Jung, Bion and social phenomena: Intra-psychic dynamics, inter-psychic dynamics or something else?

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Abstract: *This paper traces the evolution of Jung's ideas on the collective and Bion's ideas on groups stemming from their personal experiences during WWI and their respective observational studies. A comparison of their psychoid and proto-mental concepts on the basis of this historical development demonstrates an overlap in their understandings of social phenomena but a divergence in their primary interests and hence in the application of their concepts.*

Key words: Bion, collective, collective unconscious, groups, Jung, proto-mental, psychoid, Tavistock.

Introduction

Jung and Bion both developed theories relating to a deeply unconscious and unknowable stratum of the human being, in which body and mind are undifferentiated and from which distress may manifest as much in diseases of the body as in disturbances of the mind. In both cases, their experience during WWI played a part in the theoretical conceptualisation and in both cases the concepts concern collective aspects of human nature. Addison (2016) makes a comparison of the two concepts in the light of mutual influences on Jung and Bion, concluding that Jung's psychoid concept emphasises a teleological organising function designed to foster human growth whereas Bion's proto-mental concept emphasises primitive schizoid mechanisms in groups.

In the present paper, I propose to develop the comparison further, by tracing the empirical origins of these concepts and by considering specifically their application to social phenomena. I aim to show that Jung with his concept understood the possibility of dissociative functioning in the face of trauma, and thus generally the area addressed by Bion, but that he was inherently more interested in a purposive approach. Bion, by contrast, with his group studies was dealing

with group dynamics against a history of war and trauma, and was thus more aligned with schizoid understandings.

Foundations: Pre- and Post- WWI

Both Jung and Bion underwent life altering experiences during WWI, which had a major impact on their later work. These experiences were utterly different, and this is reflected in their subsequent theories. I shall start with the more mature Jung, situated in his already established psychoanalytic work, and follow on with Bion, who was still at school at the outbreak of WWI.

1) Jung

Jung was born in Switzerland in 1875. After studying medicine at Basel University, he joined the Burghölzli Mental Hospital, Zurich. Here, in the period from 1902 to 1910, he undertook his major scientific study on Word Association Tests (WATs), in which he gave a series of stimulus words to selected groups of individual subjects and recorded their reactions and associations. He noted that certain words impacted the sympathetic nervous system and produced emotional disturbance, as demonstrated by delays in response time and changes in skin resistance. Analysing the results according to logical-linguistic criteria and temporal delay, he produced graphs representing the response patterns of the individual subjects.

Of especial note is the application of the WATS to families, by administering the test to all the members of twenty-four families. Striking similarities were found in the patterns of response amongst certain sub-groupings within the families. In one case, a mother and daughter displayed almost identical responses, and in another a father and two daughters showed extremely similar response patterns. Jung comments, "the similarities of associations of related subjects is quite extraordinary" (1909, para. 1004). Taking the mother and daughter as an example, he suggests that the daughter unconsciously imitates her mother, since we become infected by intense emotion in those close to us. He points out that originally there was a biological significance to such transmission of affect as a protection for the individual and the whole herd.

During this period, Jung also observed individual in-patients. He found that some of their hallucinations contained mythological motifs, from primitive folklore of which they could have no knowledge. This was his introduction to the notion of a collective unconscious.

In 1909, Jung resigned from the Burghölzli to devote himself to a growing analytic practice and to his researches into religion, mythology and folklore. By this time, he was also closely involved with Freud and with the politics of the psychoanalytic movement. As Addison (2009) points out, from 1907 Jung had been proposing a broader interpretation for libido than Freud, and, in 1912, he published *Transformation and Symbols of the Libido*, to which is popularly attributed the split with Freud. In this work, Jung described two kind of thinking, namely directed rational thought and fantasy thought of a mythological character, the former being conscious and scientific and the latter being unconscious and a means by which "directed thinking is connected with the oldest foundations of the human mind" (1991, p. 32). He quotes Freud as saying, "Myths correspond to the distorted residue of wish phantasies of whole nations" and adds that "Rank understands the myths in a similar manner, as a mass dream of the people" (ibid., p. 26). Jung wrote, "the unconscious … not only binds the individuals among themselves to the race, but also unites them backwards with the peoples of the past" (ibid., p. 174). Even as early as 1911 therefore he was wondering about the relationship of the individual to the collective[1].

Jung's researches for *Transformations* brought him to an awareness of symbolic thinking, and, as Shamdasani notes, this was the start of the work of *The Red Book* (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, pp. 39-40). Following two dreams in the autumn of 1913 of a terrible sea of blood, Jung began his 'most difficult experiment' of actively engaging with the unconscious, by plunging himself into his own visionary fantasies, deliberately soliciting them, and then entering into dialogue with them (2009, pp. 22-24). He was thus able to elaborate a dialectic between the two forms of thinking, conscious and unconscious, through symbolisation. This self-experimentation, which he continued until 1930, is tremendously important, because it demonstrated empirically the numinous, mythopoeic levels of the individual psyche. It is from this work that Jung developed his understandings of his collective unconscious and his psychoid concept.

[1] He was not yet employing this term.

Although Jung's early studies almost exclusively address the intra-psychic domain, both in his WATs and in his own self-experimentation, nonetheless he is clearly also contemplating the relationship between individual and society. His scientific study of the family constellation and his references to 'the oldest foundations of the human mind', 'phantasies of nations' and 'mass dreams' show that he is considering how the connection between individual and society can be reconciled. Interestingly, his scientific conclusions refer to inter-psychic mechanisms of imitation and infection. I shall revert to this later.

2) Bion

Bion was born in India in 1897. He was sent to England for his schooling and was still at school when war broke out. He joined the Royal Tank Corps after leaving school in 1915, aged 17. Bion's daughter, Parthenope, suggests that his theorization of group dynamics made use of his experiences as a tank commander:

> I suspect that the experience of panic described in the Diary, his awareness of the contagious effects of high or low morale, his attempts at a rough sort of 'behaviourist' group therapy, as well as his perception of the disintegrating effects of boredom and complete lack of discipline, all formed part of the real personal emotional experience on which his theories lie. (Bion Talamo, 1997, p. 309)

The rough attempts at group therapy constituted a decision by Bion and his second in command to attempt to raise morale by pretending to enjoy action and by discouraging banter among their men. Following this policy, they observed how fighting spirit improved. Here, Bion was thinking in terms of morale within the group as a whole rather than individual performance or psychology; and, in an interview with A. G. Banet, he acknowledged that his war experience must have influenced his ideas on groups (Banet, 1976, p. 269).

After the war, Bion embarked on a medical training. As a houseman at University College Hospital, he was an attendant dresser to Wilfred Trotter, whose skill he recollects with affection and even awe. Torres (2013) considers that Trotter was a major influence, providing in his *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* the roots of several of Bion's later ideas. Especially, Trotter postulated three main instincts governing human social psychology, namely sex, self-preservation and nutrition, plus one further instinct, which he named the herd instinct. He said,

"suggestibility is the cement of the herd, the very soul of the primitive social group" (1916, p. 27).

Trotter saw the psychology of the individual and the psychology of the group as contiguous: "The two fields – the social and the individual – are regarded here as absolutely continuous; … man as a solitary animal is unknown to us, and every individual must present with the characteristic reactions of the social animal" (1916, pp. 11-12). According to Harrison, his book "provided the basic material for most British students of social psychology during the 1930s, including Bion and Rickman" (2000, p. 27).

3) Comment

Coming from different cultural backgrounds, Jung and Bion experienced the war in totally different ways. Jung's war was an intra-psychic personal affair, in which he had to manage the psychic tension of a torrent of visionary material. Bion faced a real enemy in war, in which he observed and in all probability himself experienced shell shock or war neurosis; he had through force of circumstance to consider the morale of a team of men under his command and the associated inter-psychic dynamics.

By 1930s, Jung had conceived his model of the individual psyche, although he had also noted the family constellation in his WATs, wherein similar complexes could be observed in different family members, which he had attributed to imitation and infection. He had begun to develop his idea of a collective unconscious, described in terms of a foundation to the individual mind rather than to collective phenomena. By contrast, Bion had served on the front line and had survived the war and had then gone on to complete a medical training. He had encountered Wilfred Trotter, and in all probability his work on the herd instinct, but he had not yet begun his group studies.

The Tavistock Clinic

The 1930s were interesting years. The Tavistock Clinic[2] under its founder Hugh Crichton-Miller collected a multi-disciplinary team of officers and staff for the purpose of providing

[2] The Tavistock Clinic underwent a variety of organisational changes in the period covered by this paper. I shall, however, simply refer to 'The Tavistock' to cover all of them.

psychotherapeutic services on an out-patient basis to sufferers of neurosis and other mental health disorders. Bion joined the staff as a trainee in 1933 and was appointed to the senior staff in 1934. It was during this period that the only documented occasion on which Jung and Bion encountered one another took place.

Crichton-Miller was Medical Director at the time that Bion arrived. Under his auspices, the Tavistock supported an eclectic approach to psychotherapy, representing a school dedicated to an integrative practice combining both Jung and Freud (Hinshelwood 2013, p. 45). The Clinic included followers of both and also staff with ideas on social or group psychology, notably William McDougall, who additionally had had an analysis with Jung.

Jung lectured there on two occasions at least, the first being a series of five seminars delivered from 30 September to 4 October 1935 entitled *The Tavistock Lectures* (1935, paras. 1-415) and the second being a seminar given on 14 October 1936 entitled *Psychology and National Problems* (1936, paras. 1305-42).

The initial series covered a range of topics, including Jung's model of the mind, the transference, and the relationship of body and mind, in which "the two things – the psychic fact and the physiological fact – come together in a peculiar way" (1935, para. 136). It is known that Bion attended the first three lectures and took part in the discussions relating to body and mind.

In the third seminar, Jung referred to his original WATs, returning to his work on families and explaining the extraordinary similarity between type of association and reaction time in different members of the same family. He used identical examples to those previously discussed. Now, he described this constellation as a "striking case of participation, of mental contagion" (1935, para. 156).

In the last seminar of the series, Jung described the transference as a special form of projection, "which, as a rule, is of an emotional and compulsory character" (ibid., para. 316). He went on to link emotions with physiology and to explain that they are contagious because they are deeply rooted in the sympathetic system. Referring to studies by the French psychologists, including Le Bon, he said: "any process of an emotional kind immediately arouses similar processes in others. When you are in a crowd which is moved by emotion, you cannot fail to

be roused by that same emotion" (ibid., para 318). He returned to this in the separate seminar of 1936.

In this later seminar, Jung was asked to talk about psychology at a national level and he elected to discuss the psychological situation brought about by the war, *namely the prevalence of phenomena in the form of symptoms*[3]. He made an important distinction between: phenomena having a purposive function and phenomena constituting symptoms that are a result of causal conditions. He suggested that the countries most prone to symptomatology were those most affected by the trauma of war. This distinction is critical, because it reflects Jung's contrast between his synthetic method and Freud's reductive method and it highlights the subsequent divergence between the teleological organising aspect of his psychoid concept and the fragmented psychotic mechanisms of Bion's proto-mental concept. Here, however, Jung was discussing a situation akin to the one shaping Bion's ideas.

Jung observed that the emotional conditions created by the suffering of war call up primitive instinctual forces, and this leads to regression. The helplessness and panic felt tend to lead to a clustering together in masses: "Such group formations all show unmistakable traces of infantile and archaic psychology, infantile inasmuch as they are always looking for the father, and archaic inasmuch as the father-image appears in a mythological setting" (Jung, 1936, para. 1313)

An accumulation of individuals in this state reduces to common man:

> Their individual achievements never accumulate – rather they extinguish one another. Thus a large group, considered as *one* being, exhibits merely the traits common to all people but none of their individual characteristics. The traits common to all people consist chiefly of instinctual qualities … of a relatively primitive character. (ibid., para. 1314)

Man in the masses functions like a primitive group being. And nations being the largest of such groups tend to behave like amoral monsters, living in "dreams and primitive illusions

[3] Author's italics.

usually rigged out as -isms" (ibid., para. 1316). War traumatised nations [can] behave like … psychotic individuals:

> First they get dissociated or disintegrated, then they pass into a state of confusion and disorientation. As it is not a disintegration in an individual case, the confusion … does not touch the fundamental instinctual structure of the mind, the collective unconscious. On the contrary, the confusion produces a compensatory reaction in the collective unconscious, consisting of … an archaic personality … This new constellation … as it is activated becomes perceptible in the form of a projection … [which] becomes more collective and takes on mythological forms. (ibid., para. 1330)

At the time of this presentation, Bion had not yet begun to develop his ideas on groups, and most of Jung's ideas had been confined to models of the individual psyche. But here, Jung is discussing a "collective" psyche, a group being lacking individual characteristics and even possessing psychotic elements. He touches on the area that Bion later addresses, whilst also distinguishing between social phenomena that are the result of war trauma and other phenomena having a purposive function. He delineates the area that becomes his own primary interest in his later account of his psychoid concept but he also acknowledges the area that Bion later addresses.

Jung and the collective

We come now to some confusion, which arises in relation to Jung's use of the term 'collective'. His early studies envisaged an intra-psychic model of the individual psyche, comprising a universal unconscious giving rise to primordial images of a mythological character. His *Red Book* work showed him the numinous aspect of this collective unconscious, and ultimately helped him to conceive an irrepresentable psychoid stratum underpinning the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It also fostered his notion of individuation as an ongoing process of differentiation from the collective unconscious.

However, an early paper presented to the Zurich School in 1916 suggests the possibility both of a psychic aspect in the individual that is essentially collective and of an individual identification with a collective psyche that is other:

> The universal similarity of brains results in a universal possibility of a similar mental function. This function is the collective psyche, which is divided into *collective mind* and *collective soul*. Insofar as there exist differentiations corresponding to race, descent, or even family, so, beyond the level of the "universal" collective psyche, we find a collective psyche limited by race, descent and family. (1922, pp. 451-52)

He then develops this in two directions, one intra-psychic and one that links with social phenomena. In the first, he clarifies, "in every individual, in addition to the personal memories, there are also … the great "primordial images", the inherited potentialities of human imagination. They have always been potentially latent in the structure of the brain" (ibid., p. 410). These images lie dormant in the deeper layers of the unconscious and oblige "a differentiation in the unconscious itself … to differentiate a personal unconscious and an impersonal or superpersonal unconscious. We term the latter the … collective unconscious … because it is absolutely universal, wherefore its contents may be found in every head." (ibid., p. 410-11). Here, he is designating the collective unconscious as a phylogenetic structure in the individual mind, an intra-psychic fact.

According to the second, it is unclear the extent to which there is a collectivity separate from but in some way associated with this collective unconscious. In *The Relation Between the Ego and the Unconscious*, he speaks of the contents of the collective unconscious as inherited categories, the archetypes (1928, p. 139). He then discusses the collective unconscious in another context, saying, "corresponding to the social organisation that is beyond the individual, there is also a collective psyche beyond the personal mind" (ibid., p. 148), and a "strict differentiation from the collective psyche is … a *sine qua non* for the development of the personality, since a partial or blurred differentiation inevitably leads to a liquefaction of the individual in the collective" (ibid., p. 157).

This differentiation, namely individuation, is an essential requirement for the individual, and is in opposition to the collective. He points out what a difficult task it involves:

> Human beings have a capacity which is of the utmost use for collectivism and most prejudicial to individuation, and that is the capacity to imitate. Collective psychology cannot dispense with imitation, without which the organisation of … society would be

> impossible. Imitation includes the idea of suggestibility, suggestive effect, and mental infection. (1922, p. 456)

At this point, he appears to be envisaging an inter-psychic dynamic based on imitation. However, he also raises another possibility, which is participation mystique:

> The further we go back into history, the more we see personality disappearing beneath the wrappings of collectivity. And if we go right back to primitive psychology, we find absolutely no trace of the concept of an individual. Instead of individuality we find only collective relationship or what Lévy-Bruhl calls *participation mystique*. (1933, p. 17)

His writings on participation mystique are likewise unclear because he often employs the term 'projection' in his descriptions, again suggesting an inter-psychic domain. However, this is inconsistent with his summary below:

> [O]ur individual conscious psychology develops out of an original state of unconsciousness, or in other words, a non-differentiated condition (termed by Levy-Bruhl, '*participation mystique*'). … [E]verything unconscious is undifferentiated, and everything happening unconsciously proceeds from a basis of non-differentiation. … [T]here is no certainty at all as to whether an unconscious content belongs, or does not belong to the self. It cannot be determined *a priori* whether it pertains to me or to others or to both. (1928, p. 225-26)

The 1936 presentation at the Tavistock, mentioned above, focusses mainly on the group, speaking about the collective as a mass formation involving projection. Then, in a lecture in 1941 delivered to the Swiss Society for Psychotherapy, Jung elaborates the relation of the individual with society. He observes that the patient carries the world inside himself, something impersonal and supra-personal, as given from the start. The parental imagos include the personally acquired image of the actual parents plus the parent archetype, which exists *a priori* in the structure of the psyche. These unconscious elements, especially the parent archetype, generate collective elements in the collective unconscious and need to be consciously integrated as personal individuation develops. However, there are dangers of dissolution in the collective when "man's deep-seated longing for a patriarchal and hierarchical

order finds an appropriate concrete expression which accords only too well with the herd instinct" (1945, para. 222). The mass then infallibly swallows up the individual. Jung thus contrasts such a collectivism with individuation.

As can be seen the term "collective" is employed by Jung to designate, respectively: a phylogenetic unconscious; a universal stratum in the individual psyche containing contents of a mythological character common to all mankind; a relation between the individual and the collective (mass or collectivity) through imitation, projection and an inter-psychic dynamism; and an area where man is undifferentiated from his fellow man in a *participation mystique*.

Jung's psychoid concept elaborated in *On the nature of the psyche* (1947/54) also has a bearing on interpretation, given his understanding of this deepest unknowable level of the unconscious as a region where body and mind and self and other are undifferentiated (Addison, 2019). At this fundamental level, the collective unconscious viewed as a structure in the individual psyche is undifferentiated from the collective unconscious of individual others and others in the mass through *participation mystique*.

Jung hints at this in his essay *The Relation Between the Ego and the Unconscious*, and it allows us to infer a dynamism through undifferentiation that may be infectious or contagious and that is neither imitation nor projection. Viewed thus, we have a lens onto his observations on collective or mass phenomena, embracing something that is neither intra-psychic nor inter-psychic but based on *participation mystique*, a state in which there is no differentiation between individual and collective. Here, it can be argued, the natural, teleological organising function of the psychoid realm may prevail in the individuation process but give way to dissolution of the individual in the collective in the face of trauma on a cultural level.

Bion's group work

When Bion joined the Tavistock, he joined a team of experienced individuals, a significant number of whom had served in WWI. Some like himself had witnessed or experienced shell shock or war neurosis, and a number had been involved in the treatment of individuals with symptoms of the same employing Freud's methods. Such experience was recognised to be important in the years approaching WWII, and in 1940 members of the Tavistock published a

series of essays entitled *The Neuroses in War*. Bion (1940) contributed a paper on the war of nerves in the civilian population.

Towards the end of 1930s, Bion entered an analysis with John Rickman, which had to be interrupted due to the onset of WWII when Rickman joined the Emergency Medical Service. Thereafter, Bion kept in touch with Rickman through a correspondence spanning the years 1939-1951, and through a collaboration involving his first experiments with groupwork. The earliest letters were written when Bion was still at the Tavistock, having been appointed a group psychiatrist, and contain some disparaging comments on Jungian ideas. For example, on 15 March, 1940, "when they talk of either history or myth, the Jungians seem to me to do so with a very inadequate historical or mythological equipment whatever … their psychological credentials may be. And when I detect quite serious inaccuracies in the first two I begin to suspect the last as well" (Vonofakos & Hinshelwood, p. 68).

In 1940, Bion also joined up, as a psychiatrist treating sufferers of war neurosis and investigating procedures for rehabilitation. By this time, Rickman was working at the Wharncliffe Hospital, where Bion visited him and together they wrote a Memorandum (now lost) covering their early ideas on therapeutic rehabilitation groups. Trist (1985, p. 5) refers to these as contiguous with his own ideas, based on Lewin, about viewing the wider hospital environment as a therapeutically active social field.

Hinshelwood describes the impact of Lewin's field theory in 1940s and the influence on Rickman's ideas, explaining that ""[f]ield" does not mean merely an interaction between individuals in a group. It means a background out of which something emerges as a figure in a foreground" (2018, p. 1410). In a group, an individual's role and behaviour emerge from a field of forces that constitute his social environment, and the individual inhabits a life-space comprising those forces relevant to himself. Since Rickman and Bion collaborated on a number of early group experiments, it is highly probably that Bion also was influenced by Lewin's thinking, as Torres (2013) argues.

In 1942, Bion along with other psychiatrists was appointed to the War Office Selection Boards (WOSBs) to devise procedures for the selection of potential officers. He came up with his leaderless group method. Starting from the simple premise that in war the quality of a soldier's personal relationships with his fellows is fundamental, and the tension lies always between the

interests of the group and the soldier's own interests, Bion designated this tension as the emotional field to be tested through a real-life situation. Candidates were placed in a small group and given a practical group task, such as building a bridge, with no instructions as to how the task was to be carried out. The selection officers observing the group monitored simply how each candidate managed to reconcile his personal ambitions with the requirements of the group for the task and noted what leadership patterns emerged.

This was the basic principle of all Bion's leaderless group tests, and he took the principle with him to the military psychiatric hospital, Northfield Hospital, to which he was transferred in 1943. Here, he was placed in charge of the Military Training and Rehabilitation Wing, joining Rickman who was in charge of an acute psychiatric ward. Together, they set about adapting the leaderless group method to the situation in a psychiatric hospital.

By identifying the presence of an enemy, in the form of neurosis as a disability, they established a common task of tackling this enemy. The organisation of the Training Wing was therefore drawn up to display this enemy to the men and persuade them to tackle it as a communal problem. At this point, Bion was contemplating the notion of a container and also a field: "I found it helpful to visualise the projected organisation of the training wing as if it were a framework enclosed within transparent walls. Into this space the patient would be admitted at one point" (Bion & Rickman, 1943, pp. 14-15). The wing was divided into a series of voluntary groups based around chosen activities, e.g. car maintenance, carpentry etc. Additionally, a half hour daily business meeting was arranged for the entire wing. Such meetings allowed the intra-group tensions to display themselves. Bion did not attempt to provide solutions but he made observations, suggesting that the men study the issues and themselves make proposals for resolution. In this, the hospital was treated as a social field, and individual and community were viewed as equally important interacting elements. As Bion & Rickman wrote, "there is a useful future in the study of the interplay of individual and social psychology" (1943, p. 26).

Following the war, Bion set himself up in Harley Street in private practice and returned part time to the Tavistock. He also entered an analysis with Melanie Klein. Post-war, the Tavistock instigated therapeutic groups, because the demand for psychotherapy exceeded the supply of qualified professionals. Bion took on a twice weekly patient group, with Trist as an observer. He also directed a programme of multiple group projects, including a student group and an

industrial group, on which Rickman and Sutherland joined him, and later additionally a staff group.

Trist gives an interesting description of the development of his groupwork at this time, indicating that he "was searching for the equivalent of the psychoanalytic method in the group situation and for concepts that enabled him to understand the material that emerged in it" (1985, p. 28). As Bion stated in *Psychiatry at the Time of Crisis***,** "There is no corpus of knowledge that does for the study of the group what psychoanalysis does for the study of the individual" (1948, p. 446).

Many of his ideas were forged in the patient group, whose processes he would customarily discuss with Trist afterwards. Witnessing huge dramas being played through, Trist observed that "experience of these episodes led me to think of group therapy as a theatre" (1985, p. 31). Bion began to talk about a group mentality, in which material hostile to the purposes of the group, a negative unacknowledged system, would be disavowed:

> Once he had identified this concept, he was in possession of a referent for the group setting analogous to the unconscious in the individual setting. This enabled him … to see the group process as an interplay between the group mentality, group culture and the individual who needed yet was frustrated by the group. (ibid., p. 32)

Trist saw this as an emergent and innovative concept, and it led eventually to the notion of the work group and the three basic assumption groupings, fight-flight, pairing and dependency. Bion and Trist monitored the group for evidence of a basic assumption structure, both feeling that something more was involved. Finally, noting that one basic assumption tended to be latent at any one time, Bion speculated the idea of an underlying proto-mental level and offered that "the psychosomatic level might yield evidence about the proto-mental level. He did not think that the small group would be useful for this purpose but thought that epidemiological studies might be" (ibid., p. 33). In other words, he considered that the proto-mental level was a cultural determinant.

Thereafter, based on empirical observation of both the patient group and the Staff group, he fleshed out his initial ideas to the extent described in *Experiences in Groups*. At this time, he was treating individual patients in private practice, he was taking the patient group at the

Tavistock and he was running the staff group so that he was experiencing the individual, the group and the organisation concurrently. Trist points out, "it became apparent that Bion was using the word 'group' to mean, interchangeably, the face-to-face group and the wider society" (ibid., p. 33).

Sutherland observed:

> Basic assumptions originate within the individual as powerful emotions associated with a specific cluster of ideas which compel the individual to behave accordingly and also to be attracted to those imbued with the same feeling with an immediacy that struck Bion as more analogous to tropisms than purposive behaviour. These bonds Bion termed 'valency' because of this chemical-like nature of the attraction. (1985, p. 59)

In *Experiences in Groups*, Bion describes the proto-mental system as a matrix incorporating prototypes of the three basic assumptions, each existing as a function of the individual's membership of the group and each existing as a whole in which no part can be separated from the rest. He employed the term 'valency' for events occurring in the proto-mental system postulating, "since it is a level in which in which physical and mental are undifferentiated, it stands to reason that, when distress from this source manifests itself, it can manifest itself just as well in physical forms as in psychological" (1961, p. 102).

According to Sutherland, this feature suggests that "certain illnesses, e.g. those in which a substantial psychosomatic component has long been recognised, might well be diseases of certain conditions in groups" (1985, p. 60). Bion discusses tuberculosis as an example (1961, p. 107-108).

At this point, he may not have referred specifically to Lewin but he was thinking in terms of a social field and a group mentality distinct from that of the individual psyche, a field in which the individual is subject to social forces. Bion refers to intra-group tensions, since he is seeing the group as an entity rather than as a set of people in inter-psychic relationships.

The bonding from valency was of such power that Bion sought an understanding in the most primitive mechanisms for this behaviour and this led him to the psychotic processes formulated by Melanie Klein in relation to the earliest phases of mental life, and his understandings

enhanced from this new vertex are described in *Re-View*. Here, he sets out the tensions between the work group, which is adapted to reality and seeks to develop, and the basic assumptions, all of which are opposed to development. Verbal exchange is the function of the work group, whereas the language of the basic assumption group is primitive and a mode of action. On the emotional plane, when basic assumptions are dominant, Bion describes the group material manifesting Oedipal figures including "the enigmatic, brooding, and questioning sphinx from whom disaster emanates" (1961, p. 162); and additionally an extremely early and primitive primal scene of a bizarre nature worked out on a level of part objects. These "basic assumption phenomena appear to have the characteristic of defensive reactions to psychotic anxiety" (ibid., p. 189). The work group by contrast is reality-driven and compelled to employ the methods of science, in its search for organisation and structure, and Bion considers that it is the work group that triumphs in the long run. According to Bion, these formations are to be found in all groups.

This concludes the period of Bion's study of groups, although he did revert to thoughts about the collective in *Attention and Interpretation*. However, that thinking is beyond the scope of this paper.

Discussion

It is interesting to note that in some ways the trajectories of Jung and Bion follow opposite paths. Jung's hermeneutic study in his self-experimentation, involved a profoundly numinous experience covered in his *Red Book*, out of which he later conceptualised his notion of a collective unconscious, his theory of individuation and his psychoid concept. This experience was personal, intra-psychic and spiritual. By contrast, Bion's military experience as a tank commander was sensual and fragmentary, and from this team beginning he came to his various studies of groups. His work was concerned with the dynamics affecting individuals in a group situation.

From these beginnings, Jung came to develop his thinking on the relation of the individual to the collective and the behaviour of people en masse, covering on the one hand the need to differentiate the personal unconscious from the collective unconscious in the process of individuation and on the other hand the dangers of dissolution of the individual in the mass following cultural trauma. His corpus contains almost no reference to small groups of people,

except in the family constellation arising from his WATs., which he attributes to imitation and infection.

Bion, however, stayed primarily with investigations of experience in relatively small groups[4] until he shifted to individual psychoanalytic work. In the course of those investigations, he developed ideas relating to a social field or tensions at a group level rather than inter-psychic dynamics between individuals. He strays into a wider cultural arena with his ideas concerning a proto-mental matrix but he limits this to the field of psycho-somatics and epidemiology. Most of his group work is predicated on an experience of war as a backdrop, hence the kind of trauma mentioned by Jung. But, in this regard his thinking is developed to a significantly greater extent than is that of Jung.

Conclusion

Chronologically, the present account traces the thinking of both Jung and Bion up to the early 1950s. This was a time when Jung was very well established and was elaborating his psychoid concept in his account of synchronicity as an acausal connecting principle, according to which apparently disconnected events, one internal and the other external, arise in a meaningful coincidence of profound significance to the individual experiencing them. Jung attributed such significance to the transcendental reality of the psychoid archetype. For Bion, this was the period when he moved away from his group work, the source of his ideas on his proto-mental matrix, and when he began to develop his psychoanalytic thinking beginning with a series of papers on psychosis and schizophrenia.

Vermote (2019) describes this early psychoanalytic output of Bion, including his publications at the beginning of the 1960s, as addressing transformation at the level of knowledge, through the psychic elaboration of sensual and emotional experience. She writes that a major break, a 'caesura', occurred in his work subsequently, when he concluded that an approach based on the senses was not apt and might even be a hindrance. "[H]e finally realised that profound psychic change was rooted in pure experience and being (becoming). He … began to seek a

[4] The Northfield Experiment involved a larger group in that the Training Wing housed between 100 and 200 men.

living, experiencing form of psychoanalysis from an attitude of radically not knowing" (ibid., p. 13).

After this, Bion strove to locate transformations occurring in a formless, undifferentiated, a-sensuous zone, which he designated O. He felt that this unknowable zone was of a different order than the sensual, being a domain in which transformation is "won from the dark and formless infinite" (Bion, 1967/1984, p. 173) when "something gains form out of the infinite layer and becomes more finite" (Vermote, 2019, p. 17). Accordingly, Bion in later life moved towards an understanding founded on an unknowable and undifferentiated, life-giving realm radically separated from verbal thought, which suggests that his ideas became much more aligned with those of Jung and his psychoid concept.

In conclusion, I should like to offer a quote from Bion's obituary concerning the 1967 publication of *Second Thoughts*:

> [A]pparently factual accounts of clinical work … - memories - are inevitably subject to distortion, but, more significantly, such memories can only relate to and convey sensuous experience, whereas the essential in analytic process is non-sensuous, an ineffable experience. (Lyth, 1980, p. 271)

Although this refers to his individual psychoanalytic work, perhaps it tells us that his attitude to his group work shifted also and that in a future paper reviewing his proto-mental matrix his thoughts on the ineffable would need to be taken into account and considered in comparison with Jung's concept of the psychoid as a deeply unknowable and numinous aspect of the unconscious.

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