

Bion, W.R. (1992) *Cogitations*. pp. 380-383

Notes on memory and desire

depression, anxiety, fear, and other aspects of psychic reality, whether those aspects have been or can be successfully named or not. These are the psychoanalyst's real world. Of its reality he has no doubt. Yet anxiety, to take one example, has no shape, no smell, no taste; awareness of the sensuous accompaniments of emotional experience are a hindrance to the psychoanalyst's intuition of the reality with which he must be at one.

Every session attended by the psychoanalyst must have no history and no future.

What is 'known' about the patient is of no further consequence: it is either false or irrelevant. If it is 'known' by patient and analyst, it is obsolete. If it is 'known' by the one but not the other, a defence or grid category 2 element (1,2) (see Grid, p. 295) is operating. The only point of importance in any session is the unknown. Nothing must be allowed to distract from intuiting that.

In any session, evolution takes place. Out of the darkness and formlessness something evolves. That evolution can bear a superficial resemblance to memory, but once it has been experienced, it can never be confounded with memory. It shares with dreams the quality of being wholly present or unaccountably and suddenly absent. This evolution is what the psychoanalyst must be ready to interpret.

To do this, he needs to discipline his thoughts. First and foremost, as every psychoanalyst knows, he must have had as thorough an analysis as possible; nothing said here must be taken as casting doubt on that. Second, he must cultivate a watchful avoidance of memory. Notes should be confined to matters that *can* be recorded—the programme of appointments is an obvious example.

Obey the following rules:

1. *Memory*: Do not remember past sessions. The greater the impulse to remember what has been said or done, the more the need to resist it. This impulse can present itself as a wish to remember something that has happened because it appears to have precipitated an emotional crisis: *no* crisis should be allowed to breach this rule. The supposed events

Memory is always misleading as a record of fact since it is distorted by the influence of unconscious forces. Desires interfere, by absence of mind when observation is essential, with the operation of judgement. Desires distort judgement by selection and suppression of material to be judged.

Memory and Desire exercise and intensify those aspects of the mind that derive from sensuous experience. They thus promote capacity derived from sense impressions and designed to serve impressions of sense. They deal, respectively, with sense impressions of what is supposed to have happened and sense impressions of what has not yet happened.

Psychoanalytic 'observation' is concerned neither with what has happened nor with what is going to happen, but with what is happening. Furthermore, it is not concerned with sense impressions or objects of sense. Any psychoanalyst knows

First published in 1967 in *The Psychoanalytic Forum*, Vol. 2, No. 3, and reprinted here by kind permission of John A. Lindon, M.D., Editor.

must not be allowed to occupy the mind. Otherwise the evolution of the session will not be observed at the only time when it can be observed—while it is taking place.

2. *Desires*: The psychoanalyst can start by avoiding any desires for the approaching end of the session (or week, or term). Desires for results, 'cure' or even understanding must not be allowed to proliferate.

These rules must be obeyed *all* the time and not simply during the sessions. In time the psychoanalyst will become more aware of the pressure of memories and desires and more skilled at eschewing them.

If this discipline is followed, there will be an increase of anxiety in the psychoanalyst at first, but it must not interfere with preservation of the rules. The procedure should be started at once and not abandoned on any pretext whatever.

The pattern of analysis will change. Roughly speaking, the patient will not appear to develop over a period of time, but each session will be complete in itself. 'Progress' will be measured by the increased number and variety of moods, ideas, and attitudes seen in any given session. There will be less clogging of the sessions by the repetition of material that should have disappeared and, consequently, a quickened tempo within each session every session.

The psychoanalyst should aim at achieving a state of mind so that at every session he feels he has not seen the patient before. If he feels he has, he is treating the wrong patient.

This procedure is extremely penetrating. Therefore the psychoanalyst must aim at a steady exclusion of memory and desire and not be too disturbed if the results appear alarming at first. He will become used to it and he will have the consolation of building his psychoanalytic technique on a firm basis of intuiting evolution and NOT on the shifting sand of slight experience imperfectly remembered, which rapidly gives way not to experience, but to neurologically certain decay of mental faculty. The evolving session is unmistakable, and the intuiting of it does not deteriorate. If given a chance, it starts early and decays late.

The foregoing is a brief account distilled from putting the precepts advocated into practice. The theoretical implications can be worked out by each psychoanalyst for himself. His interpretations should gain in force and conviction—both for himself and his patient—because they derive from the emotional experience with a unique individual and not from generalized theories imperfectly 'remembered'.

Discussants

The discussants commenting on this paper were: Thomas French, M.D. (Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.); John A. Lindon, M.D. (Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.); Avelino González, M.D. (Mexico D.F., Mexico); Marjorie Brierley, M.B.S. (Kewick, Cumberland, England); Herbert H. Herskovitz, M.D. (Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.).

Author's Response

The discussants of my 'Notes on Memory and Desire' help to make it clear that some of the confusion arises through the ambiguity of the terms 'memory' and 'desire'. I realize that it would be helpful if I could distinguish between two different phenomena that are both usually and indifferently called 'memory'. This I have tried to do by speaking of one as 'evolution', by which I mean the experience where some idea or pictorial impression floats into the mind unbidden and as a whole. From this I wish to distinguish ideas that present themselves in response to a deliberate and conscious attempt at recall; for this last I reserve the term 'memory'. 'Memory' I keep for experience related predominantly to sensuous impressions, 'evolution' I regard as based on experience that has no sensuous background but is expressed in terms that are derived from the language of sensuous experience. For example, I 'see' meaning I intuit through the medium of a visual impression.

evolve
(+)

recall
(-)

(+)