

CAESURA AND ITS RELATION TO REALIZATION

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In this article I attempt to investigate the way a thought or a feeling acquires the conviction of psychic reality. I suggest that realizations emerge out of discontinuities. Caesura represents the paradox of discontinuity that emerges out of the underlying continuity. Bion's clinical and theoretical development exemplifies this perspective. It introduces a transformation of the notion of loss as the engine of development. The horizontal row of Bion's grid is used to represent the development of realizations. A clinical vignette illustrates my reflections on this process.

Keywords: caesura, realization, paradox, selected fact, transformations in K, transformations in O

Je tente ici d'explorer comment une pensée ou un sentiment acquiert la conviction propre à la réalité psychique. Je suggère que les prises de conscience naissent des discontinuités. La césure représente le paradoxe de la discontinuité émergeant de la continuité. L'élaboration clinique et théorique de Bion en est un exemple. Elle introduit une transformation de la notion de perte comme moteur de développement. La ligne horizontale de la grille de Bion sert à représenter le développement des prises de conscience. Une vignette clinique servira d'illustration à mes pensées concernant ce processus.

Mots clés: césure, prise de conscience, paradoxe, fait choisi, transformations en K, transformations en O

The notion of the caesura had a rather benign origin in Freud's statement in "Inhibition Symptom and Anxiety" when he said, "There is more continuity between intrauterine life and early infancy than the impressive Caesura of the act of birth would have us believe" (Freud, 1926, p. 138). In "Evidence" (1976/1987a), Bion suggested that Freud "did not follow that very far" (p. 241). His subsequent "On a Quotation from Freud" (1976/1987b) elaborates his own associations to this sentence and notices that they might diverge from Freud's trajectory. By then, he had already embarked on a long, fruitful, and expansive reverie, which he brought together in his 1977 paper, "Caesura."

Bion's writings on the caesura leave us with the sense of an open, complex, turbulent, ongoing development of what has become a concept that is acquiring more centrality in his body of work. It has opened a new field where analysts are invited to creatively conjecture on the prenatal mind. It has extended the field of interest on how to think about thinking. Civitarese has drawn a parallel between Descartes and Bion and proposes "Caesura as Bion's Discourse on Method" (2008). In that paper, he notes the remarkable convergence of the thrust of their exploration and, in particular, the importance of systematic doubt that Bion adopts as a key principle. Civitarese suggests that "Caesura" is the text where "Bion presents his rendering of radical doubt" and also that "transcending the Caesura that redraws the boundaries of settled thoughts is the only true general, conscious and strategic criteria." Doubt, however, "is not an end in itself but serves for the attainment of truth" (p. 1123). This statement takes into account the idea that Truth (i.e., ultimate Truth, O) is unknowable, and doubt in this context acts as a reminder that knowledge is always relative and has ignorance as its background. He suggested that some passages in Descartes's "Discourse on Method" are reminiscent of Bion's theory. It would appear that for Civitarese, caesura represents a particular vertex, what I would call "the vertex of the gap," through which "conceptual opposition is not overturned, but merely destabilized in such a way as to maintain a creative tension that generates new thoughts" (p. 1122). This echoes Lopez-Corvo, who reminds us of the Greco-Latin origin of the word *caesura*: it "describes a short break or pause made in certain occasions in verse" (2003, p. 51). It represents a punctuation that both separates and links two entities that would otherwise constitute a continuous flow. The pause or the break is what Bion enjoins us to investigate rather than either side defined by the break, such as the analyst, the analysand, the transference, the counter-transference. He says, "Investigate the Caesura . . . the link, the synapse" (Bion, 1977, p. 56). The term *synapse* could represent an

ideogram that includes a space through which something flows and an entity at either side that is transformed by the flow.

From a complementary perspective, Sandler says, “Caesura marks something that embodies simultaneously something that flows continually and at the same time because of its ‘formidable’ sensuously apprehensible appearances it seems to undergo total change” (2005, pp. 97–98). Thus the impressive discontinuity brought about by the act of birth has in its background the continuity of development. The “formidable sensuously apprehensible appearance” is also one aspect of the experience of realizations. The relation between continuous flow and “sensuously apprehensible appearances” is illustrated in Bion’s reformulation of Freud’s dream theory. As he addressed the caesura night dreaming / daydreaming, he highlighted the ongoingness of unconscious dreaming. He also substituted the notion of reverie for daydreaming. It freed him from the saturated meanings that daydreaming had acquired and allowed him to develop the notion of reverie. Reverie forms the background of our mental activity and contributes to the organization of the perception of what is presented to us from both internal and external sources: it constitutes the invisible frame of our experience. Reverie could be seen as a continuous state and the thought that emerges and becomes “sensuously apprehensible” and assumes different shapes according to whether we are awake or are asleep. Referring to Bion’s transformation of Freud’s dream theory, F. Riolo says, “In this theory attention shifts from the content of thoughts to the development of the apparatus for thinking thoughts. Dreams take on the status of a specific device not only for the observation of psychic reality but also for its generation and transformation” (2007, p. 1374).

Caesura points to both the complexity and the limitations within which our minds operate. We are both helped and handicapped by our inability not to structure. We give the stamp of reality to what we structure and the structure we perceive, a necessary fiction in constant transformation. Vermote summarizes these limitations when he says,

The mind is not equipped for imperceptible facts of reality . . . our species is driven by a pleasure/pain principle . . . [it] causes us to have obstructed glasses to perceive what is . . . we cannot know reality as we translate it into forms or preconceptions that fit to our minds . . . [also] our minds tend to make stories and see cause-and-effect links, even when and where there are none . . . [and finally] . . . we are part of groups and our ideas and observations always take place in such a group field. (2009, p. 99)

Sandler suggests, “The Caesura proceeds to splitting when it is not tolerated” (2005, p. 101), and that might be the course of development with which we are more familiar. The idea of the inevitability of splitting has its precursor in Klein, who suggested that the incapacity of the newborn’s mind to apprehend its experience of the world as presented to it at birth—the original aesthetic experience—brings in the necessity to separate satisfactory and pleasurable experiences from unsatisfactory and painful experiences through splitting and projective identification as organizers. Although it has been useful to separate PS (paranoid-schizoid) elements from D (depressive) elements, a binocular view would suggest that they both have been present from the beginning and, although we might organize it sequentially for purposes of exposition, the configuration of their elements is in constant change. Thus, the totality of what is presented to us does not disappear as it becomes organized; it persists in the ongoing background as a potential for experiences that might emerge.

Sandler also suggests that caesura deals with a paradox; that is, the simultaneous existence of a phenomenon in one form and at the same time in another that appears to contradict it. Thus, he talks about “an event that simultaneously unites and disunites” (2005, p. 97). Bion alluded to the complexity of holding paradoxes without attempting to resolve them. A binocular vision would maintain the necessary tension within the paradox to allow for the emergence of a new thought. As well, paradoxes exist in different dimensions and directions at the same time. Thus there is the paradox of something that can be viewed from one direction at the same time that it can also be viewed from the opposite direction and appears quite different. Bion illustrates this perspective as he refers to Picasso’s painting on a glass surface that could be looked at from either side. He says, “Look at it from one side; there is a psychosomatic complaint; turn it round; now it is *soma psychotic*” (1976, p. 244). A binocular perspective would hold both views at the same time and awaits the thought that might emerge from the gap. There is also the paradox of the caesura as a contact barrier that can be traversed from either side. As well, the contact barrier that inevitably conjures the sense of something solid and concrete, as in the instance of a glass plate, could also be a space where the unknown resides. It can be tolerated or, alternatively, filled in by fears of catastrophic change. Realization is the experience that emerges through the gap, the caesura created in what flows continuously, characterized by sensuously apprehensible phenomena. It has the quality of something “real,” particularly as it conjures the different “senses” into a “common sense.” From a related perspective, sensual experiences acquire meaning as they mate with a pre-conception to form a

conception (Bion, 1967). From this perspective a pre-conception might be deemed to be in continuous existence awaiting the experience that will realize it, which, once realized, will have the quality of a conception.

Bion's work can be looked at from the vertex of the caesura as suggested by Civitarese. The more radical caesura involves the shift from transformations in K, which stands for Knowledge—with the empiricists providing the philosophical underpinning—to transformations in O—with Kant in the background. O stands for the Origin, the Thing in Itself, or what could not be sensuously apprehended. Vermote (2009) has compared this transformational shift to Freud's transformational shift in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." A monocular view would suggest that transformations in O would supersede transformations in K. A binocular view would hold them side by side, so that knowledge that accrues from contact with emotional reality and the relationship between separate vertices that establishes common sense exist side by side with the view that is brought about by O, where Intuition rather than Realization becomes the main tool to approach O. It is a probe into the infinite. Thus the notion of a direct approach to O would revert to a monocular view. Similarly there is a constant conjunction between knowledge—as in science—and ignorance, and from the gap thus created resides the unknown from which a new idea might emerge. In retrospect we can observe Bion's capacity to dislocate a concept; that is to introduce caesuras and create a gap through which a new idea will emerge and assume its independent development. As previously mentioned, his modification of Freud's dream theory and the assumption of a continuous dreaming background in waking life were captured in the notion of "reverie." The mother's reverie was thus ascribed a fundamental transformative function in the development of the baby's mind. It gives the full significance to the idea of the mother "minding" the baby. Earlier on, Bion had dislocated Klein's definition of projective identification by introducing in its background and parallel to it his description of normal projective identification, and, as this caesura was transcended, the concept of container/contained emerged. A similar process was applied to Klein's configuration of PS-D as he introduced the idea of an ongoing and spiraling circularity.

Realizations are linked to transformations in K. They are essentially sense based. They are part of the infrastructure of Bion's theory of thinking. They punctuate the development of the apparatus for thinking thoughts and the development of the use of thoughts. This is represented in the horizontal row of the grid where realizations mark both the end of one transformative process and the potential beginning of the next one and the caesura that separates/unites one transformative process from/with the next. From a different

perspective, realizations are available to be linked by “common sense,” which Bion describes as “the highest common factor of sense” (1992, p. 10). It was also a way to approach what could be grasped from reality. Sandler concluded, “Therefore it is necessary to have two vertexes in order to get a common sensical view or an approach to reality” (2005, p. 142). He also suggests that common sense was a way—from the perspective of transformations in K—to regard reality as synonymous with truth.

Realizations are an important phenomenon in clinical practice. The notion of insight might have been its earlier precursor. Insight refers—albeit metaphorically—to one particular sense: sight. It does not suggest the further development of what one “sees.” It was assumed to be synonymous with realization and was believed to represent an experience of discovery that would imprint the mind and have lasting consequences. This is not unlike the formation of a conception. The fact that analytic observations did not confirm that hope suggested to Freud the notion of working through. It suggested the possibility of a more complex, interconnected structure to realizations that are arrived at as the outcome of thorough and detailed attention paid to the resistances encountered in the analytic situation. Freud further developed the notion of “working through” in “Mourning and Melancholia” when he suggested that the libidinal investments in the object has to be revisited and given up “one by one” for the lost object to be put in the past and identification with it to proceed. Following Freud, but from still a different perspective, Bion suggested the different steps that could be postulated in the process of realization. They are represented in part in the elements of the horizontal row of the grid that moves from Definitory Hypothesis to Notation to Attention to Inquiry and to Action. They represent Bion’s creative elaboration of Freud’s “Two Principles of Mental Functioning.” It is stretched along six categories. He suggests, “The categories I have drawn up . . . relate to the work it is intended to do . . . i.e., . . . the use thought may be put . . . [to, after] the thoughts have been represented by words or combinations of words” (1963, pp. 20–21).

An insight might correspond to a definitory hypothesis, as, for example, “I see now that I am angry at X.” This definition can remain as such. It needs to congeal—to acquire a sense of reality, i.e. to be realized—before it could be registered as a notation. In turn, notation has to be realized before attention can be brought into play. Notation involves a registration in a mnemonic system. I believe Bion follows Freud’s trajectory particularly in the idea of attention as a scanning function that meets perception halfway and where a pre-conception becomes realized. The conception to which it gives rise could be submitted to inquiry whose outcome might

lead to action. In Bion's terms, action might be represented by the realization of a thought. Although the horizontal categories are side by side, the line that separates them marks a caesura and also indicates the presence of a void. Thus, there is always lurking in the background the possibility of a catastrophic change. It is the nature of the transformation that occurs within each category that would condition the movement to the next along the horizontal line as, for example, from notation to attention. We are all familiar with realizations that do not develop and, from the grid's perspective, with notations to which attention is not paid and do not lead to inquiry—all indications of caesuras that could not be transcended.

Working through has in its background the emotional realization of a loss. It is the prerequisite to the emergence of something new. There is an implicit constant conjunction between change and loss. In both Freud and Bion there is the implicit notion that something has to be given up before something could be contemplated and eventually acquired. Stated differently, whether it is following an interpretation that has been made and received, which could transform the prior structure, or because an actual loss has occurred that might call for a similar transformation, an existing structure has become inadequate for the new situation. It prefaces a disruption that requires that it be addressed. Sandler suggests that the change of the status quo due to "peculiarities of reaction to external sudden, unexpected, denied and/or violent stimuli" or "the violent inception of feared inner truth" pose a threat (2005, p. 103). The nature of the threat to the extent that it is perceived as disruptive and disorganizing is apprehended as a potentially violent experience. Change then has disruption and disorganization as one of its invariants. It permeates and disturbs the relation container/contained and raises the possibility for the contained emotions to be overwhelmed and suffocated. This configuration manifests itself in the form of affectless expression and words devoid of emotional content. Alternatively, the contained emotions might overwhelm the container. We then have the situation described by Bion in the first pages of *Transformations* (1965), which involves violent projective identification of emotions that lodge in their target objects and produce violent disturbances that the recipient might feel driven to discharge in the form of action. To the extent that the individual is dominated by omnipotent and powerfully judgmental feelings, the change is felt as catastrophic. Catastrophic change shifts the balance towards transformations in hallucinosis. Their distorted and projective nature gives rise to hallucinations that attempt to acquire the conviction of realizations.

Bion was interested in the study of the vicissitudes of the schizo-paranoid position where the fear of the loss of the self and the fear of disintegration

are paramount. In “A Theory of Thinking” (1962b) he made unbearableness or the balance between frustration tolerance and intolerance of frustration a central element in the development of an apparatus for thinking. It already has in its background elements of the relation container/contained. There is a caesura between the more flowing perspective of the Kleinian model that emphasizes the depressive position and has explored in considerable details the vicissitudes of loss, and Bion’s model that attributes primacy to the more punctual elements of the schizo-paranoid position and where the inexistence or the disappearance of the object is at the core. These two perspectives could metaphorically be compared to the difference and the relation between the wave and the particle theory of light.

The following clinical vignette might illustrate this model of realizations. Mr. A was complaining that he could not go back to the world that he inhabited prior to his analysis—the very world that drove him to treatment; it was an exciting and dangerous world of concurrent promiscuity and drugs. He had prided himself on being able to spend weekends in an alternative world immersed in sex and drugs and showing up on Monday morning at a highly responsible job, which he performed competently. Splitting was institutionalized as a way of life. It was omnipotently invested and an object of pride. He could achieve in phantasy the feat of maintaining two lives that proceeded in parallel, where neither knew of the other, nor did he when he was in one know of the other. However, an omnipotent aspect of him knew and had the conviction that only “it” knew and derived a sense of power out of the capacity to maintain this separation. It was further evidence that his superior intelligence has triumphed over the prevailing surrounding stupidity. Anxiety was both absent and hovering in the background. It suggests that a particular aspect of omnipotence serves as a denial of the possibility of loss. Alternatively loss, when it is experienced, is felt as shameful, as it signals a failure of the omnipotent endeavour which insists on unlimited possibilities in a timeless world where no choice needs to be made, and hallucinosis becomes an alternate reality where nothing is given up and nothing is realized.

As his omnipotent splitting weakened over time, he began to experience intense fears of being blackmailed by these “strangers,” as if they had finally found access to his “other” world. These fears turned into a conviction and he felt that his house was bugged. They were later internalized, as he felt poisoned by substances he was given and became convinced that it affected his health. This led to repeated consultations with his physician. I am assuming that his attempt to contain his emerging anxiety was realized by a configuration of intruders attempting to invade and penetrate his

“other” world through the bugging of his house. They represented his externalized persecuting internal objects. They were later re-internalized in the form of poison, for which he sought confirmation and relief. It was indeed a turbulent time, as the violence of his transformed realization made him fear a psychotic disintegration. These transformed realizations behaved as an unstable “selected fact,” searching to recruit other elements to establish a “common sense.”

Concomitantly, his dissatisfaction with his work (which was expressed earlier as a dismissed complaint), acquired a reality that he found difficult to ignore and, subsequently, to tolerate. This was related to the realization that all his career choices had been thwarted and that his present career had not been his choice. This felt to him invested with truth and acquired the status of “notation.” The developing conviction of the truth of his realization, lead to his “attention” becoming mobilized to explore particular aspects of his relationship to his parents, and his pyrrhic Oedipal victory, it eventually became translated into action. He quit his job and found himself unemployed with a modest stable income, restricted to his home and lacking motivation or purpose. The realization that the virulence of his persecuting internal objects had decreased was experienced as a loss: they had sadistically taken their revenge and left him in a void. They had taken away his liveliness, and he felt bereft. He was not seeking death, but he worried that it might be inevitable and the only solution to his plight. So a different catastrophe loomed in the background. His comments sometimes escalated into complaints that the analyst had deprived him of his liveliness. They also represented the conflict between his realization that he could not go back and his omnipotent wish to maintain all options available. His realization that he could not go back appears to have emerged as a surprise and felt as if it had imposed itself on him. It represented a selected fact that grouped a number of previous realizations. It also was a definitory hypothesis that stated where he was presently. Paradoxically, the truth of his realization was strengthened by his attempts to “go back,” and, as he tried, he found himself unable to revive the set of experiences he had found so stimulating in the past. He felt the simultaneity of something he had acquired and also of something he had lost. He felt a break with what had gone on before; it left him in a dangerous space as he conveyed the experience of a world barren of meaning, purpose, or direction. I am inclined to refer to this break, which has elements of a breakdown and elements of a breakthrough, as caesura. Riolo suggests, “The catastrophic impact with O must give rise to the lysis of a crystallized conjunction of representations, emotions, meanings (breakup) and to the revelation of a

conjunction not previously observed (a breakthrough)” (2007, p. 1377). It left us in a destruction/construction site with terror in the background and the present offering its uncertainties, experienced at times as containing faint possibilities and at other times as a void.

I have been using the notion of realization as the outcome of the coming together of elements previously dispersed. In “A Theory of Thinking” (1962b) Bion described the mating of a preconception with an emotional experience that would give rise to a conception. Realizations might represent the emotional experience of a conception.

From a different vertex, a conception could also represent a selected fact. Bion quotes Poincaré’s definition of the selected fact: “It must unite elements long since known . . . and suddenly introduce order where the appearance of disorder reigned . . . Not only is the new fact valuable on its own account but it alone give value to the old facts it unites” (1962a, p. 72). Bion adds, “The selected fact that gives coherence can be an idea or it can be an emotion” (1963, p. 83). Still, from a different perspective, Bion linked Klein’s narrative of the process of development from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position to the selected fact. He says, “The interplay between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions is made possible by a selected fact which is known as the harmonizing or unifying fact spatially” (1992, p. 44).

The notion of separate elements coming together and their coming together and being contained in a new entity such as realization, selected fact, or depressive position is the invariant of these three descriptions. For Bion, the selected fact is “a discovery made by the patient or the individual and is the tool by which he ensures the constant progression the very essence of learning and therefore of growing . . . the selected fact then is an essential element in the process of discovery” (1992, p. 252). In this statement the selected fact as well as the depressive position acquires a dynamic function oriented toward growth and development. While Klein described the developmental aspects of the depressive position, she maintained a classical linear perspective that included the back and forth of progressions and regressions, without elaborating on the ongoing process of transformation. Bion’s PS \Leftrightarrow D with its double arrow in opposite directions is a condensed representation of spiraling. Britton provides a detailed description of the spiraling whereby in a PS-D movement once D has been reached, it will act as a pre-conception in search for other elements sharing a number of invariants and awaiting a selected fact. The pre-conception is now formulated, as PS₁, the new selected fact, will group it under D₁, which will again act as a pre-conception, and so on. It follows

the general idea that what becomes known is already in search of what is not known, so that realizations have to lose their quality of realization and be transformed into a pre-conception for development to proceed. To quote Bion, “In the psychoanalytic experience we are concerned both with the translation in the direction of what we do not know into something which we do know or which we can communicate and also from what we do know and can communicate to what we do not know and are not aware of” (1977, pp. 53–54). Alternatively, realizations that remain saturated, selected facts that overstay their welcome, and a depressive position that remains stagnant are the prelude to what has been described as enclaves (O’Shaughnessy, 1992) or retreats (Steiner, 1993).

Another aspect of realization is the function it assumes in its relation to abstraction. Riolo suggested that although Bion “pursued the scientific goal of abstraction, he was not an abstract thinker; he never formulated any speculative theory removed from experience. Quite the opposite, his inquiry focused specifically on the clinical-observational field of psychoanalysis” (2009, p. 70). We could suggest a constant conjunction between abstraction and realized emotional experience, as when Bion says, “The first requirement then is to formulate an abstraction to represent the realization that existing theories purport to describe” (1963, pp. 1–2). Later he says, “The domain of sense is one of the dimensions of Psychoanalytic elements, the other two extensions of Psychoanalytic elements are in the domain of Myth and in the domain of Passion.” To be more specific he says, “Extension in the domain of sense . . . means that what is interpreted must amongst other qualities be an object of sense” (1963, p. 11). This is echoed by F. Riolo, who considers realization as a dimension of analytic transformations. He suggests that it requires the concurrence of the same three dimensions previously mentioned by Bion: the sensory dimension or, more specifically, the sensory dimension transformed into a realization, “the dimension of Myth (the theory), and the dimension of passion (the relationship)” (2009, p. 72). Riolo suggests, “Every time that one dimension usurps the place of the other, a level of the field that needs to be observed is obscured and rejected” (2009, p. 72).

In “Four Quartets,” T. S. Eliot poetically describes the ongoing realizations and their transformational development when he says,

What we call the beginning is often the end
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.
 The end is where we start from.

...

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

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