

On being Frozen in Timeⁱ

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- 1 Everything else is a defence against the experience of the present moment.
 - 1.1 The failure to realize the experience of the present moment results in the creation of Time.
 - 1.2 When a group comes together to study the experience of the present moment, anxiety about catastrophic change is aroused.
 - 1.3 The catastrophic change that is feared is being one with creation (i.e. without time).
 - 1.4 The anxiety concerning catastrophic change causes a dispersal of group members into the past, the future, and what is 'known'.
 - 1.5 In this they can become frozen.

In an editorial in the New York Times at the end of the First World War it is argued that a fit punishment for the Kaiser is 'Time without limit, unending time spent in torment without any respite...'. The editorial is entitled 'The punishment of Wilhelm', and it reads in part:

'...for he is the world's greatest animal and even the most terrible statutory penalties fall miserably short of his desert... But suppose he were tried, found guilty, and executed. Would not then end his sufferings? Retribution would cheat itself if so soon his sufferings were ended.

...we cannot well know the mental and spiritual nature of this incomparable malefactor...He knows that the earth's millions detest him, hate him with a hatred never visited upon mortal man.

Time without limit, unending time spent in torment without any respite, ceaseless, hopeless, that is the punishment appropriate to the crimes of Wilhelm, of Hohenzollern, for sins altogether inexpiable, sins that appal, that outrun experience and overpass the powers of imagination'. (*New York Times*, 13/11/1918, p.14).

The editorial concludes: 'Yet some men say there is no GOD!'

At this distance in history a small doubt may have entered the mind of readers- 'Does Wilhelm *actually* feel all this?' It is believed that he does, that he has identified with the views and feelings of the editorial, hence the punishment of having to live in

‘unending time’. And this is perhaps the clue, that Wilhelm is the recipient of the projections of a culture, that it is believed he has identified with these projections, and his punishment is to be frozen in time by these projections.

At one level the phenomena of being frozen in time is well known. There are numerous political and technological examples, eg. the Maginot line philosophy in the lead up to the Second World War, that prepared fortifications for the dangers of the First World War. The enemy came by air. Or the Luddites. Or the shock the West received when the Soviet Union abandoned Communism.

But what does being frozen in time mean? From the Wilhelm example it appears to mean being consigned to a *present* that cannot *change*. And it is a present that only contains the *past*. There is no *future* except for repetitively remembering the past as though it is the present, in every single moment of existence. One is reminded of Dante’s descent into Hell, and the unceasing repetitive punishments he witnesses.ⁱⁱ Wilhelm’s world, as envisaged by the New York Times would be a hell. ‘Let no man say there is no GOD!’ Indeed.

I have found when writing this paper that what I want to say is in the form of fragments drawn from different experiences at different times. Except for the theme they seem disconnected. And perhaps they are. Rather than a moving present, which has a reality in a human meaning which provides the connection, they are images of experiences linked by the theme of ‘being frozen in time’, that are seeking connection through the reader. If one wants to, one can consider them as fragments of a hologram, each containing an outline of the original hologram, which has so far been lost.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are four fragments. The first concerns the freezing of an individual and a group in the past, as occurred in the Global Event during the 1993 International Conference. The second explores a problem of institutional freezing in the Bion/Tavistock tradition. The third fragment sketches an outline of the three International Events in the Bion - Tavistock tradition that have far been held, and is entitled: ‘Towards Institutional Unfreezing’. And the fourth explores Study Group experiences of being frozen in the past, the future, and what is ‘known’, as a defence against the anxiety of catastrophic change which is aroused by being in the present moment.

Fragment 1 - Individual and Group Freezing

I first became conscious of the phenomenon of ‘being frozen in time’ during the Global Event at the International Group Relations and Scientific Conference. The Conference took place in Lorne, Victoria, Australia, 14th - 19th August, 1993, and was sponsored by the Australian Institute of Social Analysis.^{iv} It was the third International Event sponsored by organizations working in the Bion - Tavistock tradition, the previous ones having been at Keble College, Oxford (1988), and Spa, Belgium (1990).

The theme of the Conference in Lorne - 'Exploring Global Social Dynamics' - was explored by means of seven different events (see Fragment 3), and one of these events was the Global Event. The task of the Global Event was 'To explore Global Social Dynamics using one's learning and experience as derived from the Bion - Tavistock tradition'. There were five sessions. The Event was introduced by two members of the Conference Directorate, who then joined with the 70 other members^v in working at the task. Rooms had been allocated to the various national 'groups' represented in the Conference, and some rooms had been left vacant for uses to be determined during the Event.^{vi} People were free to work on the task in whatever way they chose.

I decided to begin the Event in the room allocated to India (I was born in India and had spent the first four years of my life there). During the Plenary it had been said that India and Israel were to share the same room. There was one 'official' Indian at the Conference, a black man, and one 'official' Israeli, a black woman. A white woman, who lives in the United States, and has dual U.S, Israeli citizenship, was the fourth member of this original group^{vii}. Why were we there, and what was the meaning of allocating the one room to be shared by India and Israel? We were soon joined by, a white German man, who said he was a 'refugee' from the German territory, which was occupied by two Americans (who live in Germany). At the end of the session a white American Jew announced that it had been decided, in the U.S. room, that a meeting of Jews would take place in the Israeli territory. No permission was asked. It seemed to be assumed as a right. The symbolic lineaments of past and present white colonialism (British^{viii} and American), the holocaust, being a refugee from 'oppression', and lumping Asian 'black' 'Third World' countries together, were awakened in this room in the first session.

On a personal level my being in the 'Indian' room was a pilgrimage to my early childhood, and land of birth. While I had been warmly welcomed I had not intended to stay more than a session or so, and during the early part of the second session I moved to the Australian room, where I remained for the rest of the Event. There were about 20 people present in a very large room, (called the 'Ballroom' by the Guest House). The atmosphere in the Australian room was quite tense. There was talk of people having left, and there had been tension around their leaving.

It was during the next few sessions of this event that I gradually became aware that when people came back to Australia there was rarely any space allowed for exploring the experiences they had had in other countries rooms. On one level this was understandable as people who remained in the Australian group wanted to continue working on their own issues rather than be 'interrupted'. But the experience of relatedness was more than this. The group in the Australian room related to the returning Australians as though they had the *same identity* as when they had left, which was sometimes two or three sessions in the past. It was *remembered* how and when people had left, and the tension that may have emerged during their leaving. And for the group that was their identity when they returned. The group behaved as though the returnee could have had no experiences since he or she left. Similarly the returning Australians tended to relate to the Australian group as though it was the

same group that existed at the time of their leaving ie. one full of tension, and that no development could have taken place in the interim. Both 'groups' then were behaving as though the 'other' was frozen in time. There was no space in the experience of 'returning' for learning and growth.

At the time when the returning Australians met the Australian group the present moment collapsed into a collusion that the past was the present. Both were ghosts for the other. But both were 'known' for the other. The collapse of the present moment into a mutual projection of the past, however unpleasant, created a feeling of safety. What was denied in this behaviour was the possibility of a present without the projected ghost of the 'other'. The possibility of this kind of present moment I would hypothesize precipitated unconscious anxiety of catastrophic change.

Letting one's boundaries be defined by the 'other' results in being frozen in time. The problem of letting the 'other' define one's identity, and therefore boundaries, and acting out the projective identification of the 'other', as a phenomenon of group behaviour^{ix}, and colonialism^x has been acutely observed and analysed by Gouranga Chattopadhyay (1997).

Fragment 2 - The Institutionalization of the Bion - Tavistock Tradition

Just as individuals and groups may be frozen in time, so too can organizations, and the management of organizations. In Fragment 2 and Fragment 3 the focus is on organizational freezing and unfreezing, being frozen in a managerial role, and the management of multiple roles. The examples that are used are from organizations working in the Bion - Tavistock tradition, but they are illustrative of phenomena that readers are likely to be very familiar with from their own managerial and organizational experience. Fragment 2 begins again from the Global Event in the 1993 International Conference.

Like me, many people in the Australian room had decided during the Global Event to explore their roots: the countries and the people they and their families had come from. Thus some people visited the U.K., some Eire, Denmark, Africa, Israel, U.S. , etc. While their experiences varied three people who visited the U.K. territory reported an experience which is germane to the theme of this paper. One person had a message for the people in the U.K room, and was told by a member of the group that the message wasn't wanted, and that they wouldn't have been interested in hearing it anyway. Another person found that he couldn't speak in the U.K. room. And a third person felt like a 'convent school girl'. A delegation from Sweden and Norway on entering the U.K. room also found they couldn't talk, and were only able to find their voices in their *own mother tongues*. A common feature in all these experiences was of feeling , or being made to feel, like a child, which is perhaps some support for the hypothesis offered by the delegation from Sweden and Norway that the U.K. group was acting as a parent for the Conference.

One Conference member, who was from the U.K., but not institutionally linked to any of the organizations where the group relations approach developed -the Tavistock Institute, the Tavistock Clinic, the Grubb Institute, the Scottish Institute of Human Relations , (which were all represented in the U.K. room) - has written (Nutman, 1995):

‘In the end I have to say it was like being in the Boardroom of a family firm fighting over history, present, and future. The members sitting round the solid oak table of ideologies with the guilt framed portrait of Bion visible from every part of the room. It was, Oh so English!

The patriarch, the dowager duchess, the brother who had left to set up his own business, with his son the new pretender, the rebellious son of the family (screaming loudly with his surly silence), various nephews and nieces (some of whom had set up their own firms some together some not), and somewhere in the background the son who had emigrated to Australia to seek his fortune there and build up his own family business.

This was the parent Company or holding company hypothesized by the Swedish/Norwegian contingent as acting as a container for the Global Event.

.....

It seemed that many of these people were hiding their emotions and feelings behind a language and framework of the Bion/Tavistock Tradition and for some behind a self authorized role of consultant that they were unable or unwilling to relinquish.^{xixii}

The frozen institutional splits, within the U.K., perhaps thawed a little during this Conference. But on a personal level there is also a ‘frozenness’ in a managerial role, due to projections and identification, and perhaps no role attracts more projections of an institutional kind in the group relations world than the Director of the Group Relations Programme at the Tavistock Institute. Eric Miller’s experience of the first couple of days of the Conference was of being in a ‘gilded cage’. This feeling disappeared as the Conference unfolded. However feeling one is in a ‘gilded cage’ is perhaps linked with Eric Miller ‘commenting with a wry smile as to whether he was going to be “killed off”^{xixiii}, during one session of the Global Event.

The problem of the institutionalization of the Group Relations Programme at the Tavistock Institute, the Establishment for the ‘keeping’ and transmission of the Bion idea, has been recognized for some time. Gordon Lawrence, a former Co-Director of the Programme, writes:

‘The paradox is that the disruptive ideas he (Bion) first presented have resulted in an Establishment(s), i.e., the group relations training institutions to which I have already referred....The Establishment ‘in the mind’ is the ideal-typical institution purveying the very best of Bion’s thinking and those who were immediately associated with him and who began the various institutions for

group relations training. Here, I suggest, a number of individuals have been put into the role of representing the untarnished truth of Bion, Rice *et al.*' (Lawrence, 1985).^{xiv}

Lawrence, in the same paper, writes about the pressures on the organization of the Tavistock programme:

'To put my concern in concrete terms: the felt pressure on the programme at the Tavistock is never to be innovative; it must be saddled with stability, certainty and perseverance. But it must never disappear, as this would leave other comparable institutions with problems of rivalry for succession that would have to be fought out. So the idea of the Tavistock programme as a dead, hollow container or spittoon easily comes to mind, even though individuals as agents may feel differently within themselves'. (Lawrence, 1985).^{xv}

Eric Miller, the Director or Co-Director of the Tavistock Institute's Group Relations Programme, 1969 - 1997, writes in the Preface to the 'Leicester Model':

'Ascribed to me, therefore, is a symbolic role as *custodian of the tradition*. (my italics.) The paper that follows refers to some of the consequences of the 'institutionalization' of the conferences. What is relevant here is the institutionalization of me. My utterances tend to carry more weight than they often deserve'. (Miller, 1989).^{xvi}

Miller concludes the Preface:

'Whilst I hope it [the paper] will be useful, I feel the need to emphasize that this is not the gospel: it is simply one person's picture, shaped by the perspective of the roles he happens to have been in.'. (Miller, 1989).^{xvii}

What has working in the Bion - Tavistock tradition come to mean? Has it perhaps become a mantra? Is it something that is repeated in order to gain access to a good spirit, that of Bion? In phantasy is the Tavistock the keeper of the good spirit - the Holy Grail of the Group Relations World? And as 'keeper' does this enforce repetition of behaviour in the 'keeping', and thereby prevent learning, innovation, and growth?

In *Attention and Interpretation* Bion wrote of the fate of the mystic, or genius, as being tied to the relationship that the mystic or genius has with the Establishment. He writes of the explosion caused by the mystic idea, the danger to the group, and the resultant struggle of the emergent establishment to contain the idea, and to be recognized (in my terms) as the 'keeper' of the idea, and how, and by whom it will be transmitted. (Bion, 1970, pp.72 - 82)^{xviii}. Bion was a genius. And it has so far been the Tavistock's fate to be frozen in the institutionalization of a few things he, Kenneth Rice, Pierre Turquet and one or two others suggested.

There are two strands that I would like to open up. The first is that a new idea provokes an Establishment fear of catastrophic change, and that the ‘keeper’ is mobilized to prevent the intrusion of the new idea. And the second is that the person and role of ‘keeper’ of the Tavistock Group Relations Tradition has perversely become confused with the ‘idea’ that is being kept. Hence Eric Miller’s comment about whether it was time for him to be ‘killed off’ during the Global Event, and the subsequent acting out of a death by a woman member of the U.K. group. Nutman (1995) writes : ‘Another member came to the conclusion that it was necessary for somebody to die and become extinct in order that something could change. She said she was leaving the event, a symbolic representation of extinction’.^{xix} Bion has written that in order for a new idea to be born an old idea has to die. I don’t think he writes anywhere about the necessity for a person having to die in order for a new idea to be born. The fusion of person, role, and ‘idea’ through massive institutional projections makes leadership of the Group Relations Programme at the Tavistock Institute very difficult, and organizational and managerial change almost impossible.

Fragment 3 - Towards Institutional Unfreezing

While at a ‘local’ organizational level freezing may be occurring (as Fragment 2 indicates), at a different system level unfreezing may be taking place. Fragment 3 explores this process of unfreezing at an international systems level. There have been three International Events sponsored by organizations working in the Bion - Tavistock group relations tradition: Keble College, Oxford, 1988; Spa, Belgium, 1990; and Lorne, Victoria, Australia, 1993.

1 Keble College, Oxford, 1988. This was the venue for the Tavistock / A.K.Rice International Symposium, which was co-directed by Eric Miller and Margaret Rioch. It was the first such Event to be held and some 200 participants from around the world took part. The design focussed on the presentation of ‘Scientific Papers’, and there were deliberately no ‘experiential learning’ Events.

2. Spa, Belgium, 1990, in the beautiful forest of Ardennes. The second International Event, a ‘Temporary Learning System’ was organized by AIM, an acronym for the three European organizations involved in the planning - AGSLO (Sweden), IFSI (France). and MundO (Germany). The organizing group was Siv Boalt-Boethius and Stefan Jern (AGSLO), Gordon Lawrence and David Gutmann (IFSI), and Burkhard Sievers and Karsten Trebesch (MundO). 35 people who had been on the Staff of a Group Relations Conference participated. Members were mainly from Western European countries, but also Israel, U.S., India, and Australia. There was nobody from the Tavistock Institute, and only one person associated (marginally) with the A.K.Rice Institute.

The ‘Temporary Learning System’ was called a ‘collegial system’^{xx} by the organizers to distinguish it from a Conference. To further this aim the organizers deliberately

gave up their staff role before the Event started. The T.L.S. Program consisted of a Social Dreaming Matrix, a Praxis Matrix, and a Monitoring Matrix. Unlike the first International Event at Oxford it was entirely experiential. Everybody was a member and there were no consultant roles. Siv Boalt-Boethius (1992) writes about T.L.S. that: ‘What we wanted to do was to provide opportunities for using the different experiences in Europe to develop something new *with the possibility to go some day beyond Bion*’^{xxi} (my italics). Part of the zeitgeist of the T.L.S. was of being trapped in the group relations tradition, or in the Establishment text of Bion, and the need to invent something different. Oddly it didn’t seem to be publicly recognized that the very Events went well beyond Bion, and that their origins and conception was largely the work of Gordon Lawrence.

As a participant in both International Events it seemed to me that one was the obverse of the other. One was a Scientific Symposium organized by the Establishment (i.e. Tavistock and A. K. Rice), and the other an Experiential Event organized by a group who wanted ‘to go some day beyond Bion’. To exaggerate a little, the Oxford Symposium was almost all ‘container’, with little space for the interaction between the ‘container’ and ‘contained’, and the Spa experience was almost all ‘contained’ with the hope for an emergent ‘container’ arising from the membership role. While both were in their different ways absorbing and worthwhile events, the exploration and the experiences were limited to what was generated in a small number of roles: the roles of presenter, listener and questioner at the Oxford Symposium, and the role of collegial member at Spa. The possibility of exploration and experiences generated by *managing oneself in multiple roles* formed a major part of the thinking in the design of the third International Event. But this thinking would not have been possible without the learning and experiences generated by the first two Events.

3. Lorne, Victoria, Australia, 1993. The Conference took place on the beachfront at Lorne, but perhaps more significantly Australia is on the other side of the world from Oxford and Spa, and this has allowed us a certain freedom to innovate.

The Executive of the Australian Institute of Social Analysis (AISA) authorized a Directorate to organize the Conference. The Directorate initially consisted of three Fellows of AISA: Gordon Lawrence, Laurence Gould, and the author of this paper. Susan Long, Kathleen White, Siv Boalt-Boethius, and Allan Souter (Conference Administrator) accepted invitations to join the Directorate. I was authorized by the Directorate to direct the Conference. The Directorate met in New York in February, 1993, (Siv Boalt-Boethius was unable to be present), and then again over a few days prior to the Conference starting in August. This experience was very significant in developing a way of working which was not hierarchical and allowed for an ‘evolving consciousness for task’.

To give a small example : the design of the Global Event. In New York we had the idea of starting the Global Event with the Directorate sitting in the middle of a ‘fishbowl’ and working at the task of the Event. Watching and interacting in ‘national groups’ would be the other participants in the Conference. The Event would unfold from this

beginning. We began from this notion in the Staff meetings held immediately prior to the Conference. Questions were raised in the Staff meetings as to why we thought we were better qualified than the other participants in initially working at the task of an Event which had never been held before. All of us also wanted to work as members in the Event, and with the national groups we were part of. I also began to feel anxious about the role I seemed to be cast in: that of a de facto 'world CEO'. In our own thinking, as a management group, we had also become frozen in models that were not relevant for the Task of the Event, in particular the Institutional Event in a Group Relations Conference.

At a Staff meeting at Lorne prior to the Conference I indicated I was not willing to proceed on the basis of our planning, and in particular I did not want to be present in the Event as Conference Director. We then began the planning afresh, and the initial start of the Global Event was agreed the night before the Conference began. Two members of the Directorate (Siv Boalt-Boethius and Susan Long) would introduce the Event, and allocate rooms for national groups, and they would then join as members of the Event. The model we eventually arrived at promoted the idea we had of this Event, and the Conference as a whole, being 'held' systemically by all the participants in the Conference through the management of multiple roles.

The Conference Primary Task was:

'To explore, identify and interpret the global relatedness of conference participants using the experience of their own and others national identities and aspirations, as framed by the Bion/Tavistock tradition.'

The Conference consisted of the following Events:

1. **An Opening Plenary**, including an address by Eric Miller on 'The Vicissitudes of Identity'.
2. **The Global Event.**
3. **Social Dreaming Matrices.** There were four Matrices each with two Consultants. The Matrices were co-directed by Gordon Lawrence and Suzanne Ross.
4. **Dialogues and Scientific Exploration Event.** There were nine presentations during the Conference in parallel sessions. Director: Laurence Gould.
5. **Interactive Systems Event**, with the task: 'to study the interactive process between other events and within the Conference as a whole'. There were 8 Consultants. Director: Alastair Bain.
6. **Prospection Event**, with the task: 'to be generative of ideas in the Bion/Tavistock tradition for further exploration of global relatedness'. The Event was introduced by Kathleen White and Gordon Lawrence. There were no Consultants.
7. **Closing Plenary.** As in the Opening Plenary members of the Directorate were present in role.

There were 72 participants in the Conference, and over one-third of the participants had consultant, director, convenor, and presenter roles at different times. All of us were in member roles during most of the Events. For example, as Director of the Conference, I was in this role at the Opening and Closing Plenaries, during Directorate staff meetings which were held each day to consider our experience of managing multiple roles, and very occasionally in dealing with member queries. Another role I had was Director of the Interactive Systems Event. But for most of the conference I was in a member role: in the Social Dreaming Matrix, Dialogues, Global Event, and Prospection Event.

The management of multiple roles is not an easy task. It is perhaps made both easier and harder, through the previous experiences of group relations conferences we bring with us to this new experience. Easier, in the sense that one is exploring, and struggling with unfamiliar realities, with colleagues who have some understanding of unconscious processes. But it is also harder as one projects into this new Conference expectations and fantasies about authority and roles based on a model of Conference learning, which Krantz (1993)^{xxii} has characterized as ‘The Military model of bureaucratic hierarchy’. In this usual Conference model the Director, Consultant Staff, and Members have clearly delineated roles, and the Staff pay particular attention to the transference and counter transference feelings which are evoked between members and staff. At Lorne there was no Director, or Staff, in the usual sense, and the management of the Conference was dependent on all participants taking up their authority appropriately for task, i.e. managing themselves in multiple roles, and allowing an evolving consciousness for task to develop. In this sense the Conference was held in the mind systemically. The difference took some participants a few days to get used to.

Fragment 4 - The Study Group experience of Freezing in the Past, the Future, and what is ‘Known’^{xxiii}.

Fragment 4 extends the idea of being frozen in a group, to exploring experiences in Study Groups of being frozen in the past, the future, and what is ‘known’. The task of the Study Groups was: “To study the the behaviour of the group as it occurs”. The groups were sponsored variously by the Australian Institute of Social Analysis; the Department of Psychology, University of Melbourne; and the Department of Psychological Medicine, Monash University. The groups met weekly for 1.5 hours, for ten, fifteen, or twenty week sessions, or formed part of a Group Relations Conference. The author worked as a Consultant with these groups.

A major part of the work of a Consultant in a small or large study group is to *enable members to gather in the present*. In my experience this is strenuously resisted by members of the group, who prefer, to gather in the past, in the future, or in what is familiar and ‘known’. Indeed at any point where there is no potentiality for change. The following vignettes indicate this phenomenon.

At the beginning of one Study Group a woman began by talking about how far she had come in order to take part in the Group. She had travelled 130 kilometres from Philip Island to Kew (which was where the Study Group was being held). She thought she had the furthest to travel. Another member commented on how far he had had to travel from the suburb he lived in. All ordinary stuff, except that as a member of the Group one was diverted from the possibly uncomfortable persecutory experience of *being* in the group to thinking *about* something outside the group that was familiar and known, ie. the relative distances from Philip Island to Kew, and other suburbs to Kew.

While it is customary for members of a study group to introduce themselves during the first session, sometimes one person will talk and talk about himself/herself which while apparently giving information to be of help to others in getting to know the person, in fact often has the opposite unconscious intention of defending against the anxiety of experiencing one's identity in this new experience, the group. The group is kept at bay. Who one is in the group is unexplored and one's identity is frozen in a shape that derives from outside the group. At the beginning of one Study Group a man on introducing himself spent about ten minutes telling us in detail what his job involved and the business his company was in. He emphasized that he was here to learn and he wanted people in the group to tell him what he was like. He insisted that people do this. The following week he was frustrated that the group didn't seem to be making any progress. While he had not been in a group of this kind before he seemed to be certain about the direction it should be going in and the absence of progress that was being made. The following week he continued the refrain: 'Please tell me what I'm like so I can make a better contribution to the group'. This for a period became his 'group' identity. And one notes that in his very wish to be told *about* himself he paradoxically contrives to keep the experience of the group at bay.

In another Study Group members of the group who already knew each other from their work had more than the usual difficulty in the first session in concentrating on the task of the group: they were in constant flight from it. The second week, when I arrived for the session , a coffee percolator was sitting on a chair in the middle of the circle of chairs, with a plate of chocolate biscuits on the floor. There was nobody there. I sat looking at the coffee percolator and biscuits. The coffee smelled delicious. People began to arrive in the next few minutes. I was asked politely if I would like a cup. It turned out there weren't enough cups so people were told to go out and get clean cups. Members of the group started to swap papers and journal articles concerning outside work, and to talk with energy about outside things they shared. There was no attention to the task of the group. I felt as though I wasn't there, and it was as I said later like a Coffee Klatch. At the time I interpreted the group's behaviour as flight from the Task, and that the coffee percolator and biscuits represented an enactment of flight in bringing the outside physically into the group. On reflection think I was wrong, and that it was an early instance of Basic Assumption Me.^{xxiv}

Another way of not being in the group at the time when it is taking place is to concentrate on a *past* or *future* event. In one Study Group the members had all

introduced themselves at a pre Study group session the week before. There was little opportunity then to talk at length about one's outside identity. Instead members of the group concentrated on how they were at the pre Study group session the week before, the anxieties that were felt, and what one might have mistakenly conveyed. What was avoided in this way was one's anxiety in the current session. After the discussion of how one was the previous week a member said 'I hope I will be seen in the group as...', where the emphasis was on future events in the life of the group. How one was and how one will be may be used to avoid the experience of how one is. Similarly, within a session, particularly early on in the life of a group, a person will say well after an event has taken place: 'You know when you said X, I didn't say it at the time, but I felt Y'. Within one session this may occur a number of times with different people reporting how they felt at a time earlier in the session. The time lapse then ensures a separation between feelings and thoughts at the time when they occur and their expression. One is not now as one was. Nor do members of the group know how one is now, they will have to wait.

If one explores the nature of flight from the experience of the present in the Study Group one notes that in almost all the examples mentioned the person is fleeing to something he or she knows: eg. who one is outside the group, how far it is from Philip Island, outside assignments, what one felt an hour ago in the Study Group. These are things one can experience a certainty about., and can therefore *control*. The possible experience of something new in the Study Group becomes replaced by something that is already known. The unknown causes terror and is coated over by this known thing. This kind of control is dependent on *memory*. Another form of control in avoiding the present is *desire* about the *future*: thus the person who remarks that they hope they will be seen in the group as..... As Bion (1970) indicates memory and desire can be thought of as two facets of the same thing : 'one is the 'past'tense [memory] and the other the 'future' [desire]' ^{xxv}.

There are perhaps different potentialities or valencies we have for being in the past, being in the future, and being in the present. Thus one person I know, for example, is consumed by the past, and also has a valency for creatively pointing to the future. The hypothesis I am offering is that the Study Group can mobilize one's valencies for being in the past, the present, or the future, and the work of the Consultant is partly to do with unfreezing the group from the past and the future. As for the fear of being frozen in the present, that is the topic I now wish to turn to.

It has already been mentioned that a major part of the work of a consultant to a Study Group is directed to assisting members of the group gather in the present (particularly early on in the life of the group). As such the consultant is likely to make comments when it appears that the group is so to speak gathering in the past, or gathering in the future, as way of avoiding experiencing the group as it is.

In this behaviour members of the group are likely to feel threatened by the consultant as taking away things they *know* , whether this is something they are remembering or something that is hoped for. The consultant in this behaviour becomes the

embodiment of what is unknown. However at the same time that the consultant is busy making comments about where or when the group seems to be, members of the group are busy building up a 'known portrait' of the consultant. This 'known portrait' may be far from the reality of how the consultant experiences himself or herself, or close; what is important is the belief by members of the group that it is 'known'.

Thus there may be a belief that the consultant never replies to a direct question. This appears to members of the group as though it is a rule of behaviour made up by the consultant which they now 'know'. In reality the consultant is likely to respond if he/she feels that this will further the task of the group; if not he/she is likely to remain silent. At the first session of one Study Group two out of the eleven members were there on time. The observation of this by the consultant later on becomes for members of the group who weren't on time: 'You are angry with us for being late'. This then became part of the 'known portrait' of the consultant. In another Study Group following an incident at the start of the second session the consultant was thought to have 'made a mistake'. For the next six sessions it fell to the lot of one member to say as though in passing and in a low voice that the consultant had made a 'mistake'. He said it in such a way as for it to go unchallenged, and as though he were speaking a fact about group life. This perception then becomes added to what the group supposedly *knows about* the consultant, and therefore subtracts, or serves as a defence against the perception of the consultant as the embodiment of what is unknown.

As the Study Group progresses the strength of memory and desire may lessen and members of the group may also begin to realize that rules of behaviour which may have been attributed to the consultant have in fact been made up by them. There is less certainty about the previously 'known portrait' of the consultant. Among some members there may also be a growing capacity to see things as they are, without adornment, without the additions and interpretations that are so often put on what others say and do. As memory, desire, and 'knowing about' decrease the members of the Study Group feel threatened. One member of a Study Group asked herself: 'What am I threatened by?' She answered herself 'Reality'. And I think this is true. The Study Group experience, like a psycho-analysis, can expose one to reality, what is ultimately true, and the unconscious anticipation of this can cause terror, and flight into the past, future, and 'certainty'.

Bion writes in *Attention and Interpretation* (Bion, 1970)^{xxvi} that the emotional state of transformations in O, (his symbol for ultimate reality), during a psycho-analysis, is akin to dread, and he quotes the following poem by Coleridge:

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread;
And having once turned round walks on
And turns no more his head:
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

Bion continues that the ‘frightful fiend’ represents indifferently the quest for truth or the active defences against it, depending on the vertex. This expresses what I also want to convey about a Study Group when memory, desire, and ‘knowing about’ decrease to the point at which reality intrudes. This point is marked by anxiety about catastrophic change, which occurs as Bion indicates at the point of the transformation of K (what is and can be known) into O (which cannot be known but only be been).

Paralleling this movement away from desire, memory, and ‘knowing about’ to ‘not knowing’, there is a final defence against the realization of ‘not knowing’. The Consultant is put in the paradoxical position by members of the group as being both the *embodiment of what is unknown*, as well as *what is known*. He becomes for members of the group an enigmatic super knower. Images used by Study Group members include, for example, a Sphinx, the Oracle of Delphi, an Egyptian God, an Easter Island statue, and God. The characteristics of the consultant for the group at this stage generally contains this powerful ambiguity: the consultant knows everything but he doesn’t tell you in a way that is helpful; he tells you in a way that makes it seem unknowable and mysterious.

Difficulties in thinking in the group are most intense at this time. Indeed instead of thought, at times as a consultant, it has felt that the question that is uppermost for members of the group who are most powerfully affected in this way is: ‘What is the appropriate offering or tribute?’, generally the implication being that some terrible vengeance will be let loose unless this happens.

At this stage in the life of the group then, rather than experience the unknown in oneself as a member of the group, the consultant is made into the omniscient and omnipotent embodiment of it. In a way this can also be viewed as the final attempt or bribe by members of the group: we will make you a God if you please don’t bother us any more with your questions: just tell us what you want and what to do, which in varying guises is likely to have been an underlying theme from the start of the group.

T.S. Eliot wrote in the first of the *Four Quartets* ‘Burnt Norton’ that ‘human kind cannot bear very much reality’.^{xxvii} By ‘reality’ I think he means what he writes later: in ‘Dry Salvages’: ‘the point of intersection of the timeless with time’^{xxviii} He goes on to write in ‘Burnt Norton’:

Yet the enchainment of past and future
woven in the weakness of the changing body
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure.
Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.

It is these forces that are being struggled with in the Study Group at this time. As a member of the group can one let oneself experience the ‘intersection of the timeless with time’ as that as Eliot indicates is the occupation of a ‘Saint’. Better perhaps to have a consultant/God rather than have to recognize these forces within oneself, and within others.

- 1 Everything else is a defence against the experience of the present moment.
 - 1.1 The failure to realize the experience of the present moment results in the creation of Time.^{xxix}
 - 1.2 When a group comes together to study the experience of the present moment, anxiety about catastrophic change is aroused.
 - 1.3 The catastrophic change that is feared is being one with creation (i.e. without time).
 - 1.4 Anxiety concerning catastrophic change causes a dispersal of group members into the past, the future, and what is ‘known’.
 - 1.5 In this they can become frozen.
- 2.0 If someone is living in the present moment he/she is regarded as a Saint (or mystic or genius).
- 2.1 For members of the group identifying a Saint is usually a defence against the experience of the present moment.
- 2.2 ‘I’, as a group member, can now live in the past, the future, and what is ‘known’.
- 2.3 Living in the past, the future, and what is ‘known’ destroys the Saint.
- 2.4 The destruction of the Saint is the creation (again) of the ‘idea’ of the present moment.
- 2.5 When the group retraces the steps from the past, the future, and what is ‘known’, at some stage the present obtrudes.

Endnotes

ⁱ The propositions at the beginning and at the end of this chapter are shared thoughts with Joshua Bain. I am also indebted to Gouranga Chattopadhyay for his comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

ⁱⁱ See Dante *The Divine Comedy* Inferno. Cantos V - XXXIV. Tr. Mark Musa. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971).

ⁱⁱⁱ I am indebted to Robert French and Russ Vince for suggesting the hologram analogy, and leading me to discard my original snapshot idea. Usually I am suspicious of directly translating ideas of Physics into explorations of social reality, but in this case the analogy may be illuminating, and provoke some thought.

^{iv} Now the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis.

^v There were no consultants.

^{vi} Members of the Conference came from the following countries: Australia - 26, Denmark - 2, Eire - 1, Finland - 1, Germany -3, India -1, Israel -1, Norway -1, Sweden -5, U.K. -15, U.S.A -15.

^{vii} See Chattopadhyay, G., ‘The Burden of the Internalized Aggressor’ Forthcoming, (Calcutta:Eureka Publishers), for an analysis of the dynamics in the ‘India / Israel’ room.

^{viii} I had U.K. citizenship and passport at the time of the Conference.

^{ix} Chattopadhyay, G., and Biran, H., ‘The Burden of the Barbarian Within’, Forthcoming (London: Free Associations Press).

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- ^x Chattopadhyay, G., 'The Burden of the Internalized Aggressor', Forthcoming, (Calcutta: Eureka Publishers).
- ^{xi} Nutman, P. N. S. 'The U.K. Group in the Global Event: Church, Family, Business or What?'. Unpublished, 1995, p.8.
- ^{xii} Two very senior members of this group had had no membership experience of a group relations conference which perhaps contributes to this phenomenon.
- ^{xiii} Nutman, op. cit., p.7.
- ^{xiv} Lawrence, W. G., 'Beyond the Frames', in M. Pines *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, p.309.
- ^{xv} Lawrence, op.cit., p.310.
- ^{xvi} Miller E.J., 'The 'Leicester' Model: Experiential study of group and organizational processes', *Tavistock Institute of Human Relations Occasional Paper*, No.10,1989, p.1.
- ^{xvii} Miller, op. cit. p.2.(n.b.)
- ^{xviii} Bion, W. R., *Attention and Interpretation*, (London: Tavistock Publications,1970), pp. 72-82.
- ^{xix} Nutman, op.cit. p.7.
- ^{xx} Boalt-Boethius, S., 'What can consultants gain by sharing experiences?'. Presentation at the *10th Scientific Meeting*, A. K. Rice Institute, St. Louis, U.S.A., 1992, p.2.
- ^{xxi} Boalt- Boethius, op. cit. p.2.
- ^{xxii} Krantz J. 'On the Future of Group Relations Work' in Changing Group Relations. Proceedings of the 9th Scientific Meeting of the A. K. Rice Institute. 1993:AKRI.
- ^{xxiii} Some of the material in this Fragment was originally presented at the Tavistock / A. K. Rice International Symposium in 1988.
- ^{xxiv} Lawrence, W. G., Bain, A., Gould, L., 'The Fifth Basic Assumption', *Free Associations*, Vol.6, 1, (No.7), (London: Process Press, 1996).
- ^{xxv} Bion, op. cit., p.45.
- ^{xxvi} Bion, op. cit., p.46.
- ^{xxvii} Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909 - 1950*, (New York:Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., , 1962), p. 118.
- ^{xxviii} Ibid., 'Dry Salvages', p.136.
- ^{xxix} i.e.past, present, and future.