard. The discipline of baby observation which Mrs Bick taught us sets its face against teaching the mother the correct way to raise her baby. Sometimes we are threatened with the observation of a tragedy, however carefully we may try to choose our families for observation or our patients for analysis. This is the great test of humility: to resist interfering, knowing that we do not know the correct way.

The great teacher of this humility is the experience of treating a hyperactive child, one of those little animals that is on the move from birth, incorrigible, unable to make contact, unable or unwilling to modulate their pace and pattern to that of the humans around them, enraged when balked and charming as puppies when gratified. They usually appear for therapy fairly early due to their capacity to frustrate and infuriate parents, nannies, later teachers and other children. But they take to the analytical setting amazingly. Often from the first moment they seem enthralled by the attentive interest of the therapist, and a process of change is set in motion which can be breathtaking.

What one sees over a period of two or three years is the appearance of a sparkling intelligence which recapitulates the conceptual history of the race, much as the embryological development of the foetus repeats the anatomical phylogeny. Attention makes its appearance, which limits action and allows emotional contact to take place. Mysteriously, play seems to arise, then the lalling of inner speech and eventually language. Contact gives way to attachment, separation anxieties and terrors. Within three years they have caught up with their agemates. Amazing! And the therapist, dragged along by this burst of development, has hardly had time to offer interpretation.

But why should we be so astonished that an innate capacity for development, held in abeyance for lack of some element in the environment, should burst forth? And why should we be astonished that it seems to follow an unerring course in conceptual development – given that we are still ignorant of the medium by which thousands of years of cultural heritage are transmitted? Is it any easier to credit the operation through the genes of millions of years of bodily evolution, just because it is longer? We say ‘genes’ as a child says ‘carburettor’, unaware of the depth of his ignorance. But worse, on the basis of this skin of knowledge, we dare to interfere with the processes of nature. We should content ourselves with pointing and naming, describing our awe and wonder at these processes.

Our meddlesomeness, and the omnipotence which drives it, takes the form of teaching, professing knowledge we do not have. It is delusional and arises from what we think of as a sense of responsibility. It is difficult to be an observer without meddling. We are haunted by the expected accusation, ‘Why didn’t you stop me?’ We are all a bit hyperactive, having very little faith in Bion’s internal ‘committee’ for exploring from all possible vertices by means of communication. If we could confine our activity to pointing and naming, to employing signs in consciousness, we could give the internal ‘committee’ time to fashion its symbols and create the basis in dream-life of understanding for ourselves, our children, our patients. Then we may all intuit this understanding. It need not be taught. In fact, like any art, it cannot be taught.

On symbol formation and allegory¹

The following talk pairs with the earlier paper 'Concerning signs and symbols'

Virginia's paper will be a hard act to follow – it was rather marvellous really and placed me up in the constellations where I never dreamed of being, but it was very kind of her. As a matter of fact I am not trying to follow this act, I am just going to talk about some wonderful dreams that I had from a patient just before a holiday break. These dreams illustrate some of the things that have exercised and fascinated me for some time, and I will welcome everybody's thoughts about them because they really seem worth discussing as a group – more of a workshop than a lecture.

The first dream we call 'Bottom's Dream' because like Bottom's dream in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it 'hath no bottom' – it has material you could dig into and dig into and always come up with an interesting discovery, indeed electrifying. The patient, a middle-aged woman, began her account of the dream by saying Nations were on the move. I didn't know what she meant by that but was certainly alerted to something interesting, and she described it geographically:

There was a first level that seemed to be on a flat arid African plain. The masses of people moving on this plain seemed urgent, hurrying as much as they could, not quite like refugees carrying their belongings on their head, but obviously going somewhere.

The second level, which seemed to be somehow behind her, was on the top of a high plateau and these people seemed particularly ragged and depressed, more like refugees from somewhere like Kosovo, dragging themselves forward. She felt there was something dangerous about them. She thought neither of these two groups – those on the arid plateau below, or on the equally arid table-mountain plateau above – were able to see the horizon; everything looked flat to them. They were in a sense flat-earthers, people to whom the earth seemed flat. The implication was of course that we were all flat-earthers who would fall off at the end.

The group that she was with herself was on the verdant side of this plateau, rich in grassland with some trees. The people she was moving with were not indolent but leisurely; they didn't seem either to be in a hurry to get somewhere or in a hurry to leave some place – neither fleeing nor desirous to attain.

Her association was that these different tiered levels seemed to have not only geographical but geological significance. It reminded her of the way in which geological shifts cause earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and so on – geological levels with catastrophic implications. She thought the implications of the two groups of people fleeing, and people pursuing some goal, were very sociological. The picture certainly reminded me of the situation that pertained in the Civil War in

¹ Transcript of talk by Donald Meltzer given at Florence in February 2000. Edited by M. H. Williams.

the United States when there were massive liberations of Negro slaves. Marching caravans were formed of freed slaves believing they were to cross the river Jordan and gain the Promised Land, as in the Biblical ideology captured in their famous songs. The tragedy was that that when these columns of slaves came to the river, they marched on, entered it and drowned. It was a bit like the lemmings, a kind of mass suicidal delusion leading them forward, and very different from the refugees on the plateau who were obviously fleeing from persecution and dread and were themselves felt to be dangerous and aggressive in their flight.

Now I thought myself that this was also a commentary on mental states: related for instance to Freud's dictum that neurotics suffer from recollections, always looking backward and thinking about what happened in the past, and bound by what he called the repetition compulsion to repeat the conflicts and anxieties of the past. What he didn't make so clear was that patients like Emmy von N., for example, were constantly peering into the future and were always saying 'what if this' and 'what if that'. They suffered constantly from the imaginary dangers conjectured through their 'what-if' ing. One meets a lot of both these states in clinical practice: people caught between 'if only' about the past and 'what if' about the future; and between these two levels of conjecture about the past and conjecture about the future, the present moment was somehow compressed and was not experienced as the reality. The reality was all past and future; the present was the evanescent moment which was just passing like the view from a rapidly moving train – flashing past, it couldn't be lived in.

This seems to me to be the essential structure of symbol formation – complex moving at many different levels. The movements along the arid African plain also reminded my patient of animals in search of waterholes. So there are references to many levels of ideation within this symbol of symbol formation – geographical, geological, animal, human, and probably some attempt at discovering the present, represented by the verdant level between the arid plain and the arid plateau. On this verdant level it was possible for people to live in some sort of peace and to see the horizon in a way that informed them the earth was not flat, but that they were living on an object moving in space, in a system that had its own laws, which could be discovered and have predictions made about it, measurements taken and so on. So the system touched on the very ancient science of astronomy and its relation astrology. Just as, as archaeology discovers one ancient civilization after another, it always seems to be discovered that they had astrological ideas and ways of measuring the movements of the sun, moon and stars – that is, an awareness that we live as part of a planetary system.

This idea of a planetary system is in many ways the origin of religion, and really is applicable to everything. It would appear to be a fairly universal method of organization for individuals, whatever the level of abstraction within their unit self:

they organize themselves as planetary systems. And of course the human family is the planetary unit of human life: it is natural that children circle in a planetary way around the parents, as sun and moon of their particular planetary system. And should any one of the children leave this planetary system (as Martha Harris and I tried to describe in our *Model*)² they fall outside the planetary pull of the parents into what Kierkegaard would have called ‘despair’. The most despairing situation being of course the schizophrenic type of illness, in which individuals have floated away from the human race and seem to be engaged nowhere, doing nothing, having no experiences – a vacuum of mental events that invites the systematic formation of delusions as a substitute for the self-evident facts of the planetary system of the family.

Today, of course, there is much worrying that this planetary system of the family has fallen to pieces – that owing to the number of divorces children are thrown from one planetary system into another, with step-parents, or thrown onto the community from neglect and so on. This deterioration of the family is believed to be consequent to the deterioration of religious beliefs – what is called (after Nietzsche) the ‘death of God’, the collapse of the Catholic church and the arising of a plethora of religious cults of one sort or another. It does seem to threaten chaos, and as Virginia was describing in her paper, reminds us of what we assume to be the mental state of the baby either before or after birth. But it is probably unfounded really. We forget that the genetic structure of the baby is something that has been prepared over millions of years and is in no sense chaotic. The speed with which children adapt themselves and learn, is evidence of the degree to which development is programmed from limitless past generations. The developmental roots are there, inbuilt. Techniques of parental care, whether at the level of the family or of local or state government or other assumed parental situations, need to reflect the fact that these programmed developmental roots already exist. The function of parents is not to prescribe progress, but to assist the growth from these roots.

In *The Psychoanalytical Process* I tried to describe what I thought was the natural history of the psychoanalytical method. I saw this too as programmed in the sense in which parental care is programmed, and that seemed to me at the time a powerful argument for not being prescriptive or seeking innovations, but for simply following along and seeing what happened. And I do think this is the correct ethos for the psychoanalytic profession to assume. The instrument which allows one to follow along is of course the transference-countertransference relationship that can grow up between patient and analyst. I did discover more recently that it

2 Donald Meltzer and Martha Harris, *A Psychoanalytical Model of the Child-in-the-Family-in-the-Community* (published in French, 1976). First published in English in *Sincerity: Collected Papers of Donald Meltzer*, ed. A. Hahn (1994).

doesn't always grow up by any means: that it is impeded by what I came to call the pre-formed transference, that is, the patient's efforts to follow Freud's expectations regarding repetition compulsions. So the transference would be a repetition of the past. I tried to describe the method for discouraging this endless repetition which gives all the appearance of being an analytical process and yet is not. The reason it is not, is that nothing surprises the patient – nothing the patient dreams, nothing the analyst says, comes as a surprise; and that of course is very discouraging to both patient and analyst. Whatever you say the patient's reply is always 'Oh yes, I have always known that.' One wonders, is it true?

Well in a certain sense of course it is true. What we have to say is a thing that the patient has known as it were for millions of years. But the fact that they are not surprised that another human being should recognise this thing and be able to frame it in some sort of verbal or metaverbal vehicle of communication, is evidence that some very powerful omniscience is being invoked by the patient. 'Yes, I have always known that.'

Now I'd like to leave this first dream, which came at the beginning of a week two weeks before a holiday break, and to present a dream from two weeks later, just two days before the break. The patient dreamed that *she was in a rather large, luxurious boat, some sort of pleasure cruiser, very elegantly built. She was looking at the flooring and particularly admired the fine wood, brass fittings and so on. She was in what seemed to be a lounge with tables and chairs and a bar – clearly a luxury cruise. She didn't remember whether there were other people there, but she thinks probably there were. She went out on deck and was surprised by what she found there. On the deck towards the prow of the boat, at the front, she found an elaborate flower garden – not the sort of thing you expect to find on an ocean cruiser. Then she walked round to the stern of the boat, and there discovered a churchyard with tombstones, which also surprised her.*

Her association to this dream was that this boat was very similar to a type of boat that is actually built in a boatyard by the canal near which she lives. One boat is built at a time, a sort of Rolls-Royce of nautical elegance. However this canal is only suitable for long-boats, it is too narrow for these 'Rolls-Royces', so that when one is finished it has to be lifted by crane several miles to the Grand Union Canal which is wide enough to float it down to the sea.

Combining these associations with her dream's description of an elegant holiday cruise style of boat, I came to think of this as a 'ship of fools', a mediaeval construction which has been the subject of various novels (for instance, by Katherine Anne Porter). This elegant and luxurious interior leads to the flower garden in the prow of the ship but also to the tombstones in the churchyard at the stern of the ship. Clearly this is meant to be an allegory, of birth and life and death: you spend nine months in elegant comfort and luxury in the womb, then you are born to a

relatively evanescent blossoming but inevitably head for the graveyard. It is a ship of fools because it mocks at human optimism; and the way in which optimism is mocked indicates that the planning and planting of this ship is all a matter of human ingenuity. Human ingenuity has set up this ship with its garden and its tombstones – like a surrealist painting, with its surprises and paradoxes, where objects and shadows are dissociated from one another in a surprising way.

Consider now this dream in juxtaposition to the first dream. It seems to me (and I'd ask Meg to comment on this) that what we have here is a distinction between allegory and symbol. Allegory I take to consist of the rather ingenious substitution of known elements for what is mysterious and unknown; it is a kind of cheat because it pretends to bring the unknown within the sphere of the already-known (that life is folly...). Symbol, on the other hand, is like Bottom's dream, full of mystery, and inexhaustible however much you dig into it, like the varied dimensions of the first dream which really do embrace the history of the world; its many levels are not just an ingenious emblem. A symbol carries with it the gift of humility; you know perfectly well you will never understand it completely.

Now the position of the psychoanalyst vis a vis his patient is one in which he is exposed by his patient's urgency to have things explained, so is tempted to explain things. One finds oneself using this perilous word 'Because ... because, because', which lends itself only to endless degradation. The autistic child asks 'Why, why, why' to everything you say. This infinite regress of course leads to the concept of God – 'Because God said so'. Well that's not an unacceptable conclusion: 'He made it and he said it was good'. But it is still a conjecture; all the evidence that religions have cited endlessly for the existence of God is really only evidence of the ignorance of man. We don't know. It is open only to our observation and our wonder, and this is to my mind the basis of the aesthetic experience: awe and wonder at the unexplainable complexity of the world and particularly the world inside one's own head.

It can seem a very precarious thing for the analyst to relinquish his position as somebody who knows more than his patient. Why should your patients pay you when you don't know any more than they do? Well, in fact they don't pay you because you know more than they do – they pay you to conduct something we call an analysis, which is a process we don't really properly understand but when patients enter on it they have the sort of experiences Virginia was talking about – experiences that are not describable in language alone but in all sorts of metalanguages. And long experience has convinced people, including analysts, that there is something about it that is conducive to growth and development of the person and the personality. Bion's formulation is that truth is food for thought. Of course we don't have any truth to hand out to our patients; but somewhere in the process is food for thought.

If it were true that the patient's transference is to the person of the analyst, it would pretty soon come to a halt. But I am pretty convinced – and this I wrote about in connection with the aesthetic conflict – that the patient's attachment is not to the person of the analyst but to the internal objects of the analyst. That is, the transference exists on a much more imaginative aesthetic and perhaps even spiritual level than the original description of transference ever encompassed.

So when the patient describes things about the analyst which seem to you – as the analyst – not to be correct or accurate, one has to pause and wait to see what his evidence is. In effect the transference is a process of legend-building. As I listened to James Fisher's wonderful paper I thought to myself, 'Well, what an intelligent person this Meltzer is! I'd like to meet him.' Legends are built, and people give them names, but really this is for purposes of simplification and identification and being able to communicate in public and so on. The legends aren't true; there is nothing true about them. The fact that I wrote some books, the content of which I can hardly bear to look at, and which I hear about from friends and colleagues but can hardly recognize, is evidence of the kind of process that goes into anything that can be thought of creative or original – that is, it is all the result of something talking or writing through you. Catharine and I did an interview for the *Journal of Melanie Klein and Object Relations* based on my personal hatred of Frank Sinatra's song 'I Did it My Way', and named this interview 'I've Been Done Its Way'. I am perpetually rather amazed when I consider how psychoanalysis gripped me by the throat when I was about sixteen years of age and dragged me to medical school, then to England, dragged me to Oxford, and so on ... absolutely helpless.

I am fairly convinced that if psychoanalysis could do that to me, dragging me onwards, functioning like a drug I'd become addicted to, then it must be a powerful set of ideas. There is much talk these days that Freud is under attack by the press, and will psychoanalysis survive, and so on. I don't have the slightest doubt that psychoanalysis will survive and will grow and change and develop. The reason I think it will survive is because it has a fast hold on two great ideas. One is the great idea of symbol-formation; and the other is the great idea of the transference-countertransference encounter.

Now, of course, the question arises: do we need to do anything about it? Well, a meeting like the one this weekend is one of the ways of doing something about it. What does it do? It strikes me that this is a ceremonial occasion, for the benefit of the children, like Christmas. Alberto told me that a different policy was decided on this time than a year and a half ago – whenever it was – and that they were going to accept all the papers that were submitted. Well that seemed to me to be eminently intelligent. It doesn't stop people who present papers from having bad experiences but at least they would be experiences they could learn something from – you can't learn anything from having your papers turned down by some committee or whatever.

As you know I am opposed to organizations of any sort. Any organization is bound to adopt a hierarchic structure, and that hierarchic structure is bound to imply authority and is therefore bound to be intimidating to people who are somehow not adept politically, and to be relished by people who are adept politically. The question is whether organization is useful for psychoanalysis, or whether psychoanalysis should be left to its unconscious organization as a natural planetary system revolving round some legendary earth with its sun and moon and so on. I am all in favour of leaving it to legend formation and not taking too seriously this pseudo-problem of how to organize it, how to bring it within the confines of human ingenuity. Olympus was full of life – the ‘religion of joy’ as Keats called it. But psychoanalytic churches, it seems to me, are deadly.

I don't know if I have described these dreams well enough for you to be able to think about and talk about them, but I'll be very pleased to hear what you have to say, because they absolutely fascinated me. What fascinated me was the regression from symbol formation to allegory formation. The dreams of the next day, the last session before the holiday, were fragmented beyond belief really. I think one of the things that promoted this regression was my evident delight in this first dream, and the talk we had about meta-communication ... I'll stop there and invite people to contribute to the discussion.

Patches of blue: the decline of the male

Talk given in 1998, edited by Dorothy Hamilton

A view from the hermitage of the consulting room of the evolution of sexual values and practices which are gradually shifting biblical male dominance and its terrors of the female towards a more friendly and rational, albeit less exciting, basis.

I should say something about being invited to be keynote speaker at a seminar like this, because I myself haven't got anywhere close to the millennium yet. My point of view comes from a sort of Victorian folly called psychoanalysis, which is still struggling out of the 19th century as far as I can see, and has an extremely limited view of the culture we live in, derived second-hand from our parents. This is only slightly augmented by the fact that I have travelled very widely, teaching in various places, and that gives me a view of other cultures. Also, I come from a different culture myself, and that makes the culture of this country very vivid to me by contrast. When I came here in 1954 the contrast was very great, but, thanks to the vulgarisation of the Thatcher era, it is no longer so great. Very disappointing, but there it is. It's largely the consequences of this vulgarisation that I am (probably) going to talk about. It seems to me that the bombardment by the entertainment industry, the alteration in values of the Thatcher era in favour of wealth production and so on, the scramble for social status promoted by the car industry, has had a tremendous effect on the male population, starting very early. It has seduced boys back to the television and later their computer games, and to the sort of secret culture that is fairly unknown to their parents' generation; this has given them a sense of superiority over their parents and has emboldened them, you might say, in relation to parental values and parental expectations.

The impact on the girl population has been quite different. It seems to have accelerated puberty by at least two years, both physical and mental, and has, it seems to me, had also an emboldening effect on them, but in a very different way that strikes one as being both useful and probably rather admirable. You might say they are no longer frightened of being raped. Well, bravo. So they walk home alone at night and often get assaulted in one way or another, but it doesn't seem to be the devastating experience their mothers might have expected. It is in line with being whistled at by the workmen in the street, which they are very blasé about.

So we have this fundamental [divergence] between the sexes, with the boys becoming more withdrawn, more passive, more gregarious in a pub sort of way, and failing to develop interests at school. They don't necessarily do badly at school, but they certainly lack interest, and do not develop passions for anything except

their Nintendo games or those peculiar skates that they spring around on. Their passionate life seems to me markedly withdrawn and markedly skewed in the direction of passivity, and, when asked for a title, I gave 'The decline of the male' because I think this is something that is happening, and is worrying individually but also worrying in terms of the culture. I see the difference on the faces of the young people as I drive along the High Street in Oxford on the way to work. The boys look really dishevelled, rather dispirited in their facial expressions, a bit weak in their eyes; and the girls stride along in a manner that used to be called manful. And what I hear from my undergraduate patients seems to bear out this alteration: that the girls have to seek out the boys, which amounts to a kind of sharing of the television culture and leads directly into mutual masturbation, homosexuality and so on. The boys expect to be sought out and, if they are at all good-looking, seem tremendously to fancy themselves as irresistible; the struggle with them in analysis is to get them to be interested in anything. They seem to be pure examples of Freud's pleasure principle, and words like 'easy' and 'fun' and 'holiday' sprinkle their vocabularies in a way that squeezes out anything like 'love' and 'adventure', 'excitement' and 'desire' and so on.

The transition that one expects psychoanalytically from puberty to adolescence and from adolescence to the beginnings of adulthood seems very blurred. The boys' gang and the girls' gang of puberty seems to carry on – at least for the boys, not so much for the girls – and the transition from adolescent boyhood to manhood is very retarded for the boys, so that they remain boyish almost indefinitely. They are usually jogged out of it to some extent by the birth of their first child, but somehow they often do not [emotionally] engage in that experience of life, of reproduction. It seems to impinge on them primarily as a deprivation – deprivation of sleep, deprivation of sex, deprivation of attention from their partners or wives or concubines of whoever they happen to have produced the child by – because they are busy, it seems to me, with the only thing that interests them deeply and that is status; and status is equated with money and earnings, and the kind of car you drive and the kind of holidays you take.

I sympathise with them in a way in their loss of athletic interests in favour of body-building – which seems to be mainly a narcissistic pursuit – because the sports that interest them are ones that are tremendously commercialised and invite spectator participation, such as football. But even the more individual sports have been a bit spoiled by the invention of superior equipment – the marvellous tennis racket which enables anybody to play tennis, the marvellous ski boot that enables anybody to ski – and I think this takes a lot of the pleasure out of accomplishment in these sports. What they get left with is golf, which remains challenging because, no matter how good the clubs and the balls, playing golf is really an art that very few people master, and certainly hardly anybody masters without lessons. So I do

notice that the men become very obsessed with golf, to a degree that drives their wives to distraction; that they disappear at weekends, and they disappear mentally too, because they are mentally searching for balls in the rough, missing putts, and wondering how Tiger Woods does it. It is amazing the excellence with which golf is played professionally and, of course, also the vast sums that are earned these days which seem, for the male, to carry on the momentum of the Thatcher era.

The transition on the other hand of the women, from girlhood to womanhood, seems to me to be both social and much more biological, in spite of the ads we are confronted with telling us that size makes a big difference and being 'bigger than John's' and so on. The girls seem fairly quickly to get over being impressed by the male organ and its capacity for erection, and the idea of babies does take hold of them very powerfully. Culturally speaking, they seem to be confronted with a situation where they expect disappointment, and you hear and see things about how to get rid of your husband but keep the children, as a kind of aim in life: how to be a single parent family, how to fight your ex-husband in the courts. The idea of the meeting of the sexes in a happy co-operative adventure seems to survive in a sort of minimal group who have been fortunate enough to have the kind of parents who were really united, and with whom we find analytically that the unconscious concept of a combined object is really in them. Whereas it does seem to be absent in most adult males and females who seem to have carried over the blatant superior separation and incommunicado status of their objects, and their therefore unresolved Oedipal conflicts, so that, when the women become ravished by their desire for children, they are at a bit of a loss from the point of view of identification processes, and many of them opt for negative identifications – that is, finding fault with their mothers and trying to do the opposite. Within five to ten years they discover they are doing exactly the same: they are screaming at their children, threatening them, depriving them of contact and so on – where their intention had been to do exactly the opposite.

Now as I say, this is really a view from this peculiar folly of the analytic consulting room and it is in a sense an old man's view as well. It is bound to say 'we did better and we had it better, and I don't know what is happening to the younger generation'. But, invited to a meeting like this, I'm bound to say what I think, though it's not very encouraging. But I think the encouraging thing is that this very biological passion that women have for babies is overcoming what I called, in my little introduction, the male biblical fear of the woman. I think that male dominance and male bullying and tyranny has always been based on fear of the woman, and very fundamentally on fear of her genitalia, those bleeding, unclean genitalia of the biblical days, the powerful seductive genitalia of Tamar and Ruth [Delilah, Jezebel] – irresistible. The fear of the female genitals has been overcome to a certain extent in men and boys by improved anatomical knowledge, but I'm

afraid anatomical knowledge is not much more use in these matters than knowing the names of parts of your car when it breaks down. Noise in the carburettor – what does that mean? It creates a sense of knowledge and mastery, but in fact the female is more mysterious today than she was apprehended to be in the past, when she was frighteningly unclean and her belly was getting swollen periodically, and she was turning all her passion and feelings towards this child. Today her mentality is much more mysterious to men, and it seems to me it's a very difficult thing for them to pay attention to. They tend, instead of paying attention to the mystery of their woman's mentality, to be content to try to attract her attention and her interest in their mentality – which unfortunately tends, with the help of the advertising media, to mean attention and interest in their genitals. I think they are losing that game, that the women are beginning to realise something about the anatomy also – to realise that the penis is just a conduit through which the semen and the urine flows, and it is not an organ of remarkable interest any more than it is an organ of remarkable beauty, so that the male population is losing its pulling power, you might say, its attraction. It's true that the male body is very beautiful when it is in good condition and when it is employed in a graceful and effective way, but it takes a great deal of love for a woman to see the male genitals as beautiful. The pubertal and pre-pubertal girl may be in awe of them because there is a lot of fear of them, but once the fear is overcome, they then lost their fascination and the power of dominion.

But there is a great mystery in the female internal genitals, with their production of eggs, insemination and fertilisation and the growth of the foetus. The beauty of this mystery, it seems to me, lies behind the enhanced self-respect that one finds in women. It doesn't have much to do with gaining the vote or having access to employment and income. I think it has a lot to do with the recognition of the mystery of the beauty of the reproductive process, in relation which, of course the male – although his function in producing semen is equally mysterious, but can be so degraded by semen banks and such things, which are equivalent really to keeping the men as studs – the male reproductive capacity has lost its kudos, because it has lost its beauty for the imagination. I don't think this is irrecoverable, but it is in dire straits at the moment, it seems to me. It is worth remembering that Freud's whole theory of castration anxiety never mentioned the testicles, was all penis, and somehow male psychology hasn't much caught up with this problem. It is not so true in the Mediterranean and South American cultures, where a man is spoken of with admiration as having big balls. Well, that's hopeful.

Now, the victim in this has been the process called falling in love, and the differentiation between making love and having sex. The term 'making love' is used either with embarrassment, or in such an automatic tick-like way as to be meaningless, so that people seem largely to mean having sex or, in fact, masturbating

one another. The cult of the orgasm is linked to the cult of the erect penis. 'Good in bed' seems to mean giving orgasms because of the size of the penis and the vigour with which it is accomplished. I think it's a sad story but I think it is fairly clear that the dawn, the renaissance that is coming is a renaissance connected with the beauty and mystery of the reproductive process.

One of the troubles about it is that, at the present time, by the time children reach puberty and adolescence, most of them inflict such distress on their parents that it is very hard for parents to look forward to their growing up; but that does seem to me to be cultural and it is not universal. It is certainly connected with things like the rate of unemployment and the loss of job security, all of which, along with the destruction of the Labour Unions, were the main accomplishments of the Thatcher era, which ushered in this craze for privatization. The disillusionment with these processes is accumulating. I notice, for instance, that the differentiation between Communism and Stalinism has finally penetrated fairly widely, and I am interested to see that a Communist has been asked to form the new government in Italy – but of course the Communist party in Italy never was Stalinist as far as I know.

So I don't want to convey to you the idea that I am gloomy about the future because I have to die so the rest can go to hell. I really do feel very optimistic, but my optimism is rooted first of all in the women, and their filling the vacuum of vitality left by this withdrawal of the male population from their own imagination, interest and passion. But as always, my trust is in the artistic community, that is not going to be swallowed up by the commercialisation of art, and by the media and the film industry and the entertainment industry, but is going to state its ideas and its attitudes and feelings artistically. It is probably music that will pull us through eventually. It is a great shame that much less music is taught in schools, both primary and secondary, and parents seem to be less and less willing to spend the time and money to get their children taught an instrument. And of course, if you can play the television and Nintendo games, who wants to blow a flute? But I think eventually even the terrible pop music begins to sound a bit musical, and they will eventually learn that they do have good instruments and the instruments will teach them. I am a bit more worried about the artists, because of the modern things like acrylics replacing oil-painting, and the brush and the spray-gun replacing technique; but we have museums full of old masters, and I am heartened to see that the museums are more and more crowded. The galleries that sell modern works are not crowded.

What I am trying to convey to you from this really severely behind-the-times point of view is that, seen from the vantage point of say, 1950, things look terrible. One is always nostalgically distorting the past, but still there has been a marked change in values, and with it a marked change in culture. I am trying to see what Richard in Mrs Klein's *Narrative of a Child Analysis* called 'patches of blue'.

Creativity and the Counter-transference¹

by Donald Meltzer

On Creativity

I am going to speak about creativity not in a descriptive or behavioural sense, as when we say: 'this person is very creative'; but in a more precise and definite mode, I am going to talk of creativity as a phenomenon of the personality, of the family, and of the culture. I will speak of Bion as a genius who in a certain sense produced everything that he did produce as though in a dream. I will describe him as someone who struggled, who made some errors, who corrected himself and often did not know where he had arrived. A creative genius is someone who permits his own internal objects to give him new ideas – even if he does not understand them or cannot use them; his function is to receive them, and he possesses the art of transmitting them. There is a distinction between invention and discovery. Invention is a function of the self; discovery, a function of the creative self.

I will start with Bion's theory of thinking, and his particular formulation of the Grid. The Grid was a means chosen by Bion to describe the processes by which thoughts evolve and the method of thinking. Bion made a very precise distinction between mental processes of an adaptive, contractual or quantitative type, that he said made part of the exoskeleton of the personality; and the processes founded on emotional experience - creativity, symbolic representation and dream thought. This emotional and symbolic aspect of the formation of the personality was considered fundamental by Bion for its development. He thought that the formation of symbols to represent emotional states was something initiated between the tiny baby and the mother. He believed that the maternal reverie, the dream thoughts that the mother transmitted to her little baby, was something the baby can internalise in such a way as to form the endoskeleton of the personality which would then permit him to think in his turn. The structure of the personality, according to Bion (and in agreement with Money Kyrle's view), was something that built up step by step whilst undergoing cognitive development. Every point in development involves the acquisition of new ideas or concepts placed on top of already existing ones. The impact of the new idea on these pre-existing concepts involves an experience of catastrophic change.

In order to give form to this, to be able to think about thought and to describe

1 Chapter 8 of *The Vale of Soulmaking* (2005) by Meg Harris Williams, pp. 175-82. The talk 'On creativity' was given at seminars on art and creativity by Meltzer and Williams in Stavanger (1992) and Biella (1993). This chapter amalgamates Meltzer's talks. The final two paragraphs, on observation and counterdreaming, were written specifically for this book.

these processes, Bion has proposed a Grid similar to the periodic table used in chemistry with two axes – a horizontal axis, and a vertical one to indicate the development of the personality. To describe the processes that take place following the emotional impact, he has used the concept of alpha function. The formation of symbols is considered a function of an external parental object, possibly also internal; and it takes place whilst undergoing the impact of these emotional elements, forming them into a pattern. The vertical axis proceeds with an ever-growing sophistication from preconceptions to concepts, derived in the first place from symbols and dream-thoughts, and arriving at a higher (more abstract) level, which he speculated could be defined through mathematical or scientific formulae. In this scheme it is important to underline that every idea that arrives at the level of conception comes to be utilised for successive experience in the form of preconceptions. The horizontal axis, comes to be used initially to record a system of notation, observation, attention, inquiry, and action.

Bion proposed column 2 in the Grid to indicate the same process, but instead of being used to search for the truth, used rather to describe those things which are not true, to hide true ignorance of the self and others. However he came to recognise the formulations of column 2 as an error; therefore he eliminated them and has thought of elaborating instead a parallel with the Grid, a Negative Grid. At the end of his work in three volumes, *A Memoir of the Future*, written in the last years of his life, Bion thought to correct another error, realising that the conclusion of the process of thinking is not action but communication, because in reality action is a method of reducing and impeding communication.

Bion held that the evolution of a thought in the thinker must follow a definite sequence: first of all, translation into a constant configuration (a pattern), then the focussing of attention on it, which stimulates the inquiry or search that finally leads to communication. This method of considering thought is useful also in the psychoanalytic process where there are constant conjunctions, constant configurations produced by the patient in a particular form, which come to the attention of the patient and the analyst, provoking inquiry and then communication. This is the transformation of the initial thought as it becomes progressively more sophisticated.

Although this system seems to underline (as with Freud) verbalisation and language as the means of expression of thought, in reality it does not, because it is clearly stated that the initiation of thought is dream-thought. When thought is considered to have its origin in dreams, the emphasis turns to the importance of envisioning it so that it can then be transformed into other symbolic forms. Symbol formation can in fact manifest itself in musical, graphic and also linguistic forms. In child analysis we deal largely with pictures and games with objects and plasticine; later, also with language. And language can be the ultimate instrument of communication when it succeeds in uniting visual and musical arts and

becomes poetry.

Following this, we see that the possibility of thought depends first on the external object relationship and then on that with the internal object. Thus implying a vision of the internal object as parental figures which precede the self in their capacity for thought. This view of development does not envisage a smooth process, but proceeds through a succession of quantum jumps, in which each jump implies the acquisition of a new idea and a period of catastrophic change. Bion then considered the passage from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position, the change of values and organization inherent in every part of catastrophic change during growth and development. Thus in every moment of development there is always an oscillation between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions.

In analysis we are able to see this process with great clarity. We can verify how between one resting-place and another a new idea appears from which the patient retreats, then struggles with anxiety, and this applies not only to the patient but also to the analyst. This formulation allows us to tailor more precisely and rationally the ongoings of the analytic process, limiting it only to communication and avoiding action and counteraction, acting out or acting in the transference. We in psychoanalysis study the evolution of the individual, and the evolution of the individual in the family or in relation to his family. These processes of catastrophic change through which the individual develops are paralleled by similar processes of change in the family while it itself evolves. We can verify that our usual method of defining critical points of development in the evolution of the individual corresponds in effect to the acquisition of new ideas – birth, weaning, etc. And in the analytic situation one can see very well how these processes entail an interior struggle, a retreat, then an acceptance, and that during this period of turbulence nothing is clear.

The nature of transference, whether of a child, an adult or a patient, leads the patient to be convinced that the analyst knows the truth. Naturally the analyst does not know the truth and must attempt to stabilise the transference situation without feeling too overwhelmed. The great danger the analyst may encounter during his work is to begin to think he knows the truth. In analysis, for example, when the patient makes a step forward towards digesting a new idea, the analyst can see through his behaviour that a new idea is present, but cannot know what it is until it is described in his dreams. We find ourselves always in a situation of uncertainty.

Bion designated as K (Knowledge) the emotional element which governs the analyst's acceptance of the ultimate mystery of things. The new theory of affects which accompanies his theory of thinking is indicated by three compartments of the Grid which speak of love, hate and knowledge as constituting the desire for

knowledge. This permits us to formulate better the nature of the passionate contact which is propelled by K (the K-link) – the wish to understand that allows us to hold together the turbulence of love and hate. It permits us also to formulate more precisely a method for modulating the anxiety produced by catastrophic change, whose destructive impact would otherwise pull the mind towards the negative Grid, that is, towards lies and negativity. One mode of retreating from this turbulence is to avoid the emotional conflict and pursue modes of adaptation and opportunistic calculation, thus avoiding thinking. The inquiry or need which is put forward by the patient in analysis, or by the individual in life, is to have a transference object, a person who can represent the good qualities necessary to his development, though not necessarily embody them. Thus the patient asks the analyst to be driven by K, by the desire to understand him; this involves attention, inquiry, arriving at communication. Even if you don't always succeed in understanding the internal state of the patient, the analyst should nonetheless be under the dominance of K, that is, of the desire to understand.

The problem of the thought that is trying to become communication is a complex one owing to the fact that the personality is not uniform but has many parts each with their own view of the world, and these parts need to be integrated. (Bion's vertices). The request that the self makes of its objects, internal or external, is that of aiding it to proceed in development, making itself a focus of integration of its various parts. In the last volume of his trilogy, *The Dawn of Oblivion*, Bion describes the type of internal organisation of the personality that makes internal communication possible in relation to thinking, and possible the thought and the confrontation with the catastrophic experience of the new idea. This gives a new significance to the term integration, affirming that the diverse parts of the self can enter into communication.

This vision of development in stages through moments of catastrophic change in the search for new ideas leads therefore to new levels of thought and of organization of the personality, going from conceptions to creativity. It is important to understand that the self experiences creativity as something coming from the object, focussing all the various aspects of the self through the passage from attention to comprehension.

In the third volume of the *Memoir*, the various characters from the first two volumes are found together in a kind of committee – they talk, talk, talk, always the same noisy discourse. Thus one understands that they wish to succeed in something. The new idea in the end becomes the idea of the combined object, and this for Mrs Klein signified the advent of the depressive position.

It follows from this model of the process of individual development as seen in relation to dependence on the external object that the transference object can then be internalised as part of a process autonomous to the individual. This is a crucial step towards creativity and towards enabling the individual to accept new ideas in

the service of cultural ends – for the benefit of ‘the world’.

It is clear that the things necessary for creativity are not exactly the same as those necessary for mental health. Creativity is a term which has special reference to artists. While development involves some give-and-take with objects, creativity comes with a strong feeling of being used by internal objects as a medium to relay knowledge to the world – communication, mission, preaching to siblings. Creativity does not require that there should be an integration of the self, but that there should be an integrated combined object well internalised. Studies and psychoanalytic experience indicate to us nevertheless that internalisation of the combined object is a very rare phenomenon. The problem of having inside oneself a capacity for creativity is different from that which Bion defines as ‘the publication of creativity’, because to render public his own creativity, the individual must have the capacity to *represent* the new ideas as they have taken form in the structure of his personality. We see the difficulties that people have in forming a ‘combined object’ relationship with another person, to represent for example to the children. It is obvious that the artist in his studio and the scientist in his laboratory, the analyst in his consulting room, function at a higher level than they function in their own family.

Viewed in this light, then, the evolution of creativity demands the dominance of K, i.e. the wish to understand. The predominance of K is that which makes possible what Keats termed ‘negative capability’ – the capacity to suspend action, the possibility of having doubts, the wish to plumb the depths of a problem, to search for truth instead of rushing for solutions or experimental actions. Whilst love and hate alone may urgently push towards action, K is the factor that permits the individual to become a thinking being.

Mrs Klein’s Adventure of Discovery with Richard

When Melanie Klein settled down with her secretary to dictate her notes on Richard, she had a clear summer holiday in prospect with a schedule free of other work, and the delight of the Scottish landscape before her. However she did not realize what a task she was setting herself. Day by day and week by week with a spirited and neurotic boy of twelve in an unfamiliar setting (the girl-guides’ cabin near a waterfall), far from home for both of them. But she set out using her usual methods, and quickly found the boy responsive and lively. He was talkative, lonely and inquisitive and soon responded to the drawing materials she provided.

Richard was much concerned with the war, the Jews, and naturally, concerned for his father on active duty. Naturally his initial drawings were seascapes with air fights and surface attacks, and gradually his imagination slipped beneath the surface to the world of fish, starfish and octopi, giving way gradually to a

territorial investigation rich with countertransference references. Mrs Klein was, in spirit, investigating the transference objects and part-objects pictured by the war situation. Gradually a list of characters arose: the star-fish babies with their greed and competitiveness, fighting the octopi – territorial and colonial. This picture of Mrs Klein's interior world became the 'territorial map of the world' with lines and boundaries marking complications of combat, very dependent on the interpretive work.

In many ways the transference was shaping up into a love story, bursting out of the confines of the hut where Richard was dazzled by beauty of the night sky and of Mrs Klein's clothing. But – invaded by the Mr Bluebottle flies. Thus Oedipus declared itself, and the breast was discovered with its strawberry nipples and combined objects. Richard's claustrophobia was about to be conquered.

In all during a whirlwind process of three months, Richard helped Mrs Klein to clarify these major issues of the Kleinian psychology: differentiating internal from external, whole objects from part-objects; clarifying the oedipal situation by discovering the combined object. Discovery at its best, emerging right there from the clinical material – as distinguished from the invention of terminology.

On Countertransference

This term, which has achieved an status of its own, is not merely a clever linguistic inversion. We can set it out for investigation, pinned out to dry like a skin. What is it? It is meant to be the analyst's contribution, as in a duet with the patient – meant to harmonize and impose its own rhythm and cadence, in the nature of the chanter of the bagpipe. It need not be lexical or intelligible; one is reminded of Bion's foibles. I remember his saying in his puckish way, which he knows I hate, that what he is saying is circular but he is depending on the diameter to give it meaning.

So the first point is that the countertransference is an utterance by the attentive analyst. Second, it represents his focus of attention. Thirdly, it is alleged to contain primitive fragments of thought called 'alpha-elements' which, when scrutinized attentively, will seem to form a pattern: incipient symbols of emotional meaning. When Bion is depending on the diameter of his excursion he is hoping it is not nonsense. The circle itself is a primal symbol, verging on language, a primitive script like linear B. Anyone who has listened to Bion knows that he has been chained to negative capability – to the suspension of judgement and action, to waiting, and to tolerating his irritation: 'Why can't he be clear, like Phil Pullman?' Because Bion is no charmer, because he is not inventing, he is hard at work in

the task of discovery as the circle turns into 'O'. Or is it Zero? More Dodgsonian Mathematics. The reader is getting tired and developing a headache. Negative capability is not easy. Small wonder that the computer is so popular. And statistics so seductive.

It is difficult to explain the technique of counter-dreaming. It is not enough to fall asleep while the patient is talking. It requires a process of working over the material, focusing and selecting interpretive configurations awaiting a state of satisfaction (rest). The state of observation is essentially a resting state. It is also a state of heightened vigilance. I compare it with waiting in the dark for the deer, grazing at night, seen by their flashing white tails. This nocturnal vigilance is on the alert for movement of the quarry, part object minimal movements which with patience can be seen to form a pattern of incipient meaning 'cast before'. This catching of the incipient meaning cast before is a function of receptive imagination – open to the possible, unconcerned with probability. Being rich with suspense, it is necessarily fatiguing, and fraught with anxiety. It is a trial of strength – and faith – that gives substance to terms such as resistance or retreat. However, it is a poetry generator.

In short the countertransference is an emotional experience which must be caught in your dreams. Now the patient must attend to the analyst to interpret. How does he know what he is talking about? He doesn't – he is 'counter dreaming'; he has in fact abandoned 'thinking' (science) for intuition (art, poetry). The verbal tradition of Homer.