Bion and Buddhism

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, *Bion and Buddhism*, represents my own work. None of the work referred to in this thesis has been accepted in any previous application for a higher degree at this or any other University or institution. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

Submitted by Yichi Zhang

Abstract

This thesis takes the form of a PhD by articles. There have been several attempts during the past five decades to indicate the connections between Bion and Buddhism. This project foregrounds the need to research the connection between 'Bion and Buddhism' in more depth. The three articles forming my PhD are named (1) 'Wilfred Bion's Annotations in the *Way of Zen*: an Investigation into his practical encounters with Buddhist ideas'; (2) 'A comparison between two methods of dealing with desire: Bion's "no memory no desire" and Buddhist "bare attention" mindfulness meditation'; and (3) 'A comparison between Paul Cooper and Mark Epstein's ideas and clinical applications of Buddhist concentration (Samadhi), mindfulness (Vipassana) meditative stances in relation to Bionian and other psychoanalytic thoughts and practices'. In the first article, I (Zhang, 2019) provide concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen*. It demonstrates five main thematic strands to Bion's interest in Buddhism as exemplified in his reading of this text: the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O'. In the second article, I focus on Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' and argues that although Bion urges for the elimination of memory and desire, the very process of retaining a 'bare' or minimal awareness of such desires – as advocated in certain Buddhist approaches – could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical material. The third article, Z concentrates on a systematic review and comparison of the actions taken by Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper to develop specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis and Buddhist meditation, in the hope of finding attentional strategies that are therapeutically beneficial for relieving the pain and suffering of the patient. This PhD seeks to provide clear evidence of Buddhist influence on

Bion's psychoanalytic thinking, and it further pinpoints the clinical benefits of attentional states derived from combining Buddhist meditation, Bion's clinical thinking and other clinical ideas in psychoanalysis.

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Author's note

At the time of writing, article one has been published by *Psychoanalysis and History* in 2019. Article two has been accepted by *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* with revisions in 2022.

Additionally, my coauthored article 'Test Anxiety and Poor Sleep: A Vicious Cycle' has been published by *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* in 2022.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Bion and his interest in Buddhism

Amongst various psychoanalysts whose ideas have been compared and intersected with Buddhist thought, W. R. Bion's work stands out as one of the most frequently discussed. Bion was born in Muttra, India and later moved back to the United Kingdom for boarding school. He was unhappy at boarding school as he missed his parents and Aya (nanny), as well as India itself. Bion (1991, p. 33) portrays his experience upon entering boarding school in England as follows:

> The train worked steadily, sometimes painfully over the stiffer gradients of the Western Ghats till it drew in to the terminus at Bombay. The railway station, like other architectural monuments of the British Raj, was a mixture of tawdry provincialism and Imperial domesticity which even in retrospect can evoke in me nostalgic feelings of great poignancy. I came in time to believe that these feelings were the substitute for what others called 'homesickness'. But I had no home for which I could feel sick – only people and things. Thus, when I found myself alone in the playground of the Preparatory School in England where I kissed my mother a dry-eyed goodbye, I could see, above the hedge which separated me from her and the road which was the boundary of the wide world itself, her hat go bobbing up and down like some curiously wrought millinery cake carried on the wave of green hedge. And then it was gone.

During his time in India, Bion was very close to his Indian Aya. During the First World War, he served as a tank commander in France and was awarded the distinguished service order. Mary Jacobus (2005, p. 193) notes that "Bion's daughter, Parthenope...raises the question of just how (and how far) her father was shaped as an analyst by his wartime experiences". After World War One, Bion studied history at The Queen's College, Oxford, and later studied

Medicine at University College London. He then trained for seven years at the Tavistock Clinic in London as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. His training analysis with John Rickman was interrupted by the onset of World War Two, during which Bion treated soldiers with shellshock (post-traumatic stress disorder). After World War Two, he underwent psychoanalysis with object relational psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and then, in 1950, he qualified as a psychoanalyst under the auspices of the British Psychoanalytic Society. Throughout Bion's lifetime, he was a tireless teacher of psychoanalysis throughout the world, in such diverse places as the UK, USA, South America, Italy and Brazil (Mawson, 2014; Levine & Civitarese, 2016; Vermote, 2019; Symington & Symington, 1996; Abel-Hirsch, 2019; Bleandonu, 1994).

Bion is well-known for his psychoanalytic work in groups which was influenced by his wartime experiences. He also dedicated a great deal of effort to studying and analysing patients in psychotic states. He is one of the most important figures to have disseminated and advanced Klein's psychoanalytic work. He is known for his psychoanalytic concept of 'container-contained', first borrowed from depth psychologist Carl Jung[1] and then used to advance Klein's concept of 'projective identification' and her idea of the mother-infant model. 'Projective identification' was first portrayed by Melanie Klein (1946, p. 102) as an intra-psychic pathological exchange between mother and infant, preceded by the splitting of parts of the ego. Bion (1962, p. 90) extends this to an intersubjective and interactive communication which can take place in a healthy way. Over time, throughout his psychoanalytic career, he seems to have gradually moved away from Klein's psychoanalytic thinking and become more introspective and mystical.

In his own work, Bion did not restrict himself to trying to answer old questions at all

[1] The constantly conjoined elements he bound with a name, container–contained, making use of terminology and an instance of a pattern that he had retained from reading a 1925 paper by Carl Jung, 'Marriage as a Psychological Relationship (Mawson, 2014, p. 22).

> costs, but raised new ones and allowed his thought the latitude of setting off to explore new directions….Looking at the trajectory of his own life, we may even conjecture that in order to do so, to free himself from the inevitable constriction that widespread acceptance and becoming part of the 'establishment' can produce --- he had been president of the British Psycho-Analytic Society and a leading figure among the London Kleinians --- he had to leave London and come to California to better and more freely expand the scope of his thinking and explore new frontiers. (Levine & Civitarese, p. xxii)

Just a few examples of Bion's post-Kleinian concepts are his later conceptualisation of 'O', the ultimate reality, his clinical concept of 'reverie' and his last book *The Memoir of the Future*. Bion is a very important and innovative psychoanalytic clinician and thinker due to his anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian mentality, as well as his deep thinking oriented by the tireless chasing of and confrontation with truth. His major innovation in the psychoanalytic and psychological field is his later introspective and intuitive methods of working with patients and thinking about psyche and soma while maintaining an object-relational point of view. He seems to abide by the classic Freudian view of the importance of instinct, but expands Freud's instinct towards another level which Bion calls 'intuition' --- a bodily centred spontaneity that always points at the raw but original ways of being instead of the hasty attempts at symbolisation, conceptualisation, institutionalisation, mentalisation and achievement. Bionian psychoanalysis, as a whole, seems to point towards the direction of psychology of the body, and its original frequency and being before the construction of any concept.

Throughout his psychoanalytic career and perhaps his life itself, Bion never settled with any thoughts that might confine his thinking within the existing range of psychoanalytic ideas. He read broadly and one of his great interests was Zen Buddhism, as evidenced by his thirty pages of annotations and underlinings in Alan Watt's book *The Way of Zen* (Zhang, 2019). In his personal copy of this book, Bion paid a tremendous amount of attention to the Buddhist

core teaching of the 'Four Noble Truths'; the comparison between conventional knowledge and spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality')[2]. The material generated from his personal copy of *The Way of Zen* is genuinely informative about Bion's deep interest in the connections between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis. Based on careful reading of his annotations and underlinings, it seems as if Bion read and annotated the book in a state of free association. The connections he drew between psychoanalytic ideas and Zen Buddhism seem to have been very fluid and spontaneous. Since Bion did not usually annotate books as extensively as he did *The Way of Zen*, it seems unlikely that he would have annotated it so heavily if he had had merely a passing interest in the subject. After closely examining Bion's books in his personal library, Meg Harris Williams (2005, p. 204–5) states that 'to judge from his own books, Bion would appear to have had little personal interest in the Judaeo-Christian tradition […] He was drawn to the religion and philosophy of the East – but to the poetry of the West'. In contrast with the few terms upon which Bion focused in the Western religious and mystic traditions, his profound interest in Zen experience is manifested in the broad scope of topics he outlined in his personal copy of *The Way of Zen*.

Throughout his psychoanalytic career, Bion observed, explored and expanded existing psychoanalytic theory and practice by examining it from different angles (vertices) such as group dynamics, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, religion, mysticism and poetry, as well as his personal experience with his own psychoanalysis, with war and with his patients. His engagement with Zen Buddhist thought is just one of the manifestations of this open-mindedness towards the complexity of a living being. He seems to have experienced psychoanalysis as a living being (such as a cell) that is constantly changing internally and

[2] 'no memory no desire' and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality') are not Buddhist ideas per se. Bion repeatedly mentioned these two psychoanalytic concepts in his annotations in *The Way of Zen*.

interacting with the outside environment. In order to keep psychoanalysis alive and lively, he refused to confine himself to any existing conceptual, cultural or experiential systems. Fixed, concrete and limited confinement within any type of culture, ideology or experiential system seems to point at the death instinct that Sigmund Freud observed upon his creation of psychoanalysis. Bion dedicated his whole life to keeping psychoanalysis as an open and live system that can gain 'nutrition' from and extract 'waste' to the larger cultural and experiential environment. He attempted to bring psychoanalysis towards the life instinct's openness, equanimity and spontaneity as opposed to the concreteness and confinement of the death instinct.

1.2 The importance of researching the interface between Bion and Buddhism

Over the past three decades, several attempts have been made to juxtapose or connect Bionian theories with Buddhism. For instance, Mark Epstein (1984) brings together Theodor Reik's 'freely floating attention', Freud's 'evenly suspended attention', Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist 'bare attention' and makes interchangeable comparisons amongst the four throughout his article. Concetta Alfano (2005) uses Buddhism, object relations theories and perinatal research to understand her encounters with her patients. While emphasising the four capacities of mental flexibility, negative capability, unconscious reception and intuitive capacities, she juxtaposes Bion's concepts of 'caesura', 'reverie' and 'the infinite', with Buddhist 'non-self', receptivity and compassion. In her comparative study, Esther Pelled (2007) argues that mental development is the common denominator between Bion's theories of alpha function, 'reverie' and Buddhist mindfulness, and she further attempts to relate Bion's ideas on 'O' and detachment to Buddhist equivalents. Steven Mendoza (2010) meanwhile points out the similarities between Bion's conceptualisation of 'O' and 'sunyata'

(emptiness) in Buddhism and also uses concepts such as ‘alpha function’, ‘reverie’ and ‘no memory no desire’ to substantiate his comparison.

Of the various schools of Buddhism, Zen has been the most frequently researched in relation to Bion’s theorisations. For example, Paul Cooper (2016) illustrates the differences and similarities between Bion’s use of ‘O’ and ‘K’, and Dogen’s Soto Zen. Lopez-Corvo (2003, p. 315) points out that Bion’s psychoanalytic concepts such as ‘O’, ‘truth’, ‘act of faith’ and ‘hallucinosis’ are reminiscent of Zen Buddhism’s ‘aims at enlightenment by direct intuition through meditation’. Cooper (2001) discusses the relationships derived from the image of gap, precipice and abyss with specific emphasis on the interacting dynamics between being and knowing as indicated in Zen Buddhism and Bion’s work. Cooper (2010) dedicates the whole book to the epistemological and ontological encounter between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis with a heavy emphasis on Bion’s thinking. Psychoanalytic authors have approached Bion and Buddhism both conceptually and experientially. The latter approach has been subdivided into personal practices with both Bionian psychoanalysis and Buddhist meditation, and experiences with patients. Mark Epstein’s (1995) *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* exemplifies these two aims. He first uses psychoanalytic language to explain and interpret the ‘Four Noble Truths’ and other meditative concepts, and then advocates for the integration of Buddhism and psychoanalysis in clinical settings.

There are two important reasons why it is important to study the interface between Bion and Buddhism. The first is due to Bion’s own deep interest in Buddhism, close study of which might shed light on Buddhism’s direct and indirect influence on his psychoanalytic thought over time. The second important reason is to facilitate the openness and liveliness of psychoanalytic thought as a whole. Throughout his psychoanalytic career, Bion observed, explored and expanded psychoanalysis by examining it from different angles (vertices) such as

existing psychoanalytic theories of the time, group dynamics, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, religion, mysticism, poetry and his personal experience with his own psychoanalysis, war and patients. His engagement with Zen Buddhist thought is just one of the manifestations of his open-mindedness: only if the container-mind is open will it have a chance to contain wild thoughts which would otherwise be dismissed as insanity or absurdity. Bion's open-mindedness helped him preserve his curiosity towards new ideas and knowledge throughout his life. His open-mindedness, achieved by maintaining no memory and no desire, is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist practice of 'beginner's mind'.[3] On the one hand, only by sustaining the mindset of a beginner can curiosity have a chance to survive. On the other hand, continuous mental growth depends on the beginner's openness towards experience.

The last and arguably most important reason to study the conjunction between Bion and Buddhist thought is to gain insights from both in order to improve the efficacy and efficiency of psychological treatment. For instance, when Buddhist meditation is used without psychoanalytic techniques, it falls short in the face of patients with complex defences and resistances. Patients might quickly drop out due to acting out of defences and resistances at the beginning of the therapy. In this case, psychoanalysis could be incorporated in order to work with patients' resistances before implementing Buddhist meditation as treatment. On the other hand, Buddhist meditative practices such as 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' can help the patient better get in touch with his or her own emotions and feelings from one moment to the next, in order for psychodynamics to work more effectively. Incorporating both might improve the treatment effect for patients with deeper and more complex traumas and resistances.

[3] Zen 'beginner's mind' refers to an open-minded attitude which lacks any preconception even though the encountering subject falls into one's expertise. 'In the beginner's mind there is no thought, "I have attained something." All self-centred thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something' (S. Suzuki, 1970/1995, p. 22).

1.3 Previous investigations regarding Buddhism, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy

In addition to the previously mentioned articles regarding Bion and Buddhism, articles engaging with the broader scope of investigation regarding Buddhism, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have also provided guidance for the current PhD project about Bion and Buddhism. Over the past five decades, many authors have felt the necessity to juxtapose and examine the intersection between Buddhist general and meditative ideas and psychoanalysis. Below, I have represented in chronological order the core articles which are most relevant to the current PhD project. The broader literature regarding psychoanalysis and Buddhism is intentionally omitted to ensure that the current project remains focused and right on point.

Engler (1983) points out that Buddhism and psychoanalysis share a common goal of alleviating mental suffering. Engler's idea on the two fields' common goal of alleviating mental suffering inspired me to think further about the similarities between Bion's tireless search for truth and Buddhist ideas regarding pain and suffering. It seems like the very process of Bion's truth-chasing is both a method of working through the pain of suffering and the remedy of relieving the pain of cycles of suffering. Engler (1983) also juxtaposes both in terms of the sense of self. He observes that while psychoanalysis emphasises the importance of becoming somebody, Buddhism points out the necessity to become nobody. Engler's juxtaposition of 'somebody' and 'nobody' helps me think further about Bion's own psychoanalytic development over the years. It seems like Bion focused on a 'somebody' or more ego-centred psychoanalysis early on and slowly worked towards his later focus on psychoanalysis beyond the ego and more towards the body and being part of it that Buddhism emphasises. Kutz and colleagues (1985) tried to bring forth a uniform theoretical framework for incorporating both Buddhist mindfulness meditation and psychotherapy. They hypothesise that the differences between the two self-observational traditions allow them to complement one another. Their attempt at a unified theoretical framework inspired me to try to bring together Bion and

Buddhism. Moreover, their focus on the self-observational nature of both fields guided my thinking regarding the attentional aspects of Bionian psychoanalysis and Buddhist meditations. Rubin (1985) in his article 'Meditation and psychoanalytic listening' proposes two ways that Buddhist meditation can enhance psychoanalytic listening. One is that meditative techniques can be used to train psychoanalysts; the other is that analysts can meditate before sessions: "Combining the best aspects of the Eastern meditative and Western psychoanalytic models of listening provides the most complete means of truly cultivating optimum listening" (Rubin, 1985, p. 609). Rubin's unconventional albeit practical view on combining the two traditions to improve the efficacy of psychoanalytic listening has indirectly inspired one of my PhD goals -- to improve the efficacy of psychotherapy by mixing and combining Buddhist and psychoanalytic techniques. Christensen and Rudnick (1999) focus on the enriching effect of Zen Buddhism on the countertransference work in psychoanalysis. They demonstrate a case study in which Zen awareness practices assisted the psychotherapist in staying closely with the mental and bodily experiences of a projective identification situation resulting in a psychoanalytic shift. Their idea on Zen meditation's function of staying closely with the patient's mental and bodily experiences makes me think further about enhancing the efficacy of the psychoanalytic 'here and now' by incorporating the Buddhist 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' meditative techniques. Alfano (2005) uses intersubjective object relations, Buddhist psychology and perinatal research to understand her clinical experience with her patient. She formulates a state of being called 'transcendent attunement' in which occurs a transient and nonpathological suspension of duality between self and other and that constitutes an atemporal mode of experiencing. Alfano's interesting concept of 'transcendent attunement' has stimulated me to work on the bridges between Buddhist meditative techniques and Bion's ideas of 'no memory no desire' and 'reverie', as well as Freud's 'evenly suspended attention'. Alfano's article also prompts me to wonder whether there are any practical methods which can

induce and prolong Bion's 'reverie' and Freud's 'evenly suspended attention'. Furthermore, in her comparative study between Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Bion's concept of 'attention', and Bion's ideas on the state of 'reverie' and Buddhist state of equanimity, Pelled (2007, p. 1508) argues that "enhancement of the ability of reverie or improving the inner container such that it can hold any content while unmoved by desire, is the purpose of Buddhist practice." Her direct comparison between Bion's ideas on 'attention' and 'containment' and Buddhist attentional practices give me further pause for thought regarding both fields' focus on attentional manipulations. It also prompts questions regarding the fundamental nature of types of attention --- for instance, are there more bodily centred attentions or ego centred attentional functions? Additionally, in a more recent publication 'The mindfulness status of psychoanalytic psychotherapy', Ivey (2015, p. 382) argues that "the analytic attitude is inherently and necessarily mindful insofar as it invites psychotherapy patients to observe and tolerate defensively avoided experiences". Ivey's idea coincides with my thinking regarding the functional similarities between Buddhist meditation and psychoanalysis in terms of working through complex defences and resistances.

The articles mentioned above regarding Bion and Buddhism, and psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and Buddhism with a broader scope have guided and stimulated my interest in studying the connections between Bion and Buddhism in a deeper and more systematic way. They have helped me to consider and reconsider the formulation of my main research questions.

1.4 Main research questions and their relation to my PhD articles

Towards the end of my Master's study in psychoanalytic studies at the University of Essex several years ago, I had an intuition regarding the connection between Buddhism and psychoanalysis while I was reading and studying Bion's concept of 'container-contained'. I thought it important to study the interrelationship between Bion and Buddhism since 1) both

are truth-seeking. Although other fields such as science and philosophy are also truth-seeking, Buddhism and Bion seem to concentrate on the specific truth-seeking of traumatic experiences and the bodily ways of penetrating the delusion of traumas (PTSD) and restoring the holistic original experience when the actual trauma occurred. 2) Both are trying to relieve or resolve the conundrum of pain and suffering. After conducting some preliminary research, I began to notice the tremendous number of similarities between certain concepts from the two schools of thought, such as Bion's 'O' and the Buddhist 'nirvana'; 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist 'non-self'; 'reverie', 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' meditations etc. Due to the seeming proximity between Bion and Buddhist thought, I felt the need to further explore their interconnections.

Several research aims prompted me to dedicate my entire PhD project to the study of Bion and Buddhism. The first aim is to study Bion and Buddhism more closely and systematically to ascertain the width and depth of their interconnections. The second is to explore whether Bion personally encountered Buddhism, considering the significant similarities between his thinking and Buddhism. The third and most important research goal is to combine both thoughts in order to advance the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and psychology in the hope of helping patients relieve their pain and suffering more effectively and efficiently.

Thinking retrospectively, my three PhD articles have fulfilled and materialised some of my initial research questions and goals when I initiated the PhD project. My first PhD article 'Wilfred Bion's Annotations in *The Way of Zen*: an investigation into his practical encounters with Buddhist ideas' provides concrete evidence of Bion's own encounter with and deep interest in Zen Buddhism by reporting and analysing his underlinings and annotations in Alan Watts' book *The Way of Zen*. Five main themes are explored in detail – the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no

desire’; and ‘O’ (or ‘ultimate reality’) – in order to provide a clearer picture of the elements which attracted Bion’s interest in Buddhism and the places where Buddhism resonated with his own psychoanalytic work. The first article not only provides firm evidence of Bion’s personal interest in Zen Buddhism, but also maps out the interconnection between the two based on the clues given by Bion himself in the form of his annotations and underlinings.

My second article, ‘A comparison between two methods dealing with desire: Bion’s “no memory no desire” and Buddhist “bare attention” mindfulness meditation’, is inspired by Bion’s annotations and underlining in *The Way of Zen* with regards to his psychoanalytic concept ‘no memory no desire’. It is important to clarify that W. R. Bion frequently used the terms 'memory and desire' and 'memory or desire' in his writings and seminar recordings throughout his psychoanalytic career. However, he had never used the term 'no memory no desire.' I have used the term 'no memory no desire' throughout the current article and PhD project, especially in chapters two and three, to represent the quality of his ways of dealing with memory and desire. When it comes to ‘memory and desire,’ Bion often uses very concise and firm verbs to express his intention of dealing with them. 'to avoid,' 'do not remember,' 'forget it,' 'to suppress,' 'to exclude,' 'to avoid,' 'to rid oneself of,' 'to deliberately divest,' 'to inhibit dwelling on,' 'no crisis should be allowed to breach this rule,' 'must not be allowed to proliferate,' 'to abolish,' 'to banish' and treat it as a 'disciplined denial' are just some examples of how he wishes to cope with memory and desire. In the current article, the term 'no memory no desire' indicates Bion’s dedication and firmness in getting rid of desire. It also indicates the ‘elimination’ and ‘suppression’ methods of ridding memory and desire by W. R. Bion. I added 'no' in front of Bion’s original term 'memory and desire' as a conscious phrase to connote the two meanings above.

Bion's terms 'memory and desire' and 'memory or desire' have two chief shortcomings. The first one is their vagueness regarding what he actually meant by 'memory' and 'desire.' Bion used the term 'memory' to represent two very different experiences,

> I realise that it would be helpful if I could distinguish between two different phenomena, which are both usually and indifferently called "memory". This I have tried to do by speaking of one as "evolution", by which I mean the experience where some idea or pictorial impression floats into the mind unbidden and as a whole. From this, I wish to distinguish ideas that present themselves in response to a deliberate and conscious attempt at recall; for this last, I reserve the term "memory." (Aguayo & Malin, 2013, p. 147)

Bion used the term' memory' to represent both an evolution-like mental development and a deliberate and conscious attempt to recall. For a reader who is not experienced with Bion's psychoanalytic theories, it could easily cause confusion on which 'memory' Bion refers to in a particular context.

Furthermore, another layer of confusion may result in distinguishing what Bion means by 'memory and desire.' Although Bion used two separate terms, they could indicate a very similar experience. "But if you get clear this point about desire, then you might think of memory as being the past tense of the same thing. The desire is the future tense of it — it's what you want to happen. Memory is what you want to have happened" (Aguayo & Malin, 2013, p. 6). As a result, Bion seems to use both terms to indicate desires for the past and future. It could result in confusion and redundancy if his texts are not carefully read and understood in specific contexts.

Apart from clarifying my use of the term 'no memory no desire,' my second article fulfils the initial research goal of studying the interconnection between Buddhism and Bion more deeply and systematically. This article focuses on one of Bion's most widely cited

psychoanalytic concepts of ‘no memory no desire’ and argues that although Bion urges for the elimination of memory and desire, the very process of being barely aware of such desires could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical material. Informed by mindfulness and other Buddhist meditative practices, this article argues that by staying with and tolerating, instead of eliminating and suppressing, memories and desires, as Bion suggested, the memories and desires will eventually come to spontaneously generate beneficial realisations, which are vital for clinical thinking. Although one can achieve 'negative capability' by trying to eliminate memory and desire, one simultaneously loses the opportunity to gain another type of intuition by staying with desire and maintaining a bare attention on it. Both ‘no memory no desire’ and 'being barely aware of desire' can lead to meaningful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent. Although my second article studied Bion and Buddhism systematically and in more depth, it only focused on Bion’s ‘no memory no desire’ and Buddhist’ bare attention’ meditation. Further studies regarding the two's interrelation need to be conducted based on his annotations and underlinings in *The Way of Zen*.

The second article has led to a further research interest in the actual quality of attentional states as a way of thinking about the overlap between Buddhism and psychoanalysis. My third article ‘A comparison between Paul Cooper and Mark Epstein’s ideas and clinical applications of Buddhist concentration (Samadhi), mindfulness (Vipassana) meditative stances in relation to Bionian and other psychoanalytic thoughts and practices’ moves closer to my last but most important research goal of attempting to merge Buddhist meditative thought with Bion’s psychoanalytic thought in order to improve the efficacy and efficiency of clinical treatment. After completing the comparison between Bion and Buddhist mindfulness methods of dealing with desires in the second article, I realised that what is underpinning Bion’s ‘no memory no desire’ and Buddhist mindfulness meditation might be the

various ways of manipulating attention and that there might be a much deeper interrelation between psychoanalytic and Buddhist meditative attentional stances in relation to Bion and other psychoanalytic frameworks. Few of the previous articles in the field have focused on the cultivation and development of Buddhist meditative and psychoanalytic attentional states. Amongst the various authors who have attempted to connect psychoanalysis and Buddhism, American psychoanalyst Paul Cooper and psychiatrist Mark Epstein stand out as the two most important contributors. Inspired by the second article's hint regarding the underpinning attentional strategies behind Bion's 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist mindfulness meditation, the third article focuses on a systematic review and comparison of the innovations of Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper in developing specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis, drawing on aspects of Buddhist meditation in the hope of isolating what is therapeutically beneficial for relieving the pain and suffering of the patient. Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper speak of two meditative techniques of Buddhist meditation. One is called 'concentration' meditation, the other 'mindfulness'. The gist of 'concentration' meditation is to make the effort to direct one's attention onto an internal or external object. A very important 'concentration' method mentioned by both Epstein and Cooper is to focus one's attention on breathing. The focus on breathing in a repetitive way provides sufficient stability and space for the ego to further observe itself and other parts of the mind and body.

In addition to the exploration of Cooper and Epstein's understanding and practices of Buddhist 'concentration' and 'mindfulness', my third article also expands on their juxtapositions amongst mindfulness and Bion's psychotherapeutic attentional stances, Freud's 'splitting the ego to observe itself', 'evenly suspended attention', 'free association' and Winnicott's 'good enough mother' and 'transitional space'. One of the most noticeable findings of the third article is the connection between Bion's clinical notes and Buddhist meditative non-judgemental stances. Although Bion did not intentionally try to implement mindfulness

meditation, what he recorded in one of his analytic sessions is very similar to mindfulness 'bare attention' in merely tracing the patient's mental changes from one moment to another. After Bion spontaneously followed his patient's mental changes, what he surprisingly discovered is that "the session came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on" (Bion, 1967, p. 346). The hypothesis is that Bion accidentally discovered the usefulness of the 'bare attention' technique which does not result in any cognitive, mental, purposeful or intentional formulation of ideas. When one is highly concentrated on the process of psychosomatic happenings, the process of concentration starts to have a containing function in the here and now. Perhaps Bion was on the verge of realizing that formulation of ideas is not always useful and necessary in sessions. At the end of my third article, I have further drawn connections amongst Bion's work on attention, the trauma relieving effect of the simultaneous practice of two Buddhist attentional meditations (mindfulness and concentration on breathing) and the recently discovered Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy. Further studies need to look more thoroughly into the connections amongst the Buddhist attentional states reached by meditation, the attentional states embedded within Bion's descriptions of various experiences between psyche and soma, and EMDR potentially as an attentional state pointing to the functionality of the simultaneity of the bodily and psychic experience.

Due to the fact that the current project takes the form of a PhD by articles, each article has a slightly different disciplinary emphasis, pondering different subjects and questions about the connections between Bion's thinking and Buddhism, and consequently each article also has a different framework. The conceptual framework of my first article utilises a textual analysis based on W. R. Bion's annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of *The Way of Zen* written by Alan Watts. Article one therefore focuses on close reading of a single text source to understand Bion's engagement with Buddhist ideas. My second article uses comparative analysis to derive a theoretical argument by building upon article one's analysis. It compares

Bion's concept of ‘no memory no desire’ with Buddhist ‘bare attention’ mindfulness meditation. Article three is a literature review and comparative analysis which uses writings of Paul Cooper and Mark Epstein on integrating Buddhist meditative practices with psychoanalysis. Article three therefore conducts a broader literature review, comparing the works of two key figures who bridge psychoanalysis (including Bion) and Buddhist thoughts.

In the form of a PhD thesis, I am putting these three articles together. Thus, there is a need to elaborate more on the overarching framework for the whole PhD project. The following section focuses specifically on the delineation of the overarching conceptual framework of the whole PhD project to develop tools which run through and underpin the rest of the PhD project facilitating the connectivity and deeper understanding of other concepts and discussions illustrated in the rest of the chapters. Two crucial concepts underpin and have guided my investigation into the connections between Bion and Buddhism: ‘intuition’ and ‘attention/attentional states’. They are selected because they serve as the conceptual framework of the whole PhD thesis, and they run through the thesis to connect and serve as the groundwork and basis of the three articles together. More importantly they frequently appear in both Bion’s and Zen Buddhist work, and they are crucial to the undersanding of both fields, the connections between them, and the correlations across their cultural and disciplinary divides. They also serve as crucial bridging concepts which facilitate mutrual understanding and integration between the two fields in order to fullful the goals of the current PhD project

- to study Bion and Buddhism more closely and systematically to ascertain the width and depth of their interconnections.
- to explore whether Bion personally encountered Buddhism, considering the significant similarities between his thinking and Buddhism.

- to combine both thoughts in order to advance the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and psychology in the hope of helping patients relieve their pain and suffering more effectively and efficiently.

1.5 Conceptual framework and underpinning core concepts ‘attention/attentional states’ and ‘intuition’

In the current section, I will first briefly discuss the general meanings of the terms 'attention' and 'intuition' to pave the way for a more detailed analysis of W. R. Bion's and Zen Buddhism's views and meanings of 'attention' and 'attentional states'. I will provide a summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' after considering its meanings in Bion and Zen Buddhism, analysed in the previous two sections. Then, I will move on to the detailed delineation and analysis of the meaning of 'intuition' in Bion and Zen Buddhism's perspectives, further resulting in a summarised umbrella meaning of 'intuition' suitable for both Bion's and Zen Buddhism's perspectives on the concept of 'intuition'. Following that, I will introduce Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh briefly and try to test the suitability of the summarised umbrella meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' in their respective works. In the end, the connection between the concepts of 'attention/attentional states' and 'intuition' and my PhD project as a whole will be stated.

It is important to note that the purpose of the current conceptual framework section is not to make comparisons between Bion, Zen Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh's writings but to develop tools that run through and underpin the rest of the PhD project, facilitating the connectivity and deeper understanding of other concepts and discussions throughout the current PhD project. It is also important to note that the current discussion regarding 'attention' and 'intuition' is not to equate the meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' in Bion and Buddhism but to show

a) how concepts, such as 'attention' and 'intuition' seem to be present in both Bion's and Zen Buddhist writings and

b) how I have tried to refine general and neutral summarised umbrella meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition', which are functional in and suitable for both contexts.

1.5.1 The general meanings of the terms 'attention' and 'intuition'

The term' attention' is used in many subjects and aspects of our daily life. In *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2024), 'attention' is defined as "a: the act or state of applying the mind to something, b: a condition of readiness for such attention involving especially a selective narrowing or focusing of consciousness and receptivity, c. sympathetic consideration of the needs and wants of others." in a general sense, 'attention' can be in the forms of an application of our mental focus, a readiness or tendency to focus on or receive a perception/entity with a narrowed focus, and a sympathetic attentiveness to others. Additionally, in *The Cambridge Dictionary* (2024), 'attention' is defined as "a. to watch, listen to, or think about something or someone carefully or with interest, b. get/attract/catch someone's attention, c. the thing or person that a lot of people notice". 'Attention' here involves an action of noticing with care, an active interest, and a type of thoughts. To summarise, 'attention' in a general sense contains meanings below:

- Focus: Attention is the act of directing your mind to something specific. This can be deliberate and intentional, or it can be a readiness to focus on something that captures your interest.
- Narrowing: Attention involves a filtering process. When you pay attention, you are not just passively taking in everything around you. You are selectively focusing on something specific, potentially blocking out distractions.

- Engagement: Attention can also involve a level of care or interest. It is not just about noticing something but about actively engaging with it, whether it is a thought, a person, or an object.

In terms of the general meanings of the term 'intuition', *The Cambridge Dictionary* (2024) defines it as "a. (knowledge from) an ability to understand or know something immediately based on your feelings rather than facts." In addition, *Merriam-Webster* (2024) defines it as "a. the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference, b. immediate apprehension or cognition, c: knowledge or conviction gained by intuition, d. quick and ready insight." Moreover, *Collins Dictionary* (2024) defines 'intuition' as "a. knowledge or belief obtained neither by reason nor by perception, b. instinctive knowledge or belief, c. a hunch or unjustified belief." In a general sense, 'intuition' can be summarised as below:

- Direct, Immediate Knowledge: Intuition is the ability to grasp something directly without needing conscious reasoning or relying solely on facts or evidence.
- Feeling-Based: It is often associated with feelings or a gut feeling rather than a logical thought process.
- Quick Insight: Intuition can provide a sudden understanding or hunch about a situation.

In relation to the general meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' delineated above, the following sections dig deeper into the meanings of these two terms in the context of W. R. Bion's psychoanalytic and Zen Buddhist work.

1.5.2 W. R. Bion's Views on Attention and Attentional States

Throughout his psychoanalytic career, W. R. Bion was devoted to delineating the functional perspectives of 'attention'. Two functional categories can be subsumed in terms of the meaning of 'attention' illustrated by Bion:

- Attention as containment, reverie and alpha function processes.
- Attention as a form of intuitive tolerance.

Attention as containment, reverie and alpha function

Bion uses a mother-infant 'container/contained' model to illustrate a mother's attentional capacity towards her baby. Bion often calls the attentional capacity 'reverie'. In this sense, 'reverie' is a complex and relaxed attentional function from the mother that makes the baby feel contained. "Using it in this restricted sense reverie is that state of mind which is open to the reception of any 'objects' from the loved object and is therefore capable of reception of the infant's projective identifications whether they are felt by the infant to be good or bad. In short, reverie is a factor of the mother's alpha-function" (Bion, 1962a, p. 36). According to Bion, 'reverie' is a mother's complex attentional function that provides the child with a sense of security and being held. Additionally, Bion's (1962a, p 36) 'reverie' as an attentional function also seems to convey an emotional digestive function:

> What kind of psychological receptor organ is required if the infant is to be able to profit from reverie as it is able, thanks to the digestive capacities of the alimentary canal, to profit from the breast and the milk it supplies. Put in another way, assuming alpha-function as that which makes available to the infant what would otherwise remain unavailable for any purpose other than evacuation as beta-elements.

Bion believes that the mother's 'reverie' as an attentional state helps the infant digest its not-yet-digested projection (beta-element) into manageable content (alpha-element). Over time, the infant assimilates the mother's 'reverie' function to digest and process its own emotional hardship with lesser assistance from the mother. In an unfortunate situation, when the mother's 'reverie', her containing attentional state, is dysfunctional, the infant's experience of linking and

communication with internal and external objects can be disrupted. To put it in terms of Bion's (1961, p 17) language of 'container/contained':

> If the infant is possessed by fears that it is dying and attempts to split them off and to project them into the mother for her to moderate their intolerable quality, instead of the process following the course described, ♀ [container] is felt greedily and enviously to remove any goodness contained in the projected fears. This 'goodness' is whatever there is of meaning in the fears that it is dying. Consequently, when the infant comes to re-introject the fears that it is dying, it does not receive back those fears moderated so as to be tolerable to the infant psyche but, instead, takes back into itself a nameless dread.

The infant's experience of fear cannot be cushioned, absorbed and processed by the mother when the mother's containing attentional function is polluted by envy. When mother's containing attentional states convey a sense of envy, both the infant's and the mother's capacity for feeling safe is rubbed and damaged, leading to a depleted, deprived and impoverished inner reality that is often accompanied by fuzzy and unknown fear in the face of internal and external realities.

Attention as intuitive tolerance -- negative capability

Closely related to his concepts of 'containment', 'reverie' and 'alpha-function', Bion also speaks of other attentional states which provide further intuitive functions to human experiences. It is important to note that this is where 'attention' and 'intuition' manifest their interconnections, leading to a benign feedback loop. The interconnection between the two holds together to form a holistic framework. A crucial example is what he called 'negative capability,' a term Bion (1970, p 125) borrowed from poet John Keats. Wrote Keats (1817/1899): "Several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed

so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." It seems like Bion borrows the term from Keats to emphasise certain attentional states, which can function as a capacity to tolerate difficult experiences such as uncertainty, mystery and doubt. The intuitive attentional states delay hasty projective identification, and it is the core feature of creativity, intuition and a competent psychoanalysis. In one of his San Paolo seminars, Bion (1974/2014, p 47) states that:

> It may be true from a macroscopic point of view to say, "Oh, he is hallucinating", or, "She is highly disturbed", but it would not be true if one could see or hear or intuit what the analysand can. Psychoanalysts must be able to tolerate the differences or the difficulties of the analysand long enough to recognise what they are. If psychoanalysts are to be able to interpret what the analysand says, they must have a great capacity for tolerating their analysands' statements without rushing to the conclusion that they know the interpretations. This is what I think Keats meant when he said that Shakespeare must have been able to tolerate 'Negative Capability'.

Bion points out that the attentional state he calls 'negative capability' is crucial for a psychoanalyst's competency because of its function of tolerance in the face of a patient's often perplexing projections. When the 'negative capability' functions long and well enough, the analyst gains enough experience from the patient to intuit the patient's difficult and confusing experience.

Furthermore, in *Four Discussions*, Bion (1976/2014, p 66) speaks further about the function of openness residing within the attentional 'negative capability' state:

> Keats, in a letter to his brother, describes what he calls 'Negative Capability'. It is clear that he is talking about this same curious business in which most people want to closure off what they do not want to see or hear…. It is one reason why it is such an extraordinary

> achievement that Shakespeare was able to be so verbal – he could verbally pictorialise things which most people do not want to see.

Here, Bion emphasises the quality and feature after the negatively capable attentional state has taken place --- it creates an open space in one's experiences in order to embrace what is original, new and creative. It is very unfortunate to close off one's alive experiences prematurely for preconceived ideology and preconceptions that do not allow originality to be contained and disseminated.

1.5.3 Attention and attentional states in Zen Buddhism

Several main terms contribute to Zen Buddhism's concept of 'attention' and 'attentional states'. They are 'concentration(samadhi)', 'mindfulness (sati, vipassana)'/'bare attention', and 'shikantaza'. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p 1818) defines 'concentration' as "a foundational term in Buddhist meditation theory and practice, which is related to the ability to establish and maintain one-pointedness of mind on a specific object of concentration." Phillip Kapleau (1965/2000, p 12) further states that

> [concentration] involves fixing one's mind on an idea or an object. In some types of Buddhist meditation, the meditator envisions, contemplates, or analyses certain elementary shapes, holding them in his mind to the exclusion of everything else. Or he may concentrate in a state of adoration upon his own created image of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, or meditate on abstract qualities such as loving-kindness and compassion. In Tantric Buddhist systems of meditation, mandala containing various seed syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet are visualised and dwelt upon in a prescribed manner.

The gist of 'concentration' meditation is to make an effort to direct one's attention to an internal or external object.

Regarding the attentional states of 'mindfulness' or 'bare attention', *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 2389) states that "seclusion of the mind usually refers to 'guarding one's senses' with mindfulness so that the mind will neither cling to, not be repulsed by, sensory stimuli." Moreover, Shunryu Suzuki (1970/1995, p 115) expresses that "The important thing in our understanding is to have a smooth, free-thinking way of observation. We have to think and to observe things without stagnation. We should accept things as they are without difficulty. Our mind should be soft and open enough to understand things as they are. When our thinking is soft, it is called imperturbable thinking. This kind of thinking is always stable. It is called mindfulness." Buddhist monk and psychiatrist Mark Epstein (1990, p 160) states that "the distinctive attentional strategy of Buddhism, however, is that of mindfulness, of moment-to-moment attention to thoughts, feelings, images, or sensations as they arise and pass away within the field of awareness." Buddhist and psychoanalyst Paul Cooper (2014, p 801) states that "this position [mindfulness] reflects a middle-way perspective that advocates nonattachment and non-aversion to all mind-moments, including attachment, aversion, nonattachment or non-aversion, as well as the judgments that might accompany or follow them. All experiences simply rise and fall." Therefore, the gist of 'mindfulness' is to follow and note minute sequential occurrences of the vicissitude of thoughts (cognitions), feelings (emotions), bodily sensations etc., in a non-judgmental, non-reactive and impartial observational stance. One follows and traces what is actually happening to and within oneself instead of what one imagines would happen here and now from one moment to the next. It includes thoughts, sensations and feelings usually avoided due to fear and anxiety, dissociated, judged, and then ignored as inappropriate by the ego. It is not to choose or pick, cling to or condemn any occurrences in the mind and body at the present moment.

Regarding the attentional state of 'shikantaza', Kapleau (1965/2000, p 73) claims that:

> shikan-taza is a practice in which the mind is intensely involved in just sitting. In this

> type of zazen, it is all too easy for the mind, which is not supported by such aids in counting the breath or by a koan, to become distracted. The correct temper of mind, therefore, becomes doubly important. In shikan-taza, the mind must be unhurried yet at the same time firmly planted or massively composed, like Mount Fuji, let us say. But it must also be alert, stretched, like a taut bowstring. So shikan-taza is a heightened state of concentrated awareness wherein one is neither tense nor hurried and certainly never slack.

Additionally, Sekida (2012, p 235) states that:

> At this stage, shikantaza reigns. You pay no particular attention to breathing, posture, and so on. Even lying in bed, you can experience absolute samadhi. On the plane of the normal activity of consciousness, working, talking, even riding in a jolting bus, you do not lose your positive samadhi. Formerly you and samadhi were two—were separated. You attained samadhi with effort. You were working on a dual system. But now this is not so.

'Shikantaza' involves sitting in a state of conscious awareness without focusing on any specific object, such as breathing, thoughts and what was listed in 'concentration' and 'mindfulness' meditations. The practitioner simply sits, embodying a state of clear and alert attention, free from attachment to mental-bodily objects. 'Shikantaza' seems to be a more bodily-centered and intuitive form of combined 'mindfulness' and 'concentration'. It is a practice of simply being fully immersing oneself in the present moment with relaxed alertness.

1.5.4 A summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' considering its meanings in Bion and Zen Buddhism

W. R. Bion's concept of 'attention' in psychoanalysis encompasses two primary functional perspectives:

- attention as a container/contained, reverie, and alpha function process,
- and attention as a form of intuitive tolerance.

In summary, Bion's 'attention' involves a relaxed and open mental state that allows one to receive, contain, digest and tolerate his or her unprocessed, raw emotions and experiences (such as uncertainty, mystery and doubt) and transforms them into manageable pieces providing a sense of security. This process itself provides a sense of security and facilitates creativity and intuition.

In Zen Buddhism, attention involves:

- Concentration (Samadhi): Focused, one-pointed attention on a specific object to stabilise and observe the mind.
- Mindfulness (Sati, Vipassana): Non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations, fostering an impartial stance.
- Shikantaza: Simply sitting in a state of open and relaxed alertness, embodying direct experience and being.

Considering the previous analysis of Bion and Zen Buddhism's work on 'attention', a summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' is a multifaceted tool that allows one to observe and stay with difficult emotions non-judgementally with stability to receive and contain difficult emotions, transforming them into more manageable pieces. As a further consequence, it develops a sense of security and self-awareness, fostering creativity, intuition and a more present-centred subjective experience.

1.5.5 'Intuition' in Bion

Bion uses the term 'intuition' directly and frequently in his writings. For instance, Bion (1992, p 315) states, "I am supposing that there is a psychoanalytic domain with its own reality—unquestionable, constant, subject to change only in accordance with its own rules even

if those rules are not known. These realities are 'intuitable' if the proper apparatus is available in the condition proper to its functioning … The conditions in which the intuition operates (intuits) are pellucid and opaque." Bion seems to define 'intuition' as a function or a complex system (domain) of functions enabled by a properly conditioned 'apparatus' or 'container', which can manifest parts of the complex psychoanalytic ultimate reality when the proper conditions are fulfilled in different times and occasions. The meeting of the conditions for the manifestation of such intuition is not easily controlled and manipulated by the logical and conscious minds. Instead, it is ruled by a complex underlying reality Bion often calls 'O' or the 'ultimate reality'.

Bion's concept of 'intuition' is closely connected with his concept of 'O' the ultimate reality. Bion (1967b/ 1984, p 145) formulates 'intuition' as becoming one with 'O' or 'atonement' with the ultimate reality: "The central postulate is that atonement with ultimate reality, or O, as I have called it to avoid involvement with an existing association, is essential to harmonious mental growth." Bion's 'intuition' indicates a directional movement or action towards and returning from a complex, dynamic and ungraspable ultimate truth.

Bion further relates his concept of 'intuition' to his theory of container 'breast' by stating that: "the statements (i) the resumption by the psyche of an emotional experience that has been detoxicated by a sojourn in the good breast (Melanie Klein) …. may now be regarded as the (i) intuitive psychoanalytic and (ii) axiomatic deductive representations of the same process." (Bion, 1965, p 121) Bion here indicates that the human function of intuition is enabled by the container-contained interaction between the infant's experience of going into and later coming out of the breast-mother.

In another place, Bion illustrates the function of 'intuition' in an example with his patient:

> In discarding the conversational expression for something more precise but less encumbered with meaning, for example, T (patient), and then falling back on the

> analytical experience and procedure to invest it with meaning, lies the justification for "naming". Analytically trained intuition makes it possible to say the patient is talking about the primal scene and from the development of associations to add shades of meaning to fill out understanding of what is taking place. (Bion, 1965, p 18)

Here, Bion indicates that psychoanalytic intuition makes clear the underlying material from the patient that is closer to the patient's ultimate reality by excluding the noises brought by preconceived ideas and meanings. Here is where the function of 'intuition' promotes a focused 'attention' that facilitates the alignment and understanding of the patient's clinical material.

Bion also uses the term 'act of faith' to indicate psychoanalytic intuition. Bion (1970, p 41) suggests that "the 'act of faith' depends on disciplined denial of memory and desire. A bad memory is not enough: what is ordinarily called forgetting is as bad as remembering. It is necessary to inhibit dwelling on memories and desires." To Bion, 'intuition' conveys a sense of eliminating certain superficial elements of the human experience in order to achieve a realisation of a truthful kind. Here, 'intuition' interconnects with a form of focused 'attention' enabled by intentionally riding memory and desire.

Another term that often relates to the meaning of 'intuition' in Bionian theory is his concept of 'catastrophic change'. Bion (1965, p 8) describes it as the "subversion of the order or system of things; it is catastrophic in the sense that it is accompanied by feelings of disaster in the participants … it is sudden and violent in an almost physical way." Bionian psychoanalyst and scholar P. C. Sandler (2005, p 87) provides a very concise but encompassing summary of Bion's 'catastrophic change':

(i) Natural change.

(ii) The unknown and uncontrollable nature of emotional reality as it is.

(iii) Violent inception of feared inner truths.

(iv) Peculiarities of reaction to external sudden, unexpected, denied and/or violent stimuli. They may provoke to many people a situation that the person is left "naked, incongruous, alien, without a point of reference that made sense.

Thus, Bion's concept of intuitive 'catastrophic change' indicates a personal realisation that is, at least temporarily, disruptive, disastrous, sudden, uncontrollable, disorienting and violent. It can be experienced so intensely and realistically, almost equivalent to a physical attack.

Last but not least, related to Bion's intuitive 'catastrophic change' are his ideas on 'mental growth' and 'evolution'. Bion (1970, p 107) writes: "Time has often been regarded as being of the essence of psychoanalysis; in the growth process, it has no part. Mental evolution or growth is catastrophic and timeless." Bion's 'intuition' conveys a sense of growth and evolution. The core feature of it is a timeless experience that is different from chronological, temporal logics and memories.

In summary, Bion discusses the concept of 'intuition' in relation to psychoanalytic theory, often linking it to his concept of 'O', the ultimate reality. He describes 'intuition' as a function or complex system enabled by a conditioned apparatus, manifesting parts of psychoanalytic reality under specific conditions. 'Intuition', according to Bion, also involves a directional movement towards and returning from an ungraspable truth. He connects 'intuition' to the container-contained interaction, suggesting that the mother-infant interaction conditions intuitive function. Bion also illustrates how psychoanalytic intuition aids in understanding patients' underlying truths. Bion also emphasises the role of disciplined elimination of memory and desire in achieving intuitive truth. Additionally, he introduces the concept of 'catastrophic change,' indicating a sudden, disruptive realisation of inner truths. This concept is related to mental growth and evolution, which Bion describes as catastrophic and timeless experiences.

1.5.6 'Intuition' in Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism's first concept that manifests 'intuition' is 'satori'. Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki (1964, p 11), in his book *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism,* states that "one has the feeling of touching upon a true secret, not something that has been imagined or pretended; this is not a case of mystifying secrecy, but rather an experience that baffles all languages. Satori comes as something unexpected, not to be expected." According to Suzuki, 'satori' is an experience in Zen Buddhism that contains several experiential properties: 1) it is an authentic experience that is sheer and original--- free from imagination and pretense; 2) preconceived languages cannot describe the satori experience; 3) it cannot be expected and desired. It is as if the realisation suddenly comes to the practitioner without any notice. Additionally, Alan Watts (1957, p 176), in his book *The Way of Zen,* argues that:

> Satori really designates the sudden and intuitive way of seeing into anything, whether it be remembering a forgotten name or seeing into the deepest principles of Buddhism. One seeks and seeks but cannot. One then gives up, and the answer comes by itself. Thus, there may be many occasions of satori in the course of training, great satori and little satori, and the solution of many of the koan depends upon nothing more sensational than a kind of "knack" for understanding the Zen style of handling Buddhist principles.

In relation to Suzuki's argument above, Watts also points out that 'satori' is a sudden and intuitive experience that clarifies the profound inner truth that cannot be sought. In addition to Suzuki, Watts indicates further that 'satori' is not necessarily a disruptive subjective event. It can happen gradually during different aspects of Zen practices with varying levels of impact on the practitioner's subjective experiences. The dividing views of Watts' perception of 'satori' as a gradual process and Suzuki's sudden process are further supported by the distinguishing of the North and South Chinese Chan (Zen) schools in the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 697): "Unlike the Northern school's more traditional soteriological approach, which was claimed to involve gradual purification of the mind so that defilements

would be removed and the mind's innate purity revealed, the Southern school instead claimed to offer immediate access to enlightenment itself." Another critical Zen scholar, Philip Kapleau (1965/2000, p 137) states in *The Three Pillars of Zen*:

> To renounce such conceptions is to stand in 'darkness.' Now, satori comes out of this 'darkness,' not out of the 'light' of reason and worldly knowledge. In the intense asking 'What is Mu?' you bring the reasoning mind to an impasse, void of every thought, even as you gradually destroy the tenacious roots of I and not-I in the unconscious mind. This dynamic kind of self-inquiry is the quickest way to Self-realisation.

Kapleau indicates that 'satori' is an experience coming out of an unknown darkness rather than rational and logical thinking and reasoning. 'Intuition' is also an attentionally introspective experience that eliminates the sense of ego and self.

Another fundamental concept in Zen Buddhism indicating the meaning of 'intuition' is 'directing perception' or the general directness conveyed by many aspects of Zen practices and experiences. In the book *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, Blofeld (1959, p 103) states, "Huang Po's poem implies that the Transmission can fall only upon one who has received intuitive experience leading to a direct perception of the One mind. Mere intellectual brilliance will avail nothing. Hence, to those who idle away their time in metaphysical or intellectual discussion, the Master will make no sign." In other words, Zen 'intuition' cannot be obtained by intellectual reasoning and logical thinking but only by experiencing Zen itself. In another place, Huang (1959, p 125) argues that "by a direct perception of the Dharmakaya's true nature, you grasp it in a flash, you will have reached the highest goal taught in the Three Vehicles." It indicates that Zen 'intuition' often manifests as a sudden experience of grasping or obtaining a realisation with little or no temporal perceptions.

In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Kapleau (1965/2000, p 27) further expresses that "at the same time, this sitting is entered into in the faith that it will one day culminate in the sudden and direct

perception of the true nature of this mind—in other words, enlightenment. Therefore, to strive self-consciously for satori or any other gain from zazen is as unnecessary as it is undesirable." The Zen' direct perception' involves a quality of faith in the face of the path towards enlightenment. It also indicates that 'direct perception' cannot be obtained by actively and consciously making any desirous efforts or striving. Thus, 'direct perception' conveys a sense of goallessness. In addition, Zen master Shunryu Suzuki (1995/1970, p 87) states that "in Zen we put emphasis on demeanour, or behaviour. By behaviour we do not mean a particular way that you ought to behave, but rather the natural expression of yourself. We emphasise straightforwardness. You should be true to your feelings and to your mind, expressing yourself without any reservations." Zen 'intuition' seems to involve the direct and straightforward attentional states of speaking out one's true feelings and thoughts without holding back. It is similar to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's attentional strategy of 'free association'. Shunryu Suzuki (1995/1970, p 24) further expresses that "Zazen practice is the direct expression of our true nature. Strictly speaking, for a human being, there is no other practice than this practice; there is no other way of life than this way of life." The Zen directness conveys a sense of presence, determination or faith that is firmly in the here and now. It is a bodily-centred attentional state of being that only registers the happenings of the present moment.

Last but not least, a significant term that conveys the meaning of 'intuition' in Zen Buddhism and Buddhism is 'sunyata'. In the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 'sunyata' is translated as 'emptiness', which indicates 'empty of clinginess' and 'nonself' or 'egoless-ness' (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 2129). "Emptiness is the lack or absence of intrinsic nature in any and all phenomena, the final nature of all things, and the ultimate truth" (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 2129). The Zen intuitive 'emptiness' describes an experience beyond phenomena similar to Bion's concept of 'O', the ultimate reality. "Despite its various interpretations among the various Madhyamaka authors, emptiness is clearly neither nothingness nor the absence of

existence, but rather the absence of a falsely imagined type of existence." (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p 2129) The Zen intuitive 'emptiness' does not equate to a sense of lack or non-existence. It indicates an intuitive and experiential understanding of the fundamental nature of the existence of being behind various manifest phenomena in the world. The fundamental nature of existence in Zen' emptiness' is further evidenced by Kapleau's (1965/2000, p 32) argument "that the mind is freed from bondage to all thought, forms, visions, objects, and imaginings, however sacred or elevating, and brought to a state of absolute emptiness, from which alone it may one day perceive its own true nature or the nature of the universe." The Zen intuitive 'emptiness' seems to be a mind and bodily attentional state beyond and free from cognition often used to make judgments, decisions and understandings.

1.5.7 A summarised umbrella meaning of 'intuition' considering its meanings in Bion and Zen Buddhism

In the context of Bion's psychoanalytic theory, the meaning of 'intuition' encompasses:

- A deep, instinctual understanding of the psychoanalytic domain, which operates according to its own inherent rules and realities.
- The ability to attune to and access these realities through properly conditioned psychological containers or apparatuses.
- Integration with Bion's concept of 'O' or ultimate reality, representing a movement towards atonement with the ultimate truth, often facilitated by experiences within the healthy mother-infant relationship.
- A process of analytical discernment, enabling the identification and interpretation of underlying truths amidst the noise of preconceived notions, memories, and desires.

- Recognition of 'catastrophic change' as a disruptive yet essential aspect of intuitive realisation, emphasizing a sudden and often violent upheaval in subjective experiences leading to growth and evolution beyond temporal constraints.

Within the framework of Zen Buddhism, 'intuition' indicates the following properties:

- A sudden or gradual realisation(s) of profound truths beyond conceptual understanding, often occurring unexpectedly and free from imagined constructs.
- A mode of perception that transcends intellectual reasoning and relies on direct experiential insight into the nature of reality particularly emphasised in Zen practices such as 'zazen'.
- The absence of intrinsic nature in phenomena and the ultimate truth underlying existence, leading to a realisation of interconnectedness and egoless-ness.
- A process of introspective inquiry and renunciation involves surrendering preconceptions and rational thought to attain a state of absolute emptiness and perceive the true nature of self and universe.
- Emphasis on present-moment awareness and authenticity, wherein one expresses and embodies their true nature without reservation or attachment to the past or the future.

Based on the above analysis, considering the meanings of 'intuition' in both Bion's psychoanalytic and Zen Buddhist ideas, a summarised umbrella characterisation of 'intuition' is a transformative experiential engagement with a complex reality that is often unknown, leading to a sudden or gradual, sometimes disruptive, and profound subjective growth, realisation or a shift in experiential perspectives. It involves temporarily letting go and suspending a sense of ego or self, desire, memory, and mental chatter.

The following sections will focus on Thich Nhat Hanh's and Bion's work as an example to test out the relevance and suitability of the previously studied summarised umbrella meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' in Bionian psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism.

1.5.8 Introduction of Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh, born in 1926 in Vietnam, is a revered Buddhist monk, peace activist, and prolific author known for his teachings on mindfulness and engaged Buddhism. His profound insights into Buddhist philosophy and his commitment to social and environmental activism have left an indelible mark on Buddhist communities and global society. Thich Nhat Hanh's journey into Buddhism began at a young age, leading him to become a novice monk at Tu Hieu Temple in Hue City at the age of 16. He later became a fully ordained monk in 1949, dedicating his life to studying and practicing Buddhism. Throughout his life, he has tirelessly advocated for peace, reconciliation, and social justice (Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation, 2024; Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 2211). His teachings on mindfulness, encapsulated in practices such as mindful breathing, walking meditation, and deep listening, have had a transformative impact on people from all walks of life. Thich Nhat Hanh's emphasis on living deeply in the present moment and cultivating awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions has resonated with individuals seeking inner peace (Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation, 2024)

Thich Nhat Hanh received his monastic training in Vietnam. "On May 1st, 1966, at Tu Hieu Temple, Thich Nhat Hanh received the 'lamp transmission' from Master Chan That, becoming a dharma teacher of the Lieu Quan Dharma Line in the 42nd generation of the Lam Te Dhyana school ("Lin Chi Chan" in Chinese or "Rinzai Zen" in Japanese)." (Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation, 2024). Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings and practices align closely with Zen Buddhism, emphasizing mindfulness meditation and the direct experience of reality. His approach to meditation, such as the practice of 'zazen' and mindful breathing, reflects the Zen tradition's emphasis on present-moment awareness and non-dualistic perception (Hanh, 2007; Hanh, 1975; Hanh, 1992; Hanh, 2009). He is prolific in writing books in Zen traditions such as *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* (Hanh, 2021), *Zen Keys: Guide to Zen Practice* (Hanh, 1994) and *Zen Battles* (Hanh, 2013).

In the following two sections, the suitability of the summarised umbrella framework of 'attention' and 'intuition' will be tested using some of Bion's and Thich Nhat Hanh's thoughts as examples. What is conducted below is testing and confirming the applicability of the derived overall framework and whether or not it fits smoothly and equally well when applied to both Bion's thought and the thought of Zen Buddhist practitioners, such as, to give a specific example, Thich Nhat Hanh.

1.5.9 Testing suitability of the summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' in Bion and Thich Nhat Hanh's work on 'mindfulness'

Bion utilises a mother-infant model to illustrate the concept of 'attention' as container/contained, often referred to as 'reverie'. In this framework, 'reverie' represents the mother's complex and relaxed attentional function that provides the infant with a sense of containment and security. It allows the mother to receive and process the infant's projective identifications, whether positive or negative, kind or aggressive, thereby aiding in the infant's emotional digestion and integration. Bion suggests that, similar to how the alimentary canal digests food, the mother's 'reverie' assists in transforming the infant's emotional experiences (beta-elements) into manageable content (alpha-elements). However, when the mother's 'reverie' is dysfunctional or polluted by negative emotional elements such as envy and hatred, the infant may experience a sense of nameless dread and difficulty linking with internal and external objects. Thus, the above-mentioned summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' applies to Bion's 'container' aspect of his concept of 'attention' since it receives, contains and transforms difficult emotions and experiences, consequentially resulting in a sense of security.

In connection to Bion's 'attention' as a 'container', Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of 'mindfulness' meditative attentional practices. In his book *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching*, Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, p 31) states, "Use the energy of mindfulness all day long to be truly

present, to embrace your suffering like a mother holding her baby. As long as mindfulness is there, you can stay with the difficulty." Thich Nhat Hanh (2011, p 11) also states that "when we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace and love." Thus, the summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' also applies to Thich Nhat Hanh's description of mindfulness attentional practices since it contains or holds difficulties and involves and results in a more present-centered subjective experience, making difficult experiences more manageable. Mindfulness attentional strategy also provides a sense of security that Thich Nhat Hanh calls 'acceptance, joy, peace and love'.

Regarding attention as intuitive tolerance, Bion introduces the concept of 'negative capability,' borrowing the term from poet John Keats to denote an attentional state characterised by the capacity to tolerate uncertainty, mystery, and doubt without immediately seeking facts or reasons. This capacity is crucial in psychoanalytic practice, allowing the analyst to refrain from premature interpretations and remain open to the patient's experiences. By embracing uncertainties and complexities without rushing to conclusions, psychoanalysts can develop a deeper and better-aligned understanding of their patients' inner realities. Bion emphasises the importance of 'negative capability' as an attentional state that enables one to sit in awe, fear and the unknown darkness, fostering creativity, intuition, and more patient-aligned understanding. The aforementioned summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' holds for Bion's 'attention' as intuitive tolerance since Bion's 'negative capability' tolerates difficult emotions such as awe, fear, doubt and a sense of uncertainty in the unknown darkness, transforming them into creativity and intuition. Bion's attentional state 'negative capability' also conveys a sense of presentness and security illustrated in the summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' --- 'sitting in awe, fear and in the unknown darkness' itself conveys a sense of being present and secure in or with emotional experiences such as awe, fear and uncertainty in the unknown.

In conjunction with Bion's attentional state' negative capability', Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, p 41) portrays 'mindfulness' attentional state as follows:

> When we practice mindfulness in order to build up concentration, mindfulness is a seed. But mindfulness itself is the life of awareness: the presence of mindfulness means the presence of life, and therefore mindfulness is also the fruit.

Thich Nhat Hanh describes mindfulness as both the seed and the fruit or both the means and the ends. The cycles of mindfulness attentional states are the insight itself. Thich Nhat Hanh not only sees mindfulness's attentional state as a tool for bringing insight but also emphasises mindfulness's 'presence' feature. Therefore, the aforementioned summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' is adequate in Thich Nhat Hanh's sense of 'mindfulness' since his understanding of mindfulness as insight itself conveys an emphasis on a more present-centered subjective self-awareness.

1.5.10 Testing suitability of the summarised umbrella meaning of 'intuition' in Bion and Thich Nhat Hanh's work

Bion closely links' intuition' with his concept of 'O,' the ultimate reality. He suggests that 'intuition' involves aligning with 'O' or achieving atonement with this ultimate truth. It also suggests directional movements towards and returning from a non-sensuous and ungraspable truth. Bion's concept of 'intuition' involves accessing the psychoanalytic ultimate reality. The summarised umbrella characterisation of 'intuition' applies to Bion's concept of 'O' the ultimate reality, since aligning with 'O' involves a transformative experiential engagement with a complex unknown reality 'O'.

In the clinical setting, Bion illustrates how psychoanalytic intuition aids in deciphering patients' manifest material and uncovering underlying truths of the phenomena the patients present. By intentionally excluding preconceived ideas and meanings, as well as memory and

desire, intuitive processes allow analysts to better align with patients' underlying experiences and realities. Furthermore, Bion introduces the concept of an 'act of faith' in relation to his thinking on 'intuition', indicating that it also involves relinquishing confusing elements of human experience such as memory and desire. 'Act of Faith' enables individuals to perceive mental phenomena with clarity, unencumbered by noisy and preconceived ideas. Thus, the summarised umbrella characterisation of 'intuition' applies to Bion's sense of 'intuition' because it involves a transformative experiential process leading to a profound realisation in understanding the patient's underlying subjective realities and experiences by suspending memory and desire.

In connection with Bion's advocacy of the relinquishment of memory and desire, Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, p. 90) speaks of the idea of 'letting go' of attachment to signs:

> Our fear and attachment come from our being caught in signs. Until we touch the sign-less nature of things, we will continue to be afraid and to suffer. Before we can touch H_2O, we have to let go of signs like squareness, roundness, hardness, heaviness, lightness, up, and down. Water is, in itself, neither square nor round nor solid. When we free ourselves from signs, we can enter the heart of reality. But until we can see the ocean in the sky, we are still caught by signs.

Thich Nhat Hanh (2007, p 241) further expresses that:

> It is not intellectual, not made of notions and concepts, but of the kind of understanding that brings more solidity, freedom, joy, and faith. For genuine awakening to be possible, we must let go of notions and concepts about nirvana, and about God. We must let go not just of our notions and concepts about the ultimate but also of our notions and concepts about things in the phenomenal realm.

To Thich Nhat Hanh, having a sign of something means remembering it in a particular way with the aim of doing something with it rather than encountering reality directly. Thus, the

summarised characteristics of 'intuition' fit what Thich Nhat Hanh means by 'free ourselves from signs' to reach 'the heart of reality' since the transformative experiential engagement with 'the heart of reality' leads to a deeper realisation that does not involve any signs and brings 'more solidity, freedom, joy, and faith.' It also involves letting go of a sense of ego or self where signs, notions and concepts reside.

Lastly, Bion views 'intuition' as integral to mental growth and evolution, emphasizing its timeless nature. He suggests that intuitive experiences transcend chronological time and memory, contributing to individuals' psychological development. Bion's notion of intuitive 'catastrophic change' underscores the timeless, disruptive and disorienting nature of intuitive realisations. This concept suggests that intuitive insights can be sudden, uncontrollable, and accompanied by feelings of disaster, akin to the impact of a physical attack. The aforementioned summarised characteristic of 'intuition' aligns well with Bion's intuitive 'catastrophic change' because it involves a transformative, sudden, disruptive, and profound subjective growth that transcends memory and time.

In relation to Bion's 'catastrophic change' leading to mental growth, Thich Nhat Hanh (2017, p 27) states that "in the beginning, I had certain ideas about mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhism. After ten years of practice, I had a much better understanding. Then, after forty or fifty years, my insight and understanding had become even deeper." Here, Thich Nhat Hanh sees mental growth as a gradual process of becoming which results from many years of mindfulness observational practices centering the practitioner's being closer and closer to the present here and now. The summarised umbrella characterisation of 'intuition' applies to Thich Nhat Hanh because he points out that the experiential shift in perspective is gradually based on many years of mindfulness practices, which leads to the dissolution of mental chatter, such as preconceived ideas about mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhism.

The purpose of the above testing of the summarised umbrella meaning of 'attention' and 'intuition' is not to equate or facilitate understanding between the work of Bion and Thich Nhat Hann. Instead, it serves as a pilot case to show how my summarised umbrella meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' can be used as markers within Bion's and Thich Nhat Hann's work, which can therefore form the basis for more complex comparisons thoughtout the rest of my current PhD project. What is essential in the above sections is making clear how the several facets of these concepts, which I summarise, manifest in Bion's and Thich Nhat Hanh's work. The main task is to provide the methodology showing the ways of summarizing umbrella meanings of 'attention' and 'intuition' in a way accessible for both Bion and Zen Buddhism and demonstrating where these features present themselves in both fields.

1.5.11 The connection between the concepts of 'attention/ attentional states', 'intuition' and my PhD project

'Intuition' and 'attention/attentional states' are the main concepts I have mobilised to compare and analyse Bion and Buddhism throughout my PhD project. The concepts of 'intuition' and 'attention/attentional states' emerged as two key elements weaving throughout the current PhD project. Thinking retrospectively and holistically, the reason for the emergence is that both concepts underpin and are crucial to understanding Bion's psychoanalytic work and Zen Buddhist ideas. They serve as the fundamental principles of both fields. 'Attention/attentional states' and 'intuition' emerged from analysing the three main chapters of my PhD project. Then, I used these two concepts as a foundation, further aiding and underpinning my comparisons of Bion and Zen Buddhist ideas and my explorations of the potential for overlap or synthesis between Bion's psychoanalytic work and Zen Buddhist ideas throughout the whole thesis.

The three chapters in the current PhD project are closely connected to the two core concepts mentioned above. In the first chapter/article, "Wilfred Bion's annotations in *The Way of Zen*: An investigation into his practical encounters with Buddhist ideas", Bion's annotations and underlines in *The Way of Zen* (1957) are closely related to the concepts of 'attention/attentional states' and 'intuition'. For instance, Bion's focus on both concepts of 'non-verbal communication' and 'no memory no desire' in his underline, and annotations indicate a clear sense of elimination of verbal and sensuous functions in order to get in touch with a more fundamental experiential reality. Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' indicates a clear instruction on how to direct and manipulate 'attention' in order to reach optimal attentional states such as 'free association' and 'reverie' when seeing patients. Another example is Bion's emphasis on 'O' and 'conventional knowledge versus spontaneity'. It indicates his thinking regarding the difference between intuitive and rational types of mental functioning. Conventional knowledge depends more on symbolic and rational thinking, whilst spontaneity relies solely on intuition. Additionally, Bion's markings in *The Way of Zen* (1957) regarding the Buddhist 'four noble truths' seem to indicate that he was very intrigued by and paid a lot of attention to the 'four noble truths' as a step-by-step manual leading to the achievement of the intuitive ultimate truth.

In the second main article/chapter, "A comparison between two methods dealing with desire: Bion's 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist 'bare attention' mindfulness meditation," Bion's 'no memory no desire' and the Buddhist 'bare attention' meditation are two different attentional strategies leading towards the targeted 'attentional states.' The former utilises the attentional strategy of eliminating and depriving desire, and the latter chooses to stay with the flow of desire.

Last but not least, article/chapter three, "A comparison between Paul Cooper's and Mark Epstein's approaches to Buddhist meditative stances in relation to Bion and other

psychoanalytic paradigms" looks closely into Epstein's and Cooper's work on Buddhist and psychoanalytic 'attentional states' in the hope that the insights drawn from this material will complement, aid and advance the training and techniques for developing Freud's attentional state termed 'evenly hovering' and 'evenly suspended attention.' Both authors and Buddhist practitioners attempt to introduce mindfulness and other Buddhist attentional techniques/states into psychotherapy and correlate such attentional states with what is happening in psychoanalysis.

Chapter Two: Wilfred Bion's annotations in *The Way of Zen*: an investigation into his practical encounters with Buddhist ideas

Abstract

Over the past three decades, several attempts have been made to juxtapose or connect Bionian theories with Buddhism. Previous studies have merely speculated on the associations between Bion and Buddhism – whether remarking on their similarities or drawing distinctions between them. In contrast, this article seeks to provide concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* in order to shed further light on those aspects of Zen which most engaged Bion's attention. Five main themes are explored in detail – the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality') – in order to provide a clearer picture of the elements which attracted Bion's interest in Buddhism and the places where Buddhism resonated with his own psychoanalytic work.

Keywords: Bion, Alan Watts, Buddhism, Zen, 'no memory no desire', Four Noble Truths, spontaneity, non-verbal, 'O'

2.1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, several attempts have been made to juxtapose or connect Bionian theories with Buddhism. For instance, in her comparative study, Esther Pelled (2007) argues that mental development is the common denominator between Bion's theories of alpha function, 'reverie' and Buddhist mindfulness, and she further attempts to relate Bion's ideas on 'O' and detachment to Buddhist equivalents. Another example is Mark Epstein (1984) who

brings together Theodor Reik's 'freely floating attention', Freud's 'evenly suspended attention', Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist 'bare attention' and makes interchangeable comparisons amongst the four throughout his article. Steven Mendoza (2010) meanwhile points out the similarities between Bion's conceptualisation of 'O' and 'sunyata' (emptiness) in Buddhism and also uses concepts such as 'alpha function', 'reverie' and 'no memory no desire' to substantiate his comparison. Another example is, Concetta Alfano (2005) who uses Buddhism, object relations theories and perinatal research to understand her encounters with her patients. While emphasising the four capacities of mental flexibility, negative capability, unconscious reception and intuitive capacities, she juxtaposes Bion's concepts of 'caesura', 'reverie', and 'the infinite', with Buddhist 'non-self', receptivity and compassion.

Of the various schools of Buddhism, Zen has been the most frequently researched in relation to Bion's theorisations. For example, Paul Cooper (2016) illustrates the differences and similarities between Bion's use of 'O' and 'K', and Dogen's Soto Zen, while Lopez-Corvo (2006), Cooper (2001) and Cooper (2010) explore various connections between Zen and Bionian ideas.

Psychoanalytic authors have approached Bion and Buddhism both conceptually and experientially. The latter approach has been subdivided into personal practices with both Bionian psychoanalysis and Buddhist meditation, and experiences with patients. Mark Epstein's (1995) *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* exemplifies these two aims. He first uses psychoanalytic language to explain and interpret the 'Four Noble Truths' and other meditative concepts, and then advocates for the integration of Buddhism and psychoanalysis in clinical settings.

Although the above-mentioned studies have explored the connections between Buddhism and Bion's psychoanalytic thinking, none of them provides firm evidence of

Buddhism's influence on Bion. In other words, such studies merely speculate on the associations between Bion and Buddhism — whether remarking on their similarities or drawing distinctions between them. In contrast, this article seeks to provide concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by presenting and analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of *The Way of Zen* written by Alan Watts and first published in 1957 in the UK, the United States and Canada. It was one of the best sellers of its era and was particularly popular amongst college students (Miller, 1995, p. 164). Watts' views on Zen Buddhism were influenced by the well-known Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki and, in fact, Watts' earlier study *The Spirit of Zen* (1936) developed out of a formative conversation he had with Suzuki (Starr, 2009, p. 341). Together, D. T. Suzuki and Watts were two of the most influential figures in the 1960s in terms of spreading Buddhist ideas to a Western audience. As Miller (1995, p. 164) notes, 'no student of Zen in the 1960s would have been without Watts' *The Way of Zen* or D. T. Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and *Essays in Zen Buddhism* on his or her bookshelf'. Bion had both Watts' *The Way of Zen* and D. T. Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* in his personal collections (Mawson, personal communication, Nov 25, 2018)

Psychoanalyst Chris Mawson, the editor of Bion's collected works, speculates that Bion read and annotated Watts's *The Way of Zen* around 1960 and 1961, which would have coincided with an invitation, extended to both Bion and Watts to contribute a chapter to a book prospectively titled *The Conception of Man* edited by Arthur Blurton.[4] They and other invited authors were requested to give their perspective on the basic nature of humanity (Mawson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). This invitation from Blurton may thus have led Bion to become aware of Watts' work and to his subsequent interest in Zen Buddhism. However, concepts that appear in Bion's annotations to Watts' book, such as 'O', and Saint John of the Cross's idea of 'Godhead' appear for the first time in Bion's book *Transformations* published

[4] *The Conception of Man* was not eventually published.

in 1965. In the same year, he utilises Milton's 'the void' and 'the formless infinite' for the first time in published form.[5] Thus, it is possible that Bion read *The Way of Zen* instead in the mid-60s, or that he read it more than once with the annotations more likely being made closer to 1965 right before he wrote *Transformations*, or soon thereafter. The hypothesis of the current article is that Bion's annotations in *The Way of Zen* might evidence Zen Buddhism's influence on his own psychoanalytic theorisation. Specifically, his engagement with Zen thoughts may have helped Bion corroborate and think through his psychoanalytic conceptualisations, including 'O' the ineffable, memory, desire and understanding, publishable K, and the limitations of sensuality and verbal communications (these ideas will be further explained where they appear in the annotations below).

Bion annotated and underlined a large portion of the first half (Background and History) of *The Way of Zen.* His further interest in Zen literature is manifested by his underscoring of Watts' mentions of D. T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and R. H. Blyth's *Zen in English Literature* on page xi and four of his personal copy of *The Way of Zen*. While Bion is likely to have read these two Zen books, it is impossible to verify since they are not in Bion's extant library (Mawson, personal communication, Nov 12, 2018). It is also likely that Bion read Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery.* According to his wife Francesca Bion, Bion used to speak of a book written by a Western author, whose wife was a student of Zen tea ceremony, which dealt with lessons from a Zen master on how to hold a bow (Mawson, personal communication, Nov 25, 2018). Unfortunately, Bion's original copy of the *Zen in the Art of Archery* can no longer be located. Nevertheless, his extensive annotations of Watts, as well as his interest in at least two additional Zen Books, and possibly *Zen in the Art of Archery*, are all indications of Bion's broader engagement with Zen literature.

[5] Bion (1992, p.35, undated note) indirectly quotes Milton's 'won from the void' in an undated note in *Cogitations*, which the editor has placed among entries for 1959, though this dating might be uncertain.

The present study is based on a detailed examination of Bion's underlinings and annotations in *The Way of Zen* and aims to shed further light on those aspects of Zen which most engaged Bion's attention. After close reading of Bion's annotations, five main themes stand out: 1) The close attention Bion paid to the 'Four Noble Truths'; 2) the contrast between conventional knowledge and spontaneity; 3) non-verbal communication and the frustration of lateral communication;[6] 4) 'no memory no desire', the vicious cycle of grasping sensuous desires, stupidity, and mental growth; and 5) 'O' in relation to Zen. These five themes will be explored in detail in this article, which deals with Bion's annotations concerning each theme in turn, in order to provide a clearer picture of the elements which attracted Bion's interest in Buddhism and the places where Buddhism resonated with his own psychoanalytic work. However, before entering the analysis of the annotations, I will first provide a brief overview of Watts' positions in Buddhist discourse; how his Buddhist work has been perceived by various schools of Zen practitioners and writers and a general summary of his book *The Way of Zen*.

2.2 'Alan Watts' postions on Buddhism and his reception by Buddhist scholars and practitioners

Alan Watts was a British writer who introduced philosophies from the East to the West around the 1960s. His written works, lectures, and public speeches made Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism accessible to the Western general public. Watts was a controversial figure in terms of his work on Buddhism. He has been both criticised and acknowledged by various schools of Buddhist writers and practitioners. For instance, the professor of literature and mythology and Buddhist enthusiast Joseph Campbell (2018, p 6) expresses his acknowledgement of Watts's *The Way of Zen* by using it as introductory teaching

[6] By 'lateral communication', Bion means the communication with psychoanalytic colleagues.

material in Buddhism to his students: “to escort my students beyond heaven and hell, I take them first to India and then China and Japan….Buddhism I introduce through Coomaraswamy’s *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* and Alan Watts’s *The Way of Zen* with readings in Waley’s *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* as my introduction to the far Eastern sphere.” In addition, professor of Buddhist studies at Duke University Richard Jaffe (Suzuki, 1964/2015, p xi) acknowledges Watts’s importance in the Zen Buddhist sphere in his introduction to the *Selected Works of D. T. Suzuki*: “a small portion of Suzuki’s work on Rinzai, a small translated passage from *the Linji lu* (Record of Rinzai), was also published in the 1958 issue of the literary magazine *Chicago Review*, which was devoted to Zen, alongside articles by Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Alan Watts.” In addition, The scholar of religion Huston Smith (1991, p 103) also shows his acknowledgement of Alan Watts’s concept of “skin-encapsulated ego” in conjunction with his thinking on suffering in Buddhism: “here, said the Buddha, is where the trouble lies; this is why we suffer. Instead of linking our faith, love, and destiny to the whole, we persist in strapping these to the puny burros of our separate selves, which are certain to stumble and give out eventually. Coddling our individual identities, we lock ourselves inside ‘our skin-encapsulated egos’ (Alan Watts) and seek fulfilment through their intensification and expanse.”

However, there are criticisms regarding the quality of Watts’s presentation of Zen Buddhism. For example, Zen writer Philip Kapleau (1965/2000; p 84) criticises Watts by stating that “the heart of Zen discipline is zazen. Remove the heart and a mere corpse remains. Despite this, neither the books enumerated by Mr Watts nor his own books on Zen contain more than a smattering of information --- and some not even that --- on this vital subject.” In his book *Original Dwelling Place: Buddhist Essays*, Robert Aitken (1996, p 29) describes Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki’s disapproval of Watts’ understanding of an important Zen dialogue between Nan-ytieh and Ma-tsu about making a mirror out of a tile: “Mr Watts remarks

somewhere in his books that this dialogue showed how T'ang period Zen people disapproved of zazen. Dr Suzuki said to both Anne and me, 'I regret to say that Mr Watts did not understand that story.'" Overall, on the one hand, some Buddhist writers and practitioners have criticised Watts's understanding of Buddhism as a distortion or misunderstanding of authentic Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, other Buddhist practitioners and scholars acknowledge and appreciate Watts's communication and his ability to draw Western audiences' interest in Zen Buddhism and Eastern religions and philosophies.

Alan Watts's positions and perceptions of Buddhism underwent changes throughout his career. At the age of twenty-one in 1936, Watts met Zen Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki, who was presenting a paper at the World Congress of Faiths at the University of London. (Watts, 1973, p 78) During his early years, Watts's interest in Zen Buddhism began during the 1930s, resulting in his book *The Spirit of Zen: a way of life, work, and art in the far East*, which explores Zen Buddhism with a focus on making it understandable to a Western audience. He takes the position that Zen is fundamentally about direct experience and intuition rather than intellectual understanding or doctrinal study. It transcends conventional thinking and aims for a spontaneous, unmediated awareness of reality. He also emphasises the importance of practices such as zazen and koan, enabling practitioners to filter out conceptual thought, break down logical reasoning, and provoke direct insight into the nature of existence. He portrays Zen as a path to liberation from the constraints of ego and conventional thought patterns. Through Zen practice, individuals can experience a sense of freedom and enlightenment, realising their true nature and interconnectedness with the universe. (Watts, 1958/1960)

Watts published his well-known book, *The Way of Zen*, in 1957 during his middle years. Watts argues that Zen Buddhism offers a way of life complementary to Western philosophical and scientific thought. It can help us understand the limitations of reason and logic and the importance of non-rational ways of knowing. He traces the origins of Zen Buddhism, detailing

its roots in Indian Mahayana Buddhism and its subsequent development in China as Chan Buddhism before evolving into Zen in Japan. He highlights the influence of Taoism on Zen, emphasising the integration of Taoist naturalism and spontaneity into Zen thought and practice. Watts advocates for a pragmatic approach to Zen, encouraging readers to engage in the practice and experience its transformative effects first-hand rather than merely intellectualising about it. The *Way of Zen* manifests Watts's disapproval of his early writings in Zen Buddhism, which takes on a more traditional point of view influenced by D. T. Suzuki. Watts criticised his early book *The Spirit of Zen* as a "popularisation of Suzuki's earlier works, and besides being very unscholarly it is in many respects out of date and misleading." (Watts, 1957, p 8)

In his later years, he identifies himself as a 'Zennist'. In his last book, *Tao: The Watercourse Way* (1975/2011), Watts discusses Zen Buddhism by integrating its principles with Taoist philosophy with a more radical standpoint on the practical and intuitive approach to Zen practices. He critiques the modern Zen emphasis on disciplined zazen (sitting meditation), describing it as 'a superstitious fetish in contemporary practice.' (Watts, 1975/2011, p 99) He aligns himself with early Zen teachers such as Hui-neng and Ma-tsu, who stressed intuitive insight over formal meditative practices (Watts, 1975/2011).

W. R. Bion's thinking about Zen Buddhism seems to have been mainly influenced by reading Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* (1957), written by him during his middle career. Because Watts' perception of Zen Buddhism changed over time, Bion might have perceived Buddhism in a biased or limited way as a consequence of Watts' still developing views on it during his early and middle career. Nevertheless, based on the quantity and quality of Bion's underlines and annotations in *The Way of Zen*, it seems that Bion was at least very excited, intrigued and provoked in his thinking by Watts' depiction of Zen Buddhism.

2.3 A Brief Summary of Watts' *The Way of Zen*

With a rich and diverse history spanning over 2500 years, Buddhism traces its origins to Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as the Buddha. The journey of Buddhism began in ancient India, but it did not confine itself to a specific region. Instead, it migrated across various parts of Asia and beyond, adapting to different cultures along the way. This adaptability led to the emergence of numerous sects and traditions, each with its distinct practices and interpretations of the Buddha's original teachings.

In the exploration of Buddhism, this article predominantly focuses on Zen Buddhism, a significant branch of Mahayana Buddhism. At the core of Zen's practices are Zazen, a seated meditation aiming to cultivate deep concentration, mindfulness, and insight. Koan studies form another crucial aspect, involving contemplating paradoxical statements or questions given by Zen masters to evoke profound insights in students. The transmission from master to disciple is integral, ultimately leading to the disciple's enlightenment.

Zen Buddhism embraces various doctrinal stances, including the concept of 'emptiness' (sunyata), asserting that all phenomena lack inherent and fixed existence, being interconnected and interdependent. 'Direct pointing' to truth emphasises the understanding that true comprehension of reality transcends language and rational reasoning, coming from direct experience. 'The Four Noble Truths', rooted in the Buddha's original teachings, clearly outline the nature of suffering, its cause, cessation, and the path leading to it.

Further insights include the 'Three Marks' (impermanence, non-self, and suffering) aiding in understanding the nature of reality and the 'Middle Way', navigating between detachment and attachment. 'Wu-Wei', or non-action, signifies a state of effortless action, while 'Satori' represents a sudden, intuitive understanding of the fundamental reality. Embracing the 'present moment', free from effortful thinking and conceptualisation, is another fundamental aspect of Zen (Hanh, 1998; Harvey, 2013a; Kapleau, 1965/2000; Watts, 1957).

Zen Buddhism encompasses various sects and schools, each with unique characteristics, practices, and interpretations. One of the main sects is the Rinzai School, which emphasises the physical expererices of Zen and the oneness of mind and body. Rinzai Zen master Omori Sogen Roshi states that "Zen is to transcend life and death (all dualism), to truly realise that the entire universe is the 'True Human Body' through the discipline of 'body-mind in oneness.'…Zen without the accompanying physical experience is nothing but empty discussion" (Moore, 2018, p 8). Another prominent sect of Zen is the Soto Zen School, which advocates "shikantaza" or "just sitting" meditation as the primary practice, without a specific focus on koans or any other activities other than 'simply sitting silently in meditation'.

> One of the emblematic teachings of the Caodong [Soto] tradition is that of the 'five ranks' (Wuwei)….During the Song dynasty, the Caodong school also came to be associated with the contemplative practice of 'silent illumination', a form of meditation that built upon the normative East Asian notion of the inherency of Buddhahood to suggest that, since enlightenment was the mind's natural state, nothing needed to be done in order to attain enlightenment other than letting go of all striving for that state. Authentic Chan practice therefore entailed only maintaining this original purity of the mind by simply sitting silently in meditation. (Buswell and Lopez, 2014, p 438)

Zen Obaku School is another main sect in Zen Buddhism founded by Chinese Chan (Zen) master Yinyuan Longqi. It is influenced by Chinese Buddhist practices incorporates recitation elements. "It assimilated the widespread practice of reciting of the Buddha's name by transforming it into a form of 'questioning meditation': e.g., 'who is it who is reciting the Buddha's name?' Raising this question while engaging in nenbutsu was a technique that initially helped to concentrate the mind, but would also subsequently help raise the sense of doubt." (Buswell and Lopez, 2014, p 1477). It is crucial to note that distinctions amongst

aforementioned sects are not always rigid, and each school may have variations in practice and interpretation.

While Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* covers a broad range of Zen Buddhist concepts and practices, he seems to primarily focus on two major Zen sects: Rinzai and Soto. *The Way of Zen* is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the background and history of Zen which Watts traces back to Taoism, 'the original Chinese way of liberation which combined with Indian Mahayana Buddhism to produce Zen' (Watts, 1957, p. 28). When delineating the connections between Taoism and Zen, he discusses the major ideas of Taoism such as 'the Dao' (the way), 'wu-wei' (not making, not doing),[7] 'wu-hsin' (no mind or un-self-consciousness), 'te' (virtue)[8] and spontaneity. He also emphasises the ineffable and direct nature of the Dao whereby, any effort to symbolise it into conventional knowledge[9] only creates more distortion and confusion.

Watts then goes on to discuss the origins of Buddhism. All schools of Buddhism have consensus on the 'middle way' which opposes the two extremes of asceticism and sensualism. Continuing with an illustration of Buddhism's Indian lineage, he deals with the theme of liberation: the experience of liberation rather than its translation into conventional language is emphasised. In Indian philosophy, the self-knowledge of liberation is 'a realisation of one's original identity with god' (Watts, 1957, p.36); liberation means 'a progressive disentanglement of one's Self (atman) from every identification' (Watts, 1957, p. 38). Within

[7] 'Wu-wei' can be understood as not interfering with the natural process of growth. Making or doing is a process of assembling parts into a whole (from without to within). However, growth or 'not making/doing' is a process in which the whole grows into parts from within to without (Watts, 1957, p. 16).

[8] Watts (1957, p. 25) defines 'te' as follows: 'when a man has learned to let his mind alone so that it functions in the integrated and spontaneous way that is natural to it, he begins to show the special kind of "virtue" or "power" called *te*. This is not virtue in the current sense of moral rectitude but in the older sense of effectiveness, as when one speaks of the healing virtues of a plant'.

[9] Watts (1957, p. 4) indicates that 'such knowledge is called conventional because it is a matter of social agreement as to the codes of communication'. For example, human languages and mathematic symbols are conventional knowledge because they are standardised by the society.

the same chapter, Watts further details the 'Four Noble Truths',[10] which are often considered to comprise the main teaching of the Buddha immediately after his awakening.

Watts then discusses the major Mahayana schools such as Pureland and Yogacara, explaining major concepts such as 'nirvana', 'samsara'[11](cycle of rebirth and re-death), and 'sunyata'(emptiness).

The final chapter of the first part of the book concentrates specifically on the development of Zen with Watts pointing out that the special flavour of Zen Buddhism is manifested in its focus on direct experience itself. The direct and sudden enlightenment of 'satori' cannot be desired or strived, while the direct experience and capacity to live with an overwhelming volume of doubt is enabled by Zen Buddhists' unique practice of 'koan' (Zen problems).

In the second part of the book, the major focus is on the principles and practice of Zen and the empty nature of Zen is first discussed. Zen is empty of concepts, patterns, measurement and conventional logic. Furthermore, the essence of Zen meditation (za-zen) is to sit for the sake of sitting. It advocates a total letting go of the mind in order to allow the mind to function as itself spontaneously. Watts (1957, p. 150) relates the Zen idea of '*mo chih ch'u*'[12] to psychoanalytic 'free association': 'the point of *mo chih ch'u* is not to eliminate reflective thought but to eliminate "blocking" in both action and thought, so that the response of the mind is always like a ball in a mountain stream — "one thought after another without hesitation." There is something similar to this in the psychoanalytic practice of free association, employed as a technique to get rid of obstacles to the free flow of thought from the "unconscious"'. Thus, both Zen and psychoanalysis, he argues, value the spontaneous free flow of the mind; both

[10] The 'Four Noble Truths' in Buddhism clarify the causes and effects of pain and suffering. Buddhism further proposes eight paths to reach 'nirvana' which is the end of the cycle of suffering and pain.
[11] Watts (1957, p. 49) uses karma (conditioned action) to explain 'samsara': 'Man is involved in karma when he interferes with the world in such a way that he is compelled to go on interfering, when the solution of a problem creates still more problems to be solved, when the control of one thing creates the need to control several others.'
[12] Watts (1957, p. 149) defines '*mo chih ch'u'* as 'going straight ahead without stopping'.

fields have developed techniques to eliminate hinderances and to ascertain the spontaneous function of the mind. Additionally, 'wu-nien' (no second thought) is an important technique of 'za-zen'. By contrast, conscious thoughts and conceptualisations are seen as manifestations of attachment.

Further discussion is given over to the practices of 'za-zen' and 'koan', both of which are aimless in nature. The practice of 'za-zen' enables 'seeing reality directly, in its 'suchness"' (Watts, 1957, p. 155). 'It is not "concentration" in the usual sense of restricting the attention to a single sense object…. It is simply a quiet awareness, without comment, of whatever happens to be here and now' (Watts, 1957, p. 155).

Additionally, the capacity to live with the awe of doubt is worked on when one is practising 'koan' or the Zen questions. The purpose of the Zen questions is thus not to provide answers but rather to make the students feel 'completely stupid – as if he were encased in a huge block of ice, unable to move or think. He just knows nothing; the whole world, including himself, is an enormous mass of pure doubt' (Watts, 1957, p. 165).[13] The stupidity here indicates a positive lack of logical sense and conscious thought.

A final chapter focuses on the application of Zen in the arts, including calligraphy, tea ceremony, and Bushido (arts of war). The aim of these arts is to convey the emptiness of the marvellous void, aimlessness, spontaneity, the principle of uncertainty and the sudden encounter (surprise) of the unknown.

Throughout *The Way of Zen*, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are mentioned interchangeably, reflecting the fact that Zen was originally developed in the Chinese cultural context, which was influenced by all three of these religious-philosophies. Nevertheless, the overall impression one obtains from Watts is that Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism are

[13] Zen koan's emphasis on the capacity to live with doubts resonates with Bion's interests in John Keats' 'negative capability'. See Zhang (forthcoming) for a further exploration of this connection.

Zen's main precursors, both emphasising the unconventional ultimate reality, as opposed to Confucianism's concern with the conventional code of conduct.

2.4 Bion's Annotations and Underlines in *The Way of Zen*

a) Bion's Close Attention to the 'Four Noble Truths'

In *The Way of Zen*, Bion pays special attention to the 'Four Noble Truths',[14] as evidenced by the circled numbers he uses, in a very organised manner, to mark the beginning of Watts' discussion of each truth. Bion focuses on several general ideas of Buddhism that are blended in Watts' illustration of the 'Four Noble Truths'. The first idea is the 'three marks' of all conditioned phenomena, impermanence, suffering and non-self,[15] each of which he numbered in the margins of his copy (p. 46-47). He also took notice of the twelve links of 'dependent origination', underscoring the footnote about the 'twelve links' as follows: 'the whole series arises together, and its terms exist only in relation to one another' (Watts, 1957, p. 49). Bion was certainly interested in the relational view and the interdependence of the 'twelve links' which are radically different from the concrete thinking of things as separate entities.

Despite the brevity and basic character of the present section, Bion's numerous circlings, numberings and, underlinings in Watts' illustration of the 'Four Noble Truths' are vital indications of the degree of interest and attention he paid to these concepts.

b) Conventional Knowledge versus Spontaneity

[14] In my two other forthcoming papers, the discussion regarding the comparison between the 'Four Noble Truths' and Bion's psychoanalytic thinking will be further detailed.
[15] 'Trilaksana', the three marks, are rather complex world views of Buddhism. Due to the space limitations of this article, a detailed discussion of the three is omitted.

Whilst the previous section briefly introduced the evidence of Bion's broad interest in the 'Four Noble Truths', this section will further delineate his underlinings and annotations with respect to the contrast between conventional knowledge and spontaneity. One of the themes most frequently annotated and underscored by Bion in his copy of *The Way of Zen* revolves around the concept of conventional knowledge. Watts (1957, p. 4) suggests that:

> for us, almost all knowledge is what a Taoist would call <u>*conventional*</u> knowledge, because we do not feel that we really know anything unless we can represent it to ourselves in words, or in some other system of conventional signs such as the notations of mathematics or music.

Bion here underlines the adjective 'conventional' and provides the following annotations at the bottom of the page: '"as conventional knowledge" = publishable K. or sensuously communicable or formulatable in terms derivable from "sense"'[16]. It is evident that the conventional knowledge mentioned by Watts prompted Bion to think about his own conceptualisations concerning the sensuous aspects of knowledge. According to the annotation, Bion believed that the Taoist conception here equated to his own notion of sensuously derivable and publishable knowledge. In *Attention and Interpretation*, when describing 'O', Bion (1970, p. 26) remarks that 'it is darkness and formlessness but it enters the domain K when it has evolved to a point where it can be known, through knowledge gained by experience, and formulated in terms derived from sensuous experience; its existence is conjectured phenomenologically.' As long as it is called knowledge, it is derived from sensuous experiences and expressed in conventional signs. However, the eternal wisdom of 'O' is unformulatable and ineffable unless it is transformed into sensuously formulated knowledge.

[16] Bion uses the letter 'K' to represent the initial of 'knowledge' and 'knowing'. It 'designate[s] the capacity to "know" something; not about what is already known, but about the propensity to know or to contain' (López-Corvo, 2005, p. 157).

In relation to his interest in Watts' thinking on 'conventional knowledge' and sensuous experiences, Bion (1962a, p 53) also speaks about his thinking regarding sensuous experience and psychic reality:

> It is hard to believe that sense data, as ordinarily understood, could bring much material of value when the object of the senses is an emotional experience of a personality (to whomever it may belong). The senses may be able in a state of fear or rage to contribute data concerning the heart-beat, and similar events peripheral, as we see it, to an emotional state. But there are no sense-data directly related to psychic quality, as there are sense-data directly related to concrete objects.

In the quote above, Bion reasons about the distinction between the sensuous and the psychic. According to Bion, the sensuous and the psychic seem to be two individual happenings with some, however, very few communications in between. According to Watts, the divergence between conventional knowledge and spontaneity lies in whether an experience is symbolic, represented by a learned sign/language or is grown directly from the inside of a human being. Although Bion and Watts do not seem to use the same English terms to think about the same issue, it does seem like Bion's concept of the 'psychic' resembles what Watts calls 'spontaneity' --- something that is closer to the sheer and holistic experience itself rather than something learned gradually from sensory inputs. Bion's sense of 'sensuality' seems to share similarities with Watt's 'conventional knowledge' since both are felt to be inappropriate, unfitted, and unaligned in the face of a unique, warm and lived experience flowing from the inside out. I am not claiming here that Watts' thinking about 'spontaneity' and 'conventional knowledge' was the primary prompt for Bion's starting to think about the distinction between the 'psychic' and the 'sensuous'. However, it does seem like Bion found affinities in Watts' reasoning, which is stimulating and thought-provoking. In another instance, Watts (1957, p 5) writes:

> what is much less obvious is that convention also governs the delineation of the thing to which the word is assigned. For the child has to be taught not only what words are to stand for what things, but also the way in which his culture has tacitly agreed to divide things from each other, to mark out the boundaries within our daily experience. Thus scientific convention decides whether an eel shall be a fish or a snake and grammatical convention determines what experience shall be called objects and what shall be called events or actions.

Above the phrase 'to divide things from each other', Bion annotates 'e.g. words' presumably indicating his agreement with Watts' argument. In the right margin of the same page, he further annotates: 'and where omnipotence "begins" and "ends"'. In connection with the concept of 'omnipotence', Bion (1974/2014, p 89) illustrates his reasoning about the sensuous as follows:

> …. we know so little about the mind, or psyche, or spirit – whichever term we borrow to talk about this thing which is not sensuously apprehensible, which does not fall within the spectrum of the sensuous range. It is ultra-physical, or infra-physical; it is outside the spectrum with which we are so far familiar. It does not mean to say that the thing-in-itself, life itself, the noumenon, is co-limited with our mental capacity, that because we can only think that far the mental world is only that big. It may be vast.

Then Bion (1974/2014, p 85) speaks further about his reasoning about the distinction between the sensuous nature of language and the ultimate reality:

> If he says that, he is using a language which has been produced to deal with the world of sensuous reality (the reality which is discernible if you have sight, hearing, sense of smell, touch and so on). It is inadequate for our purpose. We are having to use a language which was invented for one job, to do a different one. We have having to use a language which is concerned with phenomena, when what we are concerned with is noumena. We are

having to talk about things which could be described as phenomenal, while having to use that same language for things which are noumenal. This is a serious problem.

Bion's realisation of human's limited sensuous capacities coincides with what Watt suggests about the limitation of conventional knowledge that is based on human sensuous experiences unavoidably conveying a sense of omnipotent phantasy. It seems like Bion at least found affinities and support in Watts' reasoning regarding his own psychoanalytic thinking about 'sensuous reality' whether or not this amounts to direct influence by Watts. Both Bion and Watts seem to express their realisation of the limited nature of 'conventional knowledge' or 'the sensuous', which is heavily based on sensuous experiences.

Thus, Bion's annotation of 'omnipotence' above perhaps refers to scientific concepts and grammatical conventions which are used omnipotently and defensively to create a phantasy of power against the fear of the inability to grasp the ultimate reality as a meaningful whole all at once. The existing mastery of scientific conceptualisations makes people feel omnipotent about what they know; however, there exist experiences which cannot be mastered by scientific methods and conventions. The tight clinging and attachment to existing scientific and grammatical conventions are forms of denial and defence against the as-yet unknown and the awe of uncertainty derived therefrom. Once people begin to realise the limitations of scientific conventions and their inability to live with the unknown, their omnipotent feelings slowly fade away and eventually cease altogether.

Bion continues his annotations in the right margin of page five: 'then the rules of grammar are then confused by [being][17] thought to be representation of "realisation"'. To shed light on Bion's use of 'realisation' here, it is essential to examine other comments he made in his texts of the 1960s. For example, in *Second Thoughts*, Bion (1967b/ 1984, p. 161) writes:

[17] Writing unclear.

> it has been objected, for example, that 'acting out' is an English translation of a phrase used by Freud to mean something different from the meaning attributed in English to the term 'acting out'. The confusion arises because the discussion is thought to centre on the representation of a realisation and not on the realisation.

According to Bion, there is a discrepancy between the experience brought by the realisation itself and the words used to describe that experience. Words and grammatical structures cause further confusion because people use different vocabulary to describe essentially the same phenomenon. Thus, in writing 'then the rules of grammar are then confused by [being] thought to be representation of "realisation"', Bion suggests that, after the process of thinking, the grammatical structures are misunderstood as the realisation itself.

Bion further underscores 'for the very nature of conventional knowledge is that it is a system of abstractions. It consists of signs and symbols in which things and events are reduced to their general outlines' (Watts, 1957, p .7). Watts views abstractions rather negatively because he believes that abstracted signs are denuded of the rich experience they represent. Bion's underlining appears to signal his interest in Watts' thinking on abstractions, abstract signs and symbols. From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Bion thought abstraction could bring certain benefits to psychoanalysis, a good example of which is his 1963 paper *Taming Wild Thoughts[I]: The Grid.*[18] The grid is essentially an abstract notational system constituted by symbols and gradations of abstraction. The benefit of abstraction is the formation of a standardised convention which enables systematic observation, categorisation and communication (Bion, 1960[19]/1992, p. 176; F. Bion, 1997, p. 5). Nevertheless, from the late 1960s onwards, Bion began to pay more attention to the experiential richness of narrative language. His conceptualisations of 'O', sensuality, and 'no memory no desire' at this time

[18] It was presented by Bion for the first time at the British Psychoanalytical Society on 2nd October 1963.
[19] This is an undated note in *Cogitations* organised by Bion's wife Francesca Bion amongst his writings in 1960.

signals his theoretical shift from the search for a relatively rigid notational construct filled with abstract symbols to more fluid thinking based on emotional experience along with more aesthetic forms of communication. Thus, chronologically, if Bion accessed *The Way of Zen* in the early and mid-1960s, it is likely that his shift in perspective regarding abstraction as well as his overall theoretical shift were at least reinforced by his reading of Watts.

In addition to the impersonal, scientific and linguistic perspectives on conventional knowledge, Watts also discusses the conventional character of roles with regards to the identities of ourselves' and others at a personal level. In this section, Bion underlines 'even the sum total of these role labels will be far from supplying an adequate description of the man himself' (Watts, 1957, p. 6). Labels such as doctor, father, and dad are simplified categorisations of a far more complex personal lived reality. These labels merely represent a person's conventional identity but cannot convey the more complex reality of personhood as a whole. Watts then (1957, p. 6) continues: 'we learn, very thoroughly though far less explicitly, to identify ourselves with an equally conventional view of "myself"'. Bion underscores the word 'myself' and further signals his agreement with Watts' statement by annotating on the left: 'yes: a conventional view'.

What contrasts with 'conventional knowledge' is spontaneity. Bion underscores three terms about peripheral mind in the following sentences:

> we are not suggesting that Westerners simply do not use the "peripheral mind"[20]…. But it is not academically and philosophically respectable. We have hardly begun to realise its possibilities, and it seldom, if ever, occurs to us that one of its most important uses is

[20] Watts (1957, p. 8) uses an analogy of the peripheral vision to clarify what he means by the prereferral mind. On the one hand, similar to the central vision, focused mind is suitable for conscious and close examination. On the other hand, the peripheral mind is likened to the peripheral vision. 'We use it for seeing at night, and for taking "subconscious" notice of objects and movements not in the direct line of central vision. Unlike the spotlight, it can take in very many things at a time' (Watts, 1957, p. 8).

> for that "knowledge of reality" which we try to attain by the cumbersome calculations of theology, metaphysics, and logical inference (Watts, 1957, p. 9-10).

At the end of the paragraph, He further annotates: 'and mathematics — all pub[…][21]', seemingly with the view that mathematics, and all other publications[22] as well as theology, metaphysics and logical inference are too cumbersome to provide access to the kind of 'knowledge of reality' which can be spontaneously enabled by the peripheral mind. On the one hand, what interests Bion is Watts' emphasis on what is beyond logical and conscious thinking. On the other hand, Watts' 'peripheral mind' may have helped corroborate Bion's thoughts about the limitations of logic and rationality. Logical, rational, abstract, conventional and systematic ways of thinking require structure, and structural thinking undoubtedly has its advantages. Nevertheless, it is undeniably always confined (either entirely or partially) within the very structure it creates. Watts' thoughts on the 'peripheral mind' could have helped Bion confirm his wish to emancipate from his own structured ways of thinking. They may also have made Bion wonder about the usefulness of unstructured ways of thinking such as 'free floating attention' first introduced by Freud. The 'peripheral mind' and 'free floating attention' are vital for psychoanalytic thinking because they more suitably capture spontaneous encounters and the unstructured dynamics of the unconscious.

In conjunction with his emphasis on the usefulness of spontaneity and the limitations of structured ways of thinking, Watts further develops his argument by illustrating the differences between making and growing.

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[21] Bion's writing here is blurry. It could be a misspelling of 'publication', 'publishing action', or 'public action'.

[22] The term 'publication' has several connotations: 1) to bring the unconscious to the conscious level, 2) to convert preverbal thoughts into verbal ones or to transmute what is implicit into explicit forms, and 3) to make private knowledge communicable to the group. Bion (undated note in *Cogitations*, p. 119) provides a detailed explanation of what he means by 'publication': 'by this he means that he is excluding all problems that arise through the fact that sense impressions, on which all scientific work ultimately comes to rest, are private to the beholder and cannot become a matter for scientific investigation until they are made public, i.e. undergo transformation in the observer that enables them to be communicated to another. As will be seen later, this process, which I call public-ation, is in my opinion no different from the process involved in the individual who has to transmute pre-verbal into verbal thought if what is implicit is to become explicit, or what is unconscious, conscious'.

> For things made are separate parts put together, like machines, or things fashioned from without inwards. Whereas things grown divide themselves into parts, from within outwards…. But a universe which grows utterly excludes the possibility of knowing how it grows in the clumsy terms of thought and language, so that no Taoist would dream of asking whether the Tao knows how it produces the universe (Watts, 1957, p. 16-17).

In *A Memoir of the Future,* Bion (1975/1991, p. 77) points out that:

> the systematic separation into two objects, good and bad, conscious and unconscious, pain and pleasure, ugly and beautiful, has provided a framework which seems to have facilitated the development of knowledge, but the element of growth appears to have escaped formulation especially since it resembles maturation.

Bion here points out the difference between the systematic division of knowledge and the nature of psychic growth. Psychic growth (or maturation) is spontaneous, and as such requires no structures, formulations or constructs. Both the psyche's and the universe's growth processes come from within outwards and, as such, they require no framework, or formulation. Only the human mind which strives to understand the nature of the universe and the psyche is in need of structures, frameworks and formulations. However, the growth of the universe and the psyche themselves does not depend on the conventional knowledge and sensuous experience which would classify things into separate categories**.** Whether or not his underlinings inspired new thoughts, Bion's writing mentioned above was in line with certain transitions he was making in his attitude to knowledge and spontaneity. It seems likely therefore that, at the very least, he drew support for his views from Watts' text, support that he was unable to find in the psychoanalytic tradition alone.

Yet another very vital concept used by Watts to corroborate his advocacy of spontaneity and the natural process of growth (both mentally and physically) is the Daoist 'te'. Bion underscores the first half of the sentence: 'when a man has learned to let his mind alone so that

it functions in the integrated and spontaneous way that is natural to it, he begins to show the special kind of "virtue" or "power" called *te*' (Watts, 1957, p. 25). On the right margin of the underlined sentence, Bion writes the annotation: "Te. The effect of psycho-analysis→no more analysis". Watts (1957, p. 27) describes 'te' as 'the unthinkable ingenuity and creative power of man's spontaneous and natural functioning — a power which is blocked when one tries to master it in terms of formal methods and techniques'. As evidenced by his annotation, Bion suggests that the effect of psychoanalysis is to allow the mind to function alone in an integrated and spontaneous way. The analysis can be terminated when the patient is capable of letting his mind function with integrative, creative and spontaneous capacity.[23]

In Bion's psychoanalytic work, he uses the word 'spontaneity' in a very similar fashion. In the Brazilian lectures, for example, he (Bion, 1974/2014, p .176) indicates that 'trying to recall that experience is not the same thing as an experience which obtrudes spontaneously…. One could say that at one moment there is no memory of this dream; at the next moment the whole dream is present'. Bion's concept of reverie induced by no memory no desire (to be discussed below) is a spontaneous state of mind which enables the psychoanalytic dyad to dream the sessions.[24] The dream to which Bion refers is a mental evolution which is enabled by spontaneity. Bion also underscores the first half of the sentence 'inferior virtue cannot dispense with virtuosity, and thus is not virtue' (Watts, 1957, p. 26). When Watts (1957, p. 28) discusses the accidental nature of 'te', Zen arts and crafts, Bion responds by writing: 'serendipity' at the end of the paragraph. In his psychoanalytic works, Bion often speaks of the necessity of intuition for psychoanalytic evolution. Psychoanalytic intuition depends on spontaneity of mind. On the one hand, psychic evolution or growth often appears to be an accident which occurs

[23] In a forthcoming paper of mine, Bion's interests in the Zen emphasis on spontaneity will be explored further in connection with his own psychoanalytic ideas.

[24] This links to a whole complex of ideas around the connections between Buddhist non-attachment, spontaneity and Bion's 'no memory no desire'. In Zhang (forthcoming), 'no memory no desire' is compared and contracted in detail with various related ideas within the framework of the Buddhist 'Four Noble Truths'.

spontaneously, effortlessly and naturally; on the other hand, forced, intentionally formulated interpretations are lies that cannot dispense with virtuosity**.**

Considering holistically Bion's annotations and underlinings illustrated above regarding his thinking on the distinction between 'sensuous' and 'psychic', 'conventional knowledge' and 'spontaneous', and the chronology of timing he accessed Watt's *The Way of Zen* and his major theoretical shifts right afterwards, it seems like Bion at least found affinities, support, inspiration, reinforcement from Watt's formulation on the differences between 'spontaneity' and 'conventional knowledge' and gained some fresh angles of looking at his own thinking on the distinction between the psychoanalytic 'sensuous' and 'psychic'.

Although the above-mentioned evidence points to the direction that Bion's thinking on the distinction between 'logic/conventional knowledge' and 'spontaneous', 'sensuous' and 'psychic' could be influenced by Watts, there remains an important question. A notion that is so important to Bion (1970, p 1) that he raises the issue as an opening paragraph in *Attention & Interpretation* (1970):

> I doubt if anyone but a practising psychoanalyst can understand this book although I have done my best to make it simple. Any psychoanalyst who is practising can grasp my meaning because he, unlike those who only read or hear about psychoanalysis, has the opportunity to experience for himself what I in this book can only represent by words and verbal formulations designed for a different task.

In the quote above, Bion speaks of the vital distinction between 'learning through experience' and 'learning from simply reading a text'. On the other hand, Watts has been criticised by Buddhist scholars for never being a Zen practitioner, which renders all of his knowledge as speculative and second-hand, which, from Bion's perspective, would be 'about Zen' but not the 'experience' of Zen. For instance, Philip Kapleau (1965/2000, p 42) points out Watts' inexpereice in Zen practices by expressing that: "not unsurprisingly, therefore, do we have the

attempt on the part of some commentators, obviously unpracticed in Zen, to show that sitting is not indispensable to Zen discipline. In his *The Way of Zen* (p 101-103) Alan Watts even tries to prove, by citing portions of a well-known dialogue, that the Zen masters themselves have impugned sitting." From this perspective, although Bion might have found intellectual support from Watts' reasoning on the distinction between 'conventional knowledge' and 'spontaneity' for his views on 'sensuous' and 'psychic' that were not thoroughly discussed in psychoanalysis of the time, the issue of first-hand experience as the primary learning mechanism for both Bion and Zen Buddhism seems to contradict Watts' lack of first-hand experience and training in Zen practices.

c) Non-verbal, Futile Lateral Communications and 'Direct Pointing'

Having discussed the close attention Bion paid to the contract between conventional knowledge and spontaneity, this section will explore his interest in non-verbal, preverbal and futile lateral communications while reading *The Way of Zen*. Watts (1957) comments that:

> Fortunately or unfortunately, Zen is above all an experience, nonverbal in character, which is simply inaccessible to the purely literary and scholarly approach....Those who know do not speak; Those who speak do not know….But on the other hand, they [Westerners who have gone through Zen training] are convinced that words are ultimately futile, and are, furthermore, under an agreement not to discuss certain aspect of their training. (p. xii-xiii)

In addition to the extensive underlinings throughout the paragraphs, Bion also writes 'overemphasis on verbal communication' on the bottom right of page xii. This correlates with some of Bion's own statements regarding the limitations of verbal communication in psychoanalysis. In *Attention and Interpretation*, Bion (1970, p. 15) comments:

> the impossibility of communication without frustration is so familiar that the nature of the frustration is forgotten….In psychoanalytic work the problems are more obtrusive than usual because the subject is novel and its difficulties are uncharted; difficulties become still more marked when the material to be communicated is pre- or non-verbal....The pre-verbal matter the psycho-analyst must discuss is certain to be an illustration of the difficulty in communication that he himself is experiencing.

The focus of psychoanalysis should be on the exploration of human experience itself. Psychoanalytic discussions, writings, research articles, seminars and conferences are mainly based on verbal, literal and conventional forms of language. These types of communications are heavily dependent on the definitions of words and concepts agreed and shared by people and cultures. However, much of the focus in psychoanalysis is on non-verbal/preverbal and unique (individually based) unconscious experiences. This is why Bion (1979/1991, p. 565) argues: 'words and articulate speech are wonderful inventions — still in their infancy'. They are in their infancy because they are quite ineffective when it comes to the communication of experiences that are non-verbal, preverbal, unconventional, unstandardised and unique to each individual.

Furthermore, Bion's intellectual alignment with Zen Buddhism's belief in the futility of verbal communication is further confirmed by his underlinings of the second half of the sentence: 'for the function of these nonsense terms is to draw our attention to the fact that logic and meaning, with its inherent duality, is a property of thought and language but not of the actual world' (Watts, 1957, p. 73). Bion further annotates 'not' in the right margin, expressing agreement with the Zen view that language that makes sense to people is mererly a representation of thoughts. However, the thoughts and language used for description are very different from the thing-in-itself which is being described.

In connection with these issues regarding verbal and linguistic limitations, Bion frequently mentions his frustrations over lateral communication. In *A Memoir of the Future*, Bion (1975/1991, p. 182) proposes that:

> I should have thought both of you might know very well what I am talking about – the thing-in-itself as contrasted with the language about it. You may find yourselves as inadequate as I am in talking about it, that is, in trying to tell someone else lateral communication. I cannot feel optimistic of my chances of making it clear even to myself.

Bion believed that the unique human emotional experience is incommunicable most of the time. In the consulting room, most clinicians are aware of the difficulties of verbalising certain emotional events shared by the psychoanalytic dyad, but which cannot be straightforwardly communicated, even within the dyadic relationship, but particularly to outsiders.

Closely related to Bion's frustration regarding lateral communication is Klein's observation of infantile pre-verbal experience. Klein (1957/1975, p. 188) reveals that 'at best, such an understanding needs no words to express it, which demonstrates its derivation from the earliest closeness with the mother in the preverbal stage'. Both preverbal and non-verbal experiences occur frequently in infancy (pre and postnatal) or in childhood when infants/children have not yet mastered the artificial common language to which adults are accustomed. Based on Kleinian observation, Bion further observes that children occasionally exhibit an incredibly fluent comprehension of communication without being able to master the meanings of specific words, phrases and languages. In the *Brazilian Lectures*, Bion (1974/2014) remarks:

> Children seem to have no difficulty in being told that, and yet it is impossible to believe that the child knows what a term like "improvident" means…. But it is not all a matter of "words" .... There is no way of describing what sort of "verbal" it is. This language is communicated by what I have fancifully called 'beta-elements': something which is not

> words…. While the verbal gap between child language and words like "soporific" and "improvident" seems to be immense, the non-verbal gap appears to be very small or even non-existent. (p. 140)

Bion believes that beta-elements (basic, unprocessed units of emotional experience)[25] cannot be communicated through linguistic means such as phrases, sentences and words. However, he asserts that they can be conveyed to others through other means. Children's or infants' inability to use common language makes them less dependent on it; as a result, they are better at and readier for communicating and receiving raw emotions, such as beta-elements, by utilising nonverbal means such as projective identification.[26] Bion's description of children's non-verbal means of communication is reminiscent of the attitude in Zen Buddhism that unique personal experiences cannot be transmitted to others except by 'direct pointing'. Bion partially underscored Watts' (1957, p. 45) description of 'direct pointing' as below:

> for his [the Buddha's] real message remained always unspoken.…Yet it is the essential tradition of Zen that what cannot be conveyed by speech can nevertheless be passed on by 'direct pointing', by some nonverbal means of communication without which the Buddhist experience could never have been handed down to future generations.

The descriptions of 'direct pointing' in Zen Buddhism and Bion's illustration of children's non-verbal transmission of beta-elements share many similarities, raising the question of whether Watts and Bion are essentially using different phrases to describe the same problem of how to communicate which is beyond symbolisation and verbal discourse.

[25] Beta-elements comprise undigested and unprocessed raw emotional data of the mind. Bion never indicates that beta-elements are pathological, however. They are also a mode of intuitive, non-verbal communication often used by children, the psychotic part of the personality or by psychotic patients (López-Corvo, 2005, p. 42).

[26] Projective identification is first portrayed by Melanie Klein (1946, p. 102) as an intrapsychic pathological exchange between mother and infant preceded by the splitting of parts of the ego. Bion (1962a, p. 90) extends this to an intersubjective and interactive communication which can take place in a healthy way.

d) No Memory No Desire, the Vicious Cycle of Grasping Sensuous Desires, and Stupidity in Relation to Mental Growth

Further to the detailed discourse regarding the limited conventional ways of perceiving a person's identity (both self and other) in Section B, these ideas will be expanded in the current section in relation to Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' and his views on sensuality. In chapter one, Watts (1957, p. 6) remarks that 'the conventional "self" or "person" is composed mainly of a history consisting of selected memories.... It is important to recognise that the memories and past events which make up a man's historical identity are no more than a selection'. Watts' perception of selected memories here engages Bion's concern with memory. Bion discusses two types of memory in his psychoanalytic writings: evolutionary memory, and intentionally recalled memory. Evolutionary memory often comes to mind effortlessly, unbidden as a whole while intentionally recalled memory struggles to form coherence. Bion (1967c/2013, p. 147) points out that 'from this [evolutionary memory] I wish to distinguish ideas which present themselves in response to a deliberate and conscious attempt at recall; for this last I reserve the term "memory"'. In the context of his critique of clinical procedures, Bion's intentionally recalled memory is essentially deliberately recalled based on the psychoanalyst's senses of pleasure and pain. It is pleasurable to stick to psychoanalytic theories and the patient's therapeutic history because they provide an illusory sense of certainty which helps the analyst avoid the pain provoked by listening to the unknown.

Watts' thoughts on memory by selection may have reinforced Bion's motivation to further illustrate the pieced-together nature of intentionally recalled memory:

> that element, and others like it, I class as "memories" together with recollections somewhat deliberately and painstakingly recalled, as for example when a patient pieces together a dream he thinks he has had. In contrast is a dream which is recalled suddenly, as if in a single whole. Or perhaps similarly lost as a single whole (1967b/1984, p. 127).

Both Bion and Watts discuss the scattered and incoherent nature of people's intentionally recalled memory. Bion believes that intentionally recalled pieced-together memory holds no value for psychoanalysis, while Watts asserts that the selected memories of a person's past only represent his selectively biased identity. In reality, the person's identity as a whole is intangible, constantly occurring and evolving.

The one-at-a-time method is the thought process behind the incoherent and partial representations of people's identities. Watts also discusses the one-at-a-time method used by humans to translate and comprehend the universe which occurs spontaneously and simultaneously. Watts (1957, p. 8) indicates that 'the linear, one-at-a-time character of speech and thought is particularly noticeable in all languages using alphabets, representing experience in long strings of letters. It is not easy to say why we must communicate with others (speak) and with ourselves (think) by this one-at-a-time method'. Bion here underlined the phrase 'one-at-a-time method' and commented: 'We do <u>not</u> have to — but we don't do anything else. cf. opacity of memory'. Here Bion is using memory as an example of the one-at-a-time method humans use to think thoughts, and one senses that he was already thinking about the clarity and opacity of the two different types of memory. On the one hand, intentionally recalled memory has the nature of opacity and a lack of coherence; on the other hand, evolution-like memories 'come unbidden, sharply, distinctly, with what appears to be unforgettable clarity, and then disappear leaving no trace by which they can be recaptured' (Bion,1970, p.70). Moreover, by stating 'we do not have to — but we don't do anything else', Bion might be suggesting that other types of thinking and communication exist in addition to the one-at-a-time method. He might here be thinking about reverie, dream thoughts, alpha function and Freud's evenly suspended attention as alternatives to the one-at-a-time thinking and communicative processes.

The place of memory and desire, in a Buddhist context, connects to its account of the vicious cycle or round of grasping — something to which Bion paid a significant amount of

attention throughout his annotations and underlines. Bion did not clearly form his ideas on 'no memory no desire' and sensuality until the mid to late 1960s. In 1965, he spoke for the first time at the scientific meeting of the British Psychoanalytical Society, of the major disadvantages of memory and desire (Mawson, 2014, Vol. VI, p. 3-4) prior to his formal publication of *Notes on Memory and Desire* (Bion. 1967a). The early 1960s was the gestation period of these ideas if it is true that Bion read *The Way of Zen* and other Zen texts around 1960 or 1961, it seems likely that his reading of the Buddhist abstinence from grasping and desires in conjunction with beliefs about memory would have fed into the development of his psychoanalytic theorisation of 'no memory no desire'.

On two pages, Bion sporadically underlines parts of the text that are related to 'the round of grasping'. The first is:

> man is involved in *karma* when he interferes with the world in such a way that he is compelled to go on interfering, when the solution of a problem creates still more problems to be solved, when the control of one thing creates the need to control several others (Watts, 1957, p. 49)

And the second:

> This is the familiar, everyday problem of the psychological 'double-bind', of creating the problem by trying to solve it, of worrying because one worries, and of being afraid of fear…the answer is that all grasping, even for nirvana, is futile for there is nothing to be grasped (Watts, 1957, p. 62).

The numerous underscores indicate that Bion was no doubt paying close attention to Watts' description of the compulsive nature of grasping for answers, for solutions which correlated with his evolving thoughts on intentionally recalled memory of the patient's past sessions and the desire to cure. When a person is looking for something, he creates more anxiety, fear and insecurity in the future in the face of what is not yet known. Intolerance of the unknown makes

people reach out for fictitious answers, temporary solutions, and reliefs such as memory and desire. However, more and more anxiety, fear and depression are created once the person realises that what he has grasped was only temporary, unstable and untruthful.

By 1967, Bion was very firm about the need to get rid of memory, desire, understanding and preconception. 'Do not remember past sessions. The greater the impulse to remember what has been said or done, the more the need to resist it…. Desires for results, "cure" or even understanding must not be allowed to proliferate' (Bion, 1967a, p. 272-273). Bion's assertiveness regarding the need to get rid of sensuously based memory and desire is because he realised that sensuality saturates the mental space necessary for receiving the patient. Watts (1957, p. 52) proposes that: 'the Buddha's precepts of conduct — abstinence from taking life, taking what is not given, exploitation of the passion, lying and intoxication — are voluntarily assumed rules of expediency, the intent of which is to remove the hinderances to clarity of awareness'. Bion's underlining of the last third of this sentence begs the question: was he already thinking along the line of 'no memory no desire' as an equivalent psychoanalytic rule to the Buddhist precepts for abstinence? Bion treats sensuous memory and desire as hindrances of the psychic space. Clear awareness of the mind can be achieved only if the sensuous hinderances are removed.

Further on, the idea of the psychic space enabled by the removal of hinderances, such as memory and desire, is closely connected to what Watts calls 'the highest state of consciousness'. Watts (1957, p. 92-93) comments that 'taken rather literally, many Buddhist and Taoist texts would substantiate this view — that the highest state of consciousness is a consciousness empty of all contents, all ideas, feelings, and even sensations'. Above this sentence, Bion notes 'cf. St. J of Cross: Understanding, Desire, Memory', suggesting that while reading this part of the book, he was clearly relating to his own psychoanalytic theorisation of no memory, desire or understanding. Memory, desire and understanding are the psychic

contents which need to be emptied to reach the highest state of consciousness or function for psychoanalysis. Undeniably, he was also simultaneously relating Buddhist ideas to the writings of St John of the Cross. In the editor's introduction to the *Complete Works of W. R. Bion*, Mawson (2014, Vol. VI, p. 5) reveals that Bion indicates the relationship between his ideas regarding 'no memory no desire' and St John of the Cross in his marked copy of *The Writings of St John of the Cross*. Based on the evidence mentioned above, it seems that, chronologically, his reading of both St John of the Cross and Watts' illustration of the Buddhist and Daoist highest concentration could have fed into Bion's generation of the psychoanalytic concept of 'no memory no desire'.

A final link to the complex around no memory no desire is Bion's underlining of the term 'stupid' and his annotation '? Unintell — ectual'. The adjective 'stupid' and the noun 'stupidity' conventionally hold negative connotations. However, Watts was using them in a rather positive way in the context of Taoism. The special sense of stupidity indicates the Daoist *wu-wei*, meaning non-action, not making and not striving. Intellectual reasoning has its advantages insofar as it is often organised, structured and logical. However, its disadvantages and limitations should not be neglected. The structured-ness of intellectual thinking often indicates its rigidity and concertedness. It limits the effectiveness of investigation when a rigid structure is used to study and explore the psyche and emotions which do not have observable structures. They are often unorganised by conscious logics and reasoning.

Over the majority of Bion's psychoanalytic career, he used words like 'stupid' and 'stupidity' in a rather conventional way to indicate a lack of intelligence or inability to think. However, in the *Tavistock Seminars*, Bion (1977/2014, p. 36) states:

> So there is everything to be said for making provision for leisure in which these wild ideas, these stupid ideas, these idiotic ideas can have a chance of germination, however much you may be persuaded that the result would be the birth of a monster.

Here Bion uses the word 'stupid' in a rather different sense: the stupid ideas seem to be something useful, valuable and necessary for the further growth of thinking. Additionally, in the Italian seminars, Bion (1977/2014, p. 140) further conveys that:

> If you can be wide open, then I think there is a chance that you might catch some of those wild thoughts. And if you allow them to lodge in your mind, however ridiculous, however stupid, however fantastic, then there may be a chance of having a look at them.

Anything novel beyond a person's limited experience might appear to be stupid and wild. Bion is here advocating an unsaturated openness in the face of strange, stupid and wild thoughts. Only by being open-minded can the limited human experience have a chance to expand, evolve and grow.

e) 'O'

The final theme for exploration revolves around Bion's psychoanalytic conceptualisation of 'O'. Bion (1970, p. 26) suggests: 'I shall use the sign O to denote that which is the ultimate reality represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself'. 'O' is an abstract symbol for all the terms mentioned in the quote above.

Watts (1957, p. 62-63) illustrates the meaning of the Buddhist term 'Sunyata' (voidness) as follows:

> the Sunyavada takes its name from the term *sunya*…of the conceptions of reality which the human mind can form…. Not only does the Sunyavada demolish the beliefs which one consciously adopts; it also seeks out the hidden and unconscious premises of thought and action…. Even the idea of *sunya* is itself to be voided. *It cannot be called void or not void, Or both or neither; But in order to point it out, It is called 'the Void'*.

Bion double-underlines the word ‘conceptions’ and notes: ‘won from the void and formless infinite, P.L. BK III’. Here, Bion is relating the Buddhist ‘void’ to book three of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In his own psychoanalytic writings, Bion (1965, p. 151) uses Milton’s poem to formulate his theorisation of ‘O’:

> The rising world of waters dark and deep Won from the void and formless infinite. I am not interpreting what Milton says but using it to represent O. The process of binding is a part of the procedure by which something is “won from the void and formless infinite”; it is K and must be distinguished from the process by which O is “become”.[27]

Just as with St John of the Cross and no memory no desire, it seems likely that both Milton’s ‘formless infinite’ and the Buddhist ‘sunyata’ helped Bion to corroborate and think through his theorisation of ‘O’. What is won from the darkness, the void and formless infinite is ‘K’ which is a transformation of ‘O’. Furthermore, Bion underscores ‘beliefs’, ‘seeks out the hidden and unconscious’, ‘*sunya* is itself’ and ‘called’. The hidden nature of certain aspects of the world is emphasised by Zen Buddhism. Although the ‘void’ is called the ‘void’, the hidden nature of the ‘void’ itself cannot be revealed by the name. In other words, the term ‘void’ is only the name of the thing-in-itself (O) defined by the English language. The thing-in-itself is eternally ineffable, unthinkable and undefinable.

In connection with this, Watts (1957, p. 69) remarks that ‘on the contrary, to seek to become Buddha is to deny that one is already Buddha…. In short, to become a Buddha it is only necessary to have the faith that one is a Buddha already’. On the right margin of this quote, Bion writes: ‘cf. identify[identity][28] with god — as evolved godhead’. Watts’ description of the Zen view of Buddhahood prompted Bion to relate it to the Western experience of God. In turn, it seems the connection between the Western godhead and the Eastern Buddhahood

[27] ‘K’ stands for knowledge. ‘O’ is eternally formless. However, parts of ‘O’ can occasionally bind together and eventually evolve into human knowledge. ‘K’ is won from the void and formless infinite. ‘K’ is the evolution of ‘O’ and it can be known. Nevertheless, ‘K’ is never ‘O’ because ‘O’ can never be known. It can only be become.
[28] The annotation is unclear as to whether Bion used the word ‘identity’ or ‘identify’.

helped Bion support his own thinking about 'O'. Watts' point that one can only be the Buddha while any attempt to strive for the Buddhahood is futile, is incredibly close to Bion's 1965 statement that 'the postulate is that already designated by O…. The most and the least that the individual person can do is to be it. Being identified with it is a measure of distance from it' (Bion, 1965, p. 140). In other words, being something is very different from identifying with it. At the time Bion made this annotation, he was possibly thinking about how identifying with God is merely an evolution of the godhead; it is an evolution from 'O' to 'K' which is drastically different from being 'O' and being the Buddha.

When Bion was thinking about his theorisation of 'O' while reading *The Way of Zen,* he was not only paying attention to its connection to Western philosophies, he was also pondering the equivalence between 'O' and Buddhism itself. For instance, Watts (1957, p. 70) briefly introduces the four dharmadhatus[29] which originated from the Mahayana Huayan school. He defines the second dharmadhatus 'Li'[30] as 'the "principle" or ultimate reality underlying the multiplicity of things' (Watts, 1957, p. 70). At the end of the definition, Bion writes '= O?'.

At a different point, earlier in the book when Watts is explaining the nature of abstraction and conventional signs, he makes the following analogy:

> when we say that we can think only of one thing at a time, this is like saying that the Pacific Ocean cannot be swallowed at a gulp. It has to be taken by a cup, and downed bit by bit. Abstractions and conventional signs are like the cup; they reduce experience to units simple enough to be comprehended one at a time (Watts, 1957, p. 7).

[29] *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 244) advises that 'In the MAHĀYĀNA, dharmadhātu is used primarily to mean "sphere of dharma", which denotes the infinite domain in which the activity of all dharmas takes place — i.e., the universe. It also serves as one of several terms for ultimate reality, such as TATHATĀ. In works such as the DHARMADHĀTUSTAVA, the purpose of Buddhist practice is to recognise and partake in this realm of reality'.

[30] 'Li', the dharma-realm of principle, 'refers to the singular, all-pervasive truth of suchness that unifies all individual phenomena' (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 474-475).

Bion underscores the words ‘reduce experience’ and writes beside this sentence: ‘part ≠ O. = to what can be understood’. Although conventional signs and abstraction make understanding possible, they are a reduced, partial representation of the experience itself. The original experience per se is the ‘O’ and the comprehensible abstraction and conventional signs designed for it only convey part of the original experience itself.

In another instance, Watts also uses ‘the Absolute’ to indicate the very ground of life itself. He (Watts, 1957, p. 12) explains that:

> it is unlikely that the throne would have become vacant if, in a sense, it had not been so already — if the Western tradition had had some way of apprehending the Absolute directly, outside the terms of the conventional order…. But with Taoism, as with other ways of liberation, the Absolute must never be confused with the abstract. On the other hand, if we say that the Tao, as the ultimate reality is called, is the concrete rather than the abstract, this may lead to other confusions.

Bion’s underlining of ‘apprehending the Absolute directly’ is reminiscent of the ‘direct pointing’ technique, illustrated in section C, Zen masters utilise to transmit experiential understandings to their disciples. The reading of *The Way of Zen* drew Bion’s attention to two types of directness: 1) the human being’s direct experience with the Absolute and 2) the direct transmission of experiential knowledge from people to people. It seems like his reading of Watts prompted Bion to think of human experience in a more spontaneous way.

Bion further underscores ‘the Absolute must never be confused with the abstract’ and ‘is the concrete’. At the time, he was likely thinking about the fundamental logical difference between the Western Hebrew-Christian and Eastern Taoist reasoning with respect to the Absolute itself. In the Western framework, the Absolute is often related to the abstract and God; however, within the Taoist framework, the concrete Absolute means the very fundamental nature of life itself. Furthermore, the word ‘concrete’ is understood in the West as something

that is tangible, sensible, classifiable and perceivable, while the Easterners construe it as the complex but fundamental nature of life which is essentially ineffable. Evidenced by the underlines, the Taoist way of conceiving the Absolute as the concrete may have given Bion a fresh point of view[31] on 'O'. 'O' is not an abstract concept although it appears abstract or ungraspable in the Western logical construct. The absolute 'O' is portrayed by Bion as the 'thing-in-itself' which is the very ground of nature of life and being.

In addition to the points mentioned so far, while reading *The Way of Zen* Bion was also very absorbed by the organisational aspect of Zen in relation to his theorisation of 'O'. Watts (1957, p. xiv) indicates that 'one must resist every temptation to "join the organisation", to become involved with its institutional commitments…. However, there can be no doubt that the essential standpoint of Zen refuses to be organised, or to be made the exclusive possession of any institution'. On the left margin by the second half of the quote, Bion writes: 'Like O? Like Sufis?'. The advent of 'O' represents Bion's rebellion against organised theories and he (1975/1991, p. 88) reveals that: 'O is by definition indestructible and not subject to, circumscribed by, beginnings and ends, rules, laws of nature or any construct of the human mind'. The reading of Zen's refusal to be institutionalised assisted Bion to corroborate his thoughts on O's anti-institutional nature which can never be possessed.

Although Bion seems to find resonance in Watt's portrayal of the anti-institutional aspects of Zen Buddhism, Zen Buddhism has not always been portrayed as anti-institutional by Buddhist scholars. For instance, Morten Schlütter (2008) presents Zen Buddhism as traditionally and historically highly structured based on family systems and subject to many complex government mandates. Watts' anti-establishment perception of Zen might be his own interpretation and understanding. It remains an interesting point regarding how both Bion and

[31] Bion uses the mathematical term 'vertex' to partially indicate the meaning of 'point of view'. However, they are not entirely equivalent.

Watts held anti-institutional views, which they both expressed clearly and cogently. One wonders how much Bion's anti-establishment view was due to Watts' writing and how much was due to Bion's real-life experience with parenting when he grew up, his schooling, the war and army, his personal losses in life, and with the British psychoanalytic community and the Los Angeles psychoanalytic group in America etc. It seems unlikely that Watts' anti-institutional attitude would have influenced Bion's anti-institutional views as much as Bion's personal encounters and development over time. In his late psychoanalytic career, Bion identified personally with such an anti-institutional attitude. In a 1977 letter to his children Parthenope, Julian and Nicola, Bion (1977b, p. 255) contends that: 'all institutions are stupid and try to crush the individuals inside them. If not by blame, then praise.' Bion here straightforwardly expresses his contempt for the rigidity of institutions. Moreover, during an interview with Anthony Banet, Bion (1976/2014, p. 158) reveals the reason behind his relocation to the US in 1968 at the age of seventy-one:

> People say things like "I don't want to hear any more of these new ideas…." If you start making me think of this and that, well then, I might have to bother about the troubles of Los Angeles…. I think there is always a resistance to development and change and a tendency to think what a horrible thing this maggot is that tries to animate the dung heap.

This shows Bion's frustration with the rigidity, deadness and inability to grow that he observed within the British psychoanalytic community.

2.5 Conclusion

Throughout the analysis of Bion's ample underlinings and annotations, five main themes (see introduction for details) stand out and these themes can be further represented and subsumed by three terms and phrases: experience itself, spontaneity, and open-mindedness for mental growth. Based on the careful reading and researching of Bion's annotations and

underscores, I here argue that: the material generated from his personal copy of *The Way of Zen* is genuinely informative about the connections between Buddhism and Bion's own psychoanalytic theorisations. Rather than initiating his psychoanalytic ideas, Bion's reading of *The Way of Zen* could have partially influenced his thinking on psychoanalysis. [32]

It is likely that Bion's encounter with Zen, firstly provided corroboration, confirmation and reinforcement of his own developing theorisation, which may have been important given the extent of his innovations during this period and his gradual departure from Freudian and Kleinian vocabularies; and secondly, it may have supported his ontological ideas about experience itself, spontaneity and mental growth, and particularly to develop their relevance beyond the clinical situation as eventually evidenced in *A Memoir of the Future*. In his later psychoanalytic career, Bion realised the limitations of epistemology and the usefulness of ontology with regards to mental maturation. The core of some of Bion's psychoanalytic theorisations, such as 'no memory no desire', 'reverie', 'dream thoughts', 'intuition', and 'O' is spontaneity and human experience itself.

It is, by no means, the primary concern of the present article to argue whether or not Bion was religious because the term 'religion' itself is a convention replete with preconceived memory, desire and understanding. Neither claiming that Bion is religious nor asserting that he is not would be in congruent with Bion's open-mindedness towards various types of thought. Throughout his psychoanalytic career, he observed, explored and expanded psychoanalysis by examining it from different angles (vertices) such as existing psychoanalytic theories of the time, group dynamics, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, religion, mysticism, poetry and his personal experience with his own psychoanalysis, war and patients. His engagement with Zen Buddhist thought is just one of the manifestations of his open-mindedness: only if the

[32] Lopez-Corvo (personal communication, May 3, 2019) states that 'there is no question that Zen Buddhism had a significant influence on Bion's contributions, after all, Bion was born in India, and he kept important emotional ties to this country'.

container-mind is open, will it have a chance to contain wild thoughts which would otherwise be dismissed as insanity or absurdity. Bion's open-mindedness helped him preserve his curiosity towards new thoughts and knowledge throughout his life. His open-mindedness achieved by maintaining no memory and no desire is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist practice of 'beginner's mind'.[33] On the one hand, only by sustaining the mindset of a beginner, can curiosity have a chance to survive. On the other hand, continuous mental growth depends on the beginner's openness towards experience. However, the opposite of openness is the overemphasis on expertise (unresolved omnipotent phantasy) and the urge to possess and institutionalise thoughts (including psychoanalytic thoughts themselves). The institutionalisation of psychoanalysis will eventually squeeze the life out of it just like an overly rigid container in which nothing can grow or remain alive.

Although the current article does not intend to argue that Bion was a Buddhist, it is reasonable to assert that he at least found support and corroboration of the key aspects of his own psychoanalytic thought while reading Watts' *The Way of Zen*. This argument is backed up by his overt mentions of 'O', and memory, desire and understanding along with his various annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Watts' book.

Furthermore, according to Mawson (personal communication, May 5, 2018), Bion usually did not annotate books as extensively as he did *The Way of Zen.* The unusually large number of annotations and underlinings made in *The Way of Zen* evidence Bion's profound enthusiasm for Zen Buddhism. It seems unlikely that he would have annotated the book so heavily if *The Way of Zen* merely illustrated what Bion already knew. After looking through Bion's books in his personal library, Meg Harris Williams (2005, p. 204-205) indicates that 'to judge from his own books, Bion would appear to have had little personal interest in the Judaeo-

[33] Zen 'beginner's mind' refers to an open-minded attitude which lacks any preconception even though the encountering subject falls into one's expertise. 'In the beginner's mind there is no thought, "I have attained something." All self-centred thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something' (S. Suzuki, 1970/1995, p. 22).

Christian tradition…. He was drawn to the religion and philosophy of the East — but to the poetry of the West'. In contrast with the few terms upon which Bion focused in the Western religious and mystic traditions, his close engagement with Zen thought is manifested in the various topics and terminologies to which he paid attention in his reading of *The Way of Zen*. Reading Watts may have provided Bion with a new perspective on human experience and the ontological aspect of psychoanalysis. Bion's ideas on reverie, dream thoughts and alpha function first appear in his 1962 paper *A Theory of Thinking*. Subsequently, these ideas began to appear in his psychoanalytic writings in and immediately after 1962, such as *Learning from Experience* (1962a), *Elements of Psychoanalysis* (1963) and *Transformations* (1965). Chronologically, 1962 is the year in which Bion began to pay serious attention to the process of thinking. His reading of *The Way of Zen* and other Zen literature may have partially contributed to his impetus to think through his own psychoanalytic theory on thinking if the assumption holds that he first read these Zen texts around 1960 or 1961.[34]

Bion was a controversial figure in both British and American psychoanalytic communities, and he often clashed with the prevailing orthodoxy. He was particularly critical of the way that psychoanalysis was being taught and practised in the British Psychoanalytical Society. He felt that it was too rigid and dogmatic and was not open to new ideas. Bion (1976/2014, p 158) wrote about his decision to leave the UK and move to the USA: "people say things like 'I don't want to hear any more of these new ideas….' If you start making me think of this and that, well then, I might have to bother about the troubles of Los Angeles." Additionally, Bion's wife, Francesca Bion (1995, p 17), spoke up about the reason behind Bion's eventual return to the UK: "in the early 1970s, Bion began to feel increasingly homesick

[34] Lopez-Corvo (personal communication, May 3, 2019) states that Francesca Bion informed him in 2003 that Bion bought Watts' book in Los Angeles. However, he does not remember the year and the name of the Watts' book Francesca indicated. Although Bion moved to Los Angeles in 1968, he was invited for a two week stay in Los Angeles by Albert Mason in 1967 (Mawson, personal communication, May 3, 2019). The exact year and location Bion obtained his personal copy of Watts' *The Way of Zen* remain uncertain.

for England. He also felt that he was no longer as welcome in the American psychoanalytic community. As a result, he decided to return to England in 1977." It is possible that Bion's reluctance to reference Buddhism and Alan Watts in his writings and lectures was because he felt that he would not be taken seriously by the psychoanalytic community. Buddhism and Eastern religious philosophies were not widely accepted in the psychoanalytic community at the time, and Bion may have felt that he would be dismissed if he spoke about them. Perhaps he also felt that the psychoanalytic environment at the time was too confining for him to speak freely regarding non-western religious-philosophical thinking such as Buddhism. It is also worth noting that scholars have interpreted Bion's work in various ways. Some scholars such as Rafael López-Corvo (2005, p 28) have argued that Bion's work is compatible with Buddhism, while others have argued that Bion's work is fundamentally different from Buddhism. This suggests that there is a disagreement about the single correct way in terms of the compatibility between Bion's psychoanalytic work and Buddhism. According to Bion's overall writings, seminars, lectures and recorded supervision, it seems that Bion references Saint John of the Cross and John Keats more often than Eastern philosophy. One could argue that Bion might be more influenced by the previously mentioned thinkers than Alan Watts. Nevertheless, the scarceness of Bion's reference to thinkers such as Alan Watts and Carl Jung could be due to the fact that his audiences at the time were mostly Westerners who had minimal first-hand experience in Eastern lives and thinking. Bion did not feel comfortable referencing Eastern thoughts due to his audience's lack of understanding and appreciation of them.

Furthermore, Bion often does not seem to reference writers and thinkers who have influenced his own psychoanalytic thinking. "Bion could be notably reticent when it came to the matter of explicitly acknowledging the contributions made by those authors whose ideas he tacitly drew upon during the course of developing his own innovations in psychoanalytic theory and practice." (Boyle, 2023, p 321) For instance, in a recently presented paper named 'W. R.

Bion's Annotated Reading of C. G. Jung's Memories, Dreams and Reflections', Dr Joseph Aguayo indicates firm evidence of Jung's influence on Bion. By analysing Bion's annotations in his personal copy of Jung's book, Aguayo (2023) asserts that "[Bion] he compared his own psychological interest in the writings of Christian mystics with those of Jung. Both analysts found something of central interest to their study of psychic reality in the writings of religious mystics. More particularly, it appears that Jung's ideas about clinical intuition may have served as one point of departure for Bion's later thoughts about its role in the analytical situation." According to Aguayo's analysis of Bion's annotations of Jung's book, it seems like Bion was influenced by Jung more than we previously thought. However, Bion never directly referenced Jung in his formal writings, lectures and seminars. Similar to D. W. Winnicott, it seems like Bion also has a habit of not referencing the influences he gained from other authors and thinkers. However, the fact remains that the detailed annotations and underlinings Bion made in his personal version of *The Way of Zen* are itself evidence of his interest in Alan Watts. Although Bion does not mention Watts directly in his writings, there is no indication that he did not get informed and inspired by Alan Watts.

Chapter Three: A comparison between two methods dealing with desire: Bion's "no memory no desire" and Buddhist "bare attention" mindfulness meditation

Abstract

This article is a continuation of research initiated with an article in *Psychoanalysis and History* (2019) on Wilfred Bion's underlinings and annotations in his personal copy of Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen*. In the present article, the author focuses on Bion's concept of "no memory no desire" and argues that although Bion urges for elimination of memory and desire, the very process of being barely aware of such desires could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical maternal. Informed by mindfulness and other Buddhist meditative practices, this article argues that by staying with and tolerating, instead of eliminating and suppressing, memories and desires, as Bion suggested, the memories and desires will eventually come to spontaneously generate beneficial realisations, which are vital for clinical thinking. Although one can achieve "negative capability" by trying to eliminate memory and desire, one simultaneously loses the opportunity to gain another type of intuition by staying with desire and maintaining a bare attention on it. Both "no memory no desire" and "being barely aware of desire" can lead to meaningful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent.

Keywords: memory and desire, intuition, bare attention, mindfulness, Buddhist meditation

3.1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, several attempts have been made to relate Buddhist thought to Bionian theory (Zhang 2019; Pelled 2007; Epstein 1995, 2007; Lopez-Crovo 2005, 2006;

Cooper 2001, 2002, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016; Mendoza 2010; Alfano 2005; Ivey 2015). However, fewer articles focus on Bion's idea of "no memory no desire" and sensuality in relation to its Buddhist counterpart. In a previous article (Zhang 2019), I delineated and analysed Bion's underlinings and annotations in his personal copy of Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* and observed (344-46) that Watts' remarks on "memories" might have influenced Bion's own development of "no memory no desire." Watts (1957, 92-93) argues that many Buddhist and Taoist texts substantiate the view that "the highest state of consciousness is a consciousness empty of all contents, all ideas, feelings, and even sensations." Above this sentence, Bion annotates "cf. St. J of Cross: Understanding, Desire, Memory," suggesting that he was indeed relating these sections to his own psychoanalytic theorisation of no memory, desire, or understanding. Memory, desire, and understanding are the psychic contents that need to be emptied to reach the highest state of consciousness or function for psychoanalysis (Zhang 2019, 347). In Ivey's (2015, 388) article "The Mindfulness Status of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy," he draws attention to the parallels between Buddhist meditative awareness and Bion's "reverie"[35]. Amongst the few authors who have related Bion's clinical concept of "no memory no desire" to Buddhist meditation, thus far, psychoanalyst Paul Cooper has juxtaposed the two most frequently. Cooper (2008, 296) compares Bion's "memory and desire" to S. (Shunryu) Suzuki's "gaining ideas," arguing that both Bion and S. Suzuki believe that all goals are desires that foreclose the "clarity of the present potentialities." He further argues that most authors in the field who attempt to compare Bion's "no memory no desire" with Buddhist meditation perceive both as nihilistic, which is a misreading of both. Cooper (2008, 300) further compares and integrates Buddhist "avidya" (not-knowing) with Bion's "no memory no desire": "It often

[35] Possessive containment is discussed later in this article. In a possessive containment, one of the psychoanalytic dyad experiences themselves as confined and trapped in the other's state of mind. The possessive type of containment is the opposite of "reverie," which contains and transforms the patient's unthinkable experience. Bion's "reverie" is also related to the Buddhist "bare attention" mindfulness meditation as a container delineated later on in the article. When "bare attention" is applied to memory and desire, it facilitates the containment and exploration thereof. Eventually, it leads to self-realisation at the emotional and bodily levels.

becomes crucial for the analyst to stay very still, to actively sit with the moment and to resist the defensive pull of memory and/or desire and/or understanding, which can be decentering and which can engender a loss of felt contact with the patient's experience." Moreover, Cooper (2001, 349) juxtaposes D. T. Suzuki's[36] idea of a strenuous fight against intruding ideas and Bion's injunction of "no memory no desire." Cooper (2001, 349) quotes D. T. Suzuki: "it is distinctly understood that this period of incubation, which intervenes between the metaphysical quest and the Zen experience proper, is not one of passive quietness but of intense strenuousness…. it keeps up an arduous fight against all intruding ideas…. an intense seeking, or steady looking into the abysmal darkness is no less than that" (Suzuki 1994, 53). Cooper (2001, 349) points out the similarity between D. T. Suzuki's "strenuous fight against intruding ideas" and Bion's "no memory no desire" in order to reach a mental state of F (act of faith) in the face of terrifying, unbounded, and not-yet effable darkness. In his book, *The Zen Impulse and the Psychoanalytic Encounter*, Cooper (2010, 10-11) briefly mentions an alternative connection between Bion's "no memory no desire" and S. Suzuki's work via the concept of "beginner's mind":

> S. Suzuki's (1995/1970) notion of beginner's mind, which is rooted in Dogen's teachings, parallels Bion's technique of relinquishing memory, desire, and understanding…Connections between diverse points derive from paying attention to the spirit of inquiry living behind what otherwise might become, as noted above, dead words and concepts.

Last but not least, Alfano (2005, 226-227) associates Bion's "reverie" and "no memory no desire" with the Buddhist metaphor of "waves and ocean" in terms of a state of receptiveness. Alfano (2005, 226-227) quoting Bollas, states that, "sitting in such a state of alert receptivity, this analyst can be said to have entered reverie, becoming the 'floating analyst' (Bollas 2002)."

[36] D. T. Suzuki and S. (Shunryu) Suzuki are two different Buddhist scholars.

Most of the aforementioned articles have noted the similarities between Bion and Buddhist practice in terms of refraining from desire in order to get in contact with the ineffable darkness via intuition. However, none of them has noticed the beneficial aspect of staying non-active *with* memory and desire in order to make use of them.

Bion's idea of eliminating and suppressing memory and desire in order to empty the mind may have been influenced by his childhood rearing in India by a Hindu aya (nanny) and his reading of Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads. Bion underlines page three of the *Vedanta Sutra of Badarayana* as follows: "the Self is lesser than the least, greater than the greatest. He lives in all hearts. When senses are at rest, free from desire, man finds Him and mounts beyond sorrow"[37]. It is not the intention of this article to assert that Bion is religious; instead, its central argument is that one can be aware of memory and desire and allow them to remain within the psyche-soma; eventually, they can intuitively evolve into realisations and understanding of the analyst's self in relation to the patient. Furthermore, the present article argues that Bionian psychoanalytic ideas can be further developed from a Buddhist perspective. Specifically, Bionian concepts related to his later work such as "reverie," "memory and desire," and "being at one with the ultimate reality (O)" can be thought and developed further by incorporating Buddhist meditative concepts such as "bare attention," "interdependent origination," "non-self," "Śūnyatā" (emptiness), and "Duḥkha" (suffering) embedded in the four noble truths as the core teaching of Buddhism.

3.2 Bion's notions of "memory and desire" and the methods he uses to deal with them

[37] A scan of Bion's annotation in his copy of *Vedanta Sutra of Badarayana* was provided by British psychoanalyst Chris Mawson (2019, personal communication). The annotation is also verified by the notes taken by Meg Harris Williams (2020, personal communication) when she obtained access to Bion's library.

The major development of the theorisation of "no memory no desire" occurred between 1965 and 1970, first emerging during a scientific meeting of the British Psychoanalytic Society in June of 1965. The audio recording of this meeting was later transcribed and published in the *Complete Works of W. R. Bion* edited by Dr Chris Mawson (2014, Vol. VI, 3). Furthermore, in *Catastrophic Change,* Bion (1966/2014, Vol. VI, 27) also briefly developed his thoughts on "no memory no desire" in relation to the theory of container/contained. Soon after that, in 1967, he published the well-known article "Notes on Memory and Desire." In this article, he discussed "no memory no desire" as a clinical technique, extensively albeit concisely. The conciseness of the article later stimulated a significant amount of confusion and misunderstanding among the discussants from the United States, UK, and Mexico[38] (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 133-149), to which Bion responded with further clarification. Additionally, in *Cogitations* (Bion 1992, 293), an undated outline of the conceptualisation of memory and desire are suspected to have been written by Bion sometime after the Autumn of 1967. Chris Mawson (2014, Vol. XI, 281) states that the first entry on memory in the outline was written by Bion in 1968 when he was in Los Angeles. Moreover, Bion also frequently mentioned "no memory no desire" in the Commentary section of *Second Thoughts* (Bion 1967/2014). During April of the same year, he often discussed the concept of "no memory no desire" in his Los Angeles seminars, the transcribed audio recording of which have been published as *Wilfred Bion: Los Angeles Seminars and Supervision* (Aguayo 2013). Furthermore, a relatively thorough development and discourse of "no memory no desire" appear in Bion's 1970 book *Attention and Interpretation*. Bion's next discussion of "no memory no desire" took place in 1973 and 1974 at the "Brazilian Lectures" that he gave in São Paulo (Mawson 2014, Vol. VII). Last but not least, Bion discussed "no memory no desire" during visits to New York and São

[38] Amongst the discussants, Dr John A. Lindon agreed with Bion and argued that his "no memory no desire" is a logical extension of Freud's free-floating associations (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 139-140).

Paulo between 1977 and 1978 (Mawson 2014). Bion discussed, developed, and expanded his ideas of "no memory no desire" from 1965 until the end of his life. It is one of his main clinical and theoretical concepts and is frequently referred to by later clinicians and academics.

Bion's "definition" of memory contains different connotations. In Bion's response to the discussants of his "Notes on Memory and Desire," he provides a relatively clear account of what he means by memory:

> I realise that it would be helpful if I could distinguish between two different phenomena which are both usually and indifferently called "memory". This I have tried to do by speaking of one as "evolution", by which I mean the experience where some idea or pictorial impression floats into the mind unbidden and as a whole. From this I wish to distinguish ideas which present themselves in response to a deliberate and conscious attempt at recall; for this last I reserve the term "memory". (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 147)

It appears that Bion distinguishes between two types of memory — beneficial memories to keep and unbeneficial memories to get rid of. He calls beneficial memory "evolution" and unbeneficial memory "deliberate and conscious attempt at recall." Bion firmly advocates that the psychoanalyst refrain from unbeneficial memory, i.e., memory that is consciously sought or remembered: "1. Memory: Do not remember past sessions. The greater the impulse to remember what has been said or done, the more the need to resist it" (Bion, 1967, 272). Both Bion and Buddhism attempt not to cling to desire. The Buddhist method is to stay with and accept desire while Bion wishes to resist it. In clinical settings, Bion is concerned about the intentional recall of past materials related to the patient. This includes the intentional remembering of who the patient is. In addition, Bion not only advised refraining from recalling memories that are related to past sessions, but also "what we ordinarily mean when we talk

about cases that we have seen, in scientific papers and elsewhere, and describe what we consider to be accounts of what took place" (Bion 1965/2014, 8).

Alongside memory – directed against certain attempts to use the past – Bion provided some examples of future-directed desire, which is equally a hindrance in analysis: "with regard to desire, in which I want to include things like thinking 'how nice it will be when the session is over'; or 'how nice it will be when summer comes' — all ideas of that kind, including (and this is an important point) 'how nice it would be to cure the patient'" (Mawson 2014, VI, 11). Desiring the weekend break can also affect psychoanalytic observation (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 6).

Overall, Bion spent less time on the discourse of desire than the discussion of memory, perhaps because he believed that desire and memory share the same fundamental nature. During his first 1967 seminar in Los Angeles, he states that "but if you get clear this point about desire, then you might think of memory as being the past tense of the same thing. The desire is the future tense of it — it's what you want to happen. Memory is what you want to have happened"[39] (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 6).

It seems that the most precise terms to represent the past and future tenses of the kind of experience to be avoided under Bion's injunction concerning "no memory no desire" are "intentionally recalled memory"[40] and "anticipation"[41]. These two are what Bion deems unbeneficial and recommends eliminating and suppressing. Bion said that "'desire' should not be distinguished from 'memory', as I prefer that the terms should represent one phenomenon which is a suffusion of both" (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 147).

Bion further uses the idea of possession to clarify the container/contained dynamic behind memory and desire: "'memories' can be regarded as possessions, desires, though just

[39] This quote is numbered as quote (1) for later references.
[40] Bion also named it "reminiscence." However, I believe "intentionally recalled memory" is more straightforward.
[41] The phrase "no memory no desire" is better rephrased as "no intentionally recalled memory and no anticipation."

as much ‘in’ the mind as are memories, and therefore just as much ‘possessions’, are spoken of as if they ‘possessed’ the mind” (Bion 1970, 42). Within the psychoanalytic dyad, the analyst and patient can feel as if they are being possessively “contained”[42] by each other.

When the analyst is possessively “contained” by the patient, the patient (consciously or unconsciously) has already successfully stimulated the analyst’s memory and desire. “From one vertex it might seem that the analysand was ‘blinding’ the analyst by flooding him with illumination — so many facts that the ‘obscure’ point could not be ‘seen’…Such a patient stimulates memory and desire by appearing to satisfy but without doing so; the analyst is tacitly invited to ‘remember’ all he is told” (Bion 1970, 60).

Furthermore, the patient could feel as if he is possessively “contained” by the analyst. “A certain class of patient feels ‘possessed’ by or imprisoned ‘in’ the mind of the analyst if he considers the analyst desires something relative to him — his presence, or his cure, or his welfare…If the psycho-analyst has not deliberately divested himself of memory and desire, the patient can ‘feel’ this and is dominated by the ‘feeling’ that he is possessed by and contained in the analyst’s state of mind, namely, the state represented by the term ‘desire’” (Bion 1970, 42).

Bion made clear in *Attention and Interpretation*: “I avoid entertaining desires and attempt to dismiss them from my mind” (Bion 1970, 56). Bion further proposed “the attempt to allow your desires to play as small a part as possible in the analysis. Suppress desire…. So the first experiment really is this: if you catch yourself looking at your watch, and wondering when the session is going to come to an end, stop it” (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 5-6). The technique Bion advocates to reach the mental state of “no memory no desire” is to actively suppress and stop memory and desire. Furthermore, in his New York and Sao Paulo seminars,

[42] Quotation marks are used for “contained” in order to express the negative, destructive, and possessive aspect of containment.

Bion (1977/2014, 267) states that "in practice it means that one 'consciously' attempts to exclude one's memories, hence rid oneself of memory; for the same reason one needs 'consciously' to exclude desire."

Besides using terms and phrases such as "deliberately divest," "avoid entertaining," "suppress," "stop it," "consciously attempts to exclude," "rid oneself of," Bion also uses stronger terminologies in the face of memory and desire. In the beginning of the 1970s, Bion also stated that "introspection will show how widespread and frequent memories and desires are. They are constantly present in the mind and to follow the advice I am giving is a difficult discipline[43]" (Bion 1970, 56). He then states that "these rules must be obeyed all the time and not simply during the sessions" (Bion 1967, 273).

In "Notes on Memory and Desire," Bion asks psychoanalysts to obey the rules in the clinical setting:

> This impulse can present itself as a wish to remember something that has happened… no crisis should be allowed to breach this rule. The supposed events must not be allowed to occupy the mind…. 2. Desires: The psychoanalyst can start by avoiding any desires for the approaching end of the session (or week, or term). Desires for results, 'cure' or even understanding must not be allowed to proliferate (Bion 1967, 272).

The rules about "no memory no desire" were stated by Bion with a firm and strong tone in the late 1960s.

Moreover, Bion says that "it really touches on this question of forgetting, really abolishing the part of memory in these situations. As soon as you feel that you wish you could understand what the patient said yesterday that throws light on it, forget it" (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 25). He also states that what "I would like to say is that you should spend your time banishing any memory of the patient whatsoever, in preparation for the session, and any aim

or ambition as regard to his cure" (Bion 1965/2014, 12). This is "a positive discipline of eschewing memory and desire" (Bion 1970, 31). "The 'act of faith' (*F*) depends on disciplined denial of memory and desire. A bad memory is not enough: what is ordinarily called forgetting is as bad as remembering. It is necessary to inhibit dwelling on memories and desires" (Bion 1970, 41). Bion does not simply advocate elimination of memory and desire. He also proposes an intensification of the demand to discipline, banish, and abolish them if necessary. Bion presents "no memory no desire" as an absolute rule that should not be breached under any circumstances.

However, in 1967, Bion changed his tone to a more introspective, steady, and slower approach towards memory and desire: "because I think unless you take this very slowly, you will find yourself in very deep water…and to make any attempt of this kind very cautious, very critical, and slow" (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 6). Furthermore, in "Notes on Memory and Desire," Bion (1967, 273) states that "this procedure [to get rid of memory and desire] is extremely penetrating. Therefore, the psychoanalyst must aim at a steady exclusion of memory…. He will become used to it."

In the final reference to memory and desire in response to the Los Angeles psychoanalytic discussants, Bion (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 147-148) expressed the following:

> I suggest that every psychoanalyst should make up his mind for himself by simple experimentation as to what these terms represent…. make up his mind about what he would call "memory" and "desire". When he has done this, he can proceed to the next stage of extending his suppressions of the experience he has discovered in this way. I must warn psychoanalysts that I do not think they should extend this procedure hurriedly or without discussion with other psychoanalysts with a view to consolidating each step before taking another…. In my experience this procedure makes it possible to intuit a

present “evolution” and lay the foundations for future “evolutions”. The more firmly this is done, the less the psychoanalyst has to bother about remembering.

In his later years, Bion shifted his recommendation from a quick and firm approach to embarking on a gradual, introspective, and collaborative approach towards “no memory no desire.” Nevertheless, he still advocates the suppression and elimination of memory and desire in his final quote.

When it comes to “no memory no desire,” Bion generally portrays it as a discipline that has to be strictly and militaristically obeyed. The methods he uses to deal with memory and desire are manifested by the phrases he had used over time, such as “to avoid,” “do not remember,” “forget it,” “to suppress,” “to exclude,” “to rid oneself of,” “to deliberately divest,” “to inhibit dwelling on,” “no crisis should be allowed to breach this rule,” “must not be allowed to proliferate,” “to abolish,” “to banish,” and “disciplined denial.” Overall, Bion advocates that once one recognises memory and desire introspectively, one should eliminate them as soon as possible. In other words, Bion’s approach toward desire is via a disciplined procedure of suppression and elimination.

In his later psychoanalytic writings, Bion realises the shortcomings of the method by elimination and suppression: “if you have an ache in your mind, forget it. But psychoanalysis seems to indicate that that is not good enough because when this thing has been forgotten – as I think, correctly – it goes on leading an independent existence and then gives rise to symptoms and signs of its activity although we are not conscious of it, although we have ‘forgotten’ it” (Bion 1977/2014, 251). One inference we can take from this might be that the elimination of conscious desire and memory does not indicate the elimination of the unconscious counterparts. While the conscious desire and memory are temporarily suppressed, they continue to interfere with the psychoanalytic receptivity, observation, judgment, and attention unconsciously. For instance, the desire to search for a cure (for certainty) is mostly an unconscious drive that

resides deep in the psyche. Although one can feel like one has successfully diminished memory and desire on the conscious level, it does not mean that the unconscious tendency has been eliminated. The root of desires in the unconscious mind can interfere with the analyst's attention, receptivity, observation, and judgment in an unconscious way without his/her conscious awareness. By consciously attempting to get rid of memory and desire, the most one can do is to get rid of the awareness of the unconscious desire but not desire itself.

Bion's later realisation indicates that he felt a strict and firm discipline of suppression and elimination might not be sufficient. However, he did not provide resources for thinking further about this. This is where, I argue, Buddhist meditative methods can be of help and provide further thinking regarding the strategies that can be used in dealing with memory and desire.

3.3 Similarities and differences between how the notion of "desire" is perceived and dealt with by the Buddha and Bion

In his first sermon, the Buddha spoke of the "four noble truths." Specifically, the second noble truth concentrates on the origin of pain and suffering: "it is this craving (tanhā), which produces rebirth, accompanied by passionate clinging, welcoming this and that, it is the craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence and craving for non-existence" (Narada 1980, 51). Instead of treating desire as something to eliminate as in Bion's thinking, the Buddha believes that desire is not the ultimate culprit but the craving and attachment to desire are.

In Buddhism, "tanhā" is often translated into English as "thirst, craving" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2696; Davids and Stede 2009, 330) or "hunger for, excitement, the fever of unsatisfied longing" (Davids and Stede 2009, 330). The *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2696) further states that "tṛṣṇā (tanhā) thus manifests itself as the thirst for sensory experience of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental

objects." Additionally, Harvey (2013a, 63) states that it "contains an element of psychological compulsion, a driven restlessness ever on the lookout for new objects to focus on." Thus, *tanhā'* is also very close to the meaning of the English word greed. A person who is attached to *tanhā'* is trapped in the endless vicious cycle of pain and inability to suffer pain. This is because, on the one hand, the more frequently one craves satisfaction, the more likely that one will be disappointed by the ever-changing and imperfect reality. On the other hand, the stronger the craving becomes, the more intense is the consequent dissatisfaction. In both situations, the person with insatiable cravings tends to demand further gratification, and in turn reinforces thirst, hunger, longing, restless compulsion, demand, and attachment to craving. Ultimately, the vicious cycle of compulsive attachment leads to a vicious cycle of pain. The current article argues that attachment is not the core issue, the core issue is the lack of awareness leading to the compulsive nature of attachment. When there is no awareness of the attachment process, desire gets acted upon, creating a vicious cycle of craving, dissatisfaction, and banishment. Awareness loosens the repetition of the vicious cycle because it transforms the person trapped in the action of the vicious cycle into an observer who stays still while paying close attention to the never-ending nature of the vicious cycle. "Bare attention" pulls the person out of the vicious cycle by transforming the doer into an observer.

It is my argument that the Buddha's awareness of the chain reaction of "craving" made him realise the endless nature of a vicious cycle — compulsive craving and attachment to desire leads to endless unsatisfaction. In turn, the endless unsatisfaction leads to further and intensified craving and attachment. The Buddha's bare attention and awareness toward the vicious cycle transforms craving-as-action into craving-as-realisation. The attentional strategy used by the Buddha (bare attention) to investigate desire and craving serves as a containment that leads to realisation and prevents hasty acting out.

The Buddha's attentional strategy (bare attention) towards "desire" not only supplements Bion's thinking about memory and desire, it also provides a different solution and technique for coping with desire. Bion advocates suppression and elimination of desire at the very moment the psychoanalyst becomes aware of it introspectively. However, the Buddha advocates otherwise: one does not need to make an effort to get rid of desire once one becomes aware of it. Instead, the simple continuation of noting and being aware of the existence of desire within us would contain the desire and eventually lead to spontaneous realisations about it.

In other words, the Buddha believes that trying to avoid and eliminate desire and craving is futile. The desire to suppress and eliminate desire becomes a desire itself. Instead of trying to get rid of and suppress desire, the Buddha further examined and elaborated on that which Bion did not have a chance to explore further: desire is not the issue; the issue is the strong compulsion to cling and attach to desire. By merely maintaining a longer attention span toward desire introspectively, the Buddha further examined it and had two realisations: 1) how "attachment/clinging" to what one desires comes to be and where it leads to (the step-by-step intensification of the compulsion of craving), and 2) lack of awareness of the attachment and clinging to desire and sensuality intensifies their compulsive nature and leads to a vicious cycle of pain.

The detailed realisation and understanding of the cycle of pain, desire, and sensuality contributed by the Buddha is named the "twelve links of interdependent origination." The general idea here is that "when this is present, that comes to be. From the arising of this, that arises. When this is absent, that does not come to be. From the cessation of this, that ceases" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 1952-1953). Harvey (2013a, 54). argues that "the abstract principle

expresses the general pattern found in the series of conditioned and conditioning links (*nidāna*), culminating in the arising of 'dukkha'[44], with 'dukkha' ending when these cease."

Although the twelve links are equally vital for understanding the origination of "dukkha," the sixth to ninth links are the ones most relevant to Bion's theorisation of "no memory no desire" and sensuous experiences. These are (6) sensory stimulation/contact (*phassa*) → (7) feeling/sensation (*vedanā*) → (8) craving (*tanhā*)→ (9) grasping/attachment (*upādāna*). While number (8) was discussed previously, the understanding of (6), (7), and (9) further facilitates the comprehension of "craving" because they illuminate its causes and effects.[45]

(6) The *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2462) describes the sixth link as "the sensory contact between a sense organ and a sense object, resulting in a corresponding sensory consciousness, with the function of distinguishing an object as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral." The contact does not only mean the concrete and physical touch between the sense organs and sense objects (as in appreciating a newly acquired sports vehicle); it also represents perception at the affective level (contact with a mental object). The detailed application of Buddhist ideas to the clinical situation is helpful for appreciating the parallels and differences between Buddhist ideas and Bion's ideas. From a Buddhist perspective, the moment of contact is when memory and desire originate. The analyst's sense organ is getting in touch with the patient as a sense object. Simultaneously, getting in touch with the patient as a sense object also activates the analyst's contact with his/her own internal sense object(s). At the very moment the analyst's sense organ is activated and getting in contact with the sense

[44] "Dukkha" is translated into English as "suffering" and "unsatisfactoriness" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 270). It is the first of the Buddhist "four noble truths."

[45] "Cause and effect" here does not connotate an empirical sense. It is not something that is sought extra-psychically. The "cause and effect" of the twelve links were realised by the Buddha. He was able to have the realisation because he looked intra-psychically (looking inward towards the self). He did not find proofs empirically. However, he found evidence at the emotional and intra-bodily level within the self.

object, the analyst falls into the realm of pleasure-unpleasure, which is misaligned with the ultimate reality of the patient's non-sensuous experience.

Following the contact between sense organ and sense object, (7) feeling/sensation (vedanā) is enabled by the formation of the perception originated in the sixth chain. The definition of the seventh link is "the physical or mental sensations that accompany all moments of sensory consciousness. Sensations are always understood as being one of three: pleasurable, painful, or neutral" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2801). The stages of (7) feeling/sensation and (8) craving are critical points because they determine whether or not feelings or sensations will be intensified. (9) Grasping/attachment can be thought of as a further intensification of (7) and (8), which would eventually lead to thoughtless action and compulsion.

Theravada Buddhism (Bodhi and Dhamma 2000, 80) further states that (7) feeling/sensation is "the mental factor that feels the object: it is the affective mode in which the object is experienced… the bare affective quality of an experience…Its function is experiencing, or its function is to enjoy the desirable aspect of the object. Its manifestation is the relishing of the associated mental factors." The term "enjoyment" here does not simply indicate pleasant sensations such as eating a sweet and delicious cake. It represents the origination of an urge and tendency to experience and subsequently discriminate between pleasure and unpleasure, and love and hate. On the one hand, when the object is felt as pleasant, one intends to hold on to it and to the enjoyable feelings it produces. On the other hand, one tries to eliminate the object and its accompanying feelings when it is experienced as unpleasant. Freud's pleasure principle is "one of the two principles which, according to Freud, govern mental functioning: the whole of psychical activity is aimed at avoiding unpleasure and procuring pleasure. Inasmuch as unpleasure is related to the increase of quantities of excitation, and pleasure to their reduction, the principle in question may be said to be an economic one" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973/2006, 323). However, Theravada Buddhism's view on pleasure

is very different from Freud's. Freud's pleasure-unpleasure principles focus on humans' instinctual tendency to maintain a homeostatic state by reducing excitation; however, Theravada Buddhism emphasises the human tendency to hold on to and attach to excitement too tightly, eventually resulting in pain and suffering. From a Buddhist perspective, overattachment to either pleasure or unpleasure eventually results in pain and suffering. Bion perceives memory and desire in a similar way — as mental objects that can be either pleasant or unpleasant. The reason he advocates eliminating them from the psyche-soma (subjectivity) is the intention to maintain the negatively capable state of mind in the face of the unknown before hastily leaping into the pleasure-unpleasure state of mind desperate for an illusory certainty. In this respect, Bion's intention to eliminate memory and desire is closer to Theravada Buddhism's view on desire in comparison to Freud's — unmanaged memory and desire quickly lead to the discrimination of pleasure or unpleasure (excitation), which occupies the subjectivity and hinders the psychoanalyst's receptivity to patients.

Feelings and sensation (vedanā) can be seen as a mild form of (8) craving (tanhā). "Tanhā" becomes manifested when a person is further attached to the accumulation of the constant and unbearable bombardment of sensation/feelings. When it comes to memory and desire, Bion started by using phrases such as "to exclude," "forget it," and "to deliberately divest," before then embarking on much stronger injunctions such as "no crisis should be allowed to breach this rule," "must not be allowed to proliferate," and wrote of the need "to abolish" and "banish" them. Over the years of his psychoanalytic career, did Bion become more aware and readier to share that attachment to desire impedes the receptiveness for the patient?

The next chain in the "twelve links of interdependent co-arising" is (9) grasping/attachment ("upādāna"), which originates based on the manifestation of "tanhā" and all other previous links in the chain. "Clinging is regarded as a more intense form of craving,

with craving defined as the desire not to separate from a feeling of pleasure, the desire to separate from a feeling of pain, or as a non-diminution of a neutral feeling. 'Upādāna' is a stronger, and more sustained, type of attachment, which is said to be of four types" (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2728). The first type is the clinging to sensuality. "Grasping at sensual pleasure is simply an intensification of sensual craving: the mind wanting to hold on to the object of desire such that the whole mind-set is coloured by sense-desire and it loses its centre of balance" (Harvey 2013b, 57). Bion thought that sensuous desire is the problem while the Buddha believed that the intensifying tendency and compulsion to attach and cling to sensuous desire might be where the issue lies. In other words, Bion wishes to eliminate and suppress desire itself while the Buddha advocates staying with the "clinging" and "attachment" to desire in order to experience, tolerate, and examine them. While the Buddha tries to make peace with desire by maintaining an observant stance, Bion advocates fighting against it. However, what Bion might not seem to realise is that the urge to fight against memory and desire becomes yet another form of desire. It is interesting to notice that the Buddha's way of dealing with desire by staying with and tolerating it is very similar to Bion's idea of containment. However, when it comes to memory and desire, Bion did not seem to apply the idea of containment to it.

Although Bion stated that "'desire' should not be distinguished from 'memory', as I prefer that the terms should represent one phenomenon which is a suffusion of both" (Aguayo and Malin 2013, 147), he did not elaborate on what the common phenomenon, the suffusion of both, is. At the surface level, the manifestation of the common phenomenon seems to have past and future tenses. Nevertheless, underlying the temporal phenomena, it is always a tendency, restlessness, agitation or an urge that is maneuvering in the psyche-soma at the present moment. While Bion only briefly insinuated on the common phenomenon suffusing both "memory" and "desire," the Buddha elaborated on it in the second noble truth. Thus, the present article argues that the Buddha's elaborations on "desire" in the second noble truth could complement and

supplement Bion's few elaborations on the common phenomenon that underlies "memory" (intentionally recalled memory) and "desire" (anticipation).

Both Bion and the Buddha examined the nature of desire and sensuality. Bion (1965/2014, 8) states that:

> When we go into this matter further – and I am talking now specifically of the way in which I use these terms – the elements about which I am concerned are, really, sensuous images. That is, both desires and memories are spoken of in terms which are derived from a background of sensuous experience.[46]

In my previous article, I (Zhang 2019, 347) argued that "Bion's assertiveness regarding the need to get rid of sensuously based memory and desire coincides with his recognition that sensuality saturates the mental space necessary for receiving the patient." Bion thinks that memory and desire should be eliminated because they are sensually based. "[T]he scope [of sensuality] is relatively limited" (1965/2014, 9). Thus, he argues that psychoanalytic observation has nothing to do with sensuality. "It is not concerned with sense impressions or objects of sense…. Of its reality he [the analyst] has no doubt. Yet anxiety, to take one example, has no shape, no smell, no taste" (Bion 1967, 272). Bion here is concerned with the differences between sensuous experience (phenomenon) and the psychic reality as the thing-in-itself (noumenon). On the one hand, what can be sensed by the sense organs (five senses) is a phenomenon. On the other hand, noumenon is the thing-in-itself without the interference of humans' subjective mind, perception, and reasoning. "Memory" and "desire" are phenomena that are considered as of secondary importance by Bion in the face of the

[46] Bion not only discusses sensuous desire as the thing-in-itself or experience-in-itself, but also the sensuous images, descriptions, and "sensuous accompaniments of emotional experience" (Bion 1967/2014, VI, 205) used to manifest and communicate the sensuous experience. For instance, the terms "memory" and "desire" are the descriptions of the same underlying sensuous experience. In terms of "no memory no desire," Bion advocates eliminating both the underlying sensuous experience and the tendency to describe that experience. Thus, two levels of urges can spiral out of control without awareness. One is the experience of desiring itself, the other is the urge to manifest and communicate the experience of desiring. Bion wishes to eliminate desire at, at least, the two levels of desiring just mentioned, whilst the Buddha recommends the experiential observation of various levels of desiring.

patient's psychic reality. "If the mind is preoccupied with elements perceptible to sense it will be that much less able to perceive elements that cannot be sensed" (Bion 1970, 41). According to Bion, what is of primary concern for the analyst should be the formless noumenon, the thing-in-it-self and the ultimate reality of the patient's painful psyche, which can't be sensedbut can be intuited. "Awareness of the sensuous accompaniments of emotional experience are a hindrance to the psychoanalyst's intuition of the reality with which he must be at one" (Bion 1967, 272).

In comparison with Bion's view on "desire" as a hindrance to attuning with emotional truth, the Buddha believes that one of the functionalities of mindfulness meditation (bare attention) is to assist the practitioner to get in touch and stay with his/her own desires and cravings and various thoughts and bodily sensations before, during, and after their occurrence in order to further understand them and let subsequent realisations spontaneously come to be. The Buddha's realisation is similar to the object-relational exploration of one's own desires as internal objects that reside in one's consciousness and unconscious. The difference between object-relations therapy and Buddhist mindfulness meditation is that compared to the former, the latter does not assume that one's close relationship with an external other necessitates self-exploration. The Buddha's proposed method is to look inwardly into the depth of the self. In other words, the Buddha advocates a self-orientated examination of one's own internal object-relations and affects: although desires and cravings are irritating, they are, after all, part of ourselves. Thus, examination of one's own desires and cravings is necessary. In Bion's terminology, the Buddhist mindfulness meditation serves the function of exploring, linking, and eventually containing[47] one's desires and cravings instead of acting them out by desiring to get rid of them.

[47] It is always partial containment. There is no such thing as complete containment.

Bion thought that “desire” prevents the psychoanalyst and analysand from getting in touch with the psychic reality while the Buddha thinks otherwise. The Buddha believes that desire is part of the experience of the psyche-soma of which the practitioner also needs to be aware. The Buddha emphasises the usefulness of looking at one’s own “desire” through mindfulness meditation. From a clinical perspective, because the Buddha looked at “desire” from a different angle and found value in it for psychic growth, his detailed thinking on “desire” might provide a useful supplement to Bion’s few considerations with respect to the utility of the “desire” he urged to eliminate.

In Bion’s psychoanalytic framework, “memory” and “desire” seem to be portrayed as hindrances that need to be alienated and detached from the self, whilst the Buddha’s solution for “memory and desire” is very different. He believes that one needs to keep “desire” in mind, tolerate it, and further examine it in order to truly let it be. This tolerance of desire proposed by the Buddha aligns with Bion’s idea of containment. However, Bion somehow did not apply his idea of containment to memory and desire. “Letting be” can be understood as making peace with “desire” and being less compulsive towards and attached to desire — neither attach to it nor try to get rid of it. In other words, the Buddha provides an alternative solution to dealing with desire. Instead of trying to detach from it, the Buddha proposes acknowledging it, observing it, and examining it. Staying with and observing desire can generate many realisations and understandings about the psychoanalyst him/herself and the way patients make us feel. Bion’s mother-infant container/contained model (mother’s reverie) is very similar to the Buddha’s idea of staying with, tolerating, and subsequently letting realisations come to be. Those articles, mentioned in the introduction, which attempt to link Bion and Buddhism via mindfulness and containing reverie make a stronger case than those that straightforwardly propose “no memory no desire” as the goal of Buddhist meditation.

Bion is correct that patients' psychic reality has nothing to do with sensory inputs and outputs, and intentionally recalled memory and anticipation are hindrances in the face of the exploration of the patient's psychic truth. However, what Bion did not seem to take into consideration is that "memory" and "desire" per se are manifestations of psychoanalysts' and patients' internal reality at another level. At least in his statement of "no memory no desire," it appears that Bion did not realise the usefulness of "memory" and "desire" and he therefore advocated getting rid of them. He has a good intention to deprive "memory" and "desire" in order to open up the psychic space and receive the patient. However, it is also noteworthy that Bion's injunction to get rid of "memory" and "desire" essentially creates another "desire" for elimination – the desire to get rid of desires. Does the desire to get rid of desires fill up the space Bion wishes to empty for the reception of patients in the first place? This is a question worth pondering.

3.4 Conclusion

The very process of being barely aware and mindful of the desires Bion is eager to eliminate could generate beneficial emotional understanding that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle (vertex) of examining clinical material. Informed by mindfulness and other Buddhist meditative practices[48], the current article argues that by staying with (tolerating), instead of eliminating and suppressing memories and desires as Bion suggested, the memories and desires will eventually generate spontaneous and beneficial realisations that are vital for clinical thinking.

[48] In the context of Western psychotherapy, mindfulness practice is often named MBI (mindfulness-based intervention). The two most commonly implemented forms of mindfulness in the Western psychotherapeutic settings are MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) introduced by Kabat-Zinn (2003) and MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy). During the past three to four decades, mindfulness is often depicted in the West as "a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment" (Zhang et al., 41).

On the one hand, in Zen Buddhist practice, practitioners are instructed to be open and aware of the desires welling up in the psyche-soma while meditating. On the other hand, Bion believes that desire and memory are harmful for cultivating the receptive mind that is essential for taking the patient in and the subsequent "evolution." In other words, at least in his statement on "no memory no desire," Bion rejects (was closed to) desire while mindfulness accepts (is open to) desire introspectively. The current article argues that Buddhist thought regarding mindfulness and meditative processes can aid and further Bion's thinking and practice regarding memory and desire. In the Grid, the essential "mental" function that transforms beta elements into alpha elements is the capacity to tolerate discomfort (containment and negative capability). When the desire that is deemed harmful is tolerated for long enough, it will generate beneficial emotional realisations and intuitions — a very bodily psychic understanding that cannot be easily expressed by existing languages.

The Buddhist staying with and meditating on impulsive desires resulted in the realisation of "interdependent origination" — how the grip of desire becomes tighter and tighter and eventually becomes possessive. In other words, the Buddha figured out how a person can fall into a trap of being overly attached to desire and being possessed by it. The issue is not desire itself, but the gradual tightening of attachment and clinging to it. Based on the realisation of the interdependent origination of desires, the Buddhist becomes more mindful of the internal dynamics of the coming and going of desires and the intensification of the grip of desires, urges, and impulses. Consequently, the Buddha further realised the method of letting be of desires, instead of attempting to eliminate them, which can easily manifest as being possessed by desire per se. When an analyst is trying to eliminate difficult experiences such as memory and desire, it either distracts her/him more or it interferes with her/his emotional process and receptiveness in an unconscious way. The Buddhists stay with the pain and impulsiveness of desire and subsequently come to realisations (Bion terms it "thinking") that result in a further

understanding of the self (containment and an improvement of openness towards the self and others). In other words, the Buddhist "letting go" is actually non-actively staying with difficult emotions such as memory and desire and letting the realisation come to be in a spontaneous and intuitive way. The Buddhists realise that it is impossible to eliminate pain and suffering (memory and desire) by cutting them out of consciousness (at least not for long); thus, they choose to stay with them, "think" about them, and eventually be content with them while remaining extra mindful of them. Mindfulness (being aware of memory, desire, and the consequential hurt, pain, and impulses at the present moment) is itself a form of tolerance in comparison with Bion's attempt to eliminate and suppress desire and memory, which can turn into a form of acting out. In order to be content with and make use of memory and desire, one needs to introspect them, be aware of them, and examine them. This process will eventually result in realisations. While Bion develops a theory of thinking and container-contained, he does not appear to have made the connection to the benefit that could derive from the thinking of and containment of memory and desire. In order to "think" about the pain derived from memory and desire, it is necessary to stay with, be open to and aware of, and examine the pain introspectively. The staying, openness, awareness, and examination are the essence of Buddhist "mindfulness" meditation and Bion's clinical idea of containment.

In terms of dealing with desire, the fundamental differences between the Buddhist practice of mindfulness (moment-to-moment tracing) towards desire and Bion's psychoanalytic recommendation of 'no memory no desire' might lie in their perceptions of duality between the sensuous and non-sensuous. Non-duality is one of the core principles of many schools of Buddhism---especially for Zen Buddhism. For instance, in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Kapleau (1965/2000, p 398) states that,

> According to Buddhism, the notion of an ego, that is, awareness of oneself as a discrete individuality, is an illusion. It arises because, misled by our bifurcating intellect (the sixth

> sense) into postulating the dualism of "myself" and "not-myself," we are led to think and act as though we were a separated entity confronted by a world external to us. Thus in the unconscious the idea of "I," or selfhood, becomes fixed, and from this arise such thought patterns as "I hate this, I love that; this is mine, that is yours." Nourished by this fodder, the ego-I comes to dominate the personality, attacking whatever threatens its position and grasping at anything which will enlarge its power. Antagonism, greed, and alienation, culminating in suffering, are the inevitable consequences of this circular process.

The Zen Buddhist does not advocate the duality between 'I' and what is not 'I' --- the universe and I are interconnected as a whole, and there is no fundamental differentiation between the two. In terms of sensuality and desire, the Zen Buddhist also does not distinguish between sensuality and non-sensuality. The Zen concept of "voidness" signifies the ultimate experience (emptiness) that underpins all phenomena, encompassing not only Bion's notion of "O", the ultimate reality but also "K", the knowing. In other words, in the eyes of a Zen Buddhist, desire is part of oneself which is impossible to be eliminated. Bion seems to hold a very clear dualistic notion regarding sensuality and non-sensuality in his early career during the 1960s while thinking about and emphasizing 'no memory no desire'. At the time, Bion borrowed and reinterpreted Kant's conceptualisation of the 'thing-in-itself' to represent the non-sensuous ultimate reality 'O' in comparison with the sensuously based K (knowledge/knowing). "O does not fall in the domain of knowledge or learning save incidentally; it can 'become', but it cannot be 'known'" (Bion, 1970; p 26). Essentially, Bion advocates a dualistic perception between the non-sensuous O and the sensuous K at the time when he believed that getting rid of memory and desire is necessary. Bion repeatedly stated that the analyst's aim/concern should be O instead of K. "The analyst must focus his attention on O, the unknown and unknowable…. He knows phenomena by virtue of his senses but, since his concern is with O, events must be

regarded as possessing either the defects of irrelevancies obstructing, or the merits of pointers initiating, the process of 'becoming' O" (Bion, 1970, p 27). Because Bion believed there is a distinction between the non-sensuous ultimate reality and the sensuous desire, he thought the technique of 'no memory no desire' is necessary to help the analyst stay focused on the non-sensuous ultimate reality of the patient.

Bion advocates getting rid of memory and desire in the hope of intuiting a state of receptivity and at-one-ment with O (the truth of the patient's suffering). Getting rid of memory and desire could stimulate a type of intuition (negative capability) that aids the analyst in getting in touch with the unbounded darkness of the ultimate reality. Nevertheless, the old saying "you lose something, you gain something" is undoubtedly true. The current article argues that a different technique from what Bion advocates leads to intuitive realisations. Although one can achieve negative capability by trying to eliminate memory and desire, one simultaneously loses the opportunity to gain another method leading to intuition by staying with desire and maintaining a bare attention to it. There are many types of intuition that can benefit psychoanalysis; both "no memory no desire" and "being barely aware of desire" can generate different routes to the ultimate. Both methods are two leaves of the same sprout. Both can lead to fruition when they meet the right person with the right talent at the right moments.

Bion did not advocate tracing memory and desire or the causes and effects of suffering. Instead, his approach involves getting rid of the causes and effects, at least temporarily, within one's internal experiences. Thus, there is a clear difference between Bion's method of 'no memory no desire' and the Buddhist meditative 'bare attention' mindfulness technique in dealing with desire and the sensuous. Human experience seems to exist at many levels simultaneously. Bionian psychoanalyst James Grotstein (2000, p 281) speaks of many dimensions of the human psyche in his book *Who Is the Dreamer, Who Dreams the Dream?: A Study of Psychic Presences*. "Perhaps what unites all of us who read (and who have listened

to) Bion is a conviction that he was on to something about psychoanalysis that was just beyond and yet, paradoxically, just within, our ken, something that thrust psychoanalysis into unparalleled perspectives and unheard of dimensions." Meaningful realisations can be reached at different levels of experiences, such as the non-sensuous emphasised by Bion and the level of mindfulness, which tracks the causes and effects of memory and desire. In addition, Buddhist scholar Bhikkhu Bodhi (2000) discusses many levels of the human mind such as the four establishments of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind-objects, and mindfulness of mental qualities in his book *TheConnected Discourses of the Buddha*. The Buddhist mindfulness introspective method is not limited to the tracing of memory and desire; it only uses the tracing method to ground oneself at the seemingly sensuous level in order to create a pathway towards the non-sensuous, which eventually converges with Bion's goal of accessing the non-sensuous and ultimate reality of the human experience. Both Bion's 'no memory no desire' and the Buddhist mindfulness method seem to function at many levels of human experience. People in different states of mind and body might experience these concepts and methods differently. Different introspective methods suit different cultures and practitioners with different mind-body states.

Chapter Four: A comparison between Paul Cooper and Mark Epstein's approaches to Buddhist meditative stances in relation to Bion and other psychoanalytic paradigms

Abstract

This article is a continuation of research initiated with an article accepted by The American Journal of Psychoanalysis (2022) on the comparison between Bion's "no memory no desire" and Buddhist "bare attention" mindfulness meditation. Although the previous attempted to compare, contrast and combine Buddhist ideas and psychoanalysis with various fundamental rationales, few have focused on the cultivation and development of Buddhist meditative and psychoanalytic attentional states. Amongst the various authors who attempt to connect psychoanalysis and Buddhism, American psychoanalyst Paul Cooper and psychiatrist Mark Epstein stand out as the two most important contributors. In addition, they focus some of their interest on the juxtaposition and integration between psychoanalytic ideas – including approaches drawn from the insights of W. R. Bion, Sigmund Freud, and D. W. Winnicott, and Buddhist meditative ideas. One of the main goals of the current article is to look closely into Epstein and Cooper's work on Buddhist and psychoanalytic attentional states in the hope that the insights drawn from this material will complement, aid and advance the training and techniques for developing what Freud originally termed 'evenly hovering' and 'evenly suspended attention'. It is important to look more closely at Epstein and Cooper's work, in the context of attempts to introduce mindfulness and other Buddhist attentional techniques into psychotherapy, and to correlate such attentional states with what is happening in psychoanalysis. The current article focuses on the systematic review and comparison of the innovations of Epstein and Cooper in developing specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis, drawing on aspects of Buddhist meditation in hope of isolating what is therapeutically beneficial for relieving the pain and suffering of the patient.

Keywords: Bion, Paul Cooper, Mark Epstein, Buddhist meditation, attention, Bion, Freud, Winnicott

4.1 Introduction

The present article has grown out of a series of studies on Bion and Buddhism. In the first article, Zhang (2019) provides concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen*. It also then distinguishes five main connections between Bion and his interests in Buddhism – the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality'). In a second article, Zhang (2022) focuses on Bion's concept of "no memory no desire" and argued that whereas Bion urged for the elimination of memory and desire in the analyst, allowing oneself to remain minimally aware of such desires, without acting on them – as advocated in certain strands of Buddhist meditative practice – could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical material. Both "no memory no desire" and "being minimally aware of desire" can lead to meaningful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent. The second article has led to a further research interest in the actual quality of attentional states as a way of thinking about the overlap between Buddhism and psychoanalysis.

Over the past five decades, many authors have tried to juxtapose Buddhist meditative ideas and psychoanalysis. Christensen and Rudnick (1999) focus on the enriching effect of Zen Buddhism on the countertransference work in psychoanalysis. They demonstrate a case study in which Zen awareness practices assisted the psychotherapist in staying closely with the mental and bodily experiences of a projective identification situation resulting in a

psychoanalytic shift. Engler (1983) points out that both Buddhism and psychoanalysis have the same goal of alleviating mental suffering. He juxtaposes both in terms of the sense of self. He notices that while psychoanalysis emphasises the importance of becoming somebody, Buddhism points out the necessity to become nobody. Kutz and colleagues (1985) tried to bring forth a uniform theoretical framework for incorporating both Buddhist mindfulness meditation and psychotherapy. They hypothesise that the mechanistic differences between the two psychological traditions allow them to complement one another in terms of the framing of self-observation. Rubin (1985) in his article 'Meditation and psychoanalytic listening' proposes two ways that Buddhist meditation can enhance psychoanalytic listening. One is that meditative techniques can be used to train psychoanalysts. The other is that analysts can meditate before sessions. "Combining the best aspects of the Eastern meditative and Western psychoanalytic models of listening provides the most complete means of truly cultivating optimum listening" (Rubin, 1985, p. 609).

In a more recent publication 'The mindfulness status of psychoanalytic psychotherapy', Ivey (2015, p. 382) argues that "the analytic attitude is inherently and necessarily mindful insofar as it invites psychotherapy patients to observe and tolerate defensively avoided experiences". Ivey (2015, p. 382) asserts that psychoanalysis goes further by emphasising the interpretive collaboration in the context of transference experiences. Furthermore, Pelled (2007) did a comparative study between Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Bion's concept of 'attention', and Bion's idea on the state of 'reverie' and Buddhist state of equanimity. She (Pelled, 2007, p. 1508) argues that "enhancement of the ability of reverie, or improving the inner container such that it can hold any content while unmoved by desire, is the purpose of Buddhist practice." Additionally, Alfano (2005) uses intersubjective object relations, Buddhist psychology and perinatal research to understand her clinical experience with her patient. She formulates a state of being called 'transcendent attunement' "in which occurs a transient and

nonpathological suspension of duality between self and other and that constitutes an atemporal mode of experiencing."

Purpose and Hypothesis of the Present Study

Although the above-mentioned authors attempted to compare, contrast and combine Buddhist ideas and psychoanalysis with various fundamental rationales, few have focused on the cultivation and development of Buddhist meditative and psychoanalytic attentional states. Amongst the various authors who attempt to connect psychoanalysis and Buddhism, American psychoanalyst Paul Cooper and psychiatrist Mark Epstein stand out as the two most important contributors. In addition, they focus some of their interest on the juxtaposition and integration between psychoanalytic ideas – including approaches drawn from the insights of W. R. Bion, Sigmund Freud, and D. W. Winnicott, and Buddhist meditative ideas.

One of the primary purposes of the current article is to look closely into Epstein and Cooper's work on Buddhist and psychoanalytic attentional states in the hope that the insights drawn from this material will complement, stimulate thinking, aid, and advance the training and clinical techniques in psychoanalysis. Potential insights which could emerge from the comparison between the two are 1) the nuanced differences and similarities between the two authors' description of the Buddhist 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' meditative techniques could further lead to new findings about the rationales behind the fact that both authors and many other experienced Buddhist practitioners have recommended practising the combination of the two techniques together or interchangeably. 2) its connection to and potential improvement of existing trauma-centred psychotherapies such as the EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) psychotherapy, and very importantly, 3) the potential indication of the connections between the Buddhist meditative techniques mentioned above and Bion's clinical ideas such as the 'protomental system', 'O', the 'ultimate reality', 'the

screen' and various in-between experiences Bion describes as a conversation between psyche and soma in his last book *The Memoir of the Future* etc. Most importantly, 4) the thinking and perspectives generated by both authors focus on the relationships between the Buddhist 'attentional manipulation' techniques and Bion's descriptions and emphasis on the concepts of 'attention' and 'functions' of body and mind. The reasons behind my belief that the insights mentioned above can be derived from the comparison between the two authors' writings on Buddhist and psychoanalytic attentional states are 1) their similarities, such as both authors dedicate their training, experiences, studies and writings to the juxtaposition between Buddhist and psychoanalytic attentional states and 2) their differences in personal development, career orientations, views, theoretical and clinical frameworks on the connections between Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and their different writing styles and intended audiences. It is my intuition that insights will grow out of their similar yet diverse experiences of the same or similar attempts to bring together psychoanalytic attentional and Buddhist meditative stances.

It is important to look more closely at Epstein and Cooper's work in the context of attempts to introduce mindfulness and other Buddhist attentional techniques into psychotherapy and to correlate such attentional states with what is happening in psychoanalysis. The current article focuses on the systematic review and comparison of the innovations of Epstein and Cooper in developing specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis, drawing on aspects of Buddhist meditation. The current article hypothesises that insights into what is therapeutically beneficial for relieving the pain and suffering of the patient might reside in or would grow out of the systematic review of Epstein and Cooper's work in developing attentional states. The detailed reading and comparison between the two authors' writings in attentional states are important for the purpose of generating the four potential insights outlined above because of their different and diverse personal development, career orientations, views, theoretical and clinical frameworks on the connections between

Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and their different writing styles and intended audiences will lead to richness in maternal from very different angles, perspectives or 'vertexes' in Bion's words. In other words, the similarities and differences derived from the different experiential angles both authors perceive and practice might bring an opening space for fresh insights to grow.

4.2 'Concentration'

In their various written works, Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper have discussed two major Buddhist meditations --- 'mindfulness' and 'concentration'. Particularly, Cooper (Cooper, 1999, p 73-74) mention the analogy that 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' are often likened to the two wings of the meditation 'bird'. The two meditation techniques cannot function without each other.

In his article Beyond the Oceanic Feeling: Psychoanalytic Study of Buddhist Meditation, Mark Epstein (1990), drawing on previous studies (Benson, 1975; Davidson and Goleman, 1977; Benson, Arns, and Hoffman, 1981), defines Buddhist concentration meditation as follows:

> concentration practices stress the ability of the mind to remain steady on a single object. Such techniques provide a subjective feeling of relaxation and, if practiced to an extreme, can produce a state of trance or absorption. These practices, where attention is restricted to a single object such as a sound, a sensation, or a thought, are related to hypnosis, both in the method used and in the physiological state produced.

According to Epstein, the gist of concentration meditation is to focus one's attention on a single meditative object internally such as a sensation or externally such as a sound (sound can also be internal). Whilst sharing some similar understandings regarding

concentration meditation, Cooper's (2010, p 37**)** quotation of Phillip Kapleau (1965/2000, p 12-13) provides more details about the actual objects of concentration:

> Meditation, in the beginning at least, involves fixing one's mind on an idea or an object. In some types of Buddhist meditation, the meditator envisions, contemplates, or analyses certain elementary shapes, holding them in his mind to the exclusion of everything else. Or he may concentrate in a state of adoration upon his own created image of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, or meditate on abstract qualities as loving- kindness and compassion. In Tantric Buddhist systems of meditation, mandala containing various seed syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet are visualised and dwelt upon in a prescribed manner.

In addition to objects of concentration such as sound, sensation and thought indicated by Epstein, Cooper's quotation of Kapleau expands the objects of concentration to an idea, an external object such as elementary shapes, more complex shapes such as mandalas, a feeling (adoration of the Buddha image) or an abstract state of mind-body such as loving-kindness and compassion. Additionally, influenced by his Soto Zen training (Cooper, 2023 p 160-165), Cooper, in his later writing, emphasises an objectless and goalless psychosomatic state called 'shikantaza' (just sitting) exclusively. Cooper finds 'shikantaza' much closer to Freud's notion of evenly suspended attention. Epstein and Cooper's various ideas on 'concentration' seem to indicate that what is important in concentration meditation is not the object of concentration itself. Instead, it is the calm state of mind and body produced by the process of meditation. In other words, what is important is not the object of concentration but the inner state of concentration itself. The object of concentration can be anything, including an aimless and goalless psychosomatic state that is deemed suitable based on the meditator's individual differences and temperaments. The object of concentration can take both abstract forms, such as a mental state (such as a goalless state), or concrete forms, such as a specific internal or external image, sensation, or feeling.

Throughout their writings regarding Buddhism, psychoanalysis and psychology, Paul Cooper seems to be influenced more heavily by Zen Buddhism, whilst Mark Epstein has an emphasis on Zen Buddhism but also seems to synthesise different Buddhist traditions such as Tibetan Buddhism. For instance, in his book *Going to pieces without falling apart*, Epstein (1998, p. 141-148) elaborates on his thinking of the Tibetan 'mandala' and the spiritual aspect of love making.

When it comes to 'concentration' meditation, Paul Cooper (2010) adds from a Zen perspective that:

> it is to be distinctly understood that this period of incubation, which intervenes between the metaphysical quest and the Zen experience proper, is not one of passive quietness but of intense strenuousness, in which the entire consciousness is concentrated at one point. Until the entire consciousness really gains this point, it keeps up an arduous fight against all intruding ideas. (p 100-101)

According to Cooper, concentration mediative states are not easily achieved. Rather, it takes an effort exerted by the ego The point Cooper emphasises is the 'arduous fight' against distractions. In other words, concentration practice requires a tremendous amount of energy from the ego. Cooper (2002; 2010) often emphasises a state of concentration named by him as 'total exertion'. "Dogen's notion of gujin or 'total exertion' is instructive…. The person experiencing the situation totally becomes it. He is not thinking about it he is it. When he does this, the situation is completely revealed and manifested'. Thus, 'total exertion' refers to an opening that calls for a response that 'is never anything passive but can be quite strenuous'". (2002, p. 111)

Epstein (2013; p 88), however, proposes something similar with a very different stance "bring your attention back to the sounds. It might be after a moment or two, or it might be after a whole cascade of thoughts; it doesn't matter…. Treat your mind the way

you would a young child who doesn't know any better. Be gentle but firm. Meditation means bringing your mind back when you notice it has wandered". In another instance, Epstein (2018) elaborates further:

> but Right Concentration asks us to persevere. Beginning meditators struggle with this very simple task. Whenever they notice that their attention has strayed, they return it to the central object. Lapses in attention happen not once or twice but over and over and over again. Sometimes people notice right away, and sometimes not for a long while, but Right Concentration suggests that we do not judge ourselves for our failings. Ancient texts compare the process of concentration to the taming of a wild animal. It is a difficult endeavour, full of ups and downs, but one that yields reliable results if practiced diligently and with patience. (p 170)

Both Cooper and Epstein point out the fact that concentration meditation or meditation in general takes a tremendous amount of resolution and patience. While Cooper often takes a stance of a Samurai taking 'total exertion' fighting against distraction and guarding concentration, Epstein takes the stance of a gentle, firm and conscientious parent in the face of an easily distracted young child. In other words, Cooper and Epstein emphasise different actions in the face of distraction and inattention. Cooper emphasises the 'fighting against' it whilst Epstein emphasises the process of actions from 'simply noticing' the inattention to 'bringing back' the attention.

Cooper states that: "for example, within Zen itself, various approaches to zazen might include choiceless awareness, following the breath, counting the breath either on inhalations, exhalations or both, concentrating on the wato (head word) of a kōan such as "Mu," or some combination of any of these methods" (p. 24). In comparison with Cooper, Epstein focuses more on the details of verbs, and actions could be taken to implement the concentration practice.

4.3 From ‘Concentration’ to ‘Mindfulness’

In addition to the detailed delineation of ‘concentration’ meditation above, both Epstein and Cooper, at some point of their writings, seem to indicate that the practice of ‘concentration’ can form a foundation for, or stepping stone towards, ‘mindfulness’ meditative practices.

In terms of concentration meditation, both Epstein and Cooper mention the concentration on breathing and body. Both of their emphases on the body resonate with French philosopher and psychologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (2002, p. 169) well-known statement that “the body is our general medium for having a world”. Epstein (1995, p. 145) argues firmly that “awareness of breathing and bodily sensations is probably the most fundamental Buddhist meditation practice. Before mindfulness can be successfully applied to feelings, thoughts, emotions, or mind, it must be firmly grounded in the awareness of breath and body”. He (Epstein, 2008, p 43) further argues that “concentration on the breath is like the stick in the ground; it is the central object around which we structure our meditations. Mindfulness is like the long rope. When our minds are wandering, it jerks us back into the present moment.” Furthermore, Cooper (2019, p 41) states that “when we practice shikantaza [just sitting], we do nothing but sit with the whole body and mind. We do nothing with the mind, so this is actually not a meditation practice. ... we simply sit in an upright posture and breathe deeply, quietly and smoothly through the nose and from the abdomen.” What Cooper emphasises here is simply or just sitting, breathing. Cooper seems to insinuate that the focus of ‘shikantaza’ is to pay undivided attention to the body --- the very full experience of the body pushing out and sucking in air through the nose and the correspondent movement of the abdomen. Both Epstein and Cooper speak about the importance of concentration on the breath and body as a meditative technique to master

before the possibility of practicing mindfulness meditation. In Epstein and Cooper's writings about meditation, both of them indicate that concentration meditation provides enough stability and structure to enable further meditative practices. Both of them also mention the calming effect of concentration meditative practice as the foundation of mindfulness practice. Concentration on the breath seems to signify the transition from concentration on a fixed object to concentration on more free-flowing sequential objects. In other words, the process of breathing starts as if it is a fixed object or single action called breathing out or breathing in. However, one of them consequently leads to the other forming a fluid and flowing transition instead of a single object for self-observation. Concentration on more free-flowing objects is mindfulness meditative practice.

Epstein and Cooper seem to spend a tremendous amount of time and energy discussing whether or not concentration practice should be practiced before mindfulness meditation. For instance, Cooper (1999, p 73-74) states that:

> Depending on the style of the particular teacher, concentration functions as prerequisite or corequisite of insight meditation [mindfulness]. The practitioner develops an enhancing and supporting balance between the two techniques through a process of alternation. With continued practice the two techniques become mutually reinforcing. Calming induces insight and insight induces calming. Continued perceptual alteration dissolves the relative distinctions between the two.

Cooper clearly expresses his understanding that it is not necessary that concentration has to be practiced before mindfulness meditation. However, in the quote mentioned above he also insinuates that some meditation teachers do treat concentration practice as a prerequisite of mindfulness. What Cooper emphasises here is the importance of alternation between concentration and mindfulness practices. He further argues that:

> The image of a lantern illustrates the mutual importance and relationship between shamatha (concentration) and vipashayana (mindfulness) …. Concentration and mental strength depend on insight for their usefulness. Similarly, the flame of insight requires a strong and focused mind. Through skilful practice of the two meditation techniques, in proper balance…. The split between the container and the contained dissolves and awareness of the fluid dimensions of wholeness occurs. In the advanced stages of practice shamatha and vipashayana become one.

In the aforementioned quote, Cooper further points out the importance of the interdependent nature between concentration and mindfulness practices. Instead of focusing on the sequence between concentration and mindfulness, he emphasises the balance and intertwining of the two in practice. He (Cooper, 2001, p 169) then applies Bion's clinical idea of container-contained to the relationship between concentration and mindfulness practices: "the oscillating dynamic between container and contained provides a theoretical and experiential basis to examine the structure and function of both the concentration and analytic forms of meditation."

Compared to Paul Cooper, Epstein puts more emphasis on the sequential order moving from concentration to mindfulness practices. For example, he (Epstein, 1988, p 181-182) states that "mindfulness techniques, on the other hand, build on the concentration practices but stress the ability to remain attentive to constantly changing objects of awareness…. Intensive meditation practice usually begins (Sayadaw, 1965, 1972) with training in the concentration practices. When sufficient stability of mind is attained, new objects of awareness are gradually introduced." In another book Thoughts without a Thinker, Epstein (1995, p 142) also expresses similar ideas: "having accomplished a certain amount of inner stability through concentration, the meditator is now able to look more closely at the moment-to-moment nature of mind and self." The difference of idea between Epstein and

Cooper is that Epstein believes that the mental stability induced by the concentration practice necessitates further practice in mindfulness. Whilst Cooper asserts that both concentration and mindfulness can be practiced interchangeably in a mutually supportive and reinforcing manner, Epstein draws our attention on the sequential order from concentration to mindfulness.

4.4 Mindfulness in Conjunction with Psychotherapeutic Ideas from Bion, Freud and Winnicott

In their articles and books over the years, Epstein and Cooper tend to discuss 'mindfulness' meditation more than 'concentration' practices. It is mostly because of the fact that concentration meditation is not the invention of Buddhism and it appears in many other meditative practices, for example, in Hinduism and yoga. Both Epstein and Cooper propose that concentration meditation could serve as the foundation of mindfulness meditation in Buddhism. Only when the mind is calmed to a reasonable extent by practicing concentration does it develop the stability, space and capacity for 'mindfulness'. 'Mindfulness' meditation is often considered the original meditative form created by the Buddhist. Epstein (1990; p 160) argues that "the distinctive attentional strategy of Buddhism, however, is that of mindfulness, of moment-to-moment attention to thoughts, feelings, images, or sensations as they arise and pass away within the field of awareness." The most prominent difference between mindfulness and concentration practices is that when one is practicing concentration, his or her attention needs to focus on one fixed object internally and externally. When one notices any distractions, he or she needs to either bring attention back to the object of focus or diligently fight against distraction. However, when one is practicing mindfulness, he or she is instructed not to focus on one fixed object. Instead, "this position reflects a middle-way perspective that advocates nonattachment and

non-aversion to all mind-moments, including attachment, aversion, nonattachment or non-aversion, as well as the judgments that might accompany or follow them. All experiences simply rise and fall." (Cooper; 2014; p 801)[49] In other words, the practitioner is told to simply note the minute sequential occurrences of the vicissitude of thoughts(cognitions), feelings (emotions), bodily sensations etc. When one is practicing mindfulness, one follows and traces what is actually happening to and within oneself instead of what one imagines would happen. Thus, an essential feature of mindfulness is the non-judgemental and non-reactive stance according to both Epstein and Cooper (I deleted it here due to a lack of relevance)Epstein (2013, p 44) also made a similar statement by referencing to Winnicott's idea of the good enough mother: "the quality of bare attention, the non-judgmental and nonreactive observation that parallels the noninterfering attention of the good-enough mother, is just the first step of the Buddha's approach." Both Epstein and Cooper stress the importance of no reflection, reaction, any kind of preconceived goal or object, and judgement while practicing Buddhist meditations. The essence of mindfulness meditation is its moment-to-moment tracing of one's own mental and bodily evocations. The gist of the moment-to-moment practice is to trace and acknowledge anything that happens to us internally and externally from one moment to another then to the next. For instance, at this very moment one feels anxious, one acknowledges the anxiety. The next moment, one has an itch on the forehead, one acknowledges the itch without going ahead to scratch it. In another scenario, if one scratches the itch, one acknowledges that one has just scratched the itch. There is no actual action made according to one's own feelings, thoughts and sensations in addition to the acknowledgement. It is called 'bare attention' because one merely notes

[49] In his later writing, instead of focusing on following objects in mindfulness meditation, Cooper (2023) emphasises 'shikantaza' (just sitting), based on his Soto Zen training, which is objectless and goalless, and it seems to resemble closely Freud's notion of 'evenly suspended attention.'

what happens to and within oneself and nothing else. There is no ordinary mental or physical reactions to what is happening besides simply noting it.

In relation to the emphasis on non-judgemental stance, both Epstein and Cooper propose balance and oscillation in various other areas regarding meditation and psychotherapy in conjunction with the Buddhist Middle Way teaching. For instance, Epstein (2018; p. 140) connects Buddhist teachings and psychotherapy by speaking of the balance between tightness and looseness in terms of 'right effort' in the Buddhist eightfold path: "too tight is like the rigidity of people chronically clamping down on their feelings. Too loose is like giving feelings free rein, assuming that because we feel them they are "true" and must be taken seriously. Right Effort is an attempt to find balance in the midst of all this. From a therapeutic point of view, it means trusting that an inherent wisdom can emerge when we avoid the two extremes…. Buddha believed that this emotional equilibrium was possible for everyone…. A therapist's job is to help bring this equilibrium into awareness." When it comes to meditation in Buddhism, the adequate amount of effort invested in it is essential. On the one hand, when the practitioner puts too much effort in meditation, he or she holds on to meditation too tightly resulting in no distance between the two that enables space for spontaneity. On the other hand, when the effort becomes too loose, it is as if the meditator gives too much distance between the two resulting in a space that is too wide for any beneficial realisations to take roots or anchor. In another place, Cooper (2008; p 292-293) draws our attention to the balance and oscillation between attention and inattention in psychotherapy: "attention and inattention have become polarised and conceptualised as two diametrically opposed points. Periods of inattention can leave the analyst feeling inadequate or guilty. Another more productive way to think about attention and inattention might be to understand them as two points on one arc of an infinite circle with dimensions beyond our present capacity for perception. In this regard they can be viewed as complementary and

interwoven with both diverging and converging qualities rather than as competing states." Cooper integrates the idea of the 'Zen cycle' and the Eastern ways of circular thinking into psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Unintentionally not paying attention to the patient is often seen as inadequacy of psychotherapeutic practice as psychotherapists in general holds the assumption that making effort to pay constant attention to the patient is a good practice. However, according to Cooper's standpoint, both attention and inattention manifested by either the analyst or the patient are alternating psychological functionings in the consulting room. Instead of seeing both as incompatible opposites, Cooper sees them as different areas on the same cycle. When one is tracing the cycle of attention and inattention, one state leads to the other and vice versa. The oscillation between attention and inattention should be barely noted instead of being acted on until their functions can be understood. Both Epstein and Cooper have had ample discussions about the balance between two seemingly opposite states of mind and body in Buddhist meditation and psychotherapy.

4.5 Bion and the Meditative Non-judgemental Stance

Apart from Epstein and Cooper's deep engagement with Buddhist mindfulness, and concentration meditations, psychoanalyst W. R. Bion wrote the following interesting paragraph describing his clinical experience with a patient in 1958, which closely resembles mindfulness meditation:

> For an appreciable time my attention dwelt on this parade of associations to the exclusion of a peculiar accompaniment of running commentary on how he was feeling. As this obtruded, I became aware of a pattern which went like this: association, association, association, "definitely a bit anxious," association, association, "yes, slightly depressed," associations, "a bit anxious now," and so on. His behaviour was striking, but the session

came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on. (Bion, 1967/1984, p. 77)

Although Bion has not overtly advocated mindfully tracing the movements of cause and effect of memory and desire, what he recorded here in one of his analytic sessions is strikingly similar to mindfulness 'bare attention', merely tracing the patient's mental changes from one moment to another. After Bion spontaneously followed his patient's mental changes, what he surprisingly discovered is that "the session came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on." (Bion, 1967/1984, p. 346) This very discovery surprised Bion greatly. The hypothesis is that Bion accidentally discovered the usefulness of the 'bare attention' technique, which does not result in any cognitive, mental, purposeful, or intentional formulation of ideas. When one is very concentrated on the process of psychosomatic happenings, the process of concentration starts to have a containing function here and now. Perhaps Bion was on the verge of realizing that formulation of ideas is not always useful and necessary in sessions. In other words, the bare attention paid to the patient's mental and bodily changes from moment to moment serves as a container per se, which does not require further formulation of ideas for further intentional containment. The author of the current article sees it as an indication that symbolisation or formulation of ideas is not the only containing function of human beings. The Buddhist mindfulness practice points out that the mere tracing of others or one's own mental and physical changes in the here and now also contains the very experience itself.

In relation to Bion's above paragraph resembling the Buddhist mindfulness meditation, Cooper (2008; p 300), informed by Bion's clinical practice and Buddhist mindfulness meditation, argues that "it often becomes crucial for the analyst to stay very still, to actively sit with the moment and to resist the defensive pull of memory and/or desire and/or understanding, which can be decentring and which can engender a loss of felt contact

with the patient's experience." In my previous article, I (Zhang, 2022) focused on the comparison between Bion's clinical technique of 'no memory no desire' and the Buddhist mindfulness 'bare attention' technique. Based on extensive reading of Bion's writings regarding memory and desire, the arguments in my previous article seem to converge on the idea that Bion grants 'no memory no desire' such a heavy emphasis to bring attention back from distractions in order to pay attention to the patient in the here and now. There is no doubt that Bion notices the hazard of distraction brought by memory and desire and tries to re-centre himself in the face of the defensive pulls of memory and desire. During his first 1967 seminar in Los Angeles, Bion (in Aguayo & Malin, 2013, p. 6) states that "if you get clear this point about desire, then you might think of memory as being the past tense of the same thing. The desire is the future tense of it — it's what you want to happen. Memory is what you want to have happened." It seems like Bion is trying to implement 'no memory no desire' in order to re-centre himself to a psychoanalytic attentional stance that enables the best engagement with the patient in the here and now. The Buddhist 'bare attention' mindfulness technique seems to result in a similar goal to what Bion wanted to achieve. The mindfulness bare attention and mere acknowledging of psychosomatic states from one moment to the next is an active strategy that makes a psychoanalyst aware of his or her memory and desire in order to let them go temporarily as recommended by Bion. Both Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Bion's 'no memory no desire' try to bring the attention back from the past and the future to the very experience of the self in relation to the other here and now. Although Bion and the Buddhist share the same goal of bringing attention back to the moment, the Buddhist uses a very different strategy to achieve such a goal. "Right Mindfulness means being willing to bring the mind back whenever one notices that it has wandered. It is the ability to bring the mind back, to let go of one's personal commentary, that is the real accomplishment." (Epstein; 2018; p 160) It seems like both

Bion and the Buddhist use functions of the ego to bring attention back to the present moment. Whilst Bion uses the ego strength to eliminate memory and desire, the Buddhist embodies the ego function of tracing oneself and other's bodily and emotional happenings from one moment to another. Zhang (2022) argues that both Bion's method of elimination and the Buddhist 'bare attention' could lead to fruitful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent. The difference between Bion and the Buddhist is that the Buddhist places emphasis on the mere noticing of memory and desire because they think the mere noticing and acknowledging what is happening within the self and other is already the way leading to the elimination of memory and desire. The Buddhist believes that the active cutting off of memory and desire as recommended by Bion is not always necessary since the repeated practice of 'bare attention' to memory and desire will eventually result in the loosening of the grip imposed by memory and desire.

Mindfulness is highlighted by its non-judgemental, non-reactive and non-interfering stance towards what is happening internally within oneself and externally within others such as patients. What lies in the non-judgement, non-reaction and non-interference is qualities of impartiality. Epstein (1998; p 108-109) comments that "because mindfulness of feelings involves the careful attention to the flow of pleasant and unpleasant sensation in the body, there is none of the usual picking and choosing that otherwise colours our experience.... This created a very different relationship with my internal world than the one I was used to. My chronic tendency was to shrink from the unpleasant and reach for the pleasant. Mindfulness of feelings encouraged a dispassionate acceptance of both." Mark Epstein delineates a very important point regarding mindfulness's impartiality --- it trains the consciousness not to be biased in the face of every experience brought upon us one after another or simultaneously. In other words, mindfulness trains the ego to dampen down its judgement and pickiness in order to free our unconscious attentional directions (intuition). Only when ego's

intentionality for pleasure is eased and impartially observed by mindfulness can the non-intentional attentions from the unconscious float freely with less interference.

Mindfulness's quality of impartiality resembles 'negative capability' introduced by John Keats, later quoted frequently by the psychoanalyst W. R. Bion. Cooper links Zen master Dogen Zenji, Keats and Bion by stating that "both Bion and Dogen share quite similar practical starting points. Bion, drawing from the poet, John Keats, recommends sitting in 'negative capability' until a pattern emerges.' Keats, in a letter to his brothers, describes negative capability as follows: 'I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (1899, p 277)." Both Bion and Keats realised that when the mind can hold back its irritable and reckless addiction to certainty, intuition pointing towards the ultimate reality comes to be. "Bion makes it clear that it is not the memory as such that blocks understanding but rather the attachment to it. What Bion recommends is that the analyst place on himself a discipline where he detaches himself from an addictive attachment to memory ... Bion says that it is the psychological state of attachment to the sensual that needs to be relinquished". (Cooper; 2019; p 106) Bion and the Buddhist proposed their own methods to train the mind to open up space for 'negative capability'. Bion recommends 'no memory no desire' as the 'cutting sword' slashing attachment towards sensual desires in the clinical setting and perhaps beyond it[50], whilst the Buddhist uses mindfulness to stay with the bodily experiences by tracing internal experiences including sensual desires impartially. Both Bion and the Buddhist try to give room to the unconscious happenings by detaching from the tendency to grasp an imaginary saviour in the face of the workable discomfort brought by uncertainty (the 'saviour' is the awareness of the body residing within oneself).

[50] Bion made clear in *Attention and Interpretation*: "I avoid entertaining desires and attempt to dismiss them from my mind. (It is not enough to try to do this in the session because that is too late: the habit of desiring must not be allowed to grow)" (Bion, 1970, p. 56)."

In addition to the discussion of the rationale and thinking behind mindfulness' non-judgemental and impartial nature, Epstein (1998; p 67) provides a practical technique to implement mindfulness' impartiality in day-to-day life:

> when I learned to practice mindfulness, I was taught to keep up a running commentary on my own process in the form of an ongoing labelling: 'lifting the arm, grasping the fork, moving it toward the mouth, opening the mouth, hungry, hungry, smelling the food, remembering the last time I had this, hoping it's good, feeling the warmth of the food, too hot, tasting the food, disappointment, disappointment, hearing a noise, chewing, chewing, feeling saliva, swallowing, wanting more.' In a retreat, this kind of self-observation continues throughout very long days.

The Buddhist uses 'ongoing labelling' to acknowledge and stay aware of the internal happenings which resembles Bion's discovery of 'ongoing labelling's' containing function while seeing one of his patients mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs in the current article. The essence of 'ongoing labelling' is its effortful, intentional, but choiceless acknowledgement of what is happening internally one moment after another.

4.6 Bion and the Buddhist Meditative Faith

In addition to the importance of juxtaposing the connections between Bion's thinking and the meditative non-judgemental stance, there is also a very interesting difference regarding the idea of 'faith' in the face of the difficulties encountered in 'concentration' and 'mindfulness' practices between Epstein and Cooper. Both Epstein and Cooper refer to W. R. Bion and Buddhist meditation in terms of 'faith'. Epstein (2008, p 31) states, "In both of these passages, Bion's insights approach those of the Buddha…. It is faith, concluded Bion, that permits this kind of being. It is the kind of faith that allows us to jump off a high diving board with the knowledge that we will hit water and not earth."

Interestingly, Epstein portrays faith as the confidence that one does not hit earth but water in the face of high ground. It is as if Epstein asserts that faith is heavily influenced by a good enough mother who serves as her child's 'cushion' and 'buffer' in the face of the seemingly hard and cruel reality, giving the child the confidence to dive into the reality believing that mother will always catch him or her. Cooper (2001, p 157) also relates Buddhist' faith' to Bion and jumping off a high place:

> For Bion, the requisite state of mind entails a leap of faith. He confronts both the analyst's and the analysand's resistance to experiencing at-one-ment. He 'participates' with the patient by facilitating the 'existential leap' that finds liberal expression in the Zen literature. D. T. Suzuki (1994), for example, provides a gripping description:
>
> At first the seeker knows of no way of escape, but get out he must by some means ... before him there yawns a dark abyss. There is no light to show him a possible way to cross it ... the only thing he can do in this crisis is simply to jump, into life or death, but living he feels to be no longer possible. He is desperate, and yet something is still holding him back; he cannot quite give himself up to the unknown.... Here begins a new world of personal experiences, which we may designate "leaping" or "throwing" oneself down the precipice!

Although Cooper and Epstein use the same analogy of jumping off a high ground when it comes to 'faith' in the face of the unknown darkness, Epstein describes 'faith' as a sense of hope and confidence that something or someone will catch oneself if one leaps forward. However, Cooper, citing D. T. Suzuki, seems to describe 'faith' as a crisis in the face of which one holds no hope of living on after leaping into the abyss of the unknown. The difference between Epstein and Cooper lies in whether or not one holds the hope that someone would catch oneself after leaping into the abyss of darkness. It seems like the difference between Epstein and Cooper lies in the level of traumatic experiences one has.

The ‘faith’ Epstein illustrates is the hope of a less traumatised child who believes that their mother will always catch him or her if he/she leaps forward. However, Cooper seems to depict the ‘faith’ of a heavily traumatised child who leaps forward without the hope that the mother will ever be there for her/him. Thus, Cooper’s ‘faith’ is obtained after piercing through fear of loss and sheer hopelessness. Cooper’s ‘faith’ depicts a regained hopeful experience after completely detaching from the caregiver’s safety net. Epstein’s ‘faith’ lies in attachment to, whilst Cooper’s ‘faith’ derives from (good enough and long enough) detachment from the caregiver. Both the less and more traumatised ones can possess a quality of faith in the face of the unknown. The difference is the sheer hopelessness one experiences looking down the abyss and the degree to which any kind of anticipation is removed. The more traumatised ones gain a sense of faith or hope to propel him or her to leap into the abyss after experiencing hopelessness with little anticipation to the extreme. When hopelessness and in-anticipation are experienced to the extreme, it becomes hopefulness at another level. On the other hand, the less traumatised hold a different type of hope without experiencing the sheerness of hopelessness. Both the more and the less traumatised leap forward into the abyss. However, the quality of the mindset is drastically different the moment before leaping forward.

4.7 Mindfulness Bare Attention, Winnicott’s ‘Good Enough Mother’ and ‘Transitional Space’

Beyond the comparison with Bion, both Epstein and Cooper also link mindfulness with other psychoanalytic frames such as the ones proposed by D. W. Winnicott. Cooper (2019, p 124) argues that “one way this intention is stated from the Zen perspective is to ‘raise Bodhicitta’, which refers to the activity of pre-reflectively maintaining a neutral and non-reactive awareness of the moment-to-moment rising and falling of all experience”. Both

Epstein and Cooper place an emphasis on the moment-to-moment nature of mindfulness. The essence of the moment-to-moment nature is that one makes an effort to break free from our usual way of dealing with the world by holding onto it and refusing to let go. The moment-to-moment practice of mindfulness informs the practitioner that there is another attentional strategy other than either holding on too closely or completely cutting out the awareness of objects of focus. Epstein (1995, p 122) relates mindfulness meditation to D. W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic idea of 'transitional space' developmentally: it is "like a stray dog that has no owner, the stray thoughts and feelings that are attended to with bare attention are treated as if they, too, are ownerless…. long recognised as the crucial steppingstone between infantile dependence and the ability to tolerate being alone, transitional space has been called an 'intermediate area of experience' that permits the child a feeling of comfort when separated from the parents." Cooper (2019; p 117) also states that:

> Tsung-Tse continues, to quote Bielefeldt, that "… he [the meditator] can prepare himself by reading their description in the Buddhist literature and he can overcome them by maintaining right thought" (1988, p. 134). Doctrinally speaking, this view, which supports cultivation of "right thought" and the active aversion and elimination of 'demonic obstructions,' is not consistent with a Middle Way view that promotes 'neither attachment nor aversion'.

The moment-to-moment stance held by mindfulness practitioners creates and reinforces an observational stance towards the self which is not too close nor too far and which is very similar to Winnicott's (1951/1953, p 238) 'good enough mother' who "makes active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration." The essence of the 'good enough mother' lies in the intermediate (neither too

close nor too far) caring stance created by the 'gradually lessening adaptation' towards the infant. The process of the gradated caring stance provides enough space and time for the infant to contain and digest the frustration and elevation throughout the process of separation from the mother and meeting oneself. It is very similar to mindfulness' observational stance towards the self. On the one hand, when one holds on to the self too tightly, one becomes too absorbed by the self which does not enable enough distance from the self for a clearer view of the self. On the other hand, when one cuts out the connection with the self, one loses awareness and contact with the self which does not facilitate gradual understanding and tolerance of the self. Only with such an observational stance midway, one can be aware of the self without alienating the self or being consumed by the self. In other words, the moment-to-moment nature of mindfulness informs the practitioner that with effortful practice, one can develop an observational stance to the self which is not too close nor too far. One maintains an observational distance, which, however, is not completely detached from the self. One is aware of the movements and actions of the self without being taken over or possessed by them.

Epstein (1995; p 118) further points out another very important trait of mindfulness 'bare attention' which is in line with Winnicott's emphasis on the importance of a child's spontaneous curiosity:

> it is also deeply interested, like a child with a new toy. The key phrase from the Buddhist literature is that it requires "not clinging and not condemning,' an attitude that Cage demonstrated with regard to the car alarms, that Winnicott described in his 'good enough mothering' notion, that Freud counselled for the psychoanalyst at work, and that meditation practitioners must develop toward their own psychic, emotional, and physical sufferings. The most revealing thing about a first meditation retreat (after seeing how out

of control our minds are) is how the experience of pain gives way to one of peacefulness if it is consistently and dispassionately attended to for a sufficient time.

Epstein points out an important trait of mindfulness: instead of an obsession with the self due to narcissistic injuries, mindfulness reminds us of another way of relating to the self by simply being deeply interested like a very young child (infant) who is intrigued by both the internal and external worlds and every single details in-between. In addition to his view of 'no choosing and no picking', Epstein adds here the 'not clinging no condemning' stance of mindfulness practices. More importantly, Epstein here mentions the length of time for mindfulness practice in order for it to work. In order for mindfulness to work, one needs to remain in the dispassionate observational stance 'consistently for a sufficient time'. It is like learning how to ride a bicycle. The potential of riding a bicycle lies in every one of us, however, it takes some time for us to activate and get used to the potential. It is the same with mindfulness. It takes some time for our consciousness to activate and adapt to the unconscious potential to take the self as an object of observation.

4.8 Freud's 'splitting the ego to observe itself', 'evenly suspended attention', 'free Association' and mindfulness 'bare attention'

Closely related to mindfulness' observational stance which takes the self as an observational object is a mental state named as 'evenly suspended attention' which seems to create a temporary split from the self for the self to have a clearer view of the self without causing any traumatic experiences. It leads to a very interesting idea pointed out by Epstein (2007, p 76) while rephrasing Freud:

> In Buddhist terms, bare attention is defined as "the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception" (Nyanaponika, 1962). In psycho- dynamic terms, this self-contemplation is defined as a

> therapeutic split (Engler, 1986) in the ego (Sterba, 1934), in which ego takes itself as object. As Freud commented in his New Introductory Lectures, we wish to make the ego the object of our study, our own ego. But how can that be done? The ego is the subject, par excellence: how can it become the object? There is no doubt, however, that it can. The ego can take itself as object; it can treat itself like any other object, observe itself, criticise itself, do Heaven knows what besides with itself.… The ego can, then, be split; ... The parts can later on join up again. (Sterba, 1934, p. 80)

Epstein cited Jack Engler from the department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School regarding the beneficial function of splitting the ego and taking itself as an observational object. The need to integrate seems to lie in narcissistic injuries. An infant can float inside mother's womb without the notion and need to integrate. On the one hand, integration is a function of the ego leading to symbolisation which always leaves a trace of un-realness and lack of authenticity at the experiential level. Symbolisation seems to try to build up a constructed reality that is always inconsistent with the internal reality which lies within.

Another very prominent idea proposed by both Epstein and Cooper is the connections between Freud's evenly suspended attention and the Buddhist concentration and mindfulness meditations. In his influential paper Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis, Freud (1912) states straightforwardly about the technique of evenly-hovering attention:

> The technique is a very simple one…. [it] simply consists in making no effort to concentrate the attention on anything in particular, and in maintaining in regard to all that one hears the same measure of calm, quiet attentiveness of 'evenly-hovering attention'.... All conscious exertion is to be withheld from the capacity for attention, and one's 'unconscious memory' is to be given full play; or to express it in terms of technique, pure

and simple; One has simply to listen and not to trouble to keep in mind anything in particular. (p 111-112)

Both Cooper and Epstein relate Freud's evenly suspended(hovering) attention to Buddhist mindfulness bare attention. However, they seem to have very different opinions about the complementary nature of the two concepts. For example, although Cooper (1998, p 359) states that: "the psychoanalytic technique of evenly hovering attention and the Buddhist practice of bare attention share observable descriptive similarities," he (Cooper, 2014, p 795-796) quoted Rubin (2009) in order to disagree with the Rubin and Epstein's recommendation of vipassana mindfulness meditation as a supplement of allegedly a lack in psychoanalytic attentional training:

> What Buddhism terms meditation --- non-judgmental attention to what is happening moment-to-moment --- cultivates exactly the extraordinary, yet accessible, state of mind Freud was depicting [as evenly suspended attention].' (Rubin, 2009, p. 93) ... While the authors cited at the beginning of this paper offer the reader clear, cogent, and convincing arguments that seem to support the cultivation of evenly hovering attention through the practice of vipassana and demonstrate remarkable descriptive similarities between these two techniques, the primary deficiency in this series of articles is a pervasive lack of consideration of the dynamic unconscious and the accompanying and related factor that it is the psychoanalytic candidate's own personal analysis that contributes to a deeper understanding of his or her own un-conscious processes and that serves to clear up obstacles to psycho-analytic listening. In fact, none of these authors discuss the dynamic unconscious, which Freud describes through his early notion of countertransference as creating 'blind spots' that the prospective analyst must resolve through the requisite personal analysis. In this regard, Freud articulates a clear and insistent mandate for facilitating and training evenly hovering attention.

It seems like Cooper holds a strong opposite opinion in terms of Epstein and Rubin's perception that there is a lack of instruction on developing Freud's 'evenly suspended attention'. Cooper believes that Freud's emphasis on working on blind spots created by unresolved countertransference or dynamic unconscious in personal analysis is itself a clear and vital recommendation of how to develop 'evenly suspended attention'. In other words, Cooper does not see the necessity of including Buddhist mindfulness as training for psychoanalytic 'evenly suspended attention'. The divergence of opinions between Cooper and Epstein might be because 'evenly suspended attention' can be developed by practising different methods. Epstein's advocate of mindfulness cultivates an attentional state that leads to 'evenly suspended attention', whilst Cooper emphasises the resolution of hindrances in the dynamic unconscious as a method of reaching the same goal. The divergence between the two authors points to a very interesting direction of thinking about developing 'evenly suspended attention' or psychological functions in general. Due to the complexity of the human potential or neuropathways, it might be that different pathways can be taken or worked on to result in the same psychological functions such as 'evenly suspended attention'.

In comparison to Cooper, Epstein (1988, p 181-182) pays more attention to the similarities between Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Freud's 'free association' and 'evenly suspended attention': "According to Buddhist psychology, in order to maintain this attention, it is necessary to attend to all objects equally, fully, impartially, and without judgment, attachment, or aversion…. The process is analogous to that undergone by Freud as he moved from an emphasis on hypnosis, with its focusing and restriction of attention, to free association and evenly suspended attention." In addition to merely pointing out the similarities between Freud's 'evenly suspended attention' and the Buddhist mindfulness practice, Epstein (2007, p 238) also states that

> it doesn't really matter whether you're focusing on one of them or none of them at any particular moment, but you're getting a kind of indirect refraction from the situation that you're in." This is not modesty --- he doesn't want people not to pay attention. Rather, he's trying to cultivate a different sort of attention: not focused, straight ahead scrutiny but something more like a glance out of the corner of your eye that catches something bright and twitching that you then can't identify when you turn to look. This sort of indirect, half-conscious attention is actually harder to summon up on purpose than the usual kind, in the way that free-associating out loud is harder than speaking in an ordinary logical manner.

Epstein not only notices that Freud tries to cultivate an encompassing attentional span that is more sensitive to the valuable content that is normally hidden from consciousness, logic, and staring at the object of focus directly, he also notices that developing 'evenly suspended attention' is harder than simply focusing our conscious attention on the object of focus. According to Epstein's ideas, the Buddhist instructions of concentration and mindfulness practices provide more practical guidelines of what an ordinary person can actually do step by step in order to cultivate a state of 'evenly suspended attention' or mindfulness.

4.9 Implication, conclusion and further studies

To summarise the present article, Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper speak of two meditative techniques of Buddhist meditation. One is called 'concentration' meditation, and the other is 'mindfulness'. The gist of 'concentration' meditation is to make an effort to direct one's attention to an internal or external object. The meditative object can be personalised, such as a sound internally or externally, a sensation, a thought, a feeling, a mantra or a stagnant or flowing image. The object of concentration can be both abstract forms, such as a mental-bodily state, or concrete forms, such as a specific internal or external image, sensation, or feeling. A

very important ‘concentration’ method mentioned by both Epstein and Cooper is to focus one’s attention on breathing. The repetitive focus on breathing provides sufficient stability and space for the ego to observe further itself and other parts of the mind and body within oneself. One might feel lost in anxious and fearful thoughts, feelings and sensations. Pulling one’s attention back to breathing is key to regaining stability, relaxation, and focus.

In addition, both Epstein and Cooper have proposed in their writings that ‘concentration’ meditation provides a firm foundation for ‘mindfulness’ or ‘bare attention’ meditation. The gist of ‘mindfulness’ is to follow and note minute sequential occurrences of the vicissitude of thoughts (cognitions), feelings (emotions), bodily sensations, etc. One follows and traces what is happening to and within oneself instead of what one imagines happening here and now from one moment to the next. ‘Mindfulness’ practices sound very simple and easy at first sight. However, the actual implementation requires repeated practice and techniques. One of the important techniques is to try to train oneself to hold a non-judgemental, non-reactive, and impartial observational stance towards anything happening to oneself picked up by one’s awareness at the present moment. It includes thoughts, sensations, and feelings normally avoided due to fear and anxiety, dissociated, judged, and then ignored as inappropriate by the ego. It is not to choose or pick, cling to or condemn any occurrences in the mind and body at the present moment. However, if choosing and picking, clinging, and condemning just happened to oneself a moment ago, one simply notes and acknowledges them at the present moment. One who practices ‘mindfulness’ observes and accepts one’s feelings, thoughts and sensations, especially the traumatic ones, and the defensive gestures against them unconditionally and dispassionately. It is like the Winnicottian mother who stands not too close nor too far to provide her child with a transitional space for the discovery of self-reliance. Instead of getting manipulated by the ego’s function of exaggerating fear and anxiety in the face of traumatic experiences, one simply notices it and accepts it. Even when exaggeration of

fear, anxiety and pain happens, one merely notes it. One is deeply interested in all mental and physiological occurrences within oneself and the surroundings in a detached manner.

Apart from the above summary concerning Epstein and Cooper's thinking on 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' meditations, it is also worth mentioning that some conscious and unconscious influences might have eventually resulted in Epstein and Cooper's different views and experiences of psychoanalytic and Buddhist attentional states and other ideas. For instance, in terms of their different perceptions of the concept of 'faith', one of the underlying reasons might be that Epstein and Cooper's understandings are based on different psychoanalysts' theoretical and clinical frameworks. Epstein seems to rely more heavily on Winnicott's use of 'holding', whilst Cooper relies more on Bion's notion of 'containment'. Both D. W. Winnicott's concept of "holding" and W. R. Bion's "containment" are crucial concepts in psychoanalysis, emphasising the significance of early nurturing experiences in shaping a person's mental and bodily development. While they share some similarities, there are also significant distinctions between them. It is beyond the scope of the current article to explore every detailed nuance of the differences between the two concepts. In a nutshell, Winnicott's 'holding' primarily focuses on the physical and emotional support given by the mother, emphasising a spontaneous adaptation to the infant's needs, whilst Bion's 'containment' extends Winnicott's 'holding' by focusing on the mother's mental and bodily functions in taking in, digesting, processing and making sense of the infant's psycho-somatic experiences, transforming them into more manageable forms before transmitting it back to the infant. Winnicott's emphasis on bodily and emotional spontaneity lays the groundwork for regulation and integration of the self, whilst Bion focuses on the functioning aspects of emotional processing, digestion and transformation for mental growth and resilience. Bion's 'containment' seems to focus more on the detailed functions of dealing with the unwanted emotional elements due to a sense of lack and

deprivation, whilst Winnicott emphasises a healthy and spontaneous developmental process of infant growth with emotional abundance as a crucial prerequisite.

Another reason for their differences may be that Epstein and Cooper look at the same psychoanalytic or Buddhist concept from different experiential angles. This might be because Epstein and Cooper have had very different clinical training and different forms of immersion in Buddhist study and practices. For instance, in his book *Thoughts Without a Thinker* (1995), Epstein attributes his training as a therapist to Isadore, a noted pioneer of Gestalt Psychotherapy, whilst Cooper was influenced by his Rinzai koan practice and formal psychoanalytic training, which he was deeply involved in at the time of the writing (personal communication, April 2022). Epstein's orientation to meditation practice finds its roots in the more goal-oriented practice articulated by Theravada Buddhism. In contrast, Cooper's practice is influenced by the radical, non-dualistic, goal-free practice of 'shikantaza' (just sitting) promoted in the Soto Zen tradition. The former practice can be described as 'instrumental' or 'facilitative' and the latter as "expressive" (Leighton, 2008, p 166-184). The differences between the two authors might also be due to their subscription to very different schools of Buddhism, both of which hold very different doctrinal premises and stated goals. After carefully reviewing Epstein and Cooper's clinical material, I noticed that the two authors use very different approaches, especially regarding transference, countertransference, and projective identification.

Furthermore, the authors' writings might be intended for different audiences. Cooper seems to write primarily to the psychoanalytic readers and the Zen community, while Epstein, with the exception of his earlier articles, writes to the general public more frequently. In summary, the conscious and unconscious influences behind Epstein and Cooper's differences include their diverse personal development, career orientations,

views, theoretical and clinical frameworks on the connections between Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and their different writing styles and intended audiences.

Despite the two authors' various differences mentioned above, the current article's attempt to juxtapose the two authors regarding attentional states generates new insights based on the hypothesis mentioned in the introduction of the current article. One such insight is the following: the Buddhist detachment is a simultaneous engagement of the bodily calm such as breathing and the unbearable traumatic experiences. In other words, one opens up one's capacity to experience both realities at the same time by practicing 'concentration' and 'mindfulness'. The Buddhist detachment is not a detachment from painful feelings, it is a re-engagement of safety of the body, and the seemingly dangerous, unbearable and traumatic experiences of the psyche (mind) at the present moment at the same time. It is related to how Milner (1969, p. 380) depicts her own experience with breathing:

> To return to my observations of my own breathing; there was also something else that I noticed, introspectively, about the transformations of the way in which the ego experiences itself, when one is lying down, both in the process of relaxing muscular tensions and in becoming aware of one's own breathing; for it could result, if given a little time, in a sensation of total melting, so that one's whole self-awareness changed to being a dark warm velvety puddle, intensely related to, in fact almost interpenetrating with, the supporting ground. And it was from this that there came, if the relaxation had been deep enough, the astounding feeling of both oneself and the world as new created.

Similar to Milner's renewed self-experience after engagement with breathing, the Buddhist detached stance towards the self and other eventually leads to a temporary breakdown of the narcissistic defences which in turn lead to a re-organisation or re-shaping of the overall experience of the self. The newly formed self-experience is more engaged with the 'true self'

Winnicott proposed instead of the false attachment to a 'false self' that always feels alien and incompatible to oneself.

The simultaneity of 'mindfulness' of traumatic experiences and 'concentration' on the bodily safety of Buddhist meditation seems to resemble the recently discovered trauma-centred EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) psychotherapy which instructs the patient to move his or her vision left to right repetitively following the doctor's fingertip while recalling traumatic memories. The American Psychological Association (2017) describes EMDR as "a structured therapy that encourages the patient to briefly focus on the trauma memory while simultaneously experiencing bilateral stimulation (typically eye movements), which is associated with a reduction in the vividness and emotion associated with the trauma memories." EMDR was first introduced by Dr Shapiro (1989) regarding a randomised controlled study evaluating the treatment effects of EMDR on traumatised individuals. The "bilateral stimulation" emphasised in EMDR therapy resembles the simultaneity of mindfulness and concentration meditations in Buddhism. The Buddhist's emphasis on concentration on breathing might deepen the engagement with the body in comparison with eye moments, tapping (parts of the physical body) and tones listed in current EMDR procedures. The Buddhist simultaneous engagement of the body by breathing and the attention paid to traumatic experiences might further improve the efficacy of therapeutically relieving the pain and suffering of the patient. However, the current study is too limited to explore further the details of the connections between EMDR and the Buddhist 'mindfulness' meditative states. Further studies are needed for exploring this connection.

Framed in a more psychoanalytic idiom, the Buddhist detached observation is a unique attentional state which tries to relax the ego and super-ego functions in order to observe and experience one's own internal happenings, such as emotions, affects, non-verbal happenings, cognitions, traumas etc. in relation to what is happening outside of ourselves. When this unique

attentional state is reached, actions cannot be made according to one's own will since there is no need for it. When the bodily experience is set free, there is not much a need to strive for omnipotence since the bodily experiences are already secure to the extreme. Omnipotence lies in the body (breathing), there is no need for extra striving at the narcissistic and egoistic levels. "It certainly seemed that what Bion calls the inchoate state was what I had been trying to describe in terms of the sense of primary relatedness to one's body from inside" (Milner, 1969, p. 383). The bodily states reached by practicing Buddhist meditation seem to connect with various Bionian concepts such as the 'protomental system', 'O'[51], the 'ultimate reality', 'the screen' and various in-between experiences Bion describes as a conversation between psyche and soma in his last book *The Memoir of the Future*. For instance, in relation to group dynamics, Bion states that

> the proto-mental system I visualise as one in which physical and psychological or mental are undifferentiated. It is a matrix from which spring the phenomena which at first appear—on a psychological level and in the light of psychological investigation—to be discrete feelings only loosely associated with one another (Bion, 1961, p. 102).

Additionally, in Bion's *A Memoir of the Future*, an expression from the fictional character 'SOMA' states (Bion, 1991, 445-446):

> I cannot make anything clear to Psyche unless I borrow a bellyache or headache or respiratory distress from somatic vocabulary for any of these post-natal structures. I believe in mind and personality as there is no evidence whatever for anything but Body.

Further studies need to look more thoroughly into the connections amongst the Buddhist attentional states reached by meditation, the attentional states embedded within Bion's descriptions of various experiences between psyche and soma, and EMDR potentially

[51] Bion states that "O is by definition indestructible and not subject to, circumscribed by, beginnings and ends, rules, laws of nature or any construct of the human mind" (Bion, 1991, 88-89)

as an attentional state pointing to the functionality of the simultaneity of the bodily and psychic experiences.

'Concentration' and 'mindfulness' point towards the complexity of the human experiences and also seem to assist human beings for discovering another area of being beyond traumatic experiences, narcissism and narcissistic injuries. When the mind and body are trained to relax long enough by mindfulness and concentration, we discover an existence beyond narcissistic injuries. Human beings are extremely afraid of narcissistic injuries or any impact on healthy or unhealthy narcissistic concerns as if we are only our narcissism and nothing else. Freud's 'evenly hovering attention', Bion's 'reverie', Winnicott's 'good enough mother' and 'true self' are all pointing towards another experiential level which is beyond, yet at the same time parallel to, narcissistic concerns. The Buddhist often addresses it as 'taking refuge in the body' and 'mindfulness' and 'concentration' are the tools working towards it.

Beyond the implications delineated above, it is crucial to clarify further the meaning of 'attentional states' since it serves as a core comparative concept in the current article. 'attentional states' indicate specific ways mind and body interact with each other within a person at a specific time in order to adapt to the external and internal happenings, especially to the unbearable ones. For instance, the Buddhist 'concentration' and 'mindfulness' meditations are two attentional states induced in a practitioner that serve as different mental-bodily functions assisting the practitioner in adapting to internal and/or external chaos such as inner fears, anxieties or very loud motorcycle driving by. Other examples are Freud's 'evenly suspended attention' (Freud, 1912, p 111-112), psychoanalytic 'free association' (Freud & Breuer, 1895), and D. W. Winnicott's 'primary maternal preoccupation' (Winnicott, 1958, p 300-305) mentioned in the current article. Each of these attentional states serves as a function for human adaptivity to the internal and external environments. To elaborate further, when a person is in an evenly suspended attentional state, he or she gains the mental and bodily

function of free association. The state of free association assists the person in regaining a more homeostatic or balanced experience internally, which in turn helps the person adapt better to daily stress. When the mother meets her newborn baby, if everything goes well, she automatically falls into an attentional state called ‘primary maternal preoccupation’ that functions as a critical buffer between the external harsh world and the baby’s internal sense of security. If the mother’s ‘primary maternal preoccupation’ is long-lasting and rich enough, the baby gains a more secure bodily safety that can help her or him cope with harsh events and traumas later in life. Moreover, the attentional state of deep sleeping induces mental and bodily states such as REM and other internal phases, which help the person rest and be better prepared for the next day’s hard work and social functioning.

In a relatively healthy or well-developed adult’s internal experience, many attentional states, such as the ones mentioned above, overlap or happen one after another during waking and sleeping to absorb, digest, symbolise, make sense of and cope with the internal and external happenings. However, when these ‘attentional states’ are disrupted or suppressed by traumas at different stages of human development, a person might encounter difficulties adapting to life. However, the Buddhist practices of meditative states indicate that many mind and bodily functionings or attentional states can be regained after practicing with the correct guidance and diligence. These guidelines are waiting to be discovered.

Bion’s notion of ‘attention’ seems to indicate a complex of human functions such as ‘containment’, ‘alpha function’, and ‘transformation’ (Bion, 1963/1989; 1970). At the surface level, Bion’s notion of ‘attention’ seems very different from Buddhist meditative states such as ‘concentration’ and ‘mindfulness’. However, both Bion’s notion of ‘attention’ and the Buddhist attentional manipulations as forms of meditations seem to indicate the existence of various mind and body interactive functionings which enable a human being’s adaptability to the internal and external stimulations or happenings. Nevertheless, Buddhism focuses more on

practical research and practices inducing these attentional states to cope with internal and external chaos. On the other hand, Bion seems to embark more on a descriptive and narrative angle of these attentional states and mind-bodily functionings.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Summary

My PhD project is composed of three articles researching the connections between Bion and Buddhism. I am very grateful to recently deceased British psychoanalyst Dr Chris Mawson who kindly shared Bion's personal copy of Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* with me. Bion's 30 pages of annotations and underlinings in the book served as the foundation of my first PhD article 'Wilfred Bion's annotations in *The Way of Zen*: an investigation into his practical encounters with Buddhist ideas'. This article provides concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* in order to shed light on those aspects of Zen which most engaged Bion's attention. Five main themes are explored in detail: the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality'). The purpose of exploring and analysing these five themes is to provide a clearer picture of the elements which attracted Bion's interest in Buddhism and the places where Buddhism resonated with his own psychoanalytic work. These five themes can be further subsumed under three overarching ideas underpinning Bion's 30 pages of annotations and underlinings --- experience itself, spontaneity and open-mindedness for mental growth. Bion did not usually annotate books as extensively as he did *The Way of Zen*.[52] Although the current article has not set out to argue that Bion was in any way a Buddhist, the unusually large number of annotations and underlinings made in Watts's book demonstrates Bion's profound enthusiasm for Zen Buddhism. It seems unlikely that he would have annotated the book so heavily if it merely illustrated what he already knew. After looking through Bion's books in his personal library, Meg Harris Williams (2005, p. 204–5) indicates that 'to judge

[52] Chris Mawson, personal communication, 5 May 2018.

from his own books, Bion would appear to have had little personal interest in the Judaeo-Christian tradition […]. He was drawn to the religion and philosophy of the East – but to the poetry of the West'. In contrast with the few terms upon which Bion focused in the Western religious and mystic traditions, his close engagement with Zen thought is manifested in the variety of topics and terminologies to which he paid attention, as outlined in the discussion in my first article.

Bion's encounter with Zen may, first, have provided corroboration, confirmation and reinforcement of his own developing theorisation, which may have been an important service, given the extent of his innovations during this period and his gradual departure from Freudian and Kleinian vocabularies. Second, it clearly lent support to his ontological ideas about experience itself, spontaneity and mental growth, as evidenced by the very specific connections he drew between elements of his own theorisation (such as 'O', memory and understanding) and particular Zen ideas. In his later psychoanalytic career, Bion realised the limitations of epistemology and the usefulness of ontology with regard to mental maturation. The core of some of Bion's psychoanalytic theorisations, such as 'no memory no desire', 'reverie', 'dream thoughts', 'intuition' and 'O', increasingly extends to a very general theorisation of spontaneity as part of human experience itself, and the evolution of human mental culture. Throughout his psychoanalytic career, he observed, explored and expanded existing psychoanalytic theory and practice by examining it from different angles (vertices) such as group dynamics, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, religion, mysticism and poetry, as well as his personal experience with his own psychoanalysis, with war and with his patients. His engagement with Zen Buddhist thought is just one of the manifestations of this open-mindedness. Bion's open-mindedness helped him preserve his curiosity about new thoughts and knowledge throughout his life. Achieved by fostering a principle of no memory and no desire, it is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist practice of 'beginner's mind' – an open-minded attitude which lacks any

preconception even if the situation encountered falls into one's area of expertise. Only by sustaining the mindset of a beginner can curiosity have a chance to survive; continuous mental growth depends on the beginner's openness to experience. The opposite of openness is the overemphasis on expertise (unresolved omnipotent fantasy) and the urge to possess and institutionalise thoughts (including psychoanalytic thoughts themselves). For Bion, the institutionalisation of psychoanalysis would eventually squeeze the life out of it just like an overly rigid container in which nothing can grow or remain alive.

Intrigued, informed by the analysis of Bion's underlinings and annotations in the first article, I felt the need to dig deeper into the five themes in order to shed further light on the interrelation between Zen Buddhism and Bion's psychoanalytic thoughts. The reason for doing so is to facilitate integration between Zen Buddhism and Bion's thoughts in the hope of advancing theoretical validity and clinical efficacy. A particular clinical concept in relation to Zen Buddhism to which Bion paid a great deal of attention in *The Way of Zen* is 'no memory no desire'.[53] Bion's focus on the connection between the two inspired me to conduct further research, in the second article, on the comparison between Bion's 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist 'bare attention' mindfulness meditation. The second article concentrates on Bion's concept of 'no memory no desire' and argues that although Bion urges for elimination of memory and desire, the very process of being barely aware of such desires could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical material. Informed by mindfulness and other Buddhist meditative practices, the second article argues that by staying with and tolerating, instead of eliminating and suppressing, memories and desires, as Bion suggested, the memories and desires will

[53] An example is Bion's underlings and comments of Watt's (1957, p. 8) discussion of 'the linear, one-at-a-time character of speech and thought is particularly noticeable in all languages using alphabets, representing experience in long strings of letters. It is not easy to say why we must communicate with others (speak) and with ourselves (think) by this one-at-a-time method'. Bion underlined the phrase 'one-at-a-time method' and commented: 'We do not have to – but we don't do anything else. cf. opacity of memory.'

eventually come to spontaneously generate beneficial realisations, which are vital for clinical thinking. Although one can achieve 'negative capability' by trying to eliminate memory and desire, one simultaneously loses the opportunity to gain another type of intuition by staying with desire and maintaining a bare attention on it. Both 'no memory no desire' and 'being barely aware of desire' can lead to meaningful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent.

After completing the comparison between Bion and Buddhist mindfulness' ways of dealing with desires in the second article, I realised that what is underpinning Bion's 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist mindfulness meditation might be the various ways of manipulating attention and there might be a much deeper interrelation between psychoanalytic and Buddhist meditative attentional stances in relation to Bion and other psychoanalytic frameworks. Few previous articles in the field have focused on the cultivation and development of Buddhist meditative and psychoanalytic attentional states. Amongst the various authors who attempt to connect psychoanalysis and Buddhism, American psychoanalyst Paul Cooper and psychiatrist Mark Epstein stand out as the two most important contributors. Inspired by the second article's hint on the underpinning attentional strategies behind Bion's 'no memory no desire' and Buddhist mindfulness meditation, the third article focuses on a systematic review and comparison of Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper's respective innovations in developing specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis, drawing on aspects of Buddhist meditation in the hope of isolating what is therapeutically beneficial in terms of relieving a patient's pain and suffering. Mark Epstein and Paul Cooper speak of two meditative techniques of Buddhist meditation. One is called 'concentration' meditation, the other 'mindfulness'. The gist of 'concentration' meditation is to attempt to direct one's attention onto an internal or external object. The meditative object can be a personalised one such as a sound internally or externally, a sensation, a thought, a feeling, a mantra or a stagnant or flowing image. The object

of concentration can be either abstract forms such as a mental state or concrete forms such as a specific internal or external image, sensation or feeling. A very important 'concentration' method mentioned by both Epstein and Cooper is to focus one's attention on breathing. The focus on breathing in a repetitive way provides sufficient stability and space for the ego to further observe itself and other parts of the mind and body within oneself. One might feel like one is lost in anxious and fearful thoughts, feelings and sensations. The key is to pull one's attention back to breathing in order to regain stability, relaxation and focus.

Both Epstein and Cooper have proposed in their writings that 'concentration' meditation provides a firm foundation for 'mindfulness' or 'bare attention' meditation. The gist of 'mindfulness' is to follow and note minute sequential occurrences of the vicissitude of thoughts (cognitions), feelings (emotions), bodily sensations, etc. One follows and traces what is actually happening to and within oneself instead of what one imagines is happening or would happen here and now from one moment to the next. One important mindfulness technique is to try to train oneself to hold a non-judgemental, non-reactive and impartial observational stance towards anything happening to oneself as picked up by one's awareness in the present moment. This includes thoughts, sensations and feelings which are normally avoided due to fear and anxiety, dissociated, judged and then ignored as inappropriate by the ego. The point is to not choose or pick, cling to or condemn any occurrences in the mind and body at the present moment. However, if choosing and picking, clinging or condemning have occurred, one simply notes and acknowledges this in the present moment. One who practices 'mindfulness' observes and accepts one's feelings, thoughts and sensations, especially the traumatic ones, and also the defensive gestures against them in an unconditional and dispassionate manner.

In addition to the exploration of Cooper and Epstein's understanding and practices of Buddhist 'concentration' and 'mindfulness', my third article also situates them in relation to

psychoanalytic clinical technique, including Bion's psychotherapeutic attentional stances, Freud's 'splitting the ego to observe itself', 'evenly suspended attention', 'free association' and Winnicott's 'good enough mother' and 'transitional space'. One of the most noticeable findings of the third article is the connection between Bion's clinical notes and Buddhist meditative non-judgemental stances. Although Bion did not intentionally try to implement mindfulness meditation, what he recorded in one of his analytic sessions shows a tremendous amount of similarity to mindfulness' 'bare attention': merely tracing the patient's mental changes from one moment to another. After Bion spontaneously followed his patient's mental changes, what he surprisingly discovered is that 'the session came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on' (Bion, 1967/1984, p. 346). The hypothesis is that Bion accidentally discovered the usefulness of the 'bare attention' technique which does not result in any cognitive, mental, purposeful and intentional formulations of ideas. When one is very focused on the process of psychosomatic happenings, the process of concentration starts to have a containing function here and now. Perhaps Bion was on the verge of realizing that formulation of ideas is not always useful and necessary in sessions. In other words, the bare attention paid to the patient's mental and bodily changes from moment to moment serves as a container per se which does not require further formulation of ideas for further intentional containment. The author of the current article sees this as an indication that symbolisation or formulation of ideas is not the only containing function of human beings. Buddhist mindfulness practice points out that the mere tracing of another's or one's own mental and physical changes in the here and now also contains the very experience itself.

5.2 Beyond my PhD project and Future Research Directions

Throughout my PhD project, several very important additional research questions and directions have gradually surfaced. The first is that further explorations are needed with regards

to Bion's 30 pages of underlinings and annotations in Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen*. Due to limited time and space, the current PhD project only explored in depth certain aspects of 'no memory no desire' and other attentional states and stances in psychoanalysis and Buddhist meditation. Other connections hinted at by Bion's underlinings and annotations, such as the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality') need more research in order to examine psychoanalysis from different angles, and further expand and advance clinical efficiency and efficacy.

The second research direction is to investigate the *breathing techniques* emphasised by Buddhist meditators in the psychoanalytic field, such as Epstein and Cooper, in relation to psychoanalytic clinical practices. This topic is closely related to how Milner (1969, p. 380) depicts her own experience with breathing:

> To return to my observations of my own breathing; there was also something else that I noticed, introspectively, about the transformations of the way in which the ego experiences itself, when one is lying down, both in the process of relaxing muscular tensions and in becoming aware of one's own breathing; for it could result, if given a little time, in a sensation of total melting, so that one's whole self-awareness changed to being a dark warm velvety puddle, intensely related to, in fact almost interpenetrating with, the supporting ground. And it was from this that there came, if the relaxation had been deep enough, the astounding feeling of both oneself and the world as new created.

More research needs to be conducted on the psychosomatic functions of breathing and how it affects and alters the way one engages and experiences oneself. The psychosomatic functions brought by breathing might greatly benefit, in the clinical setting, both the therapist and patient here and now in the consulting room. 'It certainly seemed that what Bion calls the inchoate state was what I had been trying to describe in terms of the sense of primary relatedness to one's body from inside' (Milner, 1969, p. 383). The bodily states reached by practising

Buddhist meditation seem to connect with various Bionian concepts such as the 'protomental system', 'O'[54], the 'ultimate reality', 'the screen' and various in-between experiences which Bion describes as a conversation between psyche and soma in his last book, *A Memoir of the Future*. For instance, in relation to group dynamics, Bion states that

> the proto-mental system I visualise as one in which physical and psychological or mental are undifferentiated. It is a matrix from which spring the phenomena which at first appear—on a psychological level and in the light of psychological investigation—to be discrete feelings only loosely associated with one another (Bion, 1961, p. 102).

Additionally, in Bion's *A Memoir of the Future,* an expression from the fictional character 'SOMA' states (Bion, 1991, p. 445-6):

> I cannot make anything clear to Psyche unless I borrow a bellyache or headache or respiratory distress from somatic vocabulary for any of these post-natal structures. I believe in mind and personality as there is no evidence whatever for anything but Body.

Further studies need to investigate more thoroughly the connections amongst the Buddhist attentional states reached by meditation and the attentional states embedded within Bion's descriptions of various experiences between psyche and soma as an attentional state pointing to the functionality of the simultaneity of the bodily and psychic experiences.

The third orientation which needs further exploration is the connection between the simultaneity of 'mindfulness' of traumatic experiences and 'concentration' on the bodily safety of Buddhist meditation mostly brought by breathing techniques, and the recently discovered Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy. The American Psychological Association (2017) describes EMDR as 'a structured therapy that encourages the patient to briefly focus on the trauma memory while simultaneously experiencing bilateral

[54] Bion states that 'O is by definition indestructible and not subject to, circumscribed by, beginnings and ends, rules, laws of nature or any construct of the human mind' (Bion, 1991, 88-89)

stimulation (typically eye movements), which is associated with a reduction in the vividness and emotion associated with the trauma memories'. EMDR was first introduced by Dr Shapiro (1989) in a randomised controlled study evaluating the treatment effects of EMDR on traumatised individuals. The simultaneous nature of 'bilateral stimulation' emphasised in EMDR therapy resembles the simultaneity of mindfulness and concentration meditations in Buddhism. The key resemblance between them is the simultaneous engagement of active bodily control, such as actively practising breathing rhythm in Buddhist meditation or actively moving one's eyes sideways in EMDR, and concentration on the traumatic experiences. In Buddhist meditation, concentration on breathing and mindfully tracing one's internal happenings (including traumatic experiences) are practised simultaneously and interchangeably, whilst EMDR emphasises the simultaneous engagement of the sensation brought by moving one's eyes sideways and active recollection of traumatic memories. Concentration on breathing might deepen the engagement with the body in comparison with eye moments, tapping (parts of the physical body) and tones listed in current EMDR procedures since breathing might engage bodily sensations in a more pervasive way, activating skin functions of the whole body inside the airway and lungs, and evoking cutis anserine (goosebumps) of the skin. The simultaneous engagement of deep breathing and active tracing of traumatic experiences here and now might improve the efficacy of the treatment of trauma patients.

5.3 Final Comments

This thesis takes the form of a PhD by articles. There have been several attempts during the past five decades to indicate the connections between Bion and Buddhism. This project foregrounds the need to research the connection between 'Bion and Buddhism' in more depth. In comparison with other articles attempting to juxtapose Bion and Buddhism, this PhD

provides clear evidence of the Buddhist influence on Bion's psychoanalytic thinking, and it further pinpoints the clinical benefits of attentional states derived from combining Buddhist meditations (mindfulness and concentration), Bion's clinical thinking and other clinical ideas in psychoanalysis.

An interesting finding of the current project is that psychoanalyst W. R. Bion might have accidentally discovered the beneficial function of tracing patients' states of mind. Bion wrote the following paragraph describing his clinical experience with a patient in 1958, which closely resembles mindfulness meditation:

> For an appreciable time my attention dwelt on this parade of associations to the exclusion of a peculiar accompaniment of running commentary on how he was feeling. As this obtruded, I became aware of a pattern which went like this: association, association, association, "definitely a bit anxious," association, association, "yes, slightly depressed," associations, "a bit anxious now," and so on. His behaviour was striking, but the session came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on. (Bion, 1967/1984, p 77)

Although Bion did not intentionally try to implement mindfulness meditation, what he recorded here in one of his analytic sessions is strikingly similar to mindfulness' 'bare attention', merely tracing the patient's mental changes from one moment to another. After Bion spontaneously followed his patient's mental changes, what he surprisingly discovered is that 'the session came to an end without my being able to formulate any clear idea of what was going on' (Bion, 1967/1984, p 346). This very discovery surprised Bion greatly. The hypothesis is that Bion accidentally discovered the usefulness of the 'bare attention' technique which does not result in any cognitive, mental, purposeful and intentional formulations of ideas. When one is very concentrated on the process of psychosomatic happenings, the process of concentration starts to have a containing function here and now.

Perhaps Bion was on the verge of realizing that formulation of ideas is not always useful and necessary in sessions. Merely tracing patients' mental state changes serves as a container on its own.

It is my original contribution to provide concrete evidence of Bion's deep interest in Zen Buddhism by analysing the annotations and underlinings in his personal copy of Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* (1957). He subsumed five main themes based on Bion's annotations and underlines in the book. These are the 'Four Noble Truths'; conventional knowledge versus spontaneity; non-verbal communication; 'no memory no desire'; and 'O' (or 'ultimate reality'). I provided a clearer picture of the elements that attracted Bion's interest in Buddhism and the places where Buddhism resonated with his own psychoanalytic work.

Building on this confirmation of Bion's engagement with Buddhist ideas, my second original contribution is to point out that, although Bion urges the elimination of memory and desire, the very process of being barely aware of such desires could generate beneficial intuitions that can provide the psychoanalyst with a fresh angle with which to examine clinical maternal. Informed by mindfulness and other Buddhist meditative practices, I argue that by staying with and tolerating, instead of eliminating and suppressing, memories and desires, as Bion suggested, the memories and desires will eventually come to spontaneously generate beneficial realisations, which are vital for clinical thinking. Both "no memory no desire" and "being barely aware of desire" can lead to meaningful introspective clinical realisations when they meet the right person with the right talent.

I also conducted a systematic review and comparison of the innovations of Epstein and Cooper in developing specific attentional states within the field of psychoanalysis, drawing on aspects of Buddhist meditation. It might not be considered an original contribution. However, it is my original initiative to indicate the possibility that symbolisation or formulation of ideas is not the only containing function of human beings.

I suspect that another containing function which lies more in the human instinct and human body other than intentionally or unintentionally sought symbolic functions. It is my original initiative to direct researchers' and clinicians' attention towards functions that reside in more mind-body holistic and interactive states and the existence of a more bodily-centred psych that is guided by the natural ways of complex and synergistic human functionings --- it is no longer a focus of any specific functions.

An interesting speculation of the present PhD project is that simultaneously bringing together mindfulness of traumatic experiences, such as relevant affects, emotional and physiological (e.g., sensational) responses and correspondent images, and concentration on deeper breathing, may provide an amplified containing function for traumatic experiences in the here and now. It might potentially complement and advance Bion's idea of a 'container' that seems more psychically centred rather than bodily centred. In more traumatised patients, this simultaneous engagement of the body and tracing or recalling of traumatic experiences seems to work more efficiently than the symbolic functions of the ego. This is evidenced by the recently discovered EMDR psychotherapy. After re-engaging the bodily sensations, such as eye moment, tapping parts of the physical body and focusing on certain tones, and traumatic recollections, there is a reduction in the vividness and emotion associated with the trauma memories' (American Psychological Association, 2017). The simultaneous engagement of deep breathing and active tracing of traumatic experiences here and now might improve the efficacy of treatment for trauma patients. Further research is needed to explore its relation to psychoanalyst W. R. Bion's various concepts, such as the 'protomental system', 'O', the 'ultimate reality', 'the screen' and various in-between experiences that Bion describes as a conversation between psyche and soma in his last book, *A Memoir of the Future* (1991). Relevant research projects are urgently needed for improved efficacy in treating trauma patients.

Last but not least, towards the end of my PhD project, I recognised the need to develop Chapter 1.5 in order to revisit the conceptual frameworks of each chapter/article and the overall framework of the entire PhD project. In this section, I introduced tools that underpin and connect the various concepts and discussions throughout the whole PhD project, enhancing the coherence and depth of understanding of other concepts and discussions throughout the entire PhD. I focused on two primary concepts: ‘attention/attentional states’ and ‘intuition’ which are prevalent in both Bion’s psychoanalytic theories and Zen Buddhist writings. I aimed to refine and generalise these concepts to create meanings that are functional and suitable in both contexts. The choice of 'attention' and 'intuition' as the conceptual framework was deliberate, as they are central to my comparative analysis of Bion and Zen Buddhism throughout my PhD project. Reflecting on my whole PhD project, it became clear that ‘attention/attentional states’ and ‘intuition’ are crucial to understanding both Bion’s work and Zen Buddhist ideas. These concepts emerged from the analysis of the three main chapters of my PhD and served as the foundation for my comparisons between Bion’s and Buddhist thoughts. They are also fundamental principles in both psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, facilitating a deeper exploration of the potential overlap and synthesis between these two fields. By developing Chapter 1.5, I provided a structured framework that ties together the various elements of my research. This integrative endevour not only clarifies the role of ‘attention/attentional states’ and ‘intuition’ in the current project but also enhances the connectivity between different discussions and analyses thoughout the project. Ultimately, Chapter 1.5 helps to articulate the overarching conceptual framework that supports, connects and deepens the understanding of the entire PhD thesis.

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