

A CLINICAL APPLICATION OF BION'S CONCEPTS
VOLUME 1

DREAMING, TRANSFORMATION, CONTAINMENT AND CHANGE



P.C. SANDLER



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OF BION'S CONCEPTS

Volume 1



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P.C. Sandler

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To Ester, Daniela and Luiz

*To the memory of my parents, Dr Jayme Sandler
and Mrs Bertha Lerner Sandler*



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Solomon saith, *there is no new thing upon the Earth*. So that as Plato had an imagination, that *all knowledge was but remembrance*, so Solomon giveth his sentence, that *all novelty is but oblivion*. One of their heirs, who gave utility to their work, made an observation out of this: *out of the creative powers of a couple, claims to originality are but deluded omnipotence*.

(Bacon, 1625, with expansion taking into account subsequent progress due to his contributions)



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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare, whose many gifts included unequalled epistemophilic instincts, made an invitation coloured by benevolence and challenging hope: “Come, give us a taste of your quality”.¹ His unique follower, Goethe, entertained second thoughts, dictated by depressive doubtfulness: *Individuum est ineffabile*.²

P.A. Mystery is real life; real life is the concern of real analysis. Jargon passes for psychoanalysis, as sound is substituted for music, verbal facility for literature and poetry, *trompe l’oeil* representations for painting.

(Bion, 1977b, p. 80)

P.A. I wouldn’t waste my capacity for belief on facts—I only believe when there is no fact available.

(Bion, 1977b, p. 294)

This work attempts to depict clinical applications stemming from Dr Wilfred Ruprecht Bion’s contributions to psychoanalysis. It may be used as a practical companion to *The Language of Bion: A Dictionary of Concepts*. Both constitute a natural arrangement of Dr Bion’s concepts. “Natural” here means the help

the selected concepts may provide to any analyst who understands and uses the observations underlying the concepts effectively in his or her everyday clinical work. This statement may be attributable in part to a belief, but it is also backed up by facts observed through thirty-eight years of continuous psychiatric practice and thirty-four years of continuous psychoanalytic and applied psychoanalytic practice. By “continuous practice” I mean the everyday life of seeing and trying to help patients in clinical settings.

By “natural” I mean selected concepts endowed with a general truth which is applicable to individual cases; in brief, an attempt to affiliate to the scientific vertex (which, for clarity of communication, is inimical to imprecisely defined terms). I use *theory* in its original meaning, which is an ability to contribute to a system of interrelated statements, originally corresponding to their counterparts in reality and deriving (as representations) from this very same empirically observed reality. The interrelation of statements also includes further derivations based upon each other, having, like built-in genetics, a power to apprehend reality in general enough terms to be able to encompass individual cases. Theories are speculations, in the sense that they screen and reflect experience like mirrors.³ A theory includes an attempt, and the risk of error is an integral part of it. By *concept* I mean an abstract short-cut formulated in linguistic and extra-linguistic symbols. It has a quasi-independent standing which risks being degraded into jargon but serves the understanding of realities. In scientific communication, concepts are also used as catch-phrases. Sometimes they can be the building blocks of theories.

The use of the indefinite article in the title is intentional. There are many events in life which admit nuances and multifarious degrees between arbitrary defined poles, like the colours of the visible spectrum, the infinite tones of grey between white and black, and personal opinions on just about anything. In those facts and events, the classical law of the excluded middle does not apply and fails if it is seen as a “law”. But there are other facts in life where there are no such degrees. They are, or they are not; the choice allows only their obverse, their negative; or as Nietzsche observed after Shakespeare, the choice is between them and nothing. Between life and death, truth and lie, science and nothing; one is or is not.

“Natural” also means a theory’s attempted links to living matter, provided by two bearings: a correspondence with the biological

needs of a human being, expressed synthetically in this book by Freud as instincts, following a lineage of historical achievements long before his appearance. They underlie all Bion's selected concepts and the attempted link to clinical practice.

I attempt to express these natural scientific vertices destined for written communication by explicitly resorting to clinical descriptions in the classic sense of the term. In this sense, this work differs from its companion published in 2005: the attempts to describe the psychoanalytical experience are intended to illustrate at least one way to use the concepts. Thus we return to "a", rather than "the", which would express phantasies of ownership of absolute truth.

Beyond Bion's concepts through clinical observation

There will also be some expansion of Dr Bion's concepts arising out of clinical observations, made possible by those very contributions—a common sense invariant in science. Universes of hitherto unknown—but existing—facts are observed, and through observation and application expanding universes are unlocked to consciousness (and therefore awareness).

My hope—as with my earlier book, *The Language of Bion: A Dictionary of Concepts*, and also empirically backed⁴—is that some chapters will help the reader understand Bion's original concepts and apply them in clinical practice. In other chapters I have been more explicit and gone beyond what was adumbrated or indicated by Bion, in the light of phenomena observed against the background of Bion's contributions. These chapters also indicate the intertwined nature of his contributions, an aspect we will deal with later. The observations are empirically founded, which may qualify them for inclusion in the realm of psychoanalysis.

Models, analogies, theories

P.A. When we were last together we "solved" the problem of translating thoughts into action by going to bed. That was a precise solution of a precisely defined ... what? It was apparently "defined" by being terminated. But that act defined it—in the sense of ending the discussion. It occurred to me later that we were behaving as if we had become aware of human speech,

as a child might become aware that grownups are not merely making noises with their mouths, but are communicating with each other or engaging in some prelude to communication. Such an “event”, now used as a free association, can be reviewed in the light of increased experience. The “re-view” can itself be turned into good account. [Bion, 1979, p. 505]

Bion’s contributions, in verbal written terms, made heavy use—as did Freud’s before him—of models and analogies, in the form of colloquially constructed formulae. This is expanded in later chapters. Some preliminary considerations of models as used here might be opportune, in order to establish boundaries of meaning. Firstly, models serve both concretisation and abstraction. Concretisation is here understood as the lower level, or empirical data—the point from which we start in science. Abstraction is here understood as a basic process of thinking: that is, thinking in the absence of the concrete object. Prototypically, after Bion’s theory of thinking: the breast. Secondly, models bring in themselves the seeds of their improved replacement, in a living sense that is akin to human life itself. The replacements can be either evolutionary (expendable and expandable; see below) or revolutionary (as in catastrophic change; see later):

The use of a model has a value in restoring a sense of the concrete to an investigation which may have lost contact with its background through abstraction and the theoretical deductive systems associated with it ... A model has also qualities which enable it to fulfil some of the functions of an abstraction. It enables the investigator to use an emotional experience by applying it as a totality to a subsequent experience, or to some aspect of it. These merits carry in themselves the elements that finally make the model outdated. No experience exactly matches a past experience ... models can only be an approximation to the realisation and vice versa ... The model may be regarded as an abstraction from an emotional experience or as a concretisation of an abstraction ... In the group the myth has some claim to be regarded as filling the same role in the society as the model has in scientific work of the individual ... Models are ephemeral and differ from theories in this respect; I have no compunction in discarding

a model as soon as it has served or failed to serve my purpose.
 If a model proves useful on a number of different occasions,
 the time has come to consider its transformation into a theory.
 [Bion, 1962b, pp. 64, 79]

The usefulness of models is that they are “expendable; theories are not” (Bion, 1973, p. 31), in the way that theories belong to the numinous realm, which permits transcendence. Models have uses outside academic research, as in any science. Analytic experience after Freud, Klein and Bion continues the research into deeper psychotic “strata” and will have to tackle the situation that, in contrast with the analysis of the non-psychotic, “the relationship with external reality undergoes a transformation parallel to the relationship with psychic reality which lacks an intervening (or ‘interceding’) model. There is no ‘personality’ intervening between the psychoanalyst and the ‘unconscious’” (Bion, 1967a, p. 147). This corresponds to the idea that psychotics have no resistances and their unconscious emerges directly and unhampered and cannot be interpreted. It is quite normal that a patient with a prevailing psychotic personality says, unknowingly and deaf to his own words, “I want to have sex with Mum”. Models are brokers in our apprehension of reality, and one of their outstanding media is analogy.

A problem with models, one which has been present ever since the myths were first used as models, is that some people have a tendency to over-concretise and, dazzled by the form, confuse the meaning with the content, not as a matching unity, but favouring formal constructs. Imagination—the ability of the mind to make images—is replaced by fancy, which spells, unwittingly, like the hiss of a snake, “hallucination”. These factors which contribute to the denudation of models and their unavoidable decay as messengers of truth are scrutinised by psychoanalysis after Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Bion, and will be reviewed in many chapters of this work.⁵

Models are useful to communication. The problem of communication between analysts proved to be an issue of communication between the analyst and his patient. To resort to the artist as model does not mean that an analyst must be an artist, even though Bion stated that he or any analyst would have his work made easier or perhaps feasible if he could communicate musically or odorifically (Bion, 1970, p. 18). Many analysts think that an analyst is an artist

and become enthralled with artistic formulations: so enthralled that they come to believe that these non-psychoanalytic formulations are superior to psychoanalytic ones and must replace them. This can be seen in a plethora of authors and their works; its popularity begs scrutiny. Nietzsche was not popular at first, and narcotics are perpetually popular. Just to illustrate this trend, at least historically, with some representative authors, one may quote Paul Ricoeur's work, which perhaps first aired the fashionable idea that analysis was a kind of literature. He exerted a lasting influence due to other extraneous interests, such as publishing and commercial overtones, and the affluent interest of canonical-minded non-analysts such as Bloom (1994), stemming from the non-medical training which produced what Freud called lay analysts. The necessity to have a medical education—meaning truthful experience with real life-and-death events in a condensed amount of time, with no subterfuge or evasion—was replaced by the ideology of furnishing "humanities" education to would-be analysts, leading to the replacement of the former. Some observers, like Wallerstein in the 1980s, noticed that this occurred due to lack of interest from promising medical students. If a vacuum is formed, something will occupy it; therefore it is possible that the present tendency of non-medical training is a fact born from necessity, something that tries to meet a need, rather than a wilful trend. Perhaps medically trained professionals did not take due care of their discipline, as has happened before and will continue to happen; when truth and mind could not find safe shelters or havens in other disciplines such as philosophy, there was a need to discover psychoanalysis. But art, a secure inspiration for Freud, came to be seen not as a forerunner or genetic donor but as a replacement. The enshrinement of other contributions such as art fails to observe that the issue is the enshrinement rather than the form assumed by the enshrined idol or ideal. The problem is not the selected idol, but idealisation in itself, as studied by psychoanalysis. Even historically minded (that is, with respect to science) extra-psychoanalytical authors such as Professor Carl Shorske disagreed with the idolisation which was a hallmark of their contemporaries, like Mr Peter Gay (Souza, 1993); what can we say if this tendency makes its appearance in analysts too? This idealisation of art or other disciplines was absorbed by different kinds of education; genetic inheritance and amendments were replaced by rival substitutes. It

was manifested in growing qualms about the medical heritage of psychoanalysis, and frustrations intrinsic to medicine contributed to this tendency. This current has many followers, like Dr Donald Meltzer, who subordinates science to art under a judgmental vertex. Bion thought otherwise:

P.A. Psychoanalysts are trained to do psychoanalysis only—a considerable undertaking. I would not feel qualified by my training to do more than that although like surgeons, engineers and other citizens, I am expected to carry my civil obligations as well as my professional ones. But I deprecate to say that my experience extends beyond that of a psychoanalyst; it is hard enough trying to be an “expert” in one’s own profession. Yet we are constantly expected to be expert far beyond our professional domain and are regarded with contempt if we fail to live up to expectations which we strive not to arouse. [Bion, 1979, p. 507]

Beyond Bion’s models

Bion states that models are “expendable”; but in the light of further experience obtained with their use, they can also be expandable. Some of my expansions from Bion in this and subsequent volumes will deal with:

- container and contained as they may appear in analytic sessions;
- Minus L and Minus K, which are examined in detail hitherto unavailable, with clinical examples which attempt to illustrate their usefulness;
- broader graphical visual representations of the Grid which seemed to me to facilitate comprehension of this truth-finding tool. These representations include, as a step towards comprehension, a tri-dimension grid, and lead to non-visual depictions: a six-dimension grid and a multi-dimension grid;
- alpha function, the original description of which included its reversal (or a reversal of its function). Bion hinted at this in a footnote; as it was clinically examined, different natures (and thus, their corresponding concepts) of beta-elements emerged. They were called “intelligible and unintelligible” beta-elements. Bion’s later contributions allowed the observation that the reversal of alpha

function—here called anti-alpha function—may be more usefully regarded outside its pathological meaning. In this, one follows a most fundamental discovery of psychoanalysis to display neurosis, as well as psychosis, as a universal human feature.⁶ This expansion attends to the need for a term which describes a universal primitive tendency of the human mind: to concretise non-sensual mental phenomena. It can be drawn from the beginning of Bion's observations of psychotic states. It made for an enduring object of research throughout his psychoanalytic activity, from his first theories of thinking up to his last works, especially *A Memoir of the Future*. Clinical experiences gathered from my own decades of psychiatric and psychoanalytic work confirm a model that depicts the counterparts in reality of an active process whereby alpha-elements are transformed into beta-elements—that is, the inverse of alpha function—which can then masquerade as intelligible sense data.

Some of these expansions of Bion's concepts were introduced between 1987 and 2007. The term "anti-alpha function" arrived in 1992. The first published studies appeared in 1993 and 1997. The term "realm of minus" and the hypothesis provisionally named a Versus link, added to the existing K, H and L links, appeared in published form in 2000. These mechanisms are linked with projective identification, operating in the mind of both patient and analyst, by which a depressive-position experience (or at least the awareness of it) may at least partially be evaded. All of these are factors of the Minus Realm. They have group consequences, one of them being the analytic two-body group (after Rickmann). They are far more widespread in the surrounding social environment than is immediately apparent, accounting for serious distortions in apprehension and working through, and consequently the relationship of the individual and the group to reality.

First versions of a tri-dimension Grid and their clinical application were proposed in 1986 and published in 1987; an improved form, presented in computer graphic animation, appeared in 1997, with the aid of yet another dimension; a six-dimension Grid and a multi-dimension Grid were proposed between 2004 and 2006, but due to some of the unexpected surprises so typical of life, their publication was postponed.

Expansions and clinical applications

An all-encompassing issue that pervades anything important in life, and fundamental to analysts and patients, to social groups and their endeavours in art, science, technology and fiction, whatever one's interest or focus, is the apprehension of truth and/or contact with reality. In today's world this is as much the case as it always was. Truth is an intangible issue subjected to unfortunate views. Sometimes its existence is denied; sometimes it is recognised but regarded as taboo; to many people it is unattainable; to others, simply a wasteful discussion, doomed to contingency and prey to failures of relativism or, worse, invaded and conquered by authoritarian or religiosity-ridden views, a kind of exclusive domain of elitist "illuminated" people who have the power to inflict it at will.

In any case, despite their confusing and contradictory views, those who advertise themselves as relativists are the most stubbornly adept at making a pure usucaption of truth, enjoying the spoils of imperator over established truths (their own). Issues of physical and mental survival are at stake when truth is or is not considered. Phoenix-like, truth will continue to exist and influence life as time goes on, regardless of the conscious will to consider it or not. Truth, as an issue to be discussed and dealt with here, cannot nourish ignorance of some philosophical achievements. But at the same time, there can be no concessions to philosophising—an activity alien to what some (a group to which I regard myself as belonging) consider to be a psychoanalytical clinic. Historically, philosophy tried to take care of truth as well as truth and mind. But in later times philosophers (as distinct from philosophy) gave up, especially when the "great systems" of philosophy vanished and were subjected to harsh, destructive criticism, with their proponents usually seen first as geniuses and later as obsolete and anachronistic. As usually happens, other disciplines such as art, psychoanalysis and mathematics seemed to take up studies in truth.

As for the findings reported in this work (but particularly in relation to the versus link, the analytic function, the multi-dimension grid, and epistemology and truth), my experience tells me that I am vulnerable to attack from the hostile critic. Why be concerned with hostilities? Bion observed (in *Transformations*, 1965, p. 9) that psychoanalysts do not attach much importance to social practices and malpractices, but

groups pay attention to what the psychoanalyst does: even though the analyst can “hardly” concern himself with the cultural background against which analytic work must be done, “the culture may concern him”. What I wrote in 2005 continues to be valid today: if only his warnings could be heard, perhaps the psychoanalytic movement would not face the problematic issues it now faces, putting its own survival (that is the survival of the movement, but not of psychoanalysis itself) at stake. A writer has little (or in truth nothing) to do with hostile readers, just as he or she has little (or nothing) to do with praising readers. Reading a text under H or L links are negative and positive variations of the same absolute value, which equals the absence of knowledge (-K). This issue will be examined in detail, for the first time in the hitherto published literature since Bion’s remarks on the field of minus and Green’s emphasis on the “negative”, with an integration of the two vertices, in the next volume. Nevertheless, under the heading “hostile” many factors are at work and merit attention. After all, the same source from which spring behaviours of the most despicable and bestial kind also produces human sublimity; if the behavioural hostility includes Kantian criticism, under the vertex of love instincts, it must be coped with and may be put to good service. Lack of praise is usually regarded as hostility, and this includes the world of writers and publications; but one may try to make a finer discrimination as to whether or not it is a manifestation of hostility. The term “constructive criticism” makes an attempt to profit from what can be just the exercise of or even addiction to sincerity. Analytic practice helps to learn that

... the personality of analyst and analysand can survive the loss of its protective coat of lies, subterfuge, evasion and hallucination and may even be fortified and enriched by the loss. It is an assumption strongly disputed by the psychotic and *a fortiori* by the group, which relies on psychotic mechanisms for its coherence and sense of well-being. [Bion, 1965, p. 129]

This learning will leave no perplexity or wonderment to writers and readers when psychotic ideas of superiority, and the superiority of a sanity that is destructive, prove to be popular. Writing about analysis belongs to the realm of public view. Experience in analysis also shows that it is a matter of increased difficulty.

... for the analyst to conduct himself in such a manner that his association with the analysand is beneficial to the analysand. The exercise, in the patient's view, is the establishment of the superiority of rivalry, envy and hate over compassion, complementation and generosity. [*ibid.*, p. 143]

In many cases, if both proud writers and proud readers are channelled not into arrogance but into self-respect, the act of writing and reading can be mutually beneficial.

On the other hand, dangerous and obnoxious hostility from the destructive, rivalry-prone psychopath, who neurotically disguises it as "rationality" or "erudition", cannot be dismissed either. To such a reader, the present author may be guilty of a series of flaws, among them ignorance; this leads to pretentious, opinionated dismissal of the whole body of polemical discussions and pseudo-controversies under the umbrella of what is known as philosophical contributions. Some readers gather hostility from perusing the index and bibliography to see whether or not their preferred authors or idols are quoted. If driven by potentially constructive criticism, some of them may scrutinise what is quoted from each author and how it is quoted. This would ensure a scientific discussion potentially beneficial to all involved.

Truth and having a scholar's mind differ from the modern ways of something that in medieval times was named scholasticism. Conscious or unwilling commitment to what I view as a decayed romanticism would justify this kind of accusation.⁷ Thus romanticism consists of the diversion from truthful contributions to science, epistemology and art provided by the Romantic Movement into established (or institutional), superficial and inanimate views—which extracted life from this same Romantic Movement. The mere name "Romantic" arouses suspicion in many quarters;⁸ I believe this happens because of a lack of discrimination between "-ism" (and the gathering crowds of "-ists" around it) and its non-political expressions in art and science. An added confusion in this already confused state of affairs is that formal education may fall prey to denudation. "Formal" prevails at the expense of "education". As John Kenneth Galbraith observed, good tailoring can be confused with financial trustworthiness. Variations of this: good manners are confused with genuine friendship; domestication with civilisation. Dale Carnegie's teachings proved to

be popular in unexpected milieus. All this leads to the prevalence of formalism, and is conducive to ignorance. Processes of knowing are ossified, and static knowledge is hailed. Content is doomed to disappear; concrete shells are revered. Contradictorily, and adding still more to the confusion, the same posture fuels something which may be seen, for want of a better name, as revolution-by-itself. It re-edits submission to renewed authorities in accordance with the fashion of a given time. After all, all revolutionaries are either murdered by their revolutions, like Danton or Trotsky, or they exhibit their dictators' underlying character, like Robespierre, Stalin or Castro. These concrete shells where once upon a time and for a while truth and wisdom abided, developing disciplined care towards intuition and apprehension of truth, followed a path that transformed their *nous*. In increasingly damped pompous erudition, they halted wisdom. After the enlightened foundation of universities, later generations re-created rivalry-prone places. A social compulsion to repetition echoed age-old rivalries. One may use Aristotle's Lyceum and his diatribes with his master Plato's Academia as an early example: in this case, the disciple realised his mistake; too late for himself as a person, but not too late in historical terms and for humankind. As Bion observed, universities became places where elected people create rules of election to elect themselves as group authorities (Bion, 1979). An unexpected obstacle to the Renaissance-Enlightenment "project" emerged in the form of specialisation, which constantly hampered the universalistic purpose even more. Consequently, a chronicler of social customs, hailed as an epistemologist, elaborated a much applauded (and instantaneously adopted) theoretical circumvolution in order to justify such a state of affairs. Its worldwide fame and popular appeal constituted an expected and common fact in the work of social chroniclers. Since his work was "for the moment" (like any chronicle), and dependent on fashion, it is now disappearing, but at a slower pace than it took to be instituted. Destruction is always more easily done than construction, but the debris and confusion may remain for centuries—especially in the immaterial realm of thoughts. Some readers may have recognised Thomas Kuhn's conception of "scientific peers" who idealise what he named "paradigms": the idea that reality, truth and the universe is a creation of the mind—meaning that there is not a "reality out there".

These remarks may emphasise the need to avoid the philosophising siren and the revolutionary idea (which have been characterising the

history of ideas in philosophy) when one attempts to use the psychoanalytic vertex. In doing so, one may “visualise the smell” or “hear the brilliant sight” of Plato, Kant, Diderot, Shakespeare, Hume, Maimon, von Herder, Hamann, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Russell, Berlin’s introjected hints (as a phylogenetic learning) of psychoanalysis. If this is the case, psychoanalysis is not a revolution in the field of ideas, but an evolutionary development bred mainly in the Enlightened Renaissance and Romantic periods. Psychoanalysis is a practical activity genetically nourished by the achievements of a rather large number of people (usually seen as “geniuses” by the encircling group) who functioned both as medical scientists and philosophers as well as epistemologists and artists—before a Freud emerged to think psychoanalysis, a thought without a thinker, according to Bion. We must scrutinise those forebears, who, as forebears, could not be contemporary with nor could have come later than Freud.⁹ Psychoanalysis brought home the fact that truth is not a theoretical problem of the philosopher of science: “... the psychoanalyst is concerned *practically* with a problem that the philosopher approaches *theoretically*” (Bion, 1970, p. 97).

In his last Introductory Lecture on “The Question of a Weltanschauung” (1933), for example, Freud displayed in a crystal-clear way why psychoanalysis is not philosophy, due to the former’s practical (given by its medical) intent. Anyway, no analyst must complain of not being read. Freud himself will be a good companion, as we shall see later: he rarely found anyone who had actually read “The Interpretation of Dreams” (just one example out of all his works, quoted by Freud himself in a foreword to a later edition), a work which adorns a huge number of public and private libraries all over the world. To have books as concrete property has been a popular trend from centuries ago to the present day. People nowadays buy them in pounds, kilos, metric or any other measure of quantity, but reading them is another thing entirely, as noticed by many authors from John Ruskin to the unknown authors of the Holy Bible. If Freud was aware that comparatively few people had read his works, and seemingly did not mind, he was acutely sensitive about different readings which did not see what he had written. Different readings, which nowadays give such pleasure to post-modernists, afflicted him to the point of needing to deny that he had written a kind of *roman à clef*. Discordance and disagreement awaited his works and even how to classify them: from science (as he wished), art, or imagination, to feared accusations of

false science, esoteric initiation, up to madness. For the most part he was spared seeing these judgments in his lifetime and enjoyed some success; in this he was much less unfortunate than Van Gogh and Schubert, and his memory much less distorted to the point of denudation than that of Nietzsche. To those who may level accusations of ignorance, perhaps justified in some way of which I am unaware, I offer the alternative of the principle of uncertainty.¹⁰ These claims may (and must) be justified through reading this work—so they will have a fact to bear them. The same principle of uncertainty may provide a chance of having other views less influenced by prejudice given by previous education, preferences, idolisation, academic established traditions, and the like.

Fundamentally, achievements based on psychoanalytic truthfulness¹¹ reside in technical developments linked to analytic function and free associations, as well as to some features of the analytic work linked to the individuality of analysts, as distinct from what each analyst may find in his personal analysis. These contributions came from a meeting dedicated to the German language and Freud's contributions to it in São Paulo's State University in 2004. Another meeting, held in Turin in 2004 and dedicated to the work of Ferenczi, offered an opportunity to expand on the personal factor, an issue pursued by Freud, Ferenczi and Bion (*freie Einfälle* and free-floating attention, discussed in a subsequent volume).

If truth and the lack of it really have an importance for groups, as I believe they do, this leads, in the underlying rationale guiding the structure of this work, to an expansion of Bion's study of groups (which will appear in a subsequent volume). I have suggested that another basic assumption should be added to Bion's three: I have called it the basic assumption of exclusion/appertaining. My considerations of truth as well as epistemology and psychoanalysis in the light of Bion's contributions appeared in a series of papers and congresses from 1997 to 2003. The amended basic assumption was first published in 1999; while it focused on a problem with establishments, it was instantly awarded a national prize by an acknowledged psychoanalytical establishment in an institutional event, much to my amazement.¹²

The clinical approach depicted seems to have a function of warning about common errors in analytical practice. Some of them were (hopefully) corrected by the improved use of container-contained, minus realm and anti-alpha function. The warning does

not include other people's mistakes—something that would constitute hetero-criticism. Instead, through self-criticism, which seems to be a hallmark of the psychoanalytic posture, processes of learning by experience in analysis can be put in motion. Through this method I present a series of clinical vignettes in which: (i) the analyst was tempted (by his own failures) to relate to the patient's material as if it were truly describing concrete external reality rather than disguising immaterial psychic reality (in the case of anti-alpha function); (ii) the analyst mistook the minus for a plus realm, entering into the non-existent world of hallucinosis; and (iii) in a special case of hallucinosis, the analyst mistook intra-session masculine and feminine postures through failure to apprehend projective identification. A bizarre "world" "made" of *what is not* rather than *what is*, from which an exit is eternally sought, but to no avail. How can one get out of what never was and never shall be? "To be or not to be" applies to human life and death, but cannot find a counterpart in that which is never born and cannot meet death. This realm of hallucinosis, formed by inexhaustible (because inexistent) stocks of nothingness, is examined throughout almost all the chapters of the present work. Considerable pitfalls await the analyst who cannot discriminate between the non-realm of hallucination and the flights-of-fancy imagination (which differs from imagination itself, the mind's ability to turn mental issues into images, studied by Freud and later developed by Green as a pictographic power) in the activity of constructing theory, both by patients and by would-be analysts (or apprentice analysts, the eternal state of an analyst who decides to carry on his work into the unknown). It is not fair to create a sweep-stake among scientists or in the concepts and conceptions made by a researcher. But to perceive them as more urgent in the immediate needs of the analytical work seems far removed from this. In this sense, an outstanding discovery is the immediate, pervading and ever-present influence of hallucination and hallucinosis. That is, the presence of perceptions without object and the presence of hallucinations is an otherwise preserved personality. Hallucinosis (and hallucination) is a continuously occurring event in the human mind, with natural functions running parallel to continuing dream work and dreaming. Its clinical use will be illustrated in Part II, where I will also present some hypotheses about its function. Hallucinosis seems to have no solutions of continuity, as is the case with thought

processes. Its motives in its causal form are non-existent; in terms of functions perhaps just one may be hypothesised. Analysts must not be discouraged by this state of affairs; all scientific facts and disciplines suffer the same fate.

P.A. But just as it would be impossible to explain to anyone who had not been in action what it would be like to be a combatant soldier or a regimental stretcher bearer, so is it impossible to describe to anyone who has not been a practising psychoanalyst what it is to experience real psychoanalysis.

ROBIN Surely you do not seriously mean that an analytic session is comparable with going into action?

P.A. Comparable, yes. Imminent death is not expected, although there is that possibility. That does not weigh the anxiety—fear in a low key. One shrinks from giving the unwelcome interpretation.

ROBIN Is it not just fear that the patient is going to be angry at being criticised?

P.A. I don't think so; the patient may be angry at a critical comment, perhaps even murderously angry, but I do not think that possibility consciously deters.

ROBIN Is it some unconscious fear—the countertransference of which you spoke?

P.A. It is. Though one is not “conscious” of it—to obviate that is one reason why we think analysts must themselves be analysed—there is an inherent fear of giving an interpretation. If a psychoanalyst is doing proper analysis then he is engaged on an activity that is indistinguishable from that of an animal that investigates what it is afraid of—it smells danger. An analyst is not doing his job if he investigates something because it is pleasurable or profitable. Patients do not come because they anticipate some agreeable imminent event; they come because they are ill at ease. The analyst must share the danger and has, therefore, to share the “smell” of danger. If the hair at the back of your neck becomes erect, your primitive, archaic senses indicate the presence of the danger. It is our job to be curious about that danger—not cowardly, not irresponsible.

ROLAND You must think highly of yourself if you are such a paragon.

P.A. I am trying to describe the job—not my fitness or otherwise for it. I have enough respect for the psychoanalyst’s task to tell the difference between this social chat about psychoanalysis—or even a technical discussion of it—and the practice of psychoanalysis. Anyone who is not afraid when he is engaged on psychoanalysis is either not doing his job or is unfitted for it.

ROBIN An airman or seaman who is not afraid of the elements, afraid of the sea and the skies, is unfit to navigate. The line between fear and cowardice is faint.

P.A. Quite so. I would add, the line between daring and stupidity is similarly faint.

Roland How would you define it?

P.A. I would not. In practice, where to draw the line depends on the facts, including the facts of one’s personality, with which one judges—the total capacity. Definition is only a matter of theory—useful for discussion and communication of ideas. In practice one does not rely on anything so ambiguous as verbal formulation. [Bion, 1979, pp. 516–17]

Therefore this work depicts experience at its most clinical through the doubtful medium of extra-clinical correspondent data. The former constitutes part of the living matter; dead matter, waiting for a rescuing interpreter armed with patience, experience, benevolence and intuition, usually excessively contaminates the latter, which resort to written words. Too much hope cannot allow the writer to place excessive demands on the reader. Conversely, too demanding a reader usually confronts him with a hopeless situation. Matching two different natures, clinical aliveness and extra-clinical deadness, adds too much teratology. In Bion’s formulation, the author is fated to the poverty of not being able to “vouch for the truth of these tales which became known to [him] through scientific hearsay many years later”, thus acknowledging his “dependence on sensible and experienced transcriptions”. How can we promise “communication of pure non-sense without the contamination by sense” whilst not having to apologise for “borrow[ing] the language of experience and reason despite its inadequacy”? All this will be used in this work as a flawed, but still available and as yet irreplaceable form to adumbrate, just by shadows and gross outlines, that which in a remote moment had the chance to be clinical

experience. (All quotations from Bion, 1979, p. 429; in a different form they appear in the Commentary to *Second Thoughts*.)¹³

Freud's three impossible professions are to govern, to teach and to perform psychoanalysis—which includes a specialised, later branch: communicating one's clinical experience in a good enough way to one's colleagues. As in all practices, the audience must count on its own intuition, and this means, again, experience. There may be debate as to whether the "theoretical practice" demanded from history and literature critics (among other professions) is needed, but—at least today—is there any doubt that a "practising analyst" may dispense analytic practice?¹⁴ For this reason, I prefer to say "audience" rather than "readers"; I believe one cannot learn analysis through reading texts. The problem is how to communicate a transient, immaterial experience whose medium is human memory, a faulty method whose flaws and failures are widely acknowledged—one of Bion's contributions being some of these failures. Bion was often regarded as lacking a capacity to communicate clinical experience through classical methods (according the model "The patient said this and the analyst said that"). Some readers had a high regard for Bion's methods, which evolved over time. To those readers, Bion's texts always had a literary and even poetic *nous*, able to evoke powerful emotions and experiences in his audience. Conversely, many readers found him obscure and difficult, creating a "love it or leave it" situation. More details about his style of writing and its development over time appear in the initial pages of *The Language of Bion*, and were also voiced by many other commentators, including his dedicated wife, Mrs Francesca Bion.

Psychoanalysis, like any science, was born from experience, and is inescapably experiential and experimental. Both works contain theoretical and clinical experience. Nevertheless, if the first one bounced into a theoretical presentation, the present work brings explicit clinical experience in classical terms, despite its shortcomings.

Some of the cases are presented in more than one chapter under the particular vertex provided by the selected concept. In the daily practical task of analysis, the complex intertwining—perhaps akin to that seen in the neurological realm—of mental phenomena which act as both function and factor is such that it is not possible to describe all of them and their interaction, or even a just small part of them, at least in the confines of the knowledge available to us. This

comes from the last hundred years; a rather short time if the parameter is the history of ideas in Western civilisation (even if we limit those ideas to the history of art, science and medical science), which extends over a thousand years.

Albeit some of the factors and functions are recognisable—thanks in part to Dr Bion’s work—they function and happen to be in a simultaneous way. But one cannot describe them as such—at least in the present state of knowledge. We may describe some relationships (in the same way that mathematics showed us, as forebear of all sciences and breeder of some arts such as music) in terms of factors and functions.

Bion, like Freud, made an evolving theoretical and observational device. If psychoanalysis is a tool, Bion’s device tools the tool. With this I want to convey that he made a highly integrated construction. No wonder, if one remembers the goal (ultimately impossible), a verbal counterpart of the highly integrated functional working of what we call—even though we do not know what it is—“human life”, or “psychic and material reality”. It is a never-ending task for the analyst; the opposite of “thus far and no further”. If people can realise the infinite realm of the mind, the motto demands a complement to make it a stimulus rather than a dead end: “so much further and still not far enough”. It is a struggle paradoxically for and against appearances; it demands patience, as evolution and pattern formation take an unknown quantum of time. It is at the same time instantaneous and eternal.

The division of theories into chapters and clinical examples is artificial, but obeys a rule in order to facilitate comprehension. The rule follows the functioning of the intertwined theoretical-observational device. If a gross analogy can be accepted, its functioning could remind us of cogs in a motor car transmission. For example, the negative realm appears in the difficulties some patients have in realising a container-contained relationship. The theory of alpha function and its obverse, anti-alpha function, cannot be split from that of transformations, because both deal with appearances and ways to go beyond them. In fact, Transformations and Invariants is a potent body of knowledge that pervades everything in the universe, allowing for research into living and non-living systems (Nozick, 2001). Binocular vision (and, again, the minus realm) also appears everywhere in practice, even though its emphasis appears in specific chapters.

Nevertheless, a few details may be necessary for the reader to apprehend the gist of a possible way, among others which may eventually prove to be more useful to different analysts. An analyst's free-floating associations equip him at a given moment to furnish *a* specific interpretation. I do not state how the analyst's free association equips him, nor *the* definitive interpretation, but one which is possible at a given moment. "Many roads lead to Rome"; authoritarian aspects create unnecessary pseudo-controversies—the illusion that just one way or model is possible. Access to truth or pursuing truth-O is confused with ownership of absolute truth. Psychoanalytical practice, like medicine, would be fated to eternal confinement in a Procrustean straitjacket if analysts could not introject and integrate in their practice Shakespeare's observation: "It is like a barber's chair that fits all buttocks" (*All's Well that Ends Well*, II, ii).

The problem for the analyst is how to detect invariance—human and mental invariants—without falling into the authoritarian trap of rules of conduct or undue generalisations which simply reveal that it is impossible to tolerate the paradox of transformations and invariance. Many confuse the detection of invariance with eternal and external rules of conduct,¹⁵ and transformations with an attitude indistinguishable from *laissez-faire, laissez aller, chacun à son goût*. As we all know, fundamentalism and morals beget *laissez-faire*, disguised (or travestied) by rigid rules.

I have opted to present some cases in the most extensive and comprehensive form possible, which perhaps paradoxically comprises a split form artificially arranged, to further communication, according to the heading of each chapter, corresponding to the selected concepts. This furnishes the priority vertex which will help the reader understand the specific mental movement (or phenomena) present: from diagnosis, the first step in recognising it, to some of the possible ways to deal with it. This form of split presentation tries to deal with the multifarious vertices needed if one tries (or dares) to help a person when he or she seeks analysis. This is an activity that needs a helper—in the first instance, the analyst.

Popper's criteria for science are the reproducible character of scientific experiments and the ability of a theory to be demonstrated false. This issue is critically discussed in many of Bion's books. For our purposes, the former criterion remains valid in psychoanalysis;

a century of observations and developments have furnished this kind of proof and refutation of what psychoanalysis is not:

The peculiarity of a psychoanalytic session, that aspect of it which establishes that it is a psychoanalysis and could be nothing else, lies in the use by the analyst of all material to illuminate a K relationship ... the analyst is restricted to interpretations that are an expression of a K relationship with the patient. They must not be expressions of L or H. [Bion, 1963, pp. 69–70]

The reader may be reminded that K is a quasi-mathematical sign to represent “processes of knowledge” and L and H represent love and hate; in other words, psychoanalysis is a process of knowledge aided by the possible discipline of a “personal factor”. The acquaintance with the “personal factor”, manifested by loving or hating and thus issuing judgmental values, is made by the analyst’s analysis. This aspect will be covered in a subsequent volume. Today’s universal reproducibility of the psychoanalytical act is the basis of the present attempt to depict clinical experience—as it has been in the psychoanalytic movement since its inception.¹⁶ Horace’s counsel, *Experto crede* (which can be translated as “trust one who has repeatedly suffered the same experience”; i.e. an “expert”), seems to remain valid. The reader is considered by the writer to be an expert whose experience will (or will not) match the text. It is not widely recognised that many real discoveries were made by different people living in different places who never had prior information about each other’s activities. Popper’s “reproducibility” criterion finds its best empirical justification here: if different people in different conditions reach the same conclusion, then this conclusion probably belongs to the realm of truth.¹⁷

Bion’s extensions of psychoanalysis appeared in a succession which, in hindsight, resembles Freud’s own development after his extensive review and supplanting of the cause-effect trauma theory. For this reason this volume begins with Bion’s expanded theory of dreams, through the use of daytime or waking dreaming activity, embodied by his formulation of what can be regarded as one of the analyst’s most basic needs, namely, to dream the session.

Even though it is an aspect of Bion’s contributions which both sprang from and expanded Freud’s theory of dreams, his observational theory of transformations and invariants has not hitherto

been seen as such. Anyone acquainted with Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" will recognise the term "transformation" as a built-in feature of dream work; Freud used the very same word in German and Strachey's translation kept it. The underlying "meaning" of dreams as uncovered when a "latent content" is constructed, leading to underlying facts of the patient's personality, constitutes what Bion—using a term modelled on mathematical philosophy—called an invariant. Elsewhere¹⁸ I have suggested that it corresponds to what in the Platonic realm (recovered and revitalised by psychoanalysis) was seen as "Ideas" or "Platonic ideas": the numinous realm of the unconscious. The continuous use of this term has had the result of eroding its meaning in many senses, some of the commonest ways this has occurred being anthropomorphism, trivialisation, and finally extinguishing its communicational value through the attribution to it of conflicting meanings. If this erosion is true, a synonym may recover the original sense of the term: "not-known"; unknown in mathematics; *unbevußt* in German; "O" in Bion's notation. For this editorial-didactic reason, Part II of the present volume will deal with Transformations and Invariants.

A true elemental, basic raw material of psychoanalysis is Oedipus and infantile sexuality. These are a direct and obvious manifestation of what constitutes the closest approach humankind has been able to make to this numinous realm of the "not-known". I will attempt to deal with them under the heading of one of Bion's psychoanalytic (rather than observational) theories which, though exceedingly few in number, are at the same time highly charged with significance: container-contained.

After all—again and again, we are spiralling back to the obvious, but the obvious is the most difficult thing to see—the womb is where we come from. This is the most basic fact of life that results in life itself; it was never overlooked by a part of the psychoanalytic movement in a developmental tradition that began with Freud and continued with Klein, Winnicott and Bion.

Returning to accusations against Freud, one of the most enduring, and one which did not vary fundamentally over time, related to sexuality. An enormous number of third parties—from the so-called scientific milieu composed of positivist-minded people in the medical establishment and rivalry-prone colleagues like

Dr Carl Gustav Jung to the Roman Catholic establishment of that time and members of the Nazi party—supposed the presence of evil decayed intents. Indeed, Freud “pointed out that infants are sexual; this was denied and buried” (Bion, 1975, p. 9). No rational argument can deny that this continues to be the most basic fact of life. Perhaps this was the reason that Bion attributed to it the status of an element of psychoanalysis, in the sense of being elementary and basic.

Other practitioners shared this opinion, some of them highly acknowledged, like Green (1995). More than a quarter of a century later, despite the warnings of Bion and Green, among other warnings from less known but no less experienced authors, the situation does not seem to have changed significantly if one chooses the parameter of published papers and books in the analytic field. Transcendent truth is inimical to fashionable trends.

A final quotation may give a précis of this work and its introduction:

ALICE I thought you were a scientist.

ROSEMARY I thought scientists spoke the truth and believed in facts.

P.A. I wouldn't waste my capacity for belief on facts—I only believe when there is no fact available.

ROBIN You mean that when there is nothing factual you fall back on beliefs—like the Christian religion and such rubbish. No wonder psychoanalysis is such a tissue of lies.

P.A. No, I don't mean that. I mean I am careful to choose what I know and what I believe and, to the best of my capacity, not to mix them up. Because I do not take to be true what humans tell me are the facts, it does not mean that I fall back on “believing” a lot of twaddle as if I had to keep my mind full at all costs. Or the reverse—empty, like a kind of mental anorexia nervosa.

Roland I always thought anorexia nervosa was supposed to be mental.

P.A. Not by me. It is reputed to be a fact like all these masses of psychoanalytic theories which are not facts at all though their representations, like the pages in a book, are facts. They fill a space as paramnesias fill amnesia. [Bion, 1977, pp. 294–5]

I will allow myself to take one liberty, expressed in the desire that at least some readers can apprehend the achievements that came from Bion's contributions, which seemed to improve on, as well as simultaneously make clear the difficulties of the method. These in turn are indivisible from the personal difficulties of the practitioner (and indeed of this writer, full of foibles, lacking intuition, and prone to infinite errors like any human being). This occurs in the field of medicine, but reaches its climax in analysis, a field in which the method and the object of study are the same: mind and truth. If this apprehension can be achieved through reading and continuous matching with the reader's experience, something of those achievements and mounting difficulties would be shared, discussed and allowed to be put into the vertex of creative (often called philosophical) doubt: the germ of life referred to by Goethe, added to maturity.

Notes

1. *Hamlet*, II, ii. Notice that the Bard, as unpretentious as his character, used "a", meaning "one", rather than the all-encompassing, absolute truth which the definite article "the" (meaning anything, everything, all) would indicate.
2. Letter to John Kaspar Lavater (quoted in Goethe, 1811–1830; Eckerman, 1836; Wilkinson, 1969–93).
3. *Speculum* is the original Latin root of the term. For unknown reasons, historically it acquired another popular meaning: that of an irresponsible flight of fantasy. As usually happens with originally profound terms aiming at truth, like the expression "learn by heart" and others, they are fated to represent the opposite of their original meaning. I will discuss this issue in more detail in a subsequent volume.
4. The empirical backing here comes from the well-established measures (but rarely "oiled", due to the "rusty" tendencies of any establishment) provided by some psychoanalytic institutions. As an example, an unprejudiced and therefore broadly knowledgeable colleague, Dr Claudio Rossi, keen on institutional dealings, showed how he had benefited from a tri-dimension grid, stating that it improved his understanding of Bion's original grid (at a Scientific Meeting held by Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise de São Paulo, 1997).
5. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this issue constitutes a *Leitmotiv* of this writing.
6. This libertarian tendency also characterised Enlightenment psychiatry with Pinel. Afterwards psychiatry decayed, through losing

a great deal of its science-based principia, into social-police uses, of enforcing adaptation into social criteria. In the first three quarters of the twentieth century they were governed by official bodies; in the later part of it, increasingly by commercial needs and greed.

7. I will deal with epistemology and truth in a subsequent volume; see also Sandler, 1997–2003.
8. Especially in the Northern Hemisphere due to two hugely destructive social movements, Communism and Nazism, whose effects still linger.
9. This constitutes an obvious fact, but I think it is commonly unobserved. Freud denied any links between psychoanalysis and the surrealist movement of André Breton, for example. People see similarities between analysis and dodecaphonic music, the works of Sartre, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and others, but the rationale is rational, may be coincidental, and must be the other way round. They could hardly be part of a history of ideas; at most, they could perhaps compose a trans-disciplinary study.
10. After Heisenberg: where there are two sets of interconnected variables demanding measure, one cannot obtain precise values for both at the same time (originally, of a micro-particle: momentum and position). The two sets here could be a sense of certainty (first set) in having read the text (second set).
11. The difference between truth and truthfulness may be seen in Nietzsche and will discussed in a subsequent volume.
12. Associação Brasileira de Psicanálise; this was the first time the prize was awarded. Colleagues organising the Congress decided in that year not to set rules but to award prizes after perusing submissions on freely chosen topics.
13. As Churchill said, democracy is a flawed discovery, but no one has created one better—yet. The same observation can be applied to other discoveries, such as money (which, as Horace observed, had to be earned; if possible, honestly), the wheel, medicine, and clinical descriptions in psychoanalysis; also psychoanalysis itself. My awareness of this problem of making an attempt at clinical depictions in verbal and written terms had a boost from my first contacts through supervision with two benevolent supervisors who remained outside the realm of judgmental values: Dr James Grotstein (1981) and Dr Antonio Sapienza (from 1982 to date); and Dr Irma Pick (1980). Some papers followed, such as “Writing up a Case”, presented locally in small groups. Differently minded supervisors, who also helped in this very same experience, in furnishing what will be expanded in a discussion of the Minus Realm

in a subsequent volume, were Mr Frank Julian Philips, Mrs Betty Joseph; half-way, Mrs Virginia Bicudo and Mrs Lygia Amaral.

14. In the 1950s, a well-known analyst, Mr Roger Money-Kyrle, PhD, was admitted as an associate member of a psychoanalytical institution with the express condition that he was not allowed to analyse other persons. In due time this condition was revoked (Money-Kyrle, 1970).
15. Which presumes that the superego is externally determined and the categorical imperative (Kant) does not exist.
16. The underlying *Leitmotiv* of Popper's falsifiability criterion is a denial of truth (which will be described in more detail in a subsequent volume). From some years ago to the present, at least since Dr Robert Wallenstein's administration, the psychoanalytic community's oldest and most prestigious establishment, the International Psychoanalytical Association, has stressed an emphasis on clinical demonstrations.
17. I myself had a peculiar experience which proves this point. In an activity known as public clinical supervision, a supervisor, for some particular reasons, was at first unable to pay attention to data given by the supervisee. Troubling events contributed to the group climate engendered by the supervisor, which was a complex mixture comprising a basic assumption of an attempt to create a messianic leader, a lack of attention, and a pugnacious posture which included libellous attacks on a well-known author (Bion) for what was imagined to be his disapproval of the work done by the supervisor. Bion was long dead; he was not there to confirm or deny the imagined disapproval attributed to him, nor could he defend himself against sarcastic criticism made at the same time by the same supervisor, who thought that Bion was "gaga" when he wrote the works which followed *Second Thoughts*. The supervisee did not take the provocative actions as such. Following comments by the audience both for and against, the supervisor decided to read the case. His conclusions and the supervisee's conclusions were the same, even though the ways they reached them were different.
18. *A Apreensão da Realidade Psíquica*, 1997, vol. I.

PART I

REAL LIFE IS THE STUFF
DREAMS ARE MADE OF