

BION: TEACHING GLOSSARY by Meg Harris Williams

I: The growth of thoughts
II: Enemies of growth
III: The psychoanalyst at work

I – THE GROWTH OF THOUGHTS

Alpha function = unconscious symbol-formation; develops feelings into thoughts; happens via reverie; the thought does not need to be verbalized, eg it could be a dream-thought.

Becoming (Platonic) vs. learning-about (or, knowing via introjection, vs. knowing about).

Caesuras and meetings: are they a receiving-screen or obscuring-screen? (eg, birth and pre- or post-natal parts; psyche and soma; sleeping and waking states; conscious and unconscious).

Catastrophic change. Means death to the existing state of mind – its many ‘rebirths’ constitute the process of growth. Set in motion when different parts/feelings/vertices try to link up.

Common sense (Meltzer compares Sullivan’s ‘consensuality’); when information gathers at a caesura, potentially for supra-sensuous transformation.

Container–contained necessary for growth: male-female symbols represent the fundamental linkage.

Curiosity (Oedipus in original Grid): necessity of epistemophilic instinct; equivalent to life-force. May show in ‘repetition compulsion’ in sense that the Answer is still open. Quotes Blanchot.

Endoskeleton – allows mind to expand as more thoughts are accommodated; contrasts with exoskeleton or shell (of basic assumptions, etc.).

Genomene– psychic counterpart of phenomene – the originating germ of a thought.

Growth vs. Correctness – true ethics. Room for growth. Occurs through link with object (initially breast/ maternal reverie)

Knowing vs. knowing-about. (Both needed: different from Negative Grid).

Language of achievement (not only verbal). Comes from observing truly not from trying to ‘be poetic’ if you don’t have that skill. Admiration for poetry for its shadowing of the future – ideas realized only centuries later. Contrasts with ‘language of substitution’ (failure to observe truly).

Psyche-lodgement. The germ of an idea lodges in the mind in the gaps between knowledge, provided the surface of the knowledge is not too ‘smooth’ (too closed-off).

Myth and metaphor for categorising emotional cruxes; characterized by ‘invariance’, the ‘basic feature’ of a situation that is recognizable as a constant, even when translated into different media. Examples: Oedipus (curiosity); Helen of Troy (absolute beauty, not describable); Palinurus (hidden latent turbulence); spiral nebula in astronomy (break-through); Monet’s poppy-field; the sculpture trapping light; mathematical ‘conjugate complex’ points; the Grid; polyvalency (chemical analogy) = openness to linking; river Alpheus and tracking of the idea. Sometimes called ‘transformations’ from one mode of expression into another.

Learning from experience (knowing *vs.* knowing about) – being and becoming.

LHK (Love, Hate, Knowledge). Turbulent emotions held in dramatic tension = passion. Awe or dread accompanies the K link, intimations of O (the unknown).

Mind – an apparatus for receiving and digesting thoughts, anticipated by the glandular system. A new evolutionary development for the mammal. Synonymous with ‘personality’ or ‘self’ and includes both pre- and post-natal aspects.

Negative capability (Keats) – capacity to tolerate uncertainty – results in ‘language of achievement’.

O = ultimate reality (unknowable); godlike ineffable object; origin; breast-shape as in point and circle. In Kleinian terms, an extension of idea of the restored mother. Not just containment but identification with an evolving mind – with capacities and functions of object. Nearest analogy is ‘passionate love’.

Object: the growth-promoting object is the analysis, not the analyst (Meltzer clarifies: the psychoanalytic process as aesthetic object). Created by a link between the 'pair' modelled on container-contained and maternal reverie.

Pre-conception – awaits linking with an 'other' or external feature that matches/fulfils/completes it, resulting in a conception/thought. Distinct from preconception in sense of assumption.

Pre-natal and post-natal parts of self need to meet and communicate across the mental caesura left over from birth. Prenatal life: body-ego, foetus=id=smell. Conscious formulations just the final tip of the iceberg – all thinking basically unconscious.

Projective identification – as primitive communication (basis of reverie) rather than as evacuation or intrusion. (See Meltzer for clarified distinction between communicative and intrusive projective identification.) Must be understood as part of an oscillation between paranoid-schizoid and depressive orientations (Ps↔D).

Ps↔D in continuous oscillation constitutes normal conditions for thinking. Between uncertainty and aesthetic harmony.

Realisation: expresses an achieved link between internal and external reality, a pre-conception and something that matches, confirms, and develops it.

Reverie (initially via the thinking breast). Unconscious processing of projected feelings, as in mother-baby relationship; verbalization not necessary.

Self = Psyche and Soma. Pre- and post-natal. Glandular system anticipates apparatus for digesting thoughts. The mind or personality.

Turbulence – is hated by the self and unless curiosity is strong enough, will be avoided: 'Kill it or find out about it' (that is, investigate its source and origin – via enhanced observation). Uncomfortable state that heralds the presence of an idea and potential catastrophic change, i.e. growth.

Vertices of art, science, religion (the basics – also others). Each have own truth: need to find a tension not too slack, not too taut. (Valency, linking.)

Wisdom – distinct from intelligence. Acquired when the mind learns from experience; can apply even to all phases of life.

II – ENEMIES OF GROWTH

Attacks on linking, where ‘link’ may be speech itself or the pa method (minus LHK).

Basic assumption mentality (3 types – fight–flight, pairing [messianic], dependency). Mindless *vs.* thinking orientation. Exists in everyone both in group life and internally. Contrasts with work-group.

Beta-elements and beta-screen: unprocessed by alpha-function so do not lead to transformation via reverie into thoughts. Sometimes means undigested sense-impressions; sometimes alpha-elements that have been reversed (the mind’s rubbish, for excretion).

Bizarre elements – way of dismantling elements of thinking.

Envy is essentially of ‘the growth-promoting objects’ and retreat to minus K. (The envious breast removes the will to live – this is how it deals with fear of dying.)

Frustration – can be evaded, or alternatively, modified (via link to the object).

Intelligence *vs.* wisdom – knowledge ‘too thick’ for wisdom.

Grid of development of thoughts and anti-thoughts.

Language of substitution *vs.* language of achievement.

Memory and desire (*vs.* ‘remembering’) interpose preconceived pictures of the state the person wishes to attain; so blocks evolution from within.

Mindlessness (Meltzer’s term) of non-mental level, the ‘proto-mental’ which exists in everyone including sophisticated adults.

Nameless dread (Meltzer’s ‘terror’ – of madness, the delusional system).

Negative Grid (according to Meltzer, would be drawn up from Column 2 – lies): all the anti-thinking forces.

Pain, evasion of (*vs.* modification of, with help of object). Not so different from pleasure – two sides of one spectrum. Distinguished from ‘suffering’ which means tolerating the pain until it is understood.

Paramnesias (after Freud) fill space of our ignorance; theories ‘rush to the head’ when thinking is too stressful.

Preconception (*vs.* pre-conception in sense of proto-idea) mates with a memory to prevent catastrophic change, so blocks reception of the new idea.

Psychosis: may show signs of primitive or thwarted undeveloped thought with glimpses of insight.

III – THE PSYCHOANALYST AT WORK

Aesthetic: a feeling of harmony or rightness that indicates truth is present.

At-one-ment = in line with O (sometimes ‘alignment’). Intersects with the psychoanalytic pair. (Dislikes term ‘countertransference.’)

Consciousness as organ of perception for psychic qualities (even at night, turned inward). A tool for focusing. Nothing to do with verbal formulation.

Container–contained: the personality has a container–contained relationship with psychoanalysis (not analyst) – mutual modifying, shift in values.

Interpretations: can be ‘rush of theories to the head’ or can be genuine attempt to formulate what is observed. Beware pseudo-knowledge.

Observation – the key to the psychoanalytic method. Theories are worthless by comparison.

Mind – that which is being observed and changes through the act of observing.

Ps↔D oscillates between patience (toleration of not-knowing) and security (momentary sense of truth and harmony).

Psychoanalysis: specialist method for germinating thoughts – a work-group of two or more (if you include the ‘third party’).

Reality-testing: distinguishing between evasion and modification of pain requires reality-testing – what is true, what is a lie.

Remembering (vs. memory and desire) is essential owing to links with primordial traces. Like Platonic remembering (anamnesis).

Reverie is based on mother–baby and container–contained; the analyst relies on the analytic setting to be the container.

Speculative imagination/reason. No progress without it.

Third party in a psychoanalytic setup: the analyser of the analyst. May be more than three psychic parties even if only two bodies in the room.

Work-group – the basis for thinking. Entails toleration of individuality and difference – vs. basic assumption group (the non-mental level of existence). Ideas can track via a group, as model for the individual mind.