

Edited by TOMASZ FORTUNA

BION'S VERTICES

On Truth and Lies



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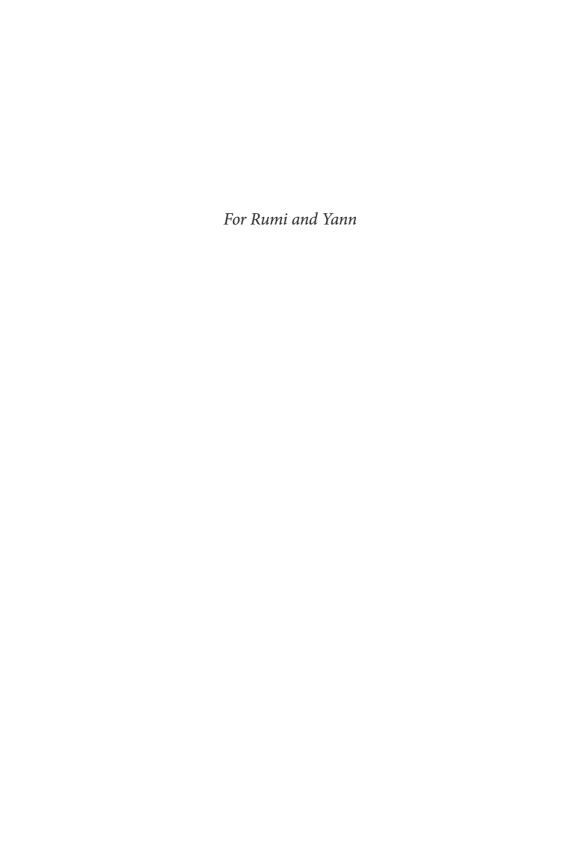
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Series editor's preface

R. Bion continues to inspire psychoanalysts and clinicians, and he undeniably paved the way for further developments in clinical work with individual patients, groups, and systems, working alongside other psychoanalytic pioneers. His writings and a way of thinking bring a sense of liberation to psychoanalytic work but he also reminds us that this work requires discipline and respect for the truth (both psychic and material). Bion's writing often seems intimidating and puzzling at first, with his specific writing style and scarce clinical material. He had, however, reasons to do that, attempting to emphasise the authenticity of the clinical encounter, the meeting of two minds, two frightened people undertaking a serious work.

His recommendation to read his books through, starting from *Learning from Experience*, without the unnecessary attempt to comprehend every phrase and sentence, goes against our common habits especially when it comes to professional literature; it is, however, so typical of Bion to let the reader have an experience of reading that gradually leads to coherence and meanings—just like his approach to clinical work.

The aim of the Contemporary Bion book series is to explore Bion's work, the avenues he opened up for us, and interpret his contribution

in a creative but disciplined way from a contemporary perspective. There will be books that creatively expand on his ideas, books that take a closer look at his contribution—there also will be books that will come along unexpectedly, challenging the status quo and opening new horizons.

We are starting with Bion's Vertices: On Truth and Lies, a collection of papers and essays on this theme by renowned international psychoanalytic authors. This book will be followed in the series by a close examination of Bion's Learning from Experience, the first of the quartet of books he published in the 1960s and 1970s.

I am very pleased that the Karnac (formerly Phoenix) team entrusted me with the introduction and development of this new book series in its publishing house.

> Tomasz Fortuna London

Foreword

he new millennium continues to provide us with new work from the cottage industry that Bion studies have become. It is now safe to say psychoanalytically speaking, that Bion has become one of the psychoanalytic immortals—indeed, on 4 July 2025, a bronze bust of W. R. Bion will be installed and take its place alongside other luminaries at the British Psychoanalytical Society in London. From his death in 1979, generation after generation of psychoanalysts return over and over to his work, both for its clinically inspired way of working and for the insights it contains on the nature of psychic truth, knowledge, and being, living more vibrantly in the present moment—and always leaving open one's mode of psychological enquiry.

The analysts/authors of the collection of papers contained in this volume admirably demonstrate their commitment to the relentless search for psychic truth, perhaps being guided by Bion's memorable comments in his (1958) paper, "On arrogance". There, in a dramatic rereading of the Oedipus story, Bion evolved a two-person version of the story, shifting the emphasis to the analyst-as-mother as the member of the analytic dyad who bears the epistemophilic instinct. The analyst's desire to connect with what is psychically truthful and put his or her patient in touch with it, bears what Jim Grotstein used to call the "truth

drive", something that can and does elicit a wide variety of patient responses. It can range all the way from annihilatory silence and evasion to chaos and conflict, and ultimately towards a more far-ranging notion of what truth is. The analyst's capacity to be emotionally or empathically attuned—or at-one-with the patient's state of mind—is another invocation of the solace that can be found in small mutative moments embedded in the oceanic experience of transformations in O (where both analyst and patient can be at-one-with new psychological meanings and a greater and more encompassing sense of truthfulness).

Tomasz Fortuna, the editor of this volume, is to be congratulated for gathering a truly international group of Bionian analysts/scholars to tackle the multifaceted dimensions of truth and lies, be it at the clinical, dyadic analytic situation, the small group situation, or the macro sociopolitical one.

There is a harmonious balance of British analysts deeply committed to the clinical and theoretical work of W. R. Bion—analysts like Waddell, Bell, Hinshelwood, Abel-Hirsch, Britton, Fortuna, Flynn, and Hahn—and analysts from the other regions of the International Psychoanalytical Association, such as Cassorla (Brazil), Jackson (Greece), Grimalt (Spain), Horovitz (France), Bergstein (Israel), Eekhoff and Caper (USA), and Tabbia (Argentina/Spain). To my way of reading this book, the contributions from our British colleagues seem to revolve around their faithfulness to Bion's work, his immediate sources and work from other British colleagues that render what I think of as a contextualist narrative of Bion's thought.

On the other hand, the contributions from Bionians in other lands seamlessly evoke a secondary literature that has blossomed in the new millennium: that of post-Bionian or hermeneutic meaning-makers, who cite the work of Ferro and Civitarese, Bergstein, Lopez-Corvo, and Bianchedi. All together, this admirable collection of papers by a distinguished group of international Bion scholars will give the reader ample opportunity to work their way through the problems in integrating the British or contextualist Bion with the hermeneutic, meaning-making Bion so amply represented in current post-Bionian contributions.

Introduction

he relationship between truth and lies is complex. They do not live in a vacuum but permeate the various layers of human experience. In one of Nick Cave's ballads the female voice tells us this story,

They call me The Wild Rose But my name was Elisa Day Why they call me it I do not know For my name was Elisa Day (Cave, 1996, p. 20)

These verses from "Where the wild roses grow" (Cave, 1996) take us straight to the tension at the border between truthful communication and the disavowal of brutal reality. Here the chorus of the song retells the painful truth of a committed murder of a young woman, in a disguised form—truth and lie at once: "Why they call me it I do not know." It is the image of wild roses at the river bank and her nickname, The Wild Rose, that contain the real story. The forces motivated by a wish (perhaps a need or necessity) to hide and disavow the reality clash with the presence of another force: a drive to communicate. Or are these perhaps two sides of the same coin?

Such tension between truth and lies relates as well to that "impossible" task of the analyst, who attempts to unravel the fine and complex fabric of the interpersonal encounter between the analyst and the analysand. Although Bion states that, "The link between one mind and another that leads to destruction of both is the lie" (Bion, 1970, p. 104), he reminds us that psychoanalysis has something to add to the examination of problems associated with truth and untruth since "the psycho-analyst has experience of the dynamics of *misunderstanding*" (ibid., p. 97). Lies and falsehoods prevent psychic growth but they can become meaningful in the analytic situation. For Bion, the lie requires a thinker, a mind that can investigate whatever may be the source of the lie, as opposed to a true statement that does not need a thinker.

In his paper "On arrogance" Bion wrote:

The meaning with which I wish to invest the term "arrogance" may be indicated by supposing that in the personality where life instincts predominate pride becomes self-respect, where death instincts predominate, pride becomes arrogance. (Bion, 1958, p. 144)

Bion refers here to arrogance with which one may approach the truth, no matter what the cost; a ruthless pursuit of truth with no respect for life. Insights can be costly, leading to an emotional upheaval opening the way to growth, through catastrophic change, or to a breakdown. In his writings, and his clinical work, Bion puts the question of truth at the heart of the analytic process. The truth can be illuminating (although unsettling) and can promote emotional thriving (like food) or feel overwhelming if not sufficiently contained. This difficult task presenting itself in the analytic encounter invites the analytic couple to recognise what's what and where the meaning lies, to create conditions for development and prevent too frequent collusions.

Where life drives, instincts, predominate, the lie becomes perhaps a psychic defence, the C2 category in Bion's grid—and although it temporarily precludes growth, it is protective and meaningful; the lie imbued with the death drive denudes the experience of meanings and dismantles links and connections or creates the false ones. Despite that, however, even in such a case there is a communication about the innate destructiveness, the "silent" operation of the death drive. Collusion by

the clinician, destructiveness and wish to avoid anxiety, from the other side of the looking-glass, is not without importance, as it may make it difficult to find the right balance, since both knowing and not-knowing have potential to affect and disturb the analytic couple.

O'Shaughnessy (1990), in her paper that follows on from Bion's question, whether a liar can be psychoanalysed (Bion, 1970), highlights the above problems,

While a denial, a disavowal, etc., expresses a psychic need not to know the truth, a lie is an acceptance of, and a perverse use of, a falsehood. I think this is the origin of what we feared initially, that there is a deep antagonism of perspective between a liar and a psychoanalyst, which must obstruct the forming of a therapeutic alliance and interfere with the analytic work Nonetheless, the lying ... was the means of communicating urgently the fundamental truth about ... early object relations. (O'Shaughnessy, 1990, pp. 193–194)

This passage demonstrates the complexity of lying in the context of the analytic situation, with the interplay of destruction of meanings as well as communication, the conscious use of a lie and its unconscious layers. However, when unravelled, it offers a ray of hope and faith in the analytic process. Inner object relations or perhaps an experience of a trauma become therefore accessible and more available to the analytic work.

In order however to engage with a lie as something potentially meaningful, a lie which is hiding and communicating truth simultaneously, one has to suspend moral judgement, which tends to render lies and falsehoods pejorative in tone (Grotstein, 2007). Such a dichotomy—black and white polarisation—invites moral judgement, condemnation, rejection, and ultimately negation, thereby acting as a lie by denying emotional conflict. As a result, judgement, acting as propaganda and omniscient conviction that utilises the excitement of the superego, avoids the real inquiry into the nature of the lie. I am not trying, however, to sanitise the idea of a lie (or a Lie—see below), which in the form of a falsehood, doubt or deception, can be employed sadistically against oneself, others, and the capacity to experience, intuit, and learn (Campbell, 2014; Lemma, 2005).

Following research carried out by de Bianchedi et al. (2000), Grotstein (2007) recognises Lies, lies, and falsehoods (as well as truth and Truth), where lie with a small "l" refers to mechanisms of defence of the ego, and Lie with a capital "L" expresses the conscious attempt to mislead and destroy meanings. Grotstein goes on,

Bion then postulated the operation in human beings of transforming/ transducing operations: α -function and later dreaming, which convert the Absolute—indifferent, impersonal—Truth into personal emotional, subjective truth, an entity that allows us to think, to feel, to grow mentally: in other words, to be enabled to "learn from experience" by being able to convert Absolute Experience into personal experience that can be felt and thought about (reflected upon). In the meantime Bion's older polarization between truth and falsehood had to be altered in favour of a gradient, Truth \rightarrow truth \rightarrow falsehood \rightarrow lie, to which gradient de Bianchedi (2000) and her group add lie \rightarrow Lie. (Grotstein, 2007, p. 148)

Together with Bion's belief that there is an ineffable ultimate reality (O), and recognition that we can only represent that reality through various transformations, the way we look at communications, including lies, had to change. Bion's recommendation of psychoanalytic discipline of eschewing memories, desires, and an urge to understand, and therefore remain intuitively open to the actual experience from O, facilitated (even permitted) the examination of the nature of communication, suspending attaching a moral value on it. Bion's use of the notion of negative capability refers both to the experience of knowing (Bion, 1958) and not knowing (Bion, 1967). One needs to tolerate both in order for new meanings to emerge in the clinical context.

Bion's Vertices started as a question of what place the notions of truth and lies occupy in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Bion's work and his deep interest in the importance of truth in the emotional development and psychic growth of an individual, as well as the relationship to reality, is a fertile ground to start (or perhaps continue, with Bion) such investigation.

The idea to create *Bion's Vertices* came to me during one of the "Bion in Marrakech" seminars, that had always been inspiring, challenging, and diverse, as well as the BION2020 conference in Barcelona. It was

then that I started thinking about how differently Bion's work has evolved in Britain and abroad, worldwide. I was fortunate to be able to invite an excellent team of clinicians and psychoanalytic authors, whose writings comprise the very core of this book. Although Bion and his work remained the inspiration and a reference point for all the contributors, freedom of expression and their own perspectives as well as writing and communication styles made the authors' vertices their own and original with emphasis on the personal lens and angle with which they approached the task. The idea of vertex itself is dynamic (as opposed to looking at things from a point of view of a particular concept or theory).

This book is not a textbook and it is not to be read like one. The reader has a freedom to engage with individual chapters, although the structure of the book has been carefully thought about. The contributing psychoanalytic authors (all clinicians) were also invited to write freely in relation to Bion and the main theme of the book. The reader will see that all the contributors engaged individually with the questions of truth and lies, what is cure and psychic growth, and what the psychoanalytic process is.

Therefore this book is not intended to find the truth in Bion but rather to follow the avenues he opened up for us, developing the work of Freud, Klein, mathematicians, philosophers, scientists, and poets.

Bion's Vertices attempts to explore what exists as the interplay of the external material and psychic realities, and what gets distorted and disguised. In other words, how to identify the invariants, reflecting reality (O), that can be intuited and observed, but may at times be camouflaged in potentially meaningful falsifications. The image on the front cover of the book is by Witkacy, a versatile Polish modernist multimedia artist and an investigator of the sense of being, the sense of existence. The painting, Kompozycja 1, was made in 1922. Through his conception of art, the theory of pure form, Witkacy tried to reach the ineffable experience of being, the strangeness of existence, as he called it, through works of art that would evoke such experience in the viewer. He considered theatre the ultimate form of art that combines the immersive visual experience with the plot and meanings and the music, to connect with the a-sensuous experience of being, akin to Bion's O.

This way he investigated the metaphysical domains of existence from the artistic and philosophical vertices. The authors of the chapters in this book undertook similar investigations.

Bion's Vertices: On Truth and Lies consists of three parts: i) inquiry into the truth/lie domain, ii) change, growth, creativity, and their opposites, and iii) clinical conversations. Papers in each section of the book examine and explore, or even dream, those areas of the psychic domain. Despite such a tripartite structure, there inevitably is an overlap, as all these areas of experience are in different ways present in the clinical encounter and the emotional experience.

In Chapter One, Waddell weaves together the clinical, and the artistic, with her poetic way of investigating the things unknown in our emotional experience. The notions of shame and guilt can have multiple meanings and take different forms, multiple transformations. Bell (Chapter Two) offers a systematic look at the questions of knowing and learning, and the substitutes for genuine knowledge, the real understanding, the pretenders, that can so easily take the form of propaganda perverting the original meanings. Similar investigations are offered by Grimalt (Chapter Ten) and Jackson (Chapter Nine). They both elaborate on instances where truth becomes distorted or replaced for both defensive and destructive reasons. In Chapter Three, R. D. Hinshelwood attends to the problem of representations, wondering about their truthfulness, Bion's invariants vs distortions in transformations of the ultimate reality O. Caper (Chapter Four) reminds us about Bion's two principles of mental functioning, the lying and the hunger for truth. As mentioned above there is no clear distinction between the two and both modes of functioning try to deal with the question of psychic pain. Cassorla, in Chapter Five, surprisingly, or not, gives praise to lying as an important facet of emotional experience. Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, by Britton, Fortuna, and Flynn, introduce the question of creativity in the clinical encounter—creativity that may evoke fear of catastrophic change and emotional upheaval, and lead to a defensive retrograde movement or offer a chance for growth. In the last part of the book, the authors look closely at the functioning of the analyst in the clinical encounter, the analyst as an investigator, a member of the analytic couple, and a person with all the struggles and challenges described above. Bergstein, Abel-Hirsch, Hahn, Horovitz, Eekhoff, and Tabbia all try to identify the

right tools and stance for the analyst to enable processes of change and growth in the psychoanalytic process—the known and the unknown in a dynamic tension. Sandler in his Afterword offers original commentary on the themes of the book, pointing out the problems of psychic and material realities, the questions of cure vs growth as well as the place of Bion and his contribution in contemporary psychoanalysis and its classical context. He also challenges adopted terminology to address the risk of dogma in psychoanalysis.

Bion's Vertices is also the first book in the new series by Karnac Books: Contemporary Bion, that I was entrusted to start as the series editor.

I will finish with these few verses from Björk's Jóga:

You don't have to speak, I feel **Emotional landscapes** They puzzle me, confuse Can the riddle get solved? And you push me up to

This state of emergency How beautiful to be State of emergency Is where I want to be (Björk, 1997).

> Tomasz Fortuna London

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