

War in the Consulting Room, Londres Dec 2016

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War entered the consulting room when attacks spread bloodshed in Paris and in Nice recently. They triggered traumatic revivals of patients' childhood spent during the previous wars, especially the Algerian war and WWII.

For instance

The house keeper of our building told me that the sweet old lady living two stories below was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital where she had received ECT. She could no more take care of her home, had hellish nightmares and was in a terror state. "I told her to talk to you", said the house keeper "but she does not want to". She has seen psychiatrists and psychotherapist but they terrify her. A year after she rang at my door and brought me some pages she had written about her childhood before the attacks. Perhaps we could talk after I read.

I had met her often, but did not know her story at all. I knew her under her husband's name, a famous painter now very old.

Through her writing, I learned her maiden name. A Jewish name. During WWI she had been hidden in family, far away from her parents in a little province town in a family and raised under another name and in the Catholic faith. She had learnt to be very nice, not to show her fear, nor to reveal her real name in any situation, not to betray her origins.

I understood immediately why she did not want to speak to a neighbour. Many Jews had been denounced by neighbours in Paris, at a time when we both were children. She is four years older than me. I told her that though I was not Jewish, I had been in prison by the Nazis in my mother's belly, escaped deportation, and as a baby, a refugee, when our town in the Alps was constantly bombed and he resistance net work meeting in our home decimated. She accepted to see me as a neighbour but not as a patient, I agreed.

I read her memoir. It was written in a beautiful prose, she writes also poetry, and did not mentioned any facts, any terror. In fact, the years of war were blank. She had no memory at all of that time, and her memoir told about the happy encounter with her husband when she was very young, and their happy life around his paintings.

Large part of her family who had stayed in Poland had been exterminated. But her parents had never mentioned them, nor did they speak of their life over there before they came to France in the thirties. Week after week she brought her fear. She incarnated Fear, Abandonment, trembling, and crying for help. Especially one day when the sirens were heard in Paris, as it happens every first Wednesday in a month, she came to my doorstep, bewildered. Her souvenir was in the present time.

1. Time had stopped for her in the blank of the war years, seventy years ago and last year were mixed together in the present tense. Kurt Vonnegut, an American soldier who had been a POW in Dresden when the town was destroyed, calls it a Timequake. My neighbour's body is still shaking from such a time quake.

Bion went also through such a Timequake. It took him sixty years to write *A Memoir of the Future*, *The long Week end*, *All my sins remembered*, in which he retrieves his experience of WWI, after he went to exile in the US "to escape the cosy domesticity of England". He was 73 years old. I wonder if the American accent he heard in LA triggered, in the present tense, the memory of the American soldiers who fought on his side in the French trenches, a memory which could no be repressed, nor remembered, as it was not mentioned in his theoretical books. He writes "One can remember only that one can forget".

This un forgettable memory is lost in exile. Bion had lost his *Journal* written on the front in France instead of letters to his parents. He had rewritten it with the precision of the traumatic memory and lost it again. His *War Memoirs* were published only after his death. Although he does not mention it, this memory of WWI, protected behind the Grid, underlies his clinical examples, often describing psychotic episodes, which fight, he says, a murderous superego. He definitely connects "emotionally" through the denial of their affect, and for sure can join them into their entrapment in death zones, in spite of the apparent regularity of the sessions, which lead nowhere. And he criticizes the dogmas of psychoanalytic orthodoxy which overlooks the war waged underground in the consulting room.

Later on, in his autobiographical books, he will write about his home coming, to study in Oxford, after the war: "I did not see that peace time as a no time for me, I did not know that however many pretty ribbons I put on a wartime uniform, that wartime was also no time for me. I was 24, no good for war, no good for peace, too old to change. Sometimes it bursts out in sleep, terrified. What about? Nothing. "When I ask my neighbour what are you afraid about, she answers: "Nothing, everything", Bion also writes: "Oh yes! I died in Amiens, in Cambrai, in Ypres, in August 1918".

This living death happens on the onset of psychotic episodes in which I always notice the potency of historical war traumas thrown into the garbage of History. I contend that psychoanalytical transference in such cases, tends to inscribe an erased history and transform the static definition of psychosis, as a structure or disease, into a dynamic process which fights the denial of child abuse and people abuse, silenced through the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

This specific transference fights also psychoanalytical dogmas, as says Bion, for in this case the analyst cannot stay neutral, and anamnesis does not work, for the past is present. "The Past presented" is the second chapter of Bion's *Memoir of the Future*".

Freud himself was struck by the interference between his own life and his patients' abuses. Suddenly, in a letter to Fliess, in September 1897, he repelled this coincidence, and renounced his *Neurotica*, his psychoanalysis of trauma. Rereading Freud, Lacan imitated him and renounced to address the topic of transference in psychosis at the end of the "Preliminary Question for the approach of Psychosis", in the *Ecrits*.

2. Although Freud writes to Fliess, in September 1897 that he abandons his *Neurotica*, his *Traumatica*, "for he does not want to incriminate fathers, especially my father", he erases the fact that he had incriminated him of sex abuse in a previous letter, in February, as responsible of the hysteria of his young brothers and sisters.

Still, Freud will constantly come back to the question of trauma. For instance in the *Gradiva*: a tale describing the healing of a delusion through a transference between a crazy young man and his young neighbour, set in the site of the historical site of Pompeii disaster during the 1st century of our era. He writes that in this case the unconscious does not relate to repression, and is best approached by literature than by psychoanalytic text books.

I followed his advice and consider Don Quixote, to which Freud identified during his youth, though later on he preferred Oedipus, as one of the best analysis of transference in the case of psychosis and trauma.

Cervantes describes this transference as a quadriple, encompassing: the crazy knight, his therapist Sancho Pança, their respective horse and ass, motors of the transference, and Dulcinea, the Lady of the thoughts. This feminine agency takes the place of the Name of the Father, when all the laws

are defeated, and the symbolic order falls down. She is the key stone of a possible symbolic link, to which address "thoughts without a thinker". From this far away address, they are, therefore, able to be thought, in a fight against the destruction of thinking, operated by a perverse social link, -don Quixote's perverse enchanter-, which attack also the analyst, rendered unable to think.

Like Captain Bion during WWI, Cervantes, during his youth, was an elite soldier, in the war against the Ottoman Empire, and a slave in Algiers after his boat was high jacked by Turkish pirates while coming back to Spain. Fifteen years after, in his late forties, he was put to jail again under a false accusation. He was fifty, when he wrote don Quixote "to fight melancholy". In the Prologue of the novel, he calls Don Quixote "his crazy son", and entrusts him with the mission of healing his PTSD.

3. Cervantes' novel and Bion's writings deal with a cut out, not repressed, exiled unconscious. Like Bion who lost his War Memoirs written on the front in France for his parents, Cervante, an early as the 8th chapter of his novel, loses his manuscript and retrieves it from discarded paper sold by a young boy to a Jewish shop, but in Arabic, the language of his slavery. The second author of the don Quixote, will be Cid Hamlet Ben Angeli an Arabic historian, able to testify the more honestly on Don Quixote's behalf, that he does not favour Christians.

After retrieving Cervantes' traumatic memory from exile, the famous episodes open progressively the field of his wars: from the famous giant windmills, to the vision and the naming, of all the armies that Cervantes fought, -the same armies present to day in the Middle East-, when don Quixote attacks a flock of sheep.

Likewise, Bion will retrieve the traumatic memory of war, when he was struck by the American accent in California, which called back the accent of American soldiers who fought on his side during the war.

After that, Bion and don Quixote become psychoanalysts. The knight, for the fool of the Sierra Morena. He meets him in the wilderness of the mountain where both seek refuge, and asks him what happened to him, instead of looking for his diagnosis. The mad young man asks don Quixote to lie on the grass in order to tell him his story and also to shut up. The psychoanalytical setting is perfect. At some point, it is broken by the analyst's blunder, when don Quixote cannot help disclosing his favourite chivalry books to defend the honour of a Queen, accused by the youth to have sex with her Arabic therapist. A huge row follows, the analysis stops, with nevertheless a positive outcome. For by disclosing the vital role, for him, of the Far away Lady of the Thought, as a shield against perversion, Don Quixote, though unaware, saves the honour of Cardenio's Dulcinea who has been high jacked and nearly raped by Don Fernando his perverse best friend.

A definition of trauma as the betrayal of one's own people, can be healed if the analyst is able to become a passionate

witness, -says Dori Laub, creator of the “Video Testimonies of the Holocaust” at Yale, -by answering, one way or the other, the question: “Who are you?” so that I may talk to you.

Don Quixote’s disclosure which provokes a fight in the session, still allows, later on in the inn where they meet again, the healing of the mad man of the Sierra Morena and of the social link around him destroyed by s betrayal.

4. Likewise war enters the consulting room, through patients who bring in the present tense, the terror endured by themselves, their relatives and their ancestors who never spoke. They bring it “live”, not as a neutral account and at some point, will consider the psychotherapist as an enemy, embodying the ruthless agency which silenced them forever.

At the same time, by acknowledging the betrayal that happened in their encounter, often through the analyst’s blunder, both may retrieve a lost manuscript telling an erased story at the crossroad with the big History, in an attempt to inscribe it.

According to Bion, the non repressed unconscious expresses itself as present thanks to beta elements, surviving images which trigger the analyst’s alpha function, that is, a testimony retrieved from the garbage of History.

Indeed, when time stops, War in the consulting room is the turning point of an analysis of psychosis and trauma, at specific moments, often after some progress has been made and the analyst is happy with his success. It happens without warning, and breaks the continuity of the sessions. Suddenly, the patient wants to quit or worse, to suicide. Sometimes with polite words, he/she tells the analyst: “thank you, you have done your best”, sometimes on a critical tone, “psychoanalysis leads nowhere”, or even more directly, dismissing the analyst with open anger: “you are stupid, you are useless”.

Although I know that this moment should happen one day, and it has to be faced, I try to avoid that necessary passage. When it shows unavoidable, I am unable to think, I try to make some links with the past life of the patient only to discover over and over that causation, as says Bion, does not work, for causality needs the symbolic chain of past and future. No way. One of the issues I find to get out of this damned situation may be to recite inwardly the regular mantra: He/she has a psychotic structure . The foreclosure of the name of the father is irreversible. , there is no transference in psychosis”.

Martin Cooperman, psychoanalyst of schizophrenia at Austen Riggs and flight surgeon in Guadalcanal where his carrier the Wasp, was sunk, calls this impasse the Defeating process When we think “ Go to hell!”.

5. Transference in this case is an interference triggered by chance, -since causation is unavailable, which makes us go to hell with the patient. The hell of History. When the word trauma was not on fashion , in my youth, I used to call this hell: an area of catastrophe. The psychoanalyst of schizophrenia, Gaetano Benedetti calls it an area of death, of physical and psychical murder, which bodily sensations,

and surviving images, like voices insist to testify for. Thanks to far away resonances, the analyst may respond to them, creating , so to speak, a polyphony . Then , he makes use of his “personality” rather than of his theories, says Bion.

I prefer to say: he makes use of some interferences which happen by chance, between the catastrophic eras of our respective stories, for History is not our private property. It is a common ground, when one can meet a neighbour, a thou, in a state of total loneliness. I usually disclose some details of this interference , often after I have pondered about what to say.

Those decisive sessions have lead to a positive outcome. Somehow, they appeared as the core of healing psychosis and trauma, from the very beginning of my practice. Since I work also with supervisees, I realized that for them too, common features, can be shared in the middle of very personal matters. Still, whatever institute they come from they all make the same statement about their difficult patients: “I come to see you because I do not dare to mention this particular analysis with colleagues, for they will tell me : “ this is not psychoanalysis”.

Like their patient, they fear to be betrayed by their own people.

6. The definition of trauma as a betrayal of one’s own people, -stated by psychoanalysts of PTSD veterans like Jonathan Shay in the US and Claude Barrois in France,- results in a wound to otherness. There is no more other to warrant truth and trust, no more discourse of the big Other, no more mirror for the little one. So psychoanalysis seems to go the other way round , to produce otherness from scratch and therefore give way to a possible repression.

The war in the consulting room, against the ruthless agency of perverse enchanters, is not a metaphor. During those critical sessions, in order to make a truce by looking for the truth, I consider my patients as researchers through their symptoms, looking for a co-researcher.

In that research for an historical truth, the patient is the PI, the Principal Investigator. In his total loneliness, his only tools is to show what is not spoken: surviving images and connect them through a shared narrative , by subverting the principle of objectivity and neutrality.

This is not new. Transference as interference was formulated by Ferenczi at a time when, in Buda Pest and Vienna , a new paradigm was invented in physics, -formulated for physics dummies by Erwin Schroedinger in his conferences on Mind and Matter, by focusing on the interferences between the observer and its field of observation. This nex paradigm resulted into a war between analysts and psychoanalytic institutions, until to day: around the possibility for the analyst to use the interference of a cut out unconscious to create a first mirror for spectral images showing what cannot be said from beyond the looking glass. In other word , around the scandal of disclosure in very precise circumstances.

I am quoting the transformation of Wittgenstein’s

Tractatus last sentence, written on the front lines during WWI”, Whereof one cannot speak thereof one should stay silent”. After ten years of PTSD symptoms, he returned to Cambridge to resume philosophy “as a therapy”, and changed that sentence into, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one cannot help showing what cannot be said”. And he adds, in the matters of ethics, -clearly the precise circumstances when the ruthless other enters the session, I can only say I and speak from my background.

What is shown, in those precise circumstances?

7. Patients show the analyst, more often, physical reactions aimed at survival, which look as psychotic symptoms. That is the reason why veterans, and survivors of child abuse usually receive the label of psychoses, bipolar, schizophrenic, phobia or even autism and catatonia.

The military psychologist, Dave Grossman, in his book *On Combat*, checked such reactions when he listened to testimonies of soldiers firemen, or policemen during and after action: they soil their pant, and sweat-in order, he says, to get rid of an unnecessary, their vision shrinks focused on the hand ready to kill them, their heart beat accelerates, sounds fade away or are amplified, anesthesia may prevent pain to be felt, and even more interesting for our purpose, time stops. As it occurs in psychotic crisis, an action which took a second felt like a quarter of an hour or an eternity.

After the adrenaline rush which ensures survival, there is an adrenaline dump, a depression in the whole body and mind, when one feels like a nobody, with no image and no energy-as a necessary stage I for the para sympathetic system to restore the maintenance of the body.

8. Such symptoms which occur in psychotic episodes, in fact open on uncharted space and time territories. The analyst may reach them, not by an objective survey, but in a proximity requested by the Salmon Principles during WWI. Thomas Salmon, psychiatrist in Ellis Island for the refugees entering the US, was sent to France by the military, when the US entered the war in 1917, to tell them how to deal in with psychic casualties.

He organized war psychiatry in France until the end of the war where he tested his famous four principles still in use nowadays. The first principle of Proximity means that the therapist is exposed the same danger as his patient of a continuing threat of destruction. The second is Immediacy, focusing on the here and now of the session, as the past does not mean anything. The third principle is Expectation: yes you are not psychically dead or dumb the life of, your mind survives. The last one is Simplicity: no jargon, no degrading diagnosis, no chemical or electrical treatments. Those four principles have a purpose: to inscribe erased events in a memory able to forget, and therefore, able to remember.

At the end of the second don Quixote, after the death of his hero, Cervantes tells us that “his pen is his spear”, a weapon embodied by the skinny figure of his son who waged two successive wars, first to “fight melancholy”, after the

traumas of war and of slavery, and in the second novel, to fight perversion after his colleagues, jealous of his success, paid a forger to destroy his characters by writing a degrading sequel of the first novel.

To write down unwritten histories we also need a pen, as well as history books, and geography books, real and mythical, which map the unknown.

9. In Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, who wrote a don Quixote in the XVIIIth century, the author advises us to use a real map when the war increases in the consulting room. The hero’s uncle, Captain Toby Shandy, has been wounded in the battle of Namur in the Flanders, against the French, on the same battle fields as Bion who fought in the North of France and in Belgium. Toby lays in his bed during four years, at his brother’s home in London. This elder brother, Walter, is the future father of Tristram Shandy. Knowing that “speaking, soothes a soldier’s wound”, Walter brings visitors to Toby’s bed side. Yet, in spite their compassion the defeating process takes over. War enters the bed chamber, as Toby tries to explain how he received his wound, where, when, and becomes more and more confused. His wound gets worse and worse, until the captain “reaches the doors of death”.

Speaking is not enough, even to benevolent people. Taking advantage of such witnesses, the wound expresses the loneliness of being abandoned on the battle. But in front of the superficial, or fake interest of the visitors, it aggravates its symptoms in a redoubled abandon. That happens regularly in the transference with the psychic wounds called trauma.

The only one who knows about war traumas is Corporal Trim, his Sancho Pança, who was wounded in the knee and almost died during another battle. Together they have a bright idea: to pin a map of Namur on the wall, where Toby can now show the space and time of the battle, the geography, and the names of the different fortifications, rivers, and armies. His wound is no more the only monument of the unspeakable. Its knowledge taped on Toby’s body, gains relief, in both senses: as if he was raising from his flat position which prevented him to check what was going on, and the relief of healing. From that time the wound gets better.

We need a map of the site of traumas, which keeps the memory of what happened, carved in the names of rivers, woods, paths, villages, animals and things, which say nothing to unconcerned analysts and speak to those who are familiar with them.

10. Bion speaks of this transference as a commensal enquiry. Commensal is the name for people who participates in a common meal.

Another definition of transference when war enters the consulting room, is described by Socrates in the *Symposium*, from a point of view conquered while he was fighting as a soldier during the wars between Greek cities. After the different commensals have given their successive discourses on Eros, the topic of the *Symposium*, Socrates speaks

through the mouth of a medicine woman, during the plague in Athens: Diotima. According to her, Eros is the son of Poros, the Passage and Penia, Poverty. What does it mean?

Only at the end, when Alcibiades arrives completely drunk and is asked to speak about his mad love for Socrates, first he complains about Socrates' refusal to go to bed with him, but at the same time, he tells us about Socrates strange habit to stand immobile, a whole night in the middle of the battle field, and listen to his daimôn. From listening to that voice, in the middle of the war, he is able to heal, not only Alcibiades' wounds, their general, but also the panic of the people, his companions, for instance telling them not to flee to their death during a defeat, and become the prey of an easy hunt, but to face the enemy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will answer the question: what is our therapeutic approach to the pervasive and social phenomenon of bloodshed, when war enters the consulting room?

In the penury of symbolic resources, when we are caught in the same dead end as our patients, not able to think and emotionally pushed to flee, we have to face the enemy, the terrible other without otherness, that we may become at times.

How? By finding the passage, Poros, to reach the patient's solitude and lack of words. by reaching analogous zones on our side and name them, in order to create a bridge toward otherness, as well an inchoative mirror from which reflexion, the spooky thoughts without a thinker may find a thinker to reflect about them.

I will end with a little story. When Jean Max, my husband

and I, decided to work, as psychoanalysts, in a psychiatric hospital, although we were neither MDs nor psychologists, -having graduated in classic literature and in sociology, we decided, without knowing, that it was the best place to train, even better than the Ecole Freudienne of Lacan which we had joined. We found a medical doctor willing to embark us in his ward, where progressively we became analysts of confined people. We followed that medical doctor, called Edmond Sanquer, in three successive hospitals and free outdoor consultations, the last one in the suburb of Paris. Interesting après coup was the fact that the first hospital was an ancient abbey of Prémontré, located at the limit of a forest in the north of France, in the middle of the battle fields of the last wars. There was no train, so we embarked every Monday at 5 am in the Volvo of the medical doctor who taught us some elements of psychiatry on the way.

But we did not realize at all that we were looking for a place, where psychosis would speak of the two wars during which we were born, as well as our parents. To reach that first hospital, we passed the military cemeteries, of infinite stretches of white crosses, under which laid the men fallen in 1970, 1914 and 1940, as if it was a banal sight.

I was not aware of that coincidence, until the patients confined in that hospital, gave me repeated testimonies of what happened on civilians in that region, which became audible after I made a dream in which I was visited by my grand father, who had been a stretcher bearer in all the battles of WWI, as well as a musician, probably on that land. Like Bion, or Wittgenstein, he had never spoken about it, but I could hear the voices of my patient's and their ancestors through the interferences of that unsung music.

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