FIELD STUDIES

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1. The Plurality of Worlds

[F]ield theory strives to strike a balance between...the usefulness for the actors and authors of the psychoanalytic dialogue to lose themselves in the fiction shaped by the setting — which means intimacy, closeness, spontaneity, emotional intensity, authenticity — and the necessity of coming out of all of this in order to access the plurality of the possible worlds in which they simultaneously live.

— G. Civitarese, The Intimate Room

How sweet I roam'd from field to field ...

— William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*

For Giuseppi Civitarese, clinical space is a dream theater intersecting a plurality of worlds. The idea of possible worlds originated in the philosophy of Leibniz, gained traction in the semantics and ontology of modal logic, and found an uncanny double in "multiverse" interpretations of quantum mechanics. Like the notion of a field, this concept, shared with philosophy and physics, wavers between speculation, metaphor and literal description, situates psychoanalysis as a human science, and embodies the potential of psychoanalytic psychotherapy that treats the clinical encounter as a dream or a narrative to connect local emotional experience with global frameworks of meaning. "Plurality of worlds" thus designates the plurality of semantic and expressive possibilities permeating the dr(e)amaturgic microcosm of the analytic setting.

"Room" in Italian is *stanza*, and my survey of Civitarese's *Intimate Room* [*L'intima stanza*] (2010) detects the ghost of a literary architecture haunting the densely informed edifice of text: that of an extended prose poem in eight *cantos* or chapters, with each chapter divided into *stanze* that partition the common topic via multiple *vertices* or vantage points. Many of the chapters include a flashback returning the reader to the keynote stanza (that which



¹ That is, a discipline that acknowledges multiple modes of "the effectiveness of symbols" (C. Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 186 and ff.).

establishes the *topos* or conceptual place), with its meaning destabilized by the intervening sections. The stanzas alternate quasi-musically between thematic-theoretical statements and clinical vignettes in which the analyst offers unsaturated interpretive-improvisatory accents to the analysand's narrative and associations, like gentle harmonic "touches" of one of the instruments in a duet.

The evocation of literature and music reflects the role of aesthetics in shaping putatively non-artistic content (as Civitarese, consolidating the testimony of postmodernity, argues in Chapter 8, "More Affects, More Eyes..."). Accordingly, figurative language and zest for popular culture are at play throughout, reinforcing the anti-realist conception of analysis as a theater of waking dreams. Civitarese's metaphor for the history of psychoanalytic thought is hydrological, that of a *karstic* flow: "... watercourses ... which disappear underground because of the geology of the area and then return to the surface in resurgences" (IR, p. 22; pp. 180-181). The note of urgency and surge of these convergent *risorgimenti*, as well as the suggestion of the return of the repressed, imply a self-reflexive psychoanalytic view of theoretical developments, just as the author regards clinical interchanges as reflecting transformations in the field ("the virtual, self-observing regime," p. 4).

One resurgence is that of a two-person understanding of transference, prophetically enunciated by Searles in 1947 but largely foreclosed by the dominance of ego psychology in the United States for three decades. Far from being "static, mechanistic and historical," or mere "misunderstanding and false connection" like "a phonograph that that goes on playing because nobody has remembered to switch it off" (IR, pp. 113-114), "[t]ransference." Civitarese writes,

... has less to do with the transferring of libido onto the analyst or with reactivation of old representations that were ... put to sleep in the past, than with the continuous construction and reconstruction of experience. The mind is engaged at all times in elaborating the stimuli that reach it ... Transferences are always multiple and multi-dimensional and relatively analyst- and context-dependent. (p. 135)

The author "karstically" returns to karstic flow as one term of an intertextual analogy that condenses a more general theory of primary process:

Transference is to transference neurosis as the work of the karstic stream of the activity of metonymy is to the — to parapharase Wordsworth — stationary blasts of the waterfalls of metaphor. (p. 146)

That is, the transference process is an unconscious flow of metonymic associations that surface, or resurge, in a substitution, a symptom. Action at a distance (unmediated and instantaneous application of a force) doesn't exist in the physical world, nor does it in mental functioning. As Freud famously taught regarding transference, for example, "No one can be destroyed in absentia or in effigy" (1912, p. 108). A metaphor that seems miraculously to couple and unify disparate entities is the resultant of unconscious contiguities, networks of approximations. Underlying connections are always local. The allusion (via "stationary blasts of ... waterfalls") to Wordsworth's poem "The Simplon Pass" (1799) suggests a sublime view of primary process, with conflictual natural imagery evoking a vast unification, a personified manifestation of "O":

— Brook and road

Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy Pass, And with them did we journey several hours At a slow step. The immeasurable height Of woods decaying, never to be decayed, The stationary blasts of waterfalls, And in the narrow rent, at every turn, Winds thwarting winds bewildered and forlorn, The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky, The rocks that muttered close upon our ears, Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside As if a voice were in them, the sick sight And giddy prospect of the raving stream, The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens, Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light — Were all like workings of one mind, the features Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree, Characters of the great Apocalypse, The types and symbols of Eternity, Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

Elucidating history from multiple vertices in the noirishly titled "Transference, USA," Civitarese diffracts an optical metaphor through the prism of Jacques Derrida's (1994) concept of spectrality: "[T]ransference is born of spectres, becomes a spectrum of concepts, and, lastly, might well soon end up as the spectre of a concept" (IR, p. 115). What Freud experienced as an acute disturbance imposed by the analysand on the therapeutic relation — the patient's protest of love is like "the cry of fire in a crowded theater" (p. 1) — evolved into an expectable (even hackneyed) terrain: transference neurosis epitomized in the formula "the parent stands behind the analyst,"3 to be resolved by working through, though covertly shadowed by the interminability of the therapist's own analysis (and that is to say, of any analysis) (p. 119). In later views of therapeutic role-playing, the analyst might be credited with being a good-enough supporting actor if not a coauthor of the script.4 Indeed, according to one influential American theorist, Henry Smith, whom Civitarese cites with evident approval, transference enactments are not only expected, they are "collu[sive]," though asymmetrized by "the analyst's ability to 'think' the experience while it is happening or rather, after the inevitable deferral of meaning denoted by Nachträglichkeit" (p. 124).

The latter diversely translated concept gets its own tour-de-force account in what is surely among the best short introductions to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* (a.k.a., "deferred action," *aprés-coup*, "belatedness," etc.) in the literature, comparable to the entry in Laplanche and Pontalis's widely cited psychoanalytic lexicon (1967). Civitarese's survey is self-admittedly (and aptly) "heterogeneous" (IR, p. 111), but it effectively outlines a generalization of memory that evolves beginning with Freud's "new idea



² What the French "New Wave" critics did to draw attention to American popular cinema, Civitarese does for post-war psychoanalytic theory in the U.S.: he looks beyond the academicism and neutrality of ego psychology to discover a re-visioning of transference on a bipersonal basis — with the analyst as one of the "auteurs" of the clinical production.

³ Or vice versa, in the postmodern reversal and reversability of manifest and latent cotent, as Civitarese argues at length in Chapter 1, "Fire at the Theater."

⁴ Elsewhere, Civitarese (VE, 2013) describes non-saturated interpretations as "discrete, non-intrusive interventions in which the analyst does not play the part of the main actor but is a stage hand" (p. 71).

(famously illustrated in the Emma Eckstein [1895] and "Wolfman" [1918] cases) that memory possessed a dynamic structure: memory traces...take on a different meaning and on occasion become pathogenic as a result of subsequent events" (IR, p. 97). By the end of the chapter, *Nachträglichkeit* is conceived as a semantic function: "the incessant movement of assigning new meaning [i]s a fundamental condition for any shaping of experience" (p. 112). This process is consonant with the prescription of Willy and Madeleine Baranger (2008), foreparents of field theory: "it is essential for the analytic procedure that each thing or event in the field be the same time something else" (p. 89).

A highlight of the *Nachträglichkeit* chapter is an excursus into Gerald Edelman's theory of neural Darwinism, which, identifying memory as the chief function of mind, characterizes consciousness itself as an act of "remember[ing the] present" by means of resonant arrays of synaptic firings associated with perceptual and conceptual maps. Edelman's comparison of the "continuous variation and recasting" of memory to a "glacier ... melting and refreezing" with variable contours formed by "rivulets of water (neural pathways)," karstically revives Civitarese's hydrology metaphor (p. 99).

Common to these instances of Civitaresean patterning of the history of ideas and associations is a notion of return or repetition and variation. Relative to the analytic frame, the author deploys the rhetorical figures chiasmus and metalepsis to characterize clinical experience. Chiasmus, or inverse repetition, formulates "psychic reality" as a recurrent movement from belief in the reality of a fiction (the "field of fantasy" or transferential illusion) to an apprehension of the illusory-fictional nature of every reality. With this chiasmic $(F - R \rightarrow R - F')$ structure, Civitarese introduces the notion of the analytic field as a mode of virtual reality, a captivating simulation of being that depends on shifts between states of "immersion" characterized by suspension of disbelief, and "interactivity," in which the play is actively and consciously transformed by the participants immersed in it (p. 72). Metalepsis, the surprising intersection of ordinarily bounded and separate discursive fields, figures the interpretive moment as an encounter between the characters of a text and its author. The figure is highlighted in the chapter "Metalepsis, or the Rhetoric of Transference Interpretation" (pp. 50-71), but also provides a succinct example in the transference chapter: "... the play of transference and transference neurosis is like ... an "intimate theater" (Kammerspiel), which brings the members of the audience back

into the performance space..." (p. 126).

The application of rhetorical terms recalls Lacan's (1966) famous formulation of the unconscious as "structured like a language," and in particular his identification of metaphor and metonymy with condensation and displacement scripting the "other scene" of intrapsychic life. Civitarese's post-structuralist application of rhetoric aims to describe the here-and-now interaction of analysand and analyst as a variety of decentered enactment, marked by a play of *différances* — registrations and deferrals of meaning (Derrida, 1967; Civitarese, IR, p. 94). Accordingly, the analyst's awareness often comes with a sense of the uncanny and/or belatedly, like an awakening from a trance, and may succeed eccentric non-verbal actions, barely at the threshold of attention. She may retrospectively discern in these actions indicia of previously inflicted injuries to the delicate but durable membrane of the frame, which epitomize, like Bion's (1962) "selected facts," multiple dimensions of the clinical encounter.

To illustrate, I quote from the *metalepsis* chapter. In the wake of an over-saturated "traumatogenic" transference interpretation from a prior session, and after informing his patient that he has to miss the final session of the week, Civitarese discloses (to the reader):

... I feel oppressed by a sense of heaviness and oppression, as if the hands of the clocks have stopped moving. I suddenly find myself leafing through a sheaf of notes on earlier sessions — not even [the patient's]! — scattered on the desk, at first purely, as it were, on account of the need to touch an object, a kind of tension impelling me to grasp something, perhaps contained in those sheets of paper, that might help me to emerge from this mildly restless state. (IR, pp. 58-59)

The impulse "to grasp" in this instance, which Civitarese later identifies as a "key moment" in the clinical sequence, and "a sensory spark kindled in the darkness of the scene," prompts him to speculate that "every authentic movement toward symbolization had to commence with the materiality of the setting, the body or the meta-ego.... [A] tactile ... sensory perception was needed to set the process of thought in motion again" (p. 66). Here the author reverts to a theme introduced in the second chapter, "The Symbiotic Bond and the Setting," regarding the theory of the analytic frame, with particular attention to the work of Bleger (1967). In the Winnicott-Bleger-Ogden model of development, the "autistic-contiguous" position (Ogden,

1989) designates the primary phase of mother-infant fusion, whose remnant in mature psychic structure is the "meta-ego," or "psychotic" part (Bleger, 1967). In Bleger's view and in Winnicottian terms, the frame is the holding environment that supports the meta-ego. Thus Civitarese's gesture aims at repairing the frame, reestablishing contiguity: to restart the hands of the clock, to restore the ongoing being impacted by the violent interpretation and fusional (shared) trauma of the missed session. It approximates sensory contact with the infant-patient at the stage in which grasping and pointing overlap; and, like a kind of tactile seeing in preparation for symbolization, orients the analyst among the "scattered notes," the "tension," the "mild restless[ness]" of yet unalphabetized impingements.

Civitarese shows that weak or unsaturated interpretations, like grace notes or subtle harmonic modulations in a piece of music, are the earmark of effective technique when the therapeutic space is conceived as a bi-personal field. Field theories have their extra-analytic cognate as mathematical descriptions of forces at once acting on and generated by masses or charged particles at rest or in motion (Landau and Lifshitz, 1951, p. 47). As physical fields are entities with a quantitative value (intensity) at each point in spacetime, they may be regarded as constituting dynamic, multi-dimensional continua. So it is with the shifting emotional valence of analysis, in which "contact with the truth of the patient's inner world is constantly lost and refound — a truth that can only be subjective and only based on emotions and on the shared experience." (Civitarese, IR, p. 90) Here, a silent gesture that repairs a damaged setting grounds the transformative experience that couples "words that touch" and the semantic richness of "the plurality of wor(l)ds" (pp. 49, 86).

2. Broken Symmetries

My reading of Bion draws its inspiration from [the] idea that aesthetic analysis is the most profound element of psychoanalysis....

The sole general principle that inspired [Bion's] theoretical activity... can be summed up in the 'gesture' of transcending caesuras wherever they arise.

— G. Civitarese, The Violence of Emotions, 2013

In what distant deeps or skies/burnt the fire of thine eyes?

— William Blake, Songs of Experience, 1789

In "Caesuras," Bion (2011) described clinical practice as a movement of mind — "... not a permanency, not a halting spot at which investigation is ended" — that works inductively, from "'blind' intuition to conceptual statement." Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory provides a model of such motion, with its definition of reflective judgments of beauty and sublimity involving perceptions (accompanied by qualities of feeling) for which a conceptual scheme doesn't at the time exist:

In order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation, not by the understanding to the object for cognition, but by the imagination ... to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or pain. (Kant, 1951, p. 37)

Kant's formula — representation \rightarrow feeling \rightarrow judgement — characterizes an essential of Bion's epistemology, in which enigmatic experience is awakened to knowledge through the medium of imaginatively elaborated emotion. In *The Violence of Emotions* (2013), Civitarese's second volume of papers translated into English, the author provides a scholarly, multitextured and often astonishing account of how primitive feelings or emotions come to be expressed and transformed. Backlighting clinically oriented chapters that present case fragments, vignettes, and *dramatis personae* are theoretical glimpses into the mystery of what Bion designated "O" or ultimate reality. In dream, art or clinical expression, beautiful or nightmarish derivatives of pleasure and pain are from one perspective responses to O in its sublime unrepresentability and from another perspective, manifestations of O.

Like a complex optical medium (part concave mirror and part prism) that reflects, absorbs, and transmits images with varying degrees of opacity and clarity, Bion's writing in its fidelity to O reveals and conceals as we struggle to frame an unequivocal understanding that the writing aims to subvert. The challenge of Civitarese's synthesis is to preserve the spirit and deliberate ambiguity of Bion's work while traversing conceptual binaries that dichotomize thinking — among these, the static charm of symmetry versus the mobilizing tension of broken symmetry.

Symmetry breaking differentiates a unity into distinct and apparently independent aspects, such as dissociated self-states. Physics, elucidating the lawful violence of nature, teaches that broken symmetries account for the differentiation of matter from antimatter, and thus, ultimately, for *us*—via nearly 14 billion years of cosmic evolution, the complex asymmetrical

crystalline form DNA, and the state change, the *caesura*, of birth, which recapitulates the movement of organisms from water to air and earth.

An approach to Bion's ideal of thought as achieving atonement/at-onement with O — tantamount to subordination of knowing to being — might begin with metaphorically incorporating broken symmetries into O as semantically generative life forces. For Civitarese, atonement necessitates "transcending caesuras," which he defines as "restoring dialectical tension to the two terms of binary oppositions…" (VE, pp. 46-47). Situating broken symmetries and caesuras in O highlights the vitalizing dialectics of discontinuity — that networks of oppositions and substitutions account for the buoyancy of meaning through the oscillation of PS \rightarrow D and the displacements and condensations of dream work. The experience of beauty may then be identified with delight in form in transformation.

If beauty is defined as the quality of what pleases in appearance, then the conventional association of beauty with symmetry depends on a conservative principle: the appeal of object constancy under a finite (except in the case of a sphere) set of transformations.⁵ In the chapter "The Cat's Eyes — Internal Focalization and Casting in the Analytic Dialogue," Civitarese illustrates how such transformations are embodied clinically as narrative or dramatic characters.⁶ He introduces that chapter with a quotation from Bion (1967), which, elegantly evoking Klein's depressive position and Winnicott's use of the object, links truth to object constancy under differing emotional coloration and thus indirectly to the beauty of symmetry:

[A] sense of truth is experienced if the view of the object which is hated can be conjoined to a view of the...object when it is loved, and the conjunction confirms that the object experienced by different emotions is the same object. (Civitarese, VE, p. 74)

A still conventional yet more complex characteristic of beauty, because it involves ratios or relations of parts to wholes, is proportion. Inasmuch as



⁵ If the "O" (Ultimate Reality) is likened to a sphere, the coordinates represented by the Grid represent a broken symmetry of the O.

⁶ These are "characters" (not always human but very alive) that populate the analytic field and convey emotions; for instance, a dreadful cat worthy of Blake's tiger: "[I]t had enormous eyes and was hissing like crazy....THIS WAS MORE THAN A CAT!" (Civitarese, VE, pp. 77, 99).

music, for example, appears over time, musical pleasure includes satisfaction of the expectation that every harmonic disproportion (dissonance) is eventually resolved with a consonance. Music conceived both formally and as a quasi-narrative involves broken symmetries such as wanderings from and returns to a tonal center; melodic variations on established themes, tempi and dynamics; and rhythmic punctuations. Along with a capacity for anticipation, enjoyment of music therefore involves tolerance of aesthetic complication associated with the impact of a crescendo of excitatory tensions (β elements). To paraphrase Wallace Stevens, music is the reverie of the emotions that occasioned it.

In a central chapter of *The Violence of Emotions*, "The Equation Analysis/Painting and the Aesthetics of the Real," Civitarese impressively summarizes Bionian aesthetic theory as it parallels artwork and α (the mother/analyst's reverie, transformations of β) characterized as effective intercommunication of emotion according to criteria of "precision, universality, and durability" (VE, p. 114). These relatively familiar criteria are supplemented and deepened by Bion's identification of Plato's eternal forms (imitated by works of art) with the lost maternal object, and more intimately, with the alternatively present and absent maternal breast. The "rhythmic" pacing of presence and absence initiates the infant into apprehension of time and space through tolerable breaks in ongoing being (caesuras, broken symmetries), the syncopes in syncopation. The caesuras, whether coded as the '-' in the "no-thing" or "contact-barrier," the '/' marking the either-or of all binary oppositions, the '.' at the end of a sentence, or as a musical rest, are like breathing points, developmentally necessary transitional pauses that mark and accommodate sentient life to what would otherwise be the trauma of both the separation from and encounter with O.

Civitarese's chief theoretical contribution in "Analysis/Painting" and in the lengthy succeeding chapter, "Aesthetic Conflict and the α Function," is to deepen Donald Meltzer's (1988) post-Bionian concept of aesthetic conflict to involve both the infant's ambivalent (delighted/fearful) response to the ambiguous outside/inside of the mother's appearance and the rupture or

⁷ "The poem is the cry of its occasion," from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (2009).

broken symmetry in the quiescence of ongoing being posed by the emergence of subjectivity and the violence of birth. Annexing to Meltzer's concept Kristeva's (1990) theory of the Abject, Civitarese "back dates" the aesthetic conflict developmentally to the pre-symbolic period when the infant is just beginning to separate from the mother as organism (VE, p. 123). The objective correlatives to infantile affect — the latter a composite of need and discomfort eventuating in shame, disgust, and horror — are bodily effluvia. These flows, imaging a toxic interchange between the infant and the mother, fertilize the Kleinian theory of art as reparation of the damaged object. Civitarese's chief emphasis, however, is on the pre-phantasmatic, protoaesthetic sensations of the infant, whose primary experience of form prior to separation is generated by the sensuous contours of the mother's body.

The aesthetic experience associated with an enduring artistic creation or performance must then, in Civitarese's summation, be connected with an intimate conviction of truth associated with "sensoriality" and "rhythmicity," which evoke a satisfying recollection of the maternal body in its presence and periodic absence. But it also requires "[m]argins of beauty": diverse modes of contextualization of the experience, from the borders of a painting to the darkening of a theater, the walls of a museum or the awakening from a dream. (Think also of the "forests of the night," which, along with the "distant deeps or skies," frame the "fearful symmetry" of Blake's tiger [1988].) Such boundedness distinguishes the as-if quality of art from hallucination but also from the everyday use of functional objects. It also distinguishes psychoanalytic sessions as framed, from ordinary social interactions (VE, pp. 139-157).

Finally, according to Bion's extraordinary insight, art involves an emotion associated with receiving the emotional communication: "the emotional state of awareness of an emotional state" (VE, pp. 114, 117). In my view, this second-order experience couples a felt response to integral form with recognition and gratitude for (rather than envy of) artistic virtuosity. It also marks a point of rapport with Civitarese's understanding of psychoanalysis as offering increasingly expansive ways of experiencing: "interpretation is not so much an interpretation of content but an interpretation of interpretation, a reflection on how interpretation is carried out" (VE, p. 70). Atonement with O is thus attunement, a self-reflexive re-orchestration of consciousness.

Coda

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One symptom of a conceptual short-circuit is when an invented and/or adapted vocabulary loses its instrumentality as a tool for thinking and becomes merely formulaic and reified, providing tokens of exchange among initiates. Bion's seductive glossary of terms, symbols, and prescriptions has become increasingly familiar: attacks on links; bizarre objects; container-contained, reverie, alpha function and beta elements; negative capability/selected fact; contact-barrier; L, H, and K; transformations in O; "without memory, desire, and understanding," etc. Here, two observations of the French philosopher Charles Péguy (1873-1914) may be apposite regarding language and power:

A word is not the same with one writer as with another. One tears it from his guts. The other pulls it out of his overcoat pocket.

Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics.

(Péguy, 2014)

Bion's aims, as Civitarese has reviewed them, are succinctly formulated in an admonitory reversal of each of these maxims.

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