3.

RECOVERING BION'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO GROUP ANALYSIS

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Bion is clearly acknowledged as a pioneer in group theory and practice. His book, *Experience in Groups* (1961), in which he wittily recounts his baffling early experiences in group therapy and attempts at theoretical explanations, has become a classic, frequently cited alongside Freud's (1921) paper on group psychology. He is the first to have approached the group-as-a-whole and to have called attention to the central role of pre-oedipal dynamics in the unconscious life of groups. Moreover, with his phenomenological descriptions of the "basic assumptions" he provided a tool for categorizing the central events of group life that many group workers continue to find indispensable. In what sense does this work have to be "recovered"?

To be sure, his actual practice—what we might loosely call his "method" has come under considerable fire. For him, the term "group therapy" referred not to therapy that takes place in the context of the group but, rather, therapy that is directed at the group as a whole, therapy that attempts to make a poorly functioning group more effective. Thus he typically did not direct his interpretations at individual group members but at the group entity, and this was consistent with his fundamental attempt to establish contact with the emotional life of the group as a whole, to observe what was being referred to when group members said, "we," for example, how this group entity made attempts to establish a consistent relationship with him, and how individual members fit into and were used by this entity as well.

In so doing, he did not posit a new force or a different kind of psychic reality manifesting itself in group life. Following Freud's disavowal of the need to posit a group or herd instinct, he sought to understand behavior in groups as expressions of collective, shared or parallel fantasies, and, in so doing, he took account of individual behavior only in so far as it was expressive of developments in the group as a whole. That is to say, if a group member attacked the leader, for example, he would attempt to interpret why this was being done on behalf of the group at a given moment—neglecting, although he was fully aware of the fact, that this

behavior was also meaningful to the individual in the light of his own particular history.

To put it another way, he took as the object of his analysis all the evidence produced by group members that they believed they belonged to a group: the common fantasies, the concerted behaviors and tacit agreements that pointed to the existence of a shared group mentality. In a sense—and this is a point I will elaborate on later—he allowed himself to be taken in by the fiction of a group that the group members seemed to share, allowing himself to experience the conscious and unconscious manifestations of this fiction or set of assumptions, including his own fantasies of belonging. Thus while he did not in fact believe that something new—some distinct group reality—came into existence when individuals joined together, he attempted to observe all the evidence for the belief and reflect back to the group what he observed. And, in so doing, he strove not to undermine or distort the sense of groupness by establishing contact with individual members. He directed his comments at group members in general about what he could observe to be their overt as well as covert common beliefs about the group they seemed to feel and act as if they belonged to.

This "method" has been severely criticized and is now, I think, quite unpopular. Yalom (1974), in his highly influential textbook on group therapy, attacked this approach and cited an outcome study that questioned the therapeutic benefits of such groups. More recently (Gustafson & Cooper, 1979), Bion's method has been criticized as inflicting too great a narcissistic injury on individual group members; if members are not responded to personally by group leaders, it has been suggested they cannot experience the trust that is essential to disclosure, risk taking and change.

Off-shoots of Bion's method continue to be nurtured at the Tavistock Clinic (Heath and Bacal, 1972; Gosling), but in this country, group therapy still refers by and large to therapy taking place in a group rather than therapy for the group. The method has survived primarily as an educational tool, in group relations conferences designed to explore group and organizational dynamics (the so-called "Tavistock model") and in university courses. And even in these applications, emotional stability is sought as a prerequisite for participation. Clearly a consensus has emerged in this country that Bion's pioneering method of working with groups is dangerously stressful, of questionable therapeutic value, only for the hardy.

In seeking to recover Bion's contribution to group analysis, thus, I will not attempt the task of combatting the consensus. I will try instead to side step the question of method and practice entirely and focus on his theory and, more broadly, on his understanding of the dimensions of the problems posed by group membership. I think this effort will be warranted even in the eyes of those who reject Bion's method. For one thing, some of the criticisms leveled against the method affirm the power and potential destructiveness of the forces he attempted to chart. For another, being the first to point out the pre-oedipal dynamics of group life, he has had a significant impact on the thinking of many group workers who do not consider employing his methods.

In what sense, then, does Bion's contribution to group analysis have to be recovered? I'd like to focus on two related aspects of his theory. First, I will attempt to reformulate his account of the group's regression—a regression that makes belief of the group possible—in more contemporary and, I think, more acceptable object relations theory. As a Kleinian analyst, at least at the point when he wrote *Experiences in Groups*, he attributed to the level of infantile experience to which group members regressed a concreteness and specificity of fantasy most of us now have difficulty accepting. Second, I would like to attempt to express some of the fundamental implications—and dilemmas—of group life that Bion was able to see clearly, uncomfortable and disconcerting thoughts that, nonetheless, I think, require our attention.

Bion's theory of group dynamics takes as its point of departure the simple and obvious question—so obvious no one seems to have asked it before: what kind of an object is a group? It is, of course, a collection of individuals, an aggregate; but what makes it appear to be an entity? Let me quote Bion's well known sentences on this point: "The adult must establish contact with the emotional life of the group in which he lives; this task would appear to be as formidable to the adult as the relationship with the breast appears to be to the infant, and the failure to meet the demands of this task is revealed in his regression. The belief that a group exists, as distinct from an aggregate of individuals, is an essential part of the regression" (Bion, 1961, pp. 141-142). The problem thus is one of adaptation, establishing emotional contact with the group members, an adaptation that cannot take place without regression because we lack other means of relating to an aggregate. A regressive process thus enables us to experience a loosely assembled collection of vaguely differentiated parts of an entity that has the potential to include us as well. In other words, to see the group as a group, consisting of members or part objects rather than separate whole objects, is to regress in our object-relatedness to that point in development prior to the "depressive position," in Klein's term, where the defense of splitting predominates and the maternal object is an unstable and loosely assembled collection of part objects with whom we still had the capacity for merger. To put it crudely, the group is mother, but before mother was experienced as a person entirely distinct from other significant members of the family constellation such as grandmother, father or big brother, and before that vaguely shifting entity, that "other," was established clearly as separate from the perceiving child. With this recollected object world to draw upon from the depths of early experience, the person wishing to join the group can perceive the group as a group and he can hope for the condition of being joined to it.

But, according to Bion, he must also suffer the consequences of unleashing other primitive fantasies as well, characteristic of the "paranoid-schizoid position": fantasies of personal fragmentation and disintegration, of persecution by "bad" breasts and penises as well as their poisonous substances, of tantalization by unstable "good" objects, of unbounded greed and envy, in short, that terrifying, phantasmagoric world of infancy Klein has described, without order or security. It is to combat these fantasies

that the group's basic assumptions come into play, as common strategies that stem the regressive process and structure the group world to defend against these sources of anxiety, "psychotic anxiety," Bion calls it, following Klein, to emphasize its chaotic, overpowering intensity. Basic assumptions, in effect, create group leaders, through the mechanism of projective identification; that is to say, the group members agree to designate individuals who are thus seen as distinct objects, separate from the amorphous mass, who become receptacles for projections and around whom somewhat more developmentally advanced and stable fantasies can crystallize. Thus in the basic assumption of dependency, for example, the group creates a leader on whom it believes it can depend for nurturance and comfort. In so far as the assumption can be sustained that such a leader exists in the group, that person becomes a focus. In the basic assumption of fight/flight, the group leader is seen by the group to embody either the evil that must be fought against (concretizing all the sources of danger felt to exist in the group) or the power needed to fight the evil. In the basic assumption of pairing, the group establishes a pair of leaders that embodies its hope of producing a new solution. In all cases, the level of anxiety is reduced to more managable proportions as external, "real" objects are established that serve to limit to some extent the chaotic turbulance of infantile fantasy. But, Bion points out, the stability is only relative as ever new sources of anxiety arise, given the regressed nature of the group and the variety of its real threats produced by the group's fantasy life. Thus the basic assumption activity of the group is itself unstable and continually shifting.

Let me give two examples to illustrate how groups act as groups—that is, with concerted actions that point to the existence of common fantasies. First, I'll refer to an episode Bion himself described in *Experiences in Groups* and then to one I encountered in my own work.

The group Bion describes consisted of four women and four men, including himself. He writes:

> The prevailing atmosphere is one of good temper and helpfulness. The room is cheerfully lit by evening sunlight.
>
> Mrs. X: I had a nasty turn last week. I was standing in a queue waiting for my turn to go to the cinema when I felt ever so queer. Really, I thought I would faint or something.
>
> Mrs. Y: You're lucky to have been going to a cinema. If I thought I could go to a cinema I should feel I had nothing to complain of at all.
>
> Mrs. Z: I know what Mrs. X means. I feel just like that myself, only I should have had to leave the queue.
>
> Mr. A: Have you tried stooping down? That makes the blood come back to your head. I expect you were feeling faint.
>
> Mrs. X: It's not really faint.
>
> Mrs. Y: I always find it does a lot of good to try exercises. I don't know if that's what Mr. A means.

Mrs. Z: I think you have to use your will power. That's what worries me—I haven't got any.

Mr. B: I had something similar happen to me last week, only I wasn't even standing in a queue. I was just sitting at home quietly when. .

Mr. C: You were lucky to be sitting at home quietly. If I was able to do that I shouldn't consider I had anything to grumble about.

Mrs. Z: I can sit home quietly all right, but it's never being able to get out anywhere that bothers me. If you can't sit at home why don't you go to a cinema or something?

Reflecting on this exchange, Bion comments that it is becoming increasingly clear that anyone in the group suffering from a neurotic complaint is going to get only advice that everyone already knows is perfectly futile and that the prospects for cooperation in this group are nil. A slogan to characterize the group's futility occurs to him: "Vendors of quack nostrums unite!" But no sooner does this strike him that it becomes clear he is expressing his feeling of the group's unity. Indeed the point is that beneath the surface of inattention and random complaints, the group is organized against him and purposefully sabotaging the task he represents.

In this instance, he has been identified as the enemy, the danger the group is attempting to exclude. Bion does not attempt to account for this, but it may well be that the group's hostility towards him has arisen out of their frustration and disappointment that the professional expertise they attribute to him has not resulted in any magical improvements, much less comfort in his presence. The hostility of group members is thus projected onto him, permitting the group to bask in an aura of good temper and helpfulness while it remains in flight from the menacing object it persists in shutting out. This is its primary activity, that which makes it cohesive. But at the same time, one can also observe a loss of differentiation among group members. Though members make efforts to refer to different outside experiences and remind themselves that some are lucky to have problems different from their own, there is, in fact no real acknowledgment of different problems requiring different solutions, no listening to each other as if those differences were real. Indeed, they act as if they shared a common identity as helpless victims of obscure complaints who are trying as ineptly as they must feel Dr. Bion is ineptly trying to offer help. They provide a vicious parody of helpfulness.

The second example I want to describe occurred in a therapy group also of four men and four women that included a male/female pair of therapists. The third meeting of the group began with members drifting in late, making a few casual remarks as they sat down, and then lapsing into fifteen minutes of tense silence. Nothing seemed to be happening as members stared glumly at the floor, except that a statement of sorts was being made in the seating arrangement and postures of the members that just seemed randomly to have occurred. The male therapist was flanked by two male members whose legs were outstretched in a seemingly casual posture as they slumped

in their chairs, but their legs formed a barrier, splitting him off from the female therapist sitting opposite. On her right, a chair was left empty, the only vacant chair in the circle, obviously left for the one member who had not yet arrived, the third male member of the group who had expressed angry feelings towards the female therapist the previous week. Again, a seemingly random collection of individual decisions by group members suddenly provided evidence of a hidden unity of purpose, an unconscious plot to isolate the female therapist and pair her with a substitute who then could attack her, giving vent to the group's fear of her malevolent power and rage at their frustrated expectations of nurturance.

The silence was broken by the female therapist with a comment about the seating arrangement and the "plot" it suggested, a comment that appeared to cause consternation among members because it both exposed their disavowed intention and confirmed their worst fears of the female therapist's omniscent power. Shortly after, the male member arrived who had been given the role of the group's fight leader in his absence. Only now, the covert plot having been exposed, the group proceeded to make him into a scapegoat by projecting onto him their feelings of rage and fear, and attempting to expel him from the group. They did this, first, by utterly failing to explain to him what had transpired before he entered the room, though they referred actively to the uncovered "plot" and one member even spoke of her wish to inform him as he could not possibly know what they were talking about. Thus, they rendered him confused, helpless, isolated and enraged. Second, they entered into a lengthy discussion about his selfishness in having joined the group with what he had referred to in the opening session as a "personal agenda," as if no one else might have personal goals or motivations in joining the group or, indeed, should have such reasons for seeking help in therapy. Thus they further confused, isolated and enraged him, making him into a suitable object onto whom they could project their own feelings of vulnerability and rage as they cast him out from the group that could then sit back and congratulate itself on its selflessness, generosity and unity.

In this maneuver, the group attempted two methods of defending itself against the anxiety aroused by its fear and rage, both of which broadly speaking exemplify the basic assumption of fight. First designating the female leader as the danger to be combatted by the late-arriving male member, the group members projected their hostility into a fight pair and sat back as seemingly innocent bystanders. Failing in that and more convinced than ever of the female leader's power, it turned to fight the male member, contemptuously rendering him impotent and confused, projecting their feelings of anger and vulnerability onto him and drumming him out of the group.

I can't describe these examples without being aware of the skeptical observer, of course, who will doubt my observations, much less my analysis of such events. And this is a concern Bion himself frequently expressed, telling his reader that the phenomena he inadequately tried to describe could only be experienced and seen in actual groups. But even seeing itself is inadequate unless the observer is able to employ what Bion

called "binocular vision." That is, one eye has to be trained on the surface, the level on which individuals maintain their discrete identities and interact in a random manner, the level on which the first group acted as an assortment of inattentive, uncooperative members and the second group experienced itself as not even having begun its meeting. The other eye, however, must be trained on the group purpose, the hidden unity, the level on which nothing is more important to members than the need to belong and to find a common method of defending against their anxiety through the creation of leaders, leaders who paradoxically in the very act of being attacked and excluded can reveal the value of their membership.

To my knowledge, Bion's discovery of this binocular view of group process is an unparalleled contribution to the understanding of group life. Moreover, his account of the regressive process his binocular vision attempts to expose is also profound and true. That is, the regressive perception of the group as a maternal entity allows the group to be perceived as a collective entity that can be joined. This is a point that has impressed many subsequent theorists (Colman, 1975; Durkin, 1964; Foulkes, 1957; Gibbard & Hartman, 1973; Saravay, 1975; Scheidlinger, 1974; Schindler, 1966) and it is the starting point for any attempt to go beyond Freud's account of oedipal dynamics centering on the group leader. It is also, I think, a point for which our language provides convincing evidence as the fundamental analogy between our thinking about the body and about groups is expressed in so many parallel terms. Thus the term "member" refers to a body part as well as a part of a group. We also speak of deliberative or legislative bodies, the body politic. Bion's description of the phenomena of basic assumption behavior in groups also has proven an enduring, and appreciated, contribution, an accurate guide to the unrealistic and fickle forms leadership takes, particularly in relatively unstructured groups. But I think we can recast his account of the regressive process in terms of more recent developments in object relations theory and, in so doing, provide a fuller description of the variety of anxieties group membership arouses.

I don't want to over-emphasize this point, because Bion was too fine an observer of events and had too much integrity as a thinker to substitute explanations for facts. But the theoretical framework of object relations he employed led him to view the extreme—"psychotic"—anxiety group members experienced, which caused them to cohere defensively in the unstable and infantile forms of basic assumption behavior, as a response to paranoid fantasies of early part-object relationships. Thus, for example, in the fragment of behavior he described, the members attempted to shut him out because that activity helped them to put aside the terrifying, persecutory fantasies aroused by the psychological act of joining themselves to mother's body. Nowhere does he spell this out, but it is a reasonable conjecture that in his view, members relieved themselves of the anxieties aroused individually by this act of joining through a common agreement that was then acted upon in fleeing from him: projecting some of their terrifying fantasies on to him and denying some of their others, they were able to agree he was a kind of poisonous penis (I'm guessing) who em-

bodied the threat all members felt. In the second example, similarly, one could view the agreement to fight the female group leader as a defensive strategy to attack the "bad" breast, making this fantasy common and pervasive over the multifarious individual fantasies aroused in members by their regressed state of attachment.

Instead of viewing the infant's early object world as consisting of sharply visualized part objects, however, we can, I think, adopt in general the view of Jacobson, Mahler, Kernberg and others that the infant's perceptual world only gradually achieves distinctness and organization in response to the maturation of perceptual and cognitive abilities as well as to its own affectively charged experience. That is, gradually a sense of good maternal object as well as a bad one is organized out of the recurring fragments of experience. Thus the regressive-adaptive process that group members go through as they search for analogs in their experience that would allow them to establish a relationship with the group as a whole brings them in touch with preambivalent "good" and "bad" objects of this earlier object world as well as part objects that are defined with varying degress of distinctness and associated with varying degrees of firmness to larger entities. Almost certainly such primitive object worlds would vary considerably for each person, based upon each person's early experience of the object world encountered in his family of origin. And we would expect these objects to be linked with a variety of fears: abandonment by good objects, destruction of good objects, persecution by bad objects, etc. But we would also expect that in most instances where childhood development was not severely pathological, such fears were more or less successfully defended against in ways that are not totally inaccessable to the regressed ego. That is to say, it seems unlikely that a regression in object relationships would arouse in all or even most individuals the intensity of "psychotic anxiety" associated with Klein's view of the chaotic and menacing part-object world of early infancy. But we do need to account for the arousal of intense anxiety through the regressive-adaptive process in order to explain, in the context of Bion's theory, the desperate defensive maneuvers of basic assumption behavior.

An additional and, I think, greater degree of anxiety comes about from another source: the disintegration of psychic structures in the ego and superego. That is to say, if we draw on the contributions of Jacobson (1964) and others in elucidating the reciprocal development of the self and the object world, we can readily see that a regression in object ties is likely to be linked with the loosening of structural identifications incorporated in the self-image and the ego-ideal.

The disintegration or dedifferentiation of the super-ego in group settings has, of course, frequently been observed since Freud called attention to it (1955a). In his view, the group leader is incorporated by group members as a replacement for more highly developed and individualized super-egos, leading often to a combination of behaviors both more permissive and more harsh. But the effect on individual psychic structures is even more catastrophic, as the self-image also begins to come apart under the influence of regressive object ties. Thus as the mature object world gives way, earlier

self-representations are activated, including some that have been discarded in the developmental process. And they are given validation and support as impulses previously repressed gain expression in the group and as more primitive defenses become activated. All these archaic aspects of the self tend to gain validation and support in the group because, of course, all members are subject to similar repressive processes and engaged in a collaborative effort to establish a consensus about the nature of the group object they compose. And yet, at the same time, members cannot completely forget the mature object ties that link them with the world outside and the self-images validated in that world. Thus the situation in the group poses continual threats to self-esteem, making members vulnerable to confusion, embarrassment and shame.

But perhaps most distressing of all is the threat this adaptive process poses to the ego's synthetic function. The continual effort that the ego makes to integrate its self-image with its ideals and actual behavior, and reality with fantasy and impulse, cannot easily be sustained when the materials it has to work with are as disparate as in the group setting and from such different levels of functioning. And because the ego's ability to integrate and synthesize is its source of strength and self-confidence, the core element in the sense of identity, group membership thus necessarily disrupts and undermines the member's very sense of a stable and functioning identity. This, I think, is the greatest source of anxiety: a kind of panic arising out of a faltering, disintegrating self that is losing its very capacity to right itself.

Observational data available to anyone who works in groups will lend some support, I think, to this view. Not only are primitive impulses unleashed in group settings but more often than not it is with conviction and support from others. We have seen that in the examples described earlier where intense and cruel pressure was exerted by members who, were they to be granted a moment of objectivity, would recoil in embarrassment from the meanness they casually uttered out of the security of membership. And membership makes people complacently stupid, as we witnessed by the offering of "quack nostrums" Bion observed, in the first example, and the inability of group members in the second example to acknowledge that they all had, or might consider the value of having, "personal agendas" in joining a therapy group. How quickly and fully members embrace common and extremely narrow identities, as well-intentioned victims or altruistic contributors, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. But also, how fragile and fleeting such identities are shown to be as the focus of the group and its defensive needs begin to shift.

Thus, I think, we can understand the sources of anxiety aroused by the process of joining somewhat differently from the way Bion did: as arising not only from the liberation of primitive impulses but also from the fragmentation of the self and the loss of the ego's capacity for flexible and integrative behavior. And these sources of anxiety are, I think, quite sufficient to account for the degree of restless desperation necessary to produce basic assumption behavior as well as for the naivete to explain basic assumption beliefs.

Thus it seems to me that Bion's fundamental contributions to group analysis can be integrated into more recent object relations theory, with a full appreciation of the disruptive power of group forces, which brings me to the second topic I wish to address in the paper: in essence, why it is important to understand these forces in the first place; what the implications of this theory are that we would do well to bear in mind.

Group membership necessarily involves us in a number of irreducable dilemmas. We cannot join a group without entering a process that overthrows, if only temporarily, we can hope, vital achievements of maturity. The very nature of the task of joining demands a regressive immersion in primitive levels of experience that sets aside our highly developed capacities for discriminating object relationships as well as threatens our differentiated identities. To belong is to regress.

This is, of course, not news to those who work with therapy groups. Indeed the very effectiveness of group treatment has often been seen to require such a regression, but then, it has also often been seen as a benign process. Scheidlinger (1955), for example, has written about the regressive processes of adaptation to the pre-oedipal "mother group" but as an essentially nonconflictual process in which the group becomes a "good" maternal object fostering a sense of basic trust. This has become a rationale for group treatment as members thus are seen as being able to risk change because they come to trust the group as a matrix for corrective emotional experience. The group leader becomes the recipient of "bad" or hostile projections.

This view does not seem warranted in the light of Bion's theory and the examples cited above. The group entity as regressively perceived can take many forms and, indeed, usually does in rapid succession. Moreover, it would be surprising if the group, which demands as a condition for joining the overthrow of higher level functioning, were not perceived as the threat it truly is. No amount of leadership can evade this reality.

This raises a second, sobering point: as Bion points out that leaders emerge in the group as part of the group members' strategy to stem the regressive process and defend against anxiety, he implies that leaders are the creature of the group. That is to say, they serve only because they serve the group's purpose and only as long as they do. This is very much the opposite of conventional wisdom, not to mention our own often cherished beliefs in the power of our or others charismatic leadership ability. We foster the value of leadership; we neglect the role of follower.

It is entirely true, of course, that individuals vary enormously in their suitability and availability for different leadership roles. In the second example I gave earlier, the group member who was designated with the job of fighting the female leader and ended up by being extruded across the group's emotional boundary was familiar with the role of the angry outsider from his childhood on. Note that he arrived late for that meeting and that he himself did not ask for clarification about what had happened in his absence. Thus from the start he saw himself and acted in a way that perfectly suited the group's need for someone to occupy that role. And most of us carry with us a capacity for specific roles that were acquired

in our families of origin, which is to say, our groups of origin, internalized roles that provide the stock from which subsequent groups may draw upon in their search for leadership. And talent for leadership is also often the possession of narcissistic personalities (Kernberg, 1979) who are less vulnerable to the disintegrative threat of regression and more mercurially suited to pick up the subtle currents of group feeling and exploit them in the service of seeming important and influential.

According to Bion, no group leader can afford to neglect the question of what defensive service his leadership is providing the group, a message that need not be lost on therapists familiar with the defensive uses of transference. But because of the depth of the regressive phenomena in groups and, thus, the intensity and variety of the anxieties aroused, leadership takes many subtle and shifting forms. It is often not easy to see all the ways in which group members offer themselves up or are offered up to be used in the service of the group's defensive needs and how that relates to the uses the group makes of its formal leadership.

For group therapists, Bion's message can be easily summarizied, I think: ignore these forces at your peril. Regardless of whether one chooses to do individually focused therapy in a group setting, focus on interpersonal interactions in a group, or approach the group as a whole, the group itself is always alive in the unconscious of its members and its leaders. The amorphous entity is continually being shaped and tested out for validation by members, its boundaries continually being redrawn, and its power is being confirmed in every statement and thought that testifies to the existence of a group, that is to the existence of the regressive fantasy that a group exists, rather than a collection of individuals who want and need to belong.

I'd like to add a final word about the implication of Bion's work on groups for the world at large. The forces he describes are at work in all groups: committees, staffs, faculties, jurys, units, classes, teams, etc. And all groups have a reason for being called into existence, a job to do. Thus all groups are simultaneously what Bion calls "work groups," often with formal structures, traditions, procedures for establishing membership, as well as basic assumption groups. And thus we belong to groups in two senses: we have been formally admitted or assigned to it and given a work role to perform and we come to feel as if we belong to it and have an accepted place.

But again this need to feel we belong places a constraint on our ability to work: we serve two masters, the group task and the group itself. The one requires all our intelligence and skill and the other requires our regression and "valency" (Bion's term for an individual's predisposition to be subject to unconscious group processes). It is an essential, that is to say, inescapable conflict. Social stability and institutional achievement are built upon the basis of work groups, that is, collective collaborative efforts in which individual members can be replaced, work roles can be re-assigned. It is fair to say that civilization depends on our ability to function in work groups at the same time that our ability to join in work groups impairs our

capacity to function at our maximum capacity. It is, I think, a tragic dilemma we can only engage again and again and attempt to understand.

In a work Bion (1977) wrote some years after *Experiences in Groups*, when in fact he had seemed to give up his interest in groups, he commented on the relationship between what he called the "mystic" or the "genius" or the "messiah" (which he considered interchangeable terms—but note that he did not use the term "leader") and the institution or "Establishment." The truly creative individual exists in an essential but antagonistic relationship with the established order. The established order exists to preserve the wisdom of the past and make possible the future vision of the truly creative individual, yet it is endangered by the emergence of that vision. It is a container threatened with explosion by what it does not know how to contain, the reality or truth, the "O," which only the creative individual can approximate.

This is, I think, a special case of the universal dilemma of group membership. Society is an association of diverse groups, and our need to belong to at least some of these groups is as profound as our need to sleep and dream. And yet, what we give up to belong! Some of us have more to give up than others, to be sure—certainly from the perspective of society that stands to lose precious contributions of wisdom. We cannot evade the dilemma involved in joining. But I think Bion's message can be expressed as the thought that we can make it conscious. It's possible to analyze experiences in groups.

I conceded at the outset of this paper that Bion's "method" of group analysis has been discredited in this country. But can we afford to neglect any means of acquiring binocular vision into so central an aspect of our experience? Perhaps the point is that his method needs to be exercised with those who attempt to work in groups, in organizations, who occupy assigned leadership roles and find themselves mysteriously enabled or thwarted in their attempts with others to achieve their tasks. Maybe group therapy as Bion conceived it—in a society of groups—is too important to be wasted on patients.