A CLINICAL APPLICATION OF BION'S CONCEPTS
VOLUME 2

ANALYTIC FUNCTION AND THE FUNCTION OF THE ANALYST

P. C. SANDLER

ROUTLEDGE

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Analytic Function and the Function of the Analyst

P. C. Sandler

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To Ester, Daniela, and Luiz

To the memory of my parents: Dr Jayme Sandler, one of the first psychoanalysts in Brazil, who introduced me to Freud, Klein, and Bion, and Mrs Bertha Lerner Sandler, professional home decorator, who first showed me what Art is all about

Solomon saith, *There is no new thing upon the Earth*. So that as Plato had an imagination, that *all knowledge was but remembrance*; so Solomon giveth his sentence, that *all novelty is but oblivion*.

One of their heirs who gave utility to their wisdom, Freud, made an observation out of this: *out of the creativity of a couple, claims to originality are but deluded omnipotence*.

(Expanded from Bacon, 1625, on account of subsequent progress due to his contributions.)

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Rathbone and Mrs Anna Nilsen, who helped its progression from an impossible manuscript into a real book.

Naming is an almost impossible activity. Paradoxically, there are good names, in the sense that they convey beautifully the natural function of the corresponding things, events or facts they identify. In a book devoted to the analytic function, it is essential to reiterate the previous volume's final acknowledgement, which is paradoxically the first one, the reason for the existence of this writing. It seems to me that "Patient" is one of those names which do justice to their function. For ethical reasons, I cannot name each Patient who came to see me for helping analysis. I express my gratitude for their patience, where nature and nurture meets—and, in a special way, their perennial personal forbearance with my failures. Stemming from the medical tradition, the analytic couple is a way to make the best of a bad job: they were able to couple my personal need to care with their need for help—as well my need to share, both with them and with analytic colleagues, to whom I wish a nourishing and hopefully rewarding reading.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paulo Cesar Sandler, MD, MSc, MhFAB, obtained his medical training at the Universidade de São Paulo; he is a Training Analyst at the Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise de São Paulo. Author of several books in Portuguese, including an eight-volume series dedicated to transdisciplinary research between psychoanalysis, medical biology, epistemology, mathematics and physics, he has also written more than one hundred psychiatric and psychoanalytic papers in medical and psychoanalytic periodicals, as well as book chapters, some of which have been published in the English, French, Italian and Russian languages. He has translated most of Bion's books and papers into Portuguese, including the first ever translation of *A Memoir of the Future*, and has organised several international meetings on the work of Bion. Dr Sandler currently teaches at the Institute of Psychoanalysis of the SBPSP, giving courses on the work of Freud, Klein and Bion; he was formerly a professor on a post-graduate course (in the broad sense) at the Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade de São Paulo, the first one devoted to the work of Bion in Brazil. He has worked in private psychiatric and psychoanalytic practice since 1974, having previously worked with psychotics in a traditional in-patient clinic. He has experience in group-oriented

social and community psychiatry, including the epidemiology of mental disorders, as a former Manager of the Programa de Saúde Mental, at Faculdade de Saúde Pública da Universidade de São Paulo, the local Public Health School. He is an Honorary Member of the Brazilian Air Force, due to voluntary work with group dynamics, and an Honorary Associate of the Accademia Lancisiana (Rome).

PREFACE

Appreciation of Volume 1 of *A Clinical Application of Bion's Concepts*

by James S. Grotstein

In this magisterial work Paulo Sandler continues to distinguish himself as a foremost scholar on the works of Bion. Already well known for his encyclopedic zeal, this present book continues Sandler's tireless search of Bion's contributions by this noteworthy clinical application of Bion's ideas. When one scans Sandler's bibliography on Bion's works, one can only be deeply impressed by his rigour and his far-reaching scholarship. His 853-page dictionary, *The Language of Bion: A Dictionary of Concepts* (Karnac, 2005) attests to that. It was so useful to me that I purchased two copies, one for my consulting room and another for home. Both have been well used. Two of the features of his scholarship deserve especial notice. One has been his frequent checking with other Bion scholars, including Francesca Bion, about questions he might have. Another stems from his enormous erudition and scholarship. After the reader immerses him- or herself in this text, he or she will observe a sizeable number of languages in which he is fluent and variegated cultures and disciplines with which he is conversant.

A major feature of Sandler's approach to studying Bion has been to contextualise the background of Bion's assumptions. In so doing, he extensively investigates the cultural and historical antecedents,

especially including the philosophical and scientific points of view. From them Sandler selects Romanticism and its dialectical relationship with the Enlightenment. Among the many characteristics of Romanticism is imagination, at best creative, but also idealisation and hyperbole. It is its imaginatively creative nature that Sandler believes applies to Freud's, Bion's, and Klein's theories of dreams, phantasies, and myths. Romanticism can also apply to the preternatural concept of Mother Nature, and derivatively to the numinous quality Freud assigned to the instinctual (biological) drives. For over a century since its creation psychoanalysis had been mainly thought of as a body-rooted psychology, which emphasis was used by its practitioners to require that analysts should be physicians.

The Enlightenment, on the other hand, was a trend in which man was gradually developing ideas of certainty, ideas which would lend "scientific" calibration, i.e. measurable truth, to the measurement of a vast array of living and non-living objects. Consequently, even though the origin of the instinctual drives emerged from a numinous "Romantic" matrix, the drives became enlisted to become "first cause" for all psychological phenomena. Freud (1923) declared magisterially, "It is the destiny of the instinct [drive] to be expended in the cathexis of its descendants" (my addition). Classical Freudian and its derivative, Kleinian analysis, became associated with certainty—with the drives as "first cause", whereas Bion's way of thinking became associated with uncertainty, which he was to name "O", the Absolute Truth about an Ultimate and Infinite Reality.

Sandler discusses Bion's way of being "scientific", one notable aspect of which is his distinctive use of theories, which he distinguishes from models. Theories, Sandler states, are "a system of interrelated statements, originally corresponding to their counterparts in reality and deriving (as representations) from this very same empirically observed reality" (p. 2). *I* (JSG) think Sandler is suggesting that theory is the condensation of an invariant truth that summarily captures the hidden order of a phenomenon. Justifiable theories are few and seldom need to be added to. Models, on the other hand, are analogues that exist outside the system they are being applied to. They are instruments to vicariously approximate, measure, and calibrate the objects or phenomena to which they are being applied, e.g., the sphygmomanometer for blood pressure.

The Chapter titles, along with their contents, reveal the range and depth of Sandler's exploration: Chapters One, Two, Four, Five and Six examine Freud's and Bion's theories of dreaming. Chapters One and Three deal with the cultural and contemporaneous scientific background settings which helped contextualise and shape each of their formulations about dreaming. Chapter Seven deals with observation and communication, followed by Chapters Nine and Ten, which discuss the container and the contained. Chapter Eleven deals with catastrophic change. In Chapters Six and Eight Sandler presents extensive and highly credible clinical illustrations of his ideas. His discussion of dreaming, the container and the contained, and especially of invariance is of high order, clear, and inspiring.

Sandler has written another brilliant textbook on Bion's thinking that constitutes a highly useful and practical handbook on the subject.

PART I

EXTENSIONS INTO THE REALM OF MINUS

FAUST What is your name?
MEPHISTOPHELES The question seems absurd / For someone who despises the mere word, / Who treats appearances as vain illusion / And seeks the truth in such remote seclusion.
FAUST But with you gentlemen the name / And nature's usually the same, / And we can often recognise / The Liar, the Destroyer, or the Lord of Flies. / Who are you, then?
MEPHISTOPHELES A part of that same power that would / Forever work for evil, yet forever creates good.

(Goethe, *Faust*, Part I Scene iii)

In psychoanalysis it is assumed that a theory is false if it does not seem to minister to the "good" of the majority of mankind. And it is a commonplace idea of good. The whole idea of "cure", of therapeutic activity, remains unscrutinised. It is largely determined by the expectations of the patient, though this is questioned in good analysis (as I know it). But in nuclear physics a theory is considered to be good if it aids the construction of a bomb that destroys Hiroshima. Too much of the thinking about

psychoanalysis precludes the possibility of regarding as good a theory that would destroy the individual or the group. Yet there will never be a scientific scrutiny of analytic theories until it includes critical appraisal of a theory that by its very soundness could lead to a destruction of mental stability, e.g. a theory that increases memory and desire to a point where they rendered sanity impossible.

(Bion, *Cogitations*, p. 378)

What psychoanalytic thinking requires is a method of notation and rules for its employment that will enable work to be done in the *absence* of the object, to facilitate further work in the *presence* of the object. The barrier to this that is presented by unfettered play of an analyst's phantasies has long been recognised; pedantic statement on the one hand and verbalisation loaded with unobserved implications on the other mean that the potential for understanding and erroneous deduction is so high as to vitiate the value of the work done with such defective tools.

(Bion, 1965, p. 44)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Agree with the argument or not, it is undeniable that in many quarters some of the theories proposed by Wilfred Bion are felt to be obscure. Most of them were intended to help the analyst's observation and improve his or her powers of observation, like the theories of alpha function, the realm of Minus, transformations and invariance, and finally the theory of links (Bion, 1962, 1965, 1970). As I wrote elsewhere (Sandler, 2005, 2006), Bion's contributions to psychoanalytic theory are comparatively few *vis-à-vis* his theories of observation for use by the practising analyst.

I suppose that some of the difficulties are on two accounts: (i) the integrative, and (ii) the developmental character of Bion's work. It is a system of interdependent theories of both psychoanalysis and observation of psychoanalysis which function as a whole—like cogs in a car's transmission. They were not presented in a rough and ready way. Rather, they were written in a compact form which evolved through accrued experience. This evolution, like that of Freud or of any branch of science, sprang from clinical facts which until then were not observed, but became observable due to the immediately preceding theoretical achievement.

Moreover, Bion's compact writing condenses a lot of information into demanding aphorisms, metaphors and parables. They demand to be continuously synchronised with each reader's spontaneous recall of his or her experience in analysis. They presuppose a reader who prefers to think about questions and come up with his or her own answers rather than being presented with the answers from the outset. They focus on the same basic issues, stemming from (a) Freud's and Klein's insights about the lack of a capacity or willingness to tolerate frustration; (b) Oedipus; (c) dreams and free associations; and (d) the defusing of the instincts.

Even though the basic issues are invariant, the focus is changeably adjusted to several different vertices. In this sense Bion's theories resemble an analyst at work. The latter must be a synthetic (compact), terse, vertex-changing but invariant-oriented creature in order to be able to interpret. These theories are not amenable to being understood—the analyst has to be "at one" with them (Bion, 1970).

This part of the book deals with one of those theories, the realm of Minus—a name I propose in an effort to integrate the concepts and conceptions scattered throughout Bion's works. I will start with a personal analytic experience, which echoes the experience of other practising analysts. Between 1974 and 1981, I found that my attempts to cope with my patients' various manifestations of hate and love in analytic sessions resulted in impasse-creating phenomena. In other words, some people tend to restrict their appreciation of manifestations of death instincts to judgmental values.[1] I was able to see this phenomenon with the help of Melanie Klein's observations. These patients could not put up with depressive phenomena that indicated an appreciation of guilt without colouring them with marked feelings of persecution. They felt judged, or judged themselves harshly. Because of projective identification, the latter is the begetter of the former. Whereas with some patients the realisation of guilt was conducive to more freedom to move towards the depressive position and less fear of its backwards, tandem companion, a renewed paranoid-schizoid experience, other patients just felt persecuted. Neither therapeutic nor self awareness ensued; neither atonement nor becoming ensued. It seemed to me that these patients had a problem which would not yield readily to treatment using existing psychoanalytic theories. In 1981 I came across Bion's suggestions

about a "Minus" realm. It seemed to illuminate those issues, but in a sense that was not very clear to me. Sometimes this realm seemed to be a purely destructive one; sometimes it seemed to be constitutive. More experience was needed, and it seemed necessary to make an attempt to unify Bion's seemingly different theories. The present unification, which includes André Green's contributions, displays the result of twenty-five years of analytic practice. This unification demanded an expansion, which is presented here. I have attempted to make explicit some implicit issues, and at the same time I have included clinical examples.

Contradictions, paradoxes and the two principles of mental functioning

Elsewhere I have distinguished two kinds of relationship between a pair of opposites: namely, to see them either as contradictions or as paradoxes (Sandler, 1997b; 2001a, b, c; 2002a, b; 2003, 2006).

Contradiction is a verbal formulation derived from a Latin expression (*contra dictum*). It may be seen as expressing a war-minded state. The relationship between the poles is parasitic, bound to destroy both (Bion, 1970, p. 95).

I shall use the term Paradox, the Greek predecessor of the same idea (*paradoxon*), to describe the Platonic realm of the noumena, ultimately unknowable reality as it is, and its phenomenal counterpart which is apprehensible by the senses. This means two sets of knowledge (*doxa*) running parallel, like the counterpoint developed by Bach in music. It was once called dialectics, meaning two languages. In its primitive forms, as for example among the Sophists, one set would triumph over the other through rhetoric—more akin to what I call contradiction. Via Kant this evolved into Hegel's dialectics, which allows for a product from the pair of opposites: namely, the synthesis. The development of this philosophical root and its application in psychoanalysis as discovered by Freud and extended by Klein, Winnicott and Bion are researched elsewhere (Sandler, 1997a, b, c; 2002a, b; 2003).

A sense of truth is achieved when one realises that the object that is loved and the object that is hated are one and the same object, observed Bion, in a remarkable integration of Hegel, Freud and Klein (Bion, 1961b). The sense of truth depends on an ability to deal