

## Cuts and sutures

### Processes of splitting/integration and the function of psychoanalytic interpretation

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#### Prologue

In the weeks following the invitation to deliver this talk, I often found myself obsessively thinking about some prominent figures that are for me inextricably linked to the city where the present congress is taking place. The first is Paolo Rumiz, a poet rather than a journalist, to whom we owe a series of wonderful articles and a dozen of beautiful DVDs on the premises and consequences of the Great War – the hundred-years-old historical event that is key to understand what Europe is (or rather is *not*) today. Trieste was the most important port of a large multi-lingual and multi-ethnic reality. Due to the drastic geographical and cultural decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this city remained for long an isolated city in a tiny stretch of Italian land. For nearly a century, as Rumiz has written, Trieste has endured “the end of the world of yesterday” and has laid its hopes on a future that is yet to be built.

In addition to being the birthplace of many Austrian, Croat, Slovene and Italian artists, Trieste is was also a second homeland to one of the most important English-language writers of the twentieth century. It is here that James Joyce, in voluntary exile from Ireland, finished one of his greatest books: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In it, we find memorable pages that have much to do with the central theme of many psychoanalytic stories as well as with our own existence and the topic of this very congress: the splitting and integration between the maternal and the paternal influence. Let me quote the concluding lines of the novel:

*“April 26. Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So it be. Welcome, O life, I go to encounter for the milionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.  
April 27. Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.”*

My last Triestine persecutor is another intellectual who belongs to the intelligentsia of this small/big town: Claudio Magris. In an interview published in 2005 in the journal *Psiche*, Magris very acutely addressed the issue of borders and their transformability. The peoples inhabiting this region have experienced the impermanence and the unpredictable variability of borders more than any other in the world (the interview is entitled *All we need to know about borders is that they are mortal...*, *Psiche*, 2005/1, pp. 57-72). As in the case of inner splittings in our psychic structure, political boundaries separate neighboring entities that are in many respects “different”, but at the same time similar or at least analogous. To prove his point, Magris referred to a pun expressed in what until a century ago was the official language of Trieste. If we don’t want the divisions implied by institutional differences to become rigid, we must keep in mind – he says – that boundaries are alive and therefore mortal. They are *sterblich*. When we become oblivious of

their transience, and borders are experienced as an insurmountable, supernatural or supra-historical reality, then they turn *tödlich* – that is, deadly rather than mortal. Instead of fostering mutual recognition and the processing of differences, they become an obstacle to cooperation and diversity.

I believe this has much to do with the topic proposed by the organizers of this congress: the antagonistic or dialectic relationship between processes of splitting and integration. In addition to the psychopathological and psychoanalytical implications of this problem, the politico-institutional relevance of this kind of relationship becomes particularly clear in a town like Trieste.

## Introduction

“Splitting is the name of an interpretation”

Bion W. (1992/1994), *Cogitations*, p. 253

In this paper I will try to examine the processes of splitting and integration as they can be observed in the psychoanalytic dialogue. In their dynamic alternation, such processes generate psychic transformation and clinical change. In order to concisely express their relationship, I decided to use a slash sign to connect these two defensive mechanisms (splitting/integration). This decision is in line with the post-Kleinian and post-Bionian tradition (Bott-Spillius, 2011; Civitarese, 2014; Ferro 2013, 2014; Grotstein, 2007, 2009), where a similar descriptive method is adopted to illustrate certain couples of concepts and their dialectic relationship: content and container, projective identification and rêverie, negative capability and the recognition of the selected fact and, finally, the prototype of all these models, namely the oscillation between the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position (Britton, 1998; Hinshelwood, 1990; Steiner, 2012). By focusing on the clinical material extracted from some of the sessions of a standard analysis in its middle phase, this essay intends to show that, paradoxically, the processes of psychic integration rely on splittings that can be considered minor, derivative and secondary. In order to re-establish connections of meaning that have long remained unrelated, denied or repressed, the analyst and the patient rely on other splitting phenomena (*similia similibus curantur*) characterized by a temporary, dynamic and mobile nature: these splittings are functional and not simply structural, and eventually reconnect the psychic links rather than further dissociating them.

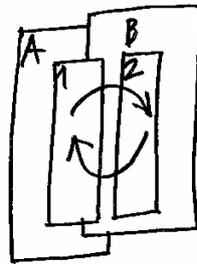
In order to study this problem, it seemed necessary to keep the inextricable intertwining of the mental processes of both the analyst and the analysand in the foreground. The psychoanalytic interpretation is a two-person and “biphasic” process emerging out of such intertwining (Foresti, 2013; Racker, 1968; Strachey, 1934). On the one hand, the analyst elaborates on his own a meaningful hypothesis which later (though not necessarily) will be offered to the patient; on the other, a process of synthesis and provisional connection and integration is gradually set in motion. Such process is endorsed by the analysand and guides the functioning of his psychic life. I will adopt the perspective of the psychoanalytic field theory (AFT), which understands the clinical relationship as a set of processes characterized by inter-subjective phenomena in which the dynamics of psychic phenomena is always the result of functions elaborated by the analytic pair together: these processes are both interpersonal and intrapsychic and they simultaneously develop at the conscious, preconscious and unconscious level (Baranger & Baranger, 1990; Ferro, 2014; Ferro et al., 2013; Foresti & Rossi Monti, 2012, Ogden, 2005).

## Psychoanalytic field and interpretative factors

The model of interpretation that I chose to rely on can be represented with a sketch aimed at distinguishing – and therefore in some way at separating (as in Bion’s quote at the beginning of this paper) – the clusters of factors involved in the clinical work (fig. 1). Before describing such model, it is worth quoting Ronald Britton’s remarks about possible misunderstanding of schemata and models: “In order to describe an analysis we have to treat as static something that is moving. The diagram below is like a still photograph of a moving picture, it is not a photograph of a still life” (Britton, 1998, p. 75).

(Fig. 1)

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The analyst (A) listens to and interprets interiorly (namely “in his heart” and “on his own”, oscillating between his inner functional modes:  $A \leftrightarrow 1$ ) what the patient says. When he chooses to intervene (interpretation 1: arrow from left to right:  $\rightarrow$ ), the analyst presents the patient (B) with thoughts and hypotheses that in turn the patient (if the ideas have been expressed with the required effectiveness: here the interpretation works as an energizing and poetic-poietic *performance*) listens to and interprets selectively ( $B \leftrightarrow 2$ ). Endorsed by the patient, the analyst’s interpretation immediately – or after some time – generates a significant psychic response (arrow from right to left:  $\leftarrow$ ). What interests us most as analysts is not the interpretation we give ( $1 \rightarrow 2$ ), but the one we receive ( $2 \rightarrow 1$ ). In fact, it is precisely the feedback coming from such cyclical intersubjective game of interpretations (*le jeu entre the jes*, as René Roussillon has put it) that allows the development of the factors of integration and psychic growth that we wish to promote. Those processes of splitting and integration are the cuts and sutures that give life to the mental functioning.

### Alessandra and Caparbia

Let us see how this perspective can be applied to the discussion of a specific clinical case. Alessandra is a woman of thirty-five with a degree in geology. On the personal level, her life is

precarious, but on the professional one it is quite rewarding. She comes from a wealthy family and is the youngest of five siblings (she has three brothers and one sister). Alessandra is extremely close to her father and has always considered herself his favourite daughter; on both the cultural and human level, she has followed in his footsteps for some time. According to her description, only at a certain stage in her life she became able to finally free herself from his influence and take a different route.

When she came to ask for help her disorders included depressive, hypochondriac, phobic and obsessive manifestations, while her personality exhibited antisocial and narcissistic traits (major and minor transgressions, pursued in a confrontational attitude against the authorities). She also had a history of eating disorders, which led to a brief psychotherapy during adolescence, and her sexual identity still seemed somewhat uncertain (the contrast between the muscular and masculine structure of her physical presence and her soft, graceful and very musical voice was quite striking).

The most critical area of her life was that of social and emotional relationships. For some time she had been living with a younger man whom she had met years earlier during a long stay abroad. Both Daniele (her partner) and his family (particularly his mother, eager to become a grandmother) insisted that Alessandra should marry, but this project aroused in her paralyzing doubts and occasional episodes of great distress.

In the third years of analysis, we focused on a number of remarkable dreams. After a very rich series which I have to omit, we worked on a very peculiar oneiric construction. During the session here described in detail, the original splitting – this is my hypothesis – between paternal/maternal and feminine/masculine was explicitly brought to the foreground and steered toward integration.

That day, Alessandra had arrived in a state of strange cheerfulness and had announced that she had had an “amazing” dream:

*She is lying on her parents' bed and is telling her mother what just happened. She received a phone call from Pierre, a much older man living abroad with whom she had a relationship that still appears vital to her. Pierre informed her that she just had a daughter, and that the little girl was named ... Caparbia.*

[It's very difficult to translate this name and to help to understand the layers of meaning which are embedded in it. The word is actually not a name at all, but an adjective which means 'obstinate', 'stubborn' (in German *starrköpfig*, *eigensinnig*). The ambiguity of the meaning is created by a subtle balance between the negative and the positive side of the word: is it good or bad to be 'caparbia'? ]

Surprised by what immediately appeared as a magnificent unconscious creation, one so full of implications and possible developments, the analyst was unable to hold back an affectionate laughter: “Caparbia?! That's extraordinary!”. She joined in the laughter, as if she had immediately grasped its meaning, and carried on with her story:

*On the parents' bed, the daughter is trying to explain to the mother who Pierre is, and why this daughter was born. The mother is appalled. She tells Alessandra that what she has done is so serious that this time she cannot protect her. Alessandra feels lost.*

This was followed by a phase of associative work in which the analytic pair recalled and developed the interpretation implied in the analyst's laughter (her stubborn attachment to her

father and her deeply-rooted, irreducible indifference/hostility to her mother). After that, the patient spoke with clarity about the emotional split that had characterized her relationship with all the men of her life and added that she felt as if she were living in different places simultaneously. The different dimensions of her emotional life tended to be mutually exclusive and seemed to be organized in coexisting but distant emotional clusters.

The same thing happened in the dream. On the one hand, it was like Alessandra was there on the bed with her mother, trying to talk about what had happened in order to make it up with her; on the other, she was unable to give up her relationship with Pierre and remained stubbornly attached to a man much older than her who lived far away. According to such an interpretation of the clinical material, the analyst, despite his awareness of both the actual and the transference meanings of the dream (who was Pierre in the psychic reality of the analysis?), chose to intervene and emphasize the elements of splitting.

“That’s why Caparbia is a well-chosen ironical name. Aren’t we constantly dealing with your tenacious and exclusive loyalty to your father? In this dream, as indeed in your life, it appears that a part of yourself has always remained confined elsewhere, isolated. And now, out of this mythological relationship with a wonderful and distant fatherly God, a daughter was born... Thus, what we have is, on the one side, a father and a daughter without a mother and, on the other, a daughter and a mother without a father”. Stimulated by this interpretation, Alessandra began to reinterpret her existential situation. She spoke of her mother, of her constant loving care and great kindness. She felt guilty for having often despised and neglected her. She was moved to tears when she recalled that some time earlier her mother had told her that, after all, she was a very sensitive girl – a comment that she found tragically incompatible with what she was feeling about herself at that moment.

Then she added: “It was important for me that she said so. I must say that I do not yet believe it, and perhaps she doesn’t either... I wouldn’t believe it if I was in her. Maybe she does not always believe it. But perhaps it seemed somewhat true to her, if she told me so...”. And after a long pause, she concluded: “That’s enough: I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I don’t know what to say. I feel like I’m getting more and more confused. I’m getting messed up...”. At this point, the analyst, empathizing with such sorrowful mood and strongly identifying with Alessandra’s words, chose to intervene again and sympathize with her attempt at reparation. “You are getting messed up because you need someone other than your mother to step in. You want to be helped to fix the damages implicit in your situation and you need your father to come back home and resume his role – together with you, of course, but also right next to your mom. [pause] If you bring your parents back together and let them take care of you again, your mutual relationship could improve and perhaps you could still feel strongly and vitally tied to them”.

An intense discursive exchange, impossible to summarize, followed. Alessandra talked about the difficult relationship between her parents and her conflicting and unequal affection for both. When the session was about to end, she added: “Something that I think is important has come to my mind. My parents have often told me that I try to sow discord: I act as if I want to create conflicts between them. Yet I’ve always tried to mediate their disputes and reconcile their perspectives. What I thought I was doing was to help one understand the reasons of the other. I was trying to make them talk to each other again...”. After a pause, she concluded: “I should stop doing that, right? My mediation was actually no mediation at all...”. And here came the analyst’s final remark: “It seems to me that your dream has expressed this thought with great clarity. At some point in your life, and at some point in our analytical work, Caparbia was born: a very determined child, conceived without the actual

presence of the mother. It is time for us to deal with her". The phrase was deliberately ambiguous and left the issue open of whom they should begin to deal with: the daughter or the mother?

### **Reintegrations and reinterpretations**

In the following days, two other dreams engaged in the same game of splitting and integration and offered further material to the interpretative work. The first dream came up during the following session and can be understood as a response to the analytical work described above. I see it as a result of a process of rethinking/dreaming the emotional material still in need of a psychic reorganization.

*The scene takes place in a big, austere and elegant house, built in front of the ocean. Large windows face the beach and allow a wide view of the outside. The signs of a rapidly approaching storm, a tornado or a tsunami, are visible on the horizon. In the house lives a rather diverse group of people: in addition to Alessandra's parents, there is a little girl of about seven years, a friend of her father, a young geology student with big short-sighted glasses and a baby girl still in the cradle. The geologist is feverish and lies on a bed next to the sleeping girl/baby's tiny crib. Far from concerned about the incoming storm, the seven-year-old girl explores the house. She starts from the basement, where she imagines there lie secrets that would better be left hidden. She then reaches the upper floor and visits the bedrooms. There are three of them. The first is a single bedroom. In the second there is a double bed. In the third, three single beds.*

Alessandra associated the scene – and in particular her tranquillity in the face of the coming cataclysm – with a traumatic incident of her childhood: an earthquake that destroyed part of her house. She understood her apparent impassivity as the prototype of the kind of emotional reaction (which is in fact no reaction at all) most appreciated by her father. "In my house, one should especially avoid being a bother", she remarked. In addition to her parents, each character in the dream points to a different aspect of Alessandra's personality: the fearless girl, the friend and companion of her father, the young sick scholar and the neglected baby. Through the transference relationship, all these characters are enigmatically brought to life out of her inner world. The bedrooms represent Alessandra's dilemma about sexuality: the parents' room, the room shared with Daniel and the very one she inhabits during the analysis. Should everybody share the same room but sleep in separate beds? Or should someone share the same bed, thereby fatally excluding someone else?

Alessandra's second dream ideally concluded this cycle. She described it after two turbulent and distressing sessions which followed an enactment (anguish-stricken, she had made her mother call the analyst on the phone). In the session that followed this episode, Alessandra repeatedly apologized for the inconvenience she had caused. The analyst understood the matter (the patient had just told him that in her house "one should especially avoid being a bother") and did not interpret the episode. And there came the dream:

*Alessandra is with her analyst. In the study in which they work – a large, multi-storey house – there are many children playing noisily. She especially notes an unhappy girl splashing around in a large pot. In the dream, she mentions this to the analyst, who tells her that actually the girl suffers from special problems, which eventually led to her adoption.*

Through Alessandra's associations, the pot emerged as an ambiguous tool (was it used to warm the water or to cook the witch?) and the splitting to be addressed in the following months also

came to the surface: the “nice” daddy who let the kids scream and adopted the most needy ones, as opposed to the strict, “bad” dad, who expected them to be as organized and disciplined as adults.

### **Splitting/integration and analysis/synthesis**

It is now time to try to conceptualize the interplay between splittings and integrations as it emerged from the clinical material I have described. In order to facilitate the discussion, I’ve split my remarks into three different paragraphs.

1. Initially conceived in the psychoanalytic tradition as a psychopathological phenomenon and a primitive defence mechanism, splitting gradually turned into something else: a mechanism of inner dislocation in the structure of the ego (Freud, 1940), a psychological device aimed at preserving the integrity of the object (Klein, 1921) and a mode of functioning that allows the first elaboration of one’s emotional experiences – the physiological splitting between the “good” and the “bad” object (Klein, 1932). The major turning point in the research on the phenomena of splitting/integration can be placed in the fifties and sixties, when the theory of projective identification was re-elaborated and the hypothesis of an oscillation between different “positions” (to be integrated with Freud’s idea of the various “stages” and “fixation points” of the libido) was formulated. Thanks to the contribution of Wilfred Bion, splitting and projective identification became the constitutive factors of a potentially positive process of emotional communication. In other words, they came to be seen as components of a pervasive unconscious dynamics which structured interpsychic exchange and interpersonal relationships.

In the clinical material just addressed, the integrating function is carried out mainly by dreams, which create emotionally meaningful connections between previously split representations. Understood as reinterpretations of the session work, dreams integrate the images elaborated during previous sessions into new representations. The key character of the process we have examined is Caparbia. The appropriately-named daughter plays a decisive role in the re-elaboration of a long series of splittings. The birth of such a *sui generis* Minerva, generated in a distant country without the contribution of the mother, triggers the process of reparation which in turn reshapes the inner representation of the parental couple.

According to Civitarese’s interpretation, Bion’s essay *Caesura* (Bion, 1977) is an illustration of the decisive factors of the analytic treatment as it emphasizes the paradox of the integrative effects produced by the splittings emerged during the analysis. Such effects seem to depend on the fact that in the clinical work the transformation process evolves through “non-pathological splittings” (Civitaresse, 2011, p. 19). Splittings of this type become “an invitation to adopt different points of view” (namely, to interpret and re-interpret): they activate an intersubjective

“game” of communication in which “the *caesura* implicit in every discrimination”, far from “inhibiting thought and becoming static and reified”, stimulates a process of reflection (ibid.)<sup>1</sup>.

As these conceptual hypotheses may suggest, the birth of Caparbia can be seen as a splitting between Alessandra the perennial daughter and Alessandra the aspiring mother. This splitting is an unstable one, since it is the product of recent changes and is further modifiable. Caparbia is both the motherless daughter born in an imaginary elsewhere, and her necessary counterpart: a mother desperately missing her daughter. Alessandra can thus rethink the counterproductive function of her family “mediations” (which were indeed real and firm operations conducted according to the principle *divide et impera*: static splittings disguised as integrational operations) and open the metaphorical window of her insight on the traumatic experiences that caused the original splitting: the earthquake of her childhood, experienced as an indigestible event. Such experience had remained trapped between, on the one side, the unshakable reflective coldness of her father and, on the other, the image of a mother perceived as emotional and sensitive but also as too fragile.<sup>2</sup>

2. It is interesting to note that, during these sessions, the processes of splitting/integration were not triggered by the analyst’s sharp interpretive interventions. On a purely descriptive level, the analyst only prepared the ground for the interpretive work implicit in the spontaneous progress of the psychoanalytic process. In the sessions that we are examining, nearly all the analyst’s communicative initiatives can be classified as unsaturated or weak interpretations: interventions aimed at “maintaining the basic setting”; or “adding an element to facilitate the unconscious process”; “questions, clarifications, reformulations, aimed at making matters conscious” (WPCCM: Tuckett et al., 2007; p. 136-137).

The only exception to this rule of style is the amused surprise that follows the story of the dream about the birth of Caparbia. According to the classification I am referring to (ibid.), such initiative could be seen as one of those “sudden and apparently glaring reactions not easy to relate to [difficult to reconcile with] the analyst’s usual method and style” (category 6, in WPCCM classification; on this topic see also Foresti, 2005). It is a phenomenon that apparently

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<sup>1</sup> If the connection between the divided parts becomes fluid, the dynamics activated by such provisional splittings develops according to an apparently spontaneous cycle that has been compared to the cardiac and the respiratory cycle (Ferro, 2010; Ferro et al., 2013). In these situations, the phenomena of splitting and integration alternate like inhalation and exhalation or systole and diastole. In less metaphorical terms, one could say that the processes of splitting/integration occur in parallel with the cycles of physiological expansion/condensation of the clinical field. Such processes were at the origin of Freud’s idea of psychoanalysis as a process in which there is a constant alternation between analysis and synthesis, construction and reconstruction, interpretation and its (always incomplete: *unendlich*) psychic metabolization (Freud, 1937a, 1937b).

<sup>2</sup> I wish to point out that I am not trying to provide any psychogenetic, biographical-reconstructive and naively realistic interpretation of Alessandra’s experiences. I am referring to Alessandra’s psychic representations of her own experiences and not to her family history and the actual characteristics of the people she mentioned – people whom the analyst knows *only* through the descriptions/representation provided each time by the analysand. The issue of the relationship between the outer and the inner reality is a crucial one; it provides the opportunity to rethink the central aspects of the patient’s life according to the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*. The most radical solution to this technical problem is the “transformation into dream”: it consists in the acknowledgment that one cannot grasp the patient’s historical reality and that the processes of psychic reorganization are fostered by the waking dream thought (Bion, 1992; Britton, 1998; Ferro, 2010; Ferro et al., 2013; Grotstein, 2007).

concerns “only” the analyst’s mind and consists in the sudden intuition of the emergence of an important new development in the clinical field. What is new is the emergence of a quite lively “little devil” (the dia-bolic is the opposite of the sym-bolic: it divides rather than unites) that could help facilitating the integrative functions. A convincing way to conceptualize this phenomenon is to see it as the sudden discovery of a “**selected fact**”. This concept, as Bion writes in *Learning from experience* (Bion, 1962, pp. 129 ff.), is borrowed from Henri Poincaré’s reflections on mathematics. It is possible to imagine an application of such concept to psychoanalysis, especially if one puts it in dialectical tension with the opposite concept: “negative capability” (Lopez-Corvo, 2003; Sandler, 2005). By referring in detail to Poincaré’s definition<sup>3</sup>, Bion illustrates the appropriateness of this concept: it describes, in his view, “what the analyst is likely to experience during the process of synthesis”, when he has the impression of discovering “that element in the realization that appears to link together elements not hitherto seen to be connected” (Bion, 1962, p. 129).

Another important passage in this regard can be found in Bion’s *Cogitations* (Bion, 1992/1994). The title of the passage poses an important problem for the discussion of our clinical material. The fragment is not dated and is titled *The cause and the selected fact*: “The selected fact – Bion writes (*ibid.*, p. 272) – relates to synthesis of objects felt to be contemporaneous or without any time component. The selected fact thus differs from the cause that relates to the synthesis of objects scattered in time and therefore with a time component”.

3. I suppose the emphasis on the difference between cause and selected fact has to be understood at two different levels:

- a) the necessity to distinguish the clinical observation from the theoretical elaboration;
- b) the rejection of any form of mechanism and realistic naivety<sup>4</sup>, with all the consequences that come from this rejection in terms of technical cautiousness and clinical discretion.

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<sup>3</sup> The quote is taken from Poincaré’s book *Science and method*, but Bion does not provide the page number. The first sentence of Poincaré’s passage is already a good definition of the selected fact: “If a new result is to have any value, it must *unite elements long since known, but till then scattered* and seemingly foreign to each other, and *suddenly introduce order where the appearance of disorder reigned*” (my emphasis). The description stresses the scientist’s subjective experience, his “eureka” moment. “Then – Poincaré goes on (*ibid.*) – it enables us to see at a glance each of these elements in the place it occupies in the whole” (so accustomed have we become to the fuzzy/sloppy nature of complex processes, that we find it hard to fully appreciate such feeling of precision and harmonic completeness). Then comes the sentence that illustrates the state of mind opposite to that of the discovery of the selected fact: a state in which the mind of the observer, despite being lost in an aimless wandering, perseveres in its quest (such attitude of persistence in the schizo-paranoid position will become known, in Keats’ words, as “negative capability”). “Our mind is frail as our senses are; it would lose itself in the complexity of the world if that complexity were not harmonious” (according to Poincaré, therefore, scientific truth is inscribed in the world: it is not in the eye of the scientist, but is part of the coherent structure of things). What follows is Poincaré’s most Bionian passage (because it concerns explicitly the theme of vision): “like the short-sighted, it [our mind] would only see the details, and would be obliged to forget each of these details before examining the next”. The passage ends with the most apodictic (and therefore less clinical) of Poincaré’s sentences: “the only facts worthy of our attention are those which introduce order into this complexity and so make it accessible to us” (Poincaré, 1914, p. 30).

<sup>4</sup> For Bion, the principle of causality is strongly connected to the genesis of the depressive position. The development of Bion’s thinking on this particular issue can be traced through many passages of his *Cogitations*. The constant conjunction (Hume), the selected fact (Poincaré) and the even stronger logical connection that postulates a relationship of cause-effect, are all operations that establish a nexus (linking): Bion keeps such operations well separate for clinical as well as epistemological reasons. An evolved and flexible symbol that is able to escape the

In what sense is the appearance of Caparbia related to the subsequent development of the psychoanalytic process? Does this character express a splitting? Is this clinical phenomenon the “cause” of further integrative processes? Or is it just a transitory organizer of meanings? Is it the emergence of a structural splitting or simply the provisional epiphenomenon of processes that are going to be developed thanks to other factors which contribute to the progressive containment of experiences and the transformations  $\beta \rightarrow \alpha$ ?

Although the chance of witnessing the birth of a selected fact represents a welcome surprise for the analyst, this experience should not be confused with a well-known and concrete psychic reality. In order to avoid such a short-circuit and escape the reductionist implications of psychoanalytic causalism, Bion later defined as “O” the sum of the elusive intra- and intersubjective processes at the basis of the changes that we observe (Bion, 1972). “Every emotional experience of knowledge gained – warns Bion in this passage (*ibid.*) – is at the same time an emotional experience of ignorance unilluminated”. “The sense of creative success with its accompanying elation – he continues – is therefore inseparable from a sense of failure to synthesize the discrete objects, the elementary particles, which are revealed by the success”. The transition from analysis to synthesis and from splitting to integration is not to be understood as a transparent and unambiguous theoretical achievement, but as a process that involves friction, uncertainty, pain and much psychic work. Such process is fuelled by doubts and perplexities and develops with the contribution of both the subjects involved. The decisive question that shapes the inner stance of the analyst (his internal setting) – “Is it a selected fact or an overvalued idea?” (Britton & Steiner, 1994) – can only be answered in retrospect, thanks to the clinical developments that make the psychoanalytic process either vital and dynamic or repetitive and stagnant.

## Conclusion

A few years ago, Haydée Faimberg defined as *listening to listening* the intricate game of communication at the basis of the analyst’s clinical work (Faimberg, 2005): this expression has now become standard in the scientific literature. We can imagine the effects of the analyst’s clinical intervention only by listening to the analysand’s personal reinterpretation of such intervention.

In this paper, I proposed to examine the processes of psychic splitting/integration by adopting a complementary principle: the *interpretation of interpretation*. Every interpretation – be it strong or weak, saturated or unsaturated – injects a differentiation and therefore a potential splitting in the clinical work. Such splitting can help to revive the clinical work and develop the integrative phenomena, but it can also exceed the capacity for containment and processing of the psychoanalytic field and hinder the development of the growth process.

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reifying fate of the symbolic equation becomes possible only when the subject (and/or the patient) has reached a certain level in the elaboration of the depressive position. According to Britton, this is the same level that originates from the elaboration of the system of oedipal relations, thereby allowing the emergence of a triangular space (Britton, 2008).

In order to foster the integration processes, the analyst must be ready not only to listen to the analysand's interpretation of his interpretation (listening to listening), but also to reinterpret and reshape the interpretation that he himself gave, so to make it more tolerable and emotionally bearable for the patient. If the proposed integration turns out to be premature and/or too painful (due to the excessively distressing nature of the splittings that hinder it), the analyst must be able to backtrack. In other words, she/he must be very cautious in exercising his mediating function: like Alessandra, he/she ought to remain perplexed on the effectiveness of the integrative operations she/he is trying to develop.

Since the beginning of this paper was meant as a tribute to Trieste (and also as a reflection on the historical processes of splitting/integration whose consequences are still felt in this town), I will conclude by quoting some verses by Umberto Saba – the Triestine poet defined by Gianfranco Contini as “psychoanalytic before psychoanalysis” (Lavagetto, 1988). The poem appeared in a collection entitled *Cose leggere e vaganti* [Light and Airy Things], and I propose to read it with an eye on our often so clumsy and ineffective attempts at interpretation. The title is *Commiato* [Farewell] (Saba, 1988, pp. 187-204 – tr. by G. Hochfield & L. Nathan).

You know it, friends, and I do too.  
Poems resemble soap bubbles:  
one flies up, and another, no.

## Summary

Clinical practice and social processes have taught us that the phenomena of good enough integration comes from processes of previous, laborious elaboration of the differences that have to be integrated – and therefore they come from a substantial amount of to and fro between analysis and splitting on the one hand, and synthesis and integration on the other. The elaboration of differences implies the transformations of dead/still phenomena of splitting into alive and dynamic areas of turbulence, which come from overt/open conflicts. This means that in order to elaborate emotionally thick and concrete mental contents, we have to recognize the splittings which are implicit in the repressed, disavowed, denied, unthought or cut off feelings and to work through this psychic and relational stuff with the aim of transforming it into an alive mental field.

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