

“

The Language of Bion

A DICTIONARY OF CONCEPTS



P.C. SANDLER

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THE LANGUAGE OF BION



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A Dictionary of Concepts

P. C. Sandler

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*To Ester, Daniela and Luiz, and to the memory
of my father, Dr Jayme Sandler*



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Francesca Bion, whose fortitude, patience with my limitations, devotion, and caring humanity have constituted a peerless source of inspiration to me during the last twenty-three years. Having benefited from such a generosity and availability since 1981, when I translated *A Memoir of the Future* into Portuguese, this acknowledgement could be seen as trivial. However, its inclusion is much more due to the fact that it is easier to plant a tree, to initiate a business, a marriage, a career, than it is to keep it alive, fit, running, striving and maturing. The help she provided in writing of this dictionary far surpassed that of a gesture. She was able to point out seemingly minor, but serious flaws in my quotations, making the text more readable. This effort and generosity cannot be overestimated, taking into account the hours she spent doing this hard, painstaking work. She granted me the same seriousness and attention to detail that are some of her hallmarks in everything she does. She is the most knowledgeable person I know in the work of her deceased husband, on a level that I have seen in only very few distinguished scholars and scientists.

I would also like to acknowledge a few other people. Mr Oliver Rathbone gave life to this book. Without him, it would not even

have the current title, which was his idea, after having discovered its underlying invariance, until then unknown to me: the inspiration in Laplanche and Pontalis's seminal dictionary. I am indebted to his dedicated, serious and patient Publishing Manager, Leena Häkkinen, and her staff.

My daughter Daniela, a knowledgeable scholar in arts and a number of languages, gave her time to proof-read the manuscript, which produced hundreds of corrections. My much loved father, who so prematurely met his fate, was a seasoned analyst keen in the English language. He translated some of Bion's first clinical seminars in Brazil, on the spot; he made me aware of Bion's existence, and also his seminal importance to psychoanalysis. Drs João Carlos Braga, Antonio Sapienza, Jaques Goldstajn, Francisco Claudio Montenegro Castelo, Almerinda Castelo Albuquerque, and Odilon de Mello Franco Filho made stimulating reading of some entries. I am deeply obliged to my son Luiz, due to his unfailing support; and to my wife Ester, without whom I am nothing.

FOREWORD

The reader is invited to be escorted in the path that Paulo Cesar Sandler fleshes out in this book. In my view, the author embodies seriousness, subtlety and critical independence in his judgements about Wilfred Bion's instigations and complex contributions. Dr Sandler manages to illuminate the huge labyrinth that characterizes Bion's work and he offers us a whole listing of comprehensive entries in the form of a dictionary.

The dictionary is based on a critical reading that builds up into a genetic-historic study about Bion's ideas. In these entries, the reader can find Bion's affinities and roots in his psychoanalytic ancestors, Freud and Klein. Moreover, the author displays the close relations that these three authors maintain with each other. He also copes with the task of displaying with clarity the differentiations and particularities that characterize Bion's contributions to contemporary psychoanalysis. He does this as a faithful scientist and with devotion to the psychoanalytic method.

I will specifically comment on a single entry in this Foreword: "Dream work alpha". It can serve as a model and an example that illustrates the author's gracefulness in making an exhaustive concept clearer to the reader's mind while incorporating it into Freud's

observations. This entry is filtered through bearings in Philosophy and Philosophy of Mathematics and its validation stems from clinical facts. One is invited to read this entry as a valuable sample of the dictionary. In this entry, Dr Sandler presents the reader with excerpts from Bion's texts written from 1959 to 1960, published in *Cogitations* (1992). He outlines a progressive axis that allows one to follow the growing distinction between dream work alpha and the theory of alpha function. The reader is then able to follow the genesis of Bion's proposals on alpha and beta elements, which in their turn will support the psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the personality.

Reading this entry is a rewarding experience. The author invites the reader to accompany him, step by step, in incursions into heuristic irradiations. He deepens our understanding of the Freudian proposal concerning the issue of "dreaming the session". Furthermore, he allows for the difference between the ideogrammatic and symbolic activities proper. The latter is founded in experiencing the depressive position.

During this scrutiny, Dr Sandler ponders the dimensions of space and linking relationships that spring from both the sensuous apprehensible and the psychic reality world. Let us consider an individual, a single person. Some of this individual's modes to feel and know the Universe are indicated—for the author furnishes those unique modes, which compose this individual's paths as well as his plans. One may grasp the psychotic and non-psychotic modes of functioning; they keep close relationship with this individual's store of alpha-elements, as well as the same individual's proficiency in storing them. Alpha-elements are bulwarks, which warrant the fitness of that which separates Unconscious from Conscious. The fitness of this system is understood here as its maintenance, vitality, and lilt.

As he finishes this entry, Dr Sandler emphasizes the "naïve idealist's" functioning, a definition he proposes as matching to Kant's "naïve realist". This is a personality stereotype, crammed with beta-elements. It survives based on his capacity to develop an intense mental activity, the hallmark of which is a prevailing use of projective identification. One may draw an analogy of this kind of personality with an "extruder" of "raw and primitive" thoughts—looking for someone to digest, refine, and think them through.

The reader who consults the entries in this dictionary will find it a work of beautiful, thorough, and professional craftsmanship. To quote just one more example, the entry “Real Psycho-Analysis” hurls the reader into Bion’s creative footpaths, which he opened up in his generous Trilogy *A Memoir of the Future* (1975, 1977, 1979). Some interesting questions are raised in this valuable fragment of this text: is there any relationship between real life and psychoanalysis? If one exists, what are the positive aspects of this? What are the limitations of psychoanalysis in the face of emotional turbulence? What is the value of myths and models in the analytic situation? *What is the relationship between feelings of suffering and their use as the basis of experimentation?* Are there any dangers involved in a real analysis? What are they? Dr Sandler fulfills the reader’s curiosity and invites him to expand on his ideas.

This is a worthwhile book to consult, and a good companion to a sophisticated psychoanalytic research. A fertile sowing and a safe crop of personal enrichment will reward the reader of this volume.

Antonio Sapienza



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Introduction

“There is a scarcity of time; a scarcity of knowledge; scarcity of availability. Therefore choice becomes of fundamental importance—choice of time, theories, and facts observed”

(Bion, 1975)

“P.A. A danger lies in the belief that psycho-analysis is a novel approach to a newly discovered danger. If psychoanalysts had an overall view of the history of the human spirit, they would appreciate the length of that history of murder, failure, envy and deceit”

(Bion, *A Memoir of the Future*, 1979, p. 571)

O TEMPORA, O MORES

... technical term gets worn away and turns into a kind of worn out coin which has lost its value. We should keep these things in good working conditions. [Bion's Brazilian Lectures II, p. 87]

ALICE From what I have heard, the complacency and ignorance of psycho-analysts makes it difficult for them to take any adequate steps to perfect either themselves or psycho-analysis. [*A Memoir of the Future*, vol. III, p. 571]

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; **in its innermost nature it is as most unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs** [Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900, p.613; Freud's bold]

This book is the result of a conjunction of many factors, chiefly, the constant requests from colleagues, especially Dr Carlos Alberto Gioielli, whom I cannot thank enough. I should also mention candidates of the local institute of psycho-analysis (Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanalise de São Paulo) and students of the post-graduate training course on psycho-analytic therapy of the University of São Paulo. Another factor in the writing of this book can be understood with the aid of the following formulation by Bion:

PRIEST . . . From what I see of psycho-analysts they do not know what religion is; they simply transfer their allegiance from one undisciplined, desire-ridden system of emotions and ideas to another. I have heard psycho-analysts discussing; their discussion itself betrays all the characteristics which I have recognized as pathognomic of religion of a primitive, undisciplined, intellectually unstructured kind. They argue heatedly, adducing national, racial, aesthetic and other emotionally coloured motivations in support of their particular brand of activity.

P.A. I would not deny that we do all these things, but we do in fact continue to question ourselves and our motives in a disciplined manner. We may not succeed; neither do we give up the attempt.

PRIEST I hate to appear to sit in judgement but I have to judge, to appraise such evidence as I have as it touches my private life and my responsibility for my own thoughts and actions. You have as many sects of psycho-analysts as there are in any religion I know. You have as many psycho-analytic "saints" with their individual following of devotees. [1979, 544-5]

The phrase, "*individual following*" brings to light some points to consider. It may reflect—and perhaps in the vast majority of cases

it does reflect—idealistic tendencies. Since the eighties it has presented itself as a trend—perhaps more trendy than anything else. It has been named, “readings”. Its adepts have jumped on the textualist and post-modernist bandwagons. The basis of the idealism is a religious state of mind, illuminated by Freud: one projects one’s omnipotence and omniscience on to a chosen god.

It is doubtful that this attitude has been fully accepted by theologians—an issue raised from time immemorial by the so-called mystic tradition. There is a difference between the attitude of reverence and awe (Bion’s terms, used in 1967; *Cogitations*, p. 285) and imitation or projected omnipotence. Bion used this differentiation from 1965. In nominally non-religious organizations the same issue presents itself in a special guise: one reads the work written by an author and replaces the author’s meanings with one’s own. The religious aspect is marked by the reader’s blind fanaticism whose allegiance is to his own idiosyncratic ideas assumed to be reflecting a given author’s discoveries. An added complication is when this kind of allegiance is mixed up with writings of authors who also are prey to this tendency. The tendency itself is at least as old as philosophy; at various times through the centuries it has been known as subjectivism, idealism and solipsism. Freud referred to it in his paper, “The question of a *weltanschauung*” (SE, XXIII).

One does not try to assess whether a given concept (and in some cases, a given event) that has been formulated and written in a text has any counterparts in reality. Therefore another factor that contributed to the decision to write this dictionary is the author’s observation of the prevalence of an unobserved “idealistic” tendency in the psycho-analytic milieu. By idealism I mean an old omnipotent fallacy: it dictates that the universe and reality itself are products of the human mind. This view proves to be enticing and popular. It is typical of very small children and psychotics stuck in paranoid states. Once installed it seeps faster than water through a rotten wall or through the fingers of a hand trying to hold it.

Bion was fond of John Ruskin and especially of one of his works, *Sesame and Lilies*. He quotes this book in *A Memoir of the Future*. Ruskin cites examples of the damage done when the reader refuses to seek the author’s original sense and tries to displace it with his or her own. What is lost to sight is that the personal ways of formulating a reading—an indispensable act—are mistaken by the act of

distorting what the author wrote. “Invariance under literacy”, as Bion warns in *Transformations*, page 3, cannot guarantee that one will be able to find the author’s sense. But it may help if the educated reader attempts to leave aside his prejudices—even if only momentarily.

Apprehension of reality and communication

As psycho-analysts, we are entitled to diminish the interference and bias due to “personal equation” as Freud called it. Not only entitled, but rather obliged, out of an ethical sense of duty, thanks to personal analysis. The uses that Bion makes of the word “imagination” and its counterparts in reality, as well as its function in psycho-analysis, seem to the author to be widely misunderstood. It often serves to leave aside the respect for a given author’s meanings.

The author tries his hand at delivering a re-arrangement of Bion’s work, in a form that may be more appropriate to our hurried epoch. From old-time *Tractatusto* easy-to-find dictionaries: a tale for our times?

I am convinced of the strength of the scientific position of psycho-analytic practice (*Learning from Experience*, p. 77).

There is no possibility of scientific communication without a precise system of notation. This includes—as a matter of necessity—the clearest definitions of concepts, theories and models, as far as possible.

As an example of an attempt at precise formulation I take alpha-function and two factors, excessive projective identification and excess of bad objects. Suppose that in the course of the analysis these two factors are obtrusive to the exclusion of other factors the analyst has observed. If psycho-analytic theory were rationally organized it should be possible to refer to both these factors by symbols which were part of a system of reference that was applied uniformly and universally. The Kleinian theory of projective identification would be referred to by initials and a page and paragraph reference. Similarly, Freud’s view of attention would be replaced by

a reference. This can be done, though clumsily, by reference to page and line of a standard edition even now. Such a statement could lend itself to mere manipulation, more or less ingenious, of symbols according to apparently arbitrary rules. Provided that the analyst preserves a sense of the factual background to which such a formulation refers, there are advantages in the exercise in precision and rigour of thought that is exacted by an attempt to concentrate actual clinical experience so that it may be expressed in such abstract notation. [LE, 38–9]

General principles of the content of this dictionary

The general principles of this re-organization in dictionary form are:

- (i) Faithfulness to the original text.
- (ii) Generalizations.
- (iii) Historicity.

(i) Faithfulness to the original text: the definitions included in this dictionary are compiled from Bion's writings. Most of the work is to reunite many ideas scattered in space and time throughout Bion's work. The hostile reader will not err if he is tempted to dismiss this attempt as just a compilation that re-organizes Bion's written work. The sympathetic reader may profit from the attempt—which includes comments about the quotations.

(ii) Generalizations: generalizations that encompass particularities are intrinsic to the scientific ethos. They may express themselves through classificatory systems first devised by Linnaeus and followed by classical and perennial formulations, from Goethe in Botany and the periodical table of elements in Chemistry. These classificatory systems are scientific groupings that try to detect either underlying or overt binding, threading lines. Classification performs the double function of communication and aids the scientist to orient his research; often they illuminated the path to discoveries. In this dictionary, the thread allows the many quotations to cohere into a whole. Each whole forms an Entry.

(iii) Historicity: the entries are developed historically as they appeared in Bion's work. This author observed that Bion's concepts

were developed in a way that may be compared to the craft of jewellery. Painstaking, increasingly finer polishing continuously improved them, resulting in transparent luminescence. This gave the impression to many critical onlookers that Bion kept repeating the same old stuff. He agrees with them and even mentioned this aspect in his introduction to *Seven Servants* (a re-print of his four basic books, *Learning from Experience*, *Elements of Psycho-analysis*, *Transformations* and *Attention and Interpretation*), using the comment in his characteristic way with humour. He uses it to learn: the comments brought home to him how little he thinks he knows, and how much he felt he owed to Freud, Rickman and Klein (the two latter being his former analysts).

Sometimes this criticism had hostile overtones. In the opinion of this writer, these readers or audiences perhaps miss the point about the continuous deepening of the concepts. "More of the same" is an expression that could well be applied to oxygen, water and nourishment. One may wonder how fundamental they are and how useful it is if they appear in purified and improved forms.

These principles resulted in entries that (I hope) form a "developing whole"—each entry tries to depict this.

Obscure and difficult?

Freud opened many broad avenues to research. Few analysts ventured to push this research beyond the limits established by the end of Freud's physical life. Bion tackles the task of trying to do this in at least four aspects of Freud's theories: dreams, two principles of mental functioning, Oedipus and the nature of free associations.

This author's comments are meant to clarify some issues. They are built by intertwining Bion's wording (in italics, using semi-colons and with the exact page where they may be found) with this author's wording. This is an attempt to address a fact derived from this author's experience with colleagues around the world for 24 years, namely, that many feel Bion's written work to be "obscure and difficult".

Is "Sordello" incomprehensible on purpose to make it difficult, or is it Browning's attempt to express what he had to say in the shortest and most comprehensible terms? [AMF, I, 121]

The following comments must be read as an assessment. They are not intended to criticize negatively the difficulties of anyone's reading. This would be a peerless arrogant act indistinguishable from disrespect and inhumanity. The fact must be mentioned because it is behind another driving factor for undertaking the task of writing the dictionary. It seems to this writer that some of the factors involved in this attributed obscurity fall into the following categories:

- (i) Lack of attentive reading, something that has occurred since Freud and was duly emphasized by him (for example, in the latest introductions to *The Interpretation of Dreams*).
- (ii) Lack of analytical experience, here defined as the analyst's personal analysis and experience seeing patients.
- (iii) Lack of experience in life itself, which sometimes help the development of concern for life and truth.
- (iv) A constant conjunction of (i), (ii) and (iii).

These difficulties are not new in the history of the psycho-analytic movement. Perhaps they are more usual than not. They are manifested often through feelings of abhorrence when reading valuable, real psycho-analytical written works. This kind of writing touches the reader's innermost aspects in unexpected and unknown ways. Sometimes the reader is led to seek analysis; sometimes he (she) is led to hate analysis right from the start. This fact was well documented by Freud, whose works were regarded as pornographic, Jewish, anti-Jewish, atheistic, progressive, reactionary, Victorian, pan-sexualist, anti-feminist, *romans-à-clef*. As occurs in many specialized fields, especially those that depend on experience, to use Bion's wording again, "*invariances under literacy*" (*Transformations*, p. 3) are necessary but they are not sufficient to allow a real apprehension of attempts at communication. Even in much older disciplines such as music, there are from time to time polemical voices about textualist reading of the score versus a kind of "interpretationist" trend. The problem is: it has to be both. A mathematical system of notation is not easily attainable and perhaps is impossible outside the realm of mathematics.

Lest the reader feel that this assessment from the author is authoritarian, the scientific outlook may help here. There follow some hard-core facts that may illustrate the issue.

Two years ago, a pervasive sense of bewilderment emerged among the twenty-five participants of a seminar. The majority of colleagues who made up the group had been reading the works of Bion for more than ten years; some for thirty years. The seminar was conducted by a colleague who enjoyed a reputation for being a kind of authority on Bion's works. This enshrining was both self- and hetero-attributed. His willingness to assume the role meant that the emotional climate of the group displayed unequivocal signs of the prevalence of one of the basic assumptions of a group (in the classification proposed by Bion in *Experiences in Groups*)—that of the messianic leader. All members of the group had the task of reading the first chapter of *Transformations* prior to the encounter. There was an expositor chosen by this leader of the group.

At the first meeting, the chosen expositor failed to show up on time. After a heavy silence, a member of the group volunteered to contribute and began a summary of the chapter. After a few minutes of exposition some in the group displayed signs of disagreement when the expositor said that the concept of invariants was a built-in, inescapable concept of the theory of transformations. He was put into quarantine. Some displayed incredulity and reacted as if it was non-sense. One said that there was no such thing there; he invoked the words of a local "authority" who had once stated, "Everything in the world was transformations". The discussion heated up and the expositor invited everyone to read the first page of *Transformations*. The "leader" disagreed more strongly than others with the expositor and echoed the view of the majority of members. There was an initial refusal to read the text on the spot.

The expositor, responding to the mounting pressure in none too serene a way, pointed out that the first paragraph of Bion's text already depicted the concept of invariants. The vast majority of the participants, with the possible exception of two, grumbled and then agreed to *read* the text. Some read it. The result was an unwitting confirmation of the "Emperor's new clothes" fable. Some said that Bion did not know what he was writing; some said that the point had no importance whatsoever. They continued with their prejudiced reading.

In light of the experience of this writer, there are two observations to be made: (i) this particular kind of reading of *Transformations* proves to be popular. It adapts Bion's text to the

acknowledgedly flawed dictum of Lavoisier; it seems enticing to some readers who are prone to over-simplification; (ii) the basic pattern of this experience repeated itself many times in different contexts for more than twenty years, even though many of them were devoid of the hostile personal tone. Some more sympathetic audiences in post-graduate courses at the University and among candidates of the local institute of psycho-analysis where this author has been teaching for the last fifteen years profited from the experience of observation of the prevalent forms of misunderstanding and mis-reading: denials, splits and transformations into the contrary of what was written. The bewilderment proved to be useful to them: how many times does one do this with patients?

Therefore the statements this author makes in the entries and the definitions of the terms are always backed by Bion's writings, from which the definitions derive. The entries have the privilege of hindsight; that is, they try to follow the evolution of the concepts throughout Bion's entire work.

When Bion wrote *Learning from Experience* he felt the need to state that "*The methods in this book are not definitive. Even when I have been aware that they are inadequate I have often not been able to better them. I have found myself in a similar position to the scientist who continues to employ a theory that he knows to be faulty because a better one has not been discovered to replace it*" (LE, last page of the Introduction, item 9). This definitely puts his attempts into the realm of science. He would repeat this often, even in the sub-title of one of his books, *Attention and Interpretation*.

Therefore, an effort towards a kind of standardization and precision in expressing Bion's concepts is not undue. This author can find no way other than to use Bion's own terms. In adding an Index to *Attention and Interpretation* he states, "*like the rest of the book, (the Index) is the outcome of an attempt at precision. The failure of the attempt will be clear; what may not be clear is the following dilemma: 'precision' is too often a distortion of the reality, 'imprecision' too often indistinguishable from confusion*" (AI, 131).

The extensive inclusion of Bion's texts is an attempt further to enable the reader to reach his or her own conclusions. It is to be hoped that they will serve as an enticing invitation, "Please now go and taste the original in its wholeness". All quotations are accompanied by the exact work and page of Bion's writings. The book is designed

to provide a quick guide, provided that the potential reader does not confuse an attempt at speed with superficiality. The entries are meant to spare the reader the work of having to track down the scattered references and their development in Bion's work.

To paraphrase Bion, in his Introduction to *Learning from Experience*: this dictionary is **not** designed to be read straight through once. Each paragraph, each entry (in many cases divided into subtitles) is designed to function as a checking point and to be checked, in the hope that it will dispel the idea that Bion was obscure. Even a single entry is not designed to be read straight through, unless the reader prefers to do this. The entries and comments are designed to be the object of minute thought. The canonical or idolatrous reader will feel, not without reason, that this dictionary's mode of presentation may run against Bion's mode of presentation. The author thinks that there is no use dealing with Bion's works as if there is a "Saint Bion" to be followed and imitated. Imitation is the offspring of fear and rivalry. The helpless little child has no other means of survival; but if it is maintained in adulthood, its outcome is destructive and it shares with hallucination the quality of "unreal-ness". The analytical movement has had enough of imitators, repeaters, mimicry and aping. Bion's stature has always enticed this kind of follower, a fact he lamented and that has been emphasized by acknowledged authors such as Ignacio Matte-Blanco, James Grotstein and André Green. In connection with this, this author thinks that no student of Bion's work—or the work of any great author—qualifies as a self-appointed minister of his scriptures.

The experience of obscurity and difficulty in reading Bion's writings is not something that the present writer is able to share with many readers. At first it was the cause of considerable anxiety, something that happens when the individual finds himself out of tune with the herd. (A fact emphasized by Bion in *A Memoir of the Future*, Book III. Please refer to the entry in this dictionary, "Establishment".) This did not diminish this author's sympathy towards the difficulties observed in others. Quite the contrary, it is just another factor that motivated the present attempt. In trying to examine the origin of the sense of clarity that Bion's writings always had on this author, some hypotheses surfaced, all of them linked to practice:

- (i) Eleven years of continuous psychiatric practice in a traditional mental hospital dealing with so-called psychotics on a daily basis. The experience included “intensive psychotherapy” using Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and John Rosen’s methods; also, work in the psychiatric emergency care service, 24 or 48 hour shifts. There was a sense of personal guilt when reading Bion’s *Second Thoughts* for the first time, regret for not having had them at hand when first dealing with the patients in the hospital.
- (ii) Nine years in a community mental health centre.
- (iii) Last, but first in importance, fifteen years of analysis deeply influenced by the contributions of Freud, Klein and Bion.

After at least ten years of trying to convey the clarity and usefulness of his works in talks with colleagues; after having written an Introductory book to *A Memoir of the Future* together with the translation of the Trilogy into the Portuguese language, this writer realized that perhaps it would be wiser to keep private the sense of clarity that pervaded his own reading. Too many older and experienced people felt the books to be obscure; Bion himself felt the need to warn the reader about this. For sure, this was because of reactions he witnessed against his writings.

Very early on this author became aware that some of those reactions were rabid. That is, there are at least two kinds of people who feel Bion’s writings to be obscure: some are sincerely interested but give up reading, and some are hostile. Making part of the hostile critics who felt Bion’s work obscure, one person who was trying to be politically influential in the psycho-analytic establishment once wrote that the book *Transformations* is “fascinating” and “contradictory”. This person, paradigmatically, did not bother to illustrate this easy use of rhetoric with hard facts. That is, this person did not display evidence of any single part that could be seen as fascinating or contradictory. Also, no one of these critics asks if reality is simple, clear and easy—the same, for psycho-analysis, dreams, life itself. Or, as if all of these are given to us as a gift, easily. If Bion’s—or Freud’s—work has anything to do with reality as it is, from what kind of stuff were those works made? Is Bion’s work more difficult than any worthwhile work? Many times the obvious and the simple is the most difficult.

Anyone who nourishes interest, love of truth, analytical experience (personal analysis and seeing patients in real analysis) and a faultless attention to the minute detail of his writings can apprehend Bion's work. This personal opinion may be mistaken, but no one could level against this writer the accusation that this statement is not born of experience.

The compilation was made *after* approximately twenty years of continuous study of his works. This study comprises:

- (i) Attending clinical and theoretical seminars at the local Institute when I was a candidate, with senior colleagues who had personal contact with Bion; one of them, who also supervised some cases, had an analysis with Bion.
- (ii) Conducting seminars since this author was accepted as a professor of the local institute of psycho-analysis (1987); teaching a regular post-graduate course about the work of Bion, since 1998—perhaps the first such course to have been delivered in the academic milieu, world-wide.
- (iii) Writing approximately twenty published papers about Bion's work, since 1983—two of them were awarded prizes at Brazilian Congresses of Psycho-analysis; three of them try to expand his theories of mental functions, basic assumptions in a group, and links. Also, the Brazilian version of the majority of Bion's books (including the first foreign-language version of *A Memoir of the Future*).

The entries, despite the fact that they respect historicity and underlying threads, were built mainly by using the author's free-associations at the moment of writing, coupled with annotations made throughout the years. The phenomenon is akin to that which happens when the analyst exercises his free floating attention with a patient. He or she is able to recall in a dream-like state the memoirs of his experiences with that patient, of sessions with him; he or she is able to have the tools, on the spur of the moment, of myths, forgotten personal experiences and so on. They flow spontaneously to his or her mind. Any writer has this method at his disposal. This means that the compilation is not the result of the currently adopted approach, namely, that of resorting to computerized methods of "reading". The computer was used here just as a word processor.

General principles of this dictionary

(A) Formal principles

How to resist the temptation to reproduce exhaustively all the parts that deal with the topics chosen? Some headings were expanded in this way, namely, those that were considered to embrace polemic topics, in the sense that they are subject to gross misunderstandings. The reader will also find some quotations being used in more than one entry.

This method of repetition is linked to a teaching experience which shows that it functions better in texts whose intention is to serve as a primer to the neophyte. Eugene Delacroix believed that in many instances what the so-called geniuses did, or do, is to present (old) buried truths in a formulation that must make sense to their contemporaries; Bacon also said something similar; Freud and Bion perhaps did this.

Therefore one faces a question of language; this is the sense of the word “neophyte”—of a new language. New languages are learned, even though not exclusively, by repetition and sedimentation. Bion dwells on this in the way an infant learns to turn the word “Daddy” into the unconscious, in *Learning from Experience*. Bion himself, as Franz Schubert before him, was often accused of repeating the themes either in the same piece or in different variations. He reached the point of registering this in the introduction to *Seven Servants* already mentioned above.

To the reader who cannot grasp the sense the first time, the “repetition method” can serve well. To the readers who are acquainted with Bion’s work it may give the impression of an old friend revisited.

(B) Concepts

As far as possible in psychiatry, in psycho-analysis, and consequently in Bion’s contribution, no effort was spared to elicit the inner quality (or nature) that some of the entries seem to possess, namely, the quality of a concept. Bion was very cautious not to attribute the status of scientific concepts to his contributions hastily. In this text, we start from the principle that when a verbal

formulation can depict its counterpart in reality, it qualifies to be treated as a concept. To some readers, the verbal formulation does not convey just this counterpart; it also brings with it, immaterially, the very reality it tries to depict. Obviously it will depend on the reader's experience to intuit that which the words strive to convey (but are doomed to fail). For this reason alone "*invariances under literacy*" are not enough. Freud and Bion stated that psycho-analytic works should be read by psycho-analysts, which presumes the analyst's analysis to be as extensive and profound as possible. In this sense, many concepts of Bion's work, as happens with all successful and valid psycho-analytical concepts, originate from his experiences of life: the bestial, murderous and violent behaviour of so-called human beings and their accompanying sublime and lovely counterparts. He suffered from them in two wars, as a soldier; his physical loss of his first wife; his second chance of a real analysis with two gifted and sincere analysts and above all, a dedicated wife. As did Freud with Oedipus and Klein with *Envy and Gratitude*, Bion made the best of a bad job: suffering turned into contributions to psycho-analysis.

The numinous realm and the ethos of psycho-analysis

This dictionary is **not** intended to be a "reading" in the post-structuralist and post-modernist sense. Phrases such as "according to Bion", "according to Freud" raise some problems. Is there any possibility in science other than to be "according to reality"? Even though reality or truth is not something one can understand, know, preview, master, own or see, one may intuit it. One may nourish faith that it exists. One may use it and apprehend it—albeit momentarily in fleeting glimpses. One may be "at-one" with it, using Bion's verbal formulation. He states—not devoid of humour—in *Transformations* that reality is not something that can be known in the same sense that one cannot sing potatoes. One may plant potatoes, peel them, cook them, eat them. Nevertheless, their ultimate reality, the immaterial invariance that makes a potato a potato and nothing else—"potatoeness"—cannot be known. It can be intuited, it exists, but what is left to us human beings is to use it, to take advantage or disadvantage of its manifestations.

Freud, Bion, Klein, Winnicott, Einstein, Shakespeare, Bach or whoever it be, was or shall be, were able to formulate verbally, mathematically, or musically, *that* which has a counterpart in reality. We can no more than suddenly, eternal as long as it lasts, have a transient, fleeting glimpse of "it" in an intuitive way. The great authors in science and art made formulations that fleetingly apprehended some emanations of reality. In this resides also the possibility of a "real analysis", a term coined by Bion. In the analytic setting the "great author" is the analytic couple.

The task of this present writer was greatly facilitated by the extreme precision with which, in the vast majority of cases, Bion formulates his concepts. This is accompanied by a remarkable consistency in the way they are used throughout his entire work. Among one hundred entries that depict concepts, this author spotted just two cases of lack of precision. Therefore it is hoped that the phrases "extreme precision" and "remarkable consistency" will not appear laudatory, but a fair depiction of the real situation. The same applies to the quotation of origins of his statements and terms. A "vast majority" includes the very few exceptions. It seems that some of them were due to faulty literary revision. As a writer and translator myself, I must say that that experience shows that despite all efforts of reviewers and the pain involved in such a strenuous task, many publishing houses turn it into a frustrating task. In the end, when a batch of brand-new shiny covers reach the bookshelves of bookstores, some errors that the author or the translator or the reviewer corrected are still there. Sometimes, a fresh crop of errors displays its unwelcome face. The concepts are coherently used in the same way throughout the books; in just four instances they are put differently.

The four inconsistencies are linked to the definition of the term, "conception"; to the definition of alpha-function; to the definition of the process of transformations, and one odd attribution to alpha-function. Where his possible intellectual forebears are concerned, Bion leaves aside the precise quotation of their names at just three points of his work (among hundreds).

The dictionary includes misuses and misconceptions of his terms. A word must be added about the origins of at least two of them. Perhaps no other work in psycho-analysis, with the possible exception of those of Freud, Klein and Winnicott, was, and

continues to be, subjected to attacks from contemporaries, as does that of Bion. These attacks show idolization and misunderstanding; more often than not, a conjunction of both. Rabid criticism also means idolization, even if it is hidden from sight. They provoke precocious dismissal. Even though he is in good company, this state of affairs does not help analysts or patients.

The sources of the misconceptions are depicted in the specific entries. Broadly speaking, they originate from two main problems: (i) Bion's use of borrowed terms; (ii) the reader's analytic experience.

(i) Bion points out that *he borrows some terms from other disciplines*. He preferred not to resort too much to neologisms and, even less, to indulge in jargon. He makes this preference clear in *A Memoir of the Future*, for example, Book II, pages 228, 231, 234. He intentionally does this to profit from the penumbra of associations of some already-existing terms. He usually emphasizes when a specific term is already endowed with some known and widely-accepted meaning and connotation. He wants the reader to be reminded of them. For example, "transformations and invariances", "hallucinosis". Sometimes he uses the term giving specific warnings that the reader must see that the term is used differently in his work. For example, the non-hyphenated term "preconception". And sometimes he creates new terms just to avoid any associations with existing ones, such as "O", " α " and " β ". Finally, sometimes he stresses some meanings that the term allows and sticks only with them, such as "hyperbole". Unfortunately, it seems that many do not pay attention to those warnings and explanations of the use of the term in his work and this leads to confusion. Again he is in good company: in the preface of the 10th edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud commented that people were not really reading it. The disciplines that furnished terms and conceptions for Bion are science, mathematics, physics, art and the mystic tradition (mainly the Jewish-Christian Cabbala). The use of those borrowed terms with the specific purpose of facilitating communication seems to have been debased. Some readers cannot see that the use of terms does not mean that Bion used or transplanted models from other sciences. As late as 1975 he warned: "*Relativity is relationship, transference, the psycho-analytic term and its corresponding approximate realization. Mathematics, science as known hitherto, can provide no model.*"

Religion, music, painting, as these terms are understood, fail me. Sooner or later we reach a point where there is nothing to be done except—if there is any exception—to wait (AMF, I, 61).

(ii) In 1970 he was still trying to make it clear that he hoped that practising psycho-analysts would realize that to read *about* psycho-analysis differs from *practising* it. He “could only represent” the practice “by words and verbal formulations designed for a different task” (AI, Introduction). This means that Bion counted on the personal analysis of the reader, and his or her analytical experience. The lack of analytic practice makes the reader blind to the value of Bion’s heavy use of analogy. “*The psycho-analytical approach, though valuable in having extended the conscious by the unconscious, has been vitiated by the failure to understand the practical application of doubt by the failure to understand the function of ‘breast’, ‘mouth’, ‘penis’, ‘vagina’, ‘container’, ‘contained’, as analogies. Even if I write it, the sensuous dominance of penis, vagina, mouth, anus, obscures the element signified by analogy.* (AMF, I, 70–71).

Those who cannot go beyond sensuously-apprehensible appearances, cannot grasp the fact that mystic tradition, as well as mathematics, art and philosophy, were *earlier modes that expressed human attempts to approach human nature and the mind’s functioning*. They tried to serve mankind before the obtrusion of science and psycho-analytic science. The present author cannot dwell on this now, having tried to display the issue in a whole series of books and some papers. It concerns the negative realm of the noumena.

This aspect is one of Bion’s contributions to human knowledge. He followed Freud’s hint; *Transformations, Attention and Interpretation*, and *A Memoir of the Future* represent the climax of his attempts. Bion used to say that people such as Shakespeare were great analysts before there appeared a Freud to think the thought without a thinker, “psycho-analysis”. In *Transformations*, he plainly states that Plato was a patron of Melanie Klein’s internal object (p. 138). But a failure to grasp the real, albeit immaterial and non-sensuously apprehensible stuff of the unconscious, whose negative nature shares the features of the noumena, seems to persist. The down-to-earth reader takes Bion’s words as if they were used in their artistic, religious, mathematical or neo-positivist senses *per se*; as if he were an artist, religious man, mathematician or neo-positivist trying to impinge art, religion, mathematics or neo-positivism on to psycho-analysis.

These readers fail to see the analogy. Bion's reverence and awe before the unknown equals that of Plato, Kant, Diderot, Goethe, Keats, Freud, Einstein, Heisenberg, to quote a few. Many do not hesitate to state that Bion was: (i) crazy, deteriorated, senile (for example, Joseph, 2002); (ii) incomprehensible, non-psycho-analytic (for example, the chairman of the IPAC's panel on schizophrenia in Edinburgh, 1961 is reputed to have said, "This is not psycho-analysis any more!" while throwing away his manuscript containing the study, "A theory of thinking", just after its public presentation; Bicudo, 1996); or that the concept of thought without a thinker has no psycho-analytical value (Segal, 1989); (iii) just a theoretician whose work had no clinical application (Joseph, 1980); (iv) that Bion had a poor grasp of Freud's work (Sandler, 1992). Bion himself addressed those critics in some parts of his work (for example, *Cogitations*, p. 377).

Some entries display the chronological evolution of the concepts. For the sake of clarity, on the occasions that an improved, later definition is available, it is given at once.

Few theories

A final word on the nature of the concepts. With the exception of a theory of thinking, of the theory of container and contained and that which he provisionally named metatheory, Bion did not make new theories in psycho-analysis. He expanded existing theories in order to have them fit the empirical (clinical) data better. He also made many theories of observation for the practising psycho-analyst.

There are some concepts that seem to the author not sufficiently developed by Bion. They have been omitted from the dictionary. For example: "vogue" (C, 374). The choice was to include that which Bion wrote in a clear way. As a consequence the attempt does not include personal ideas or interpretation of what Bion was saying or meant or intended to say. In the opinion of this writer. this is at best an exercise in imagination. It often ranges from frivolity to preposterousness. It does not mean, either, that the comments do not include the experience and opinion of this particular writer; the intention is, Ruskin-like, that they do not prevail over the writing.

Many entries were illuminated, especially as regards Bion's forebears, through the use of his personal copies of the great authors' works. He used to write in the margins of the books he read, from Plato to Popper. Due to the indescribably generous help provided by Francesca Bion, who sent this writer facsimiles of some of these pages throughout the years after having perused her library to meet my requests, and granted me access to it, the statements made in the entries relating to these origins can be safely regarded as going beyond the status of hypotheses.

Is this list of entries complete? This writer would be indebted to the reader who may eventually find missing definitions and concepts from Bion's work; otherwise, this dictionary and future students will be condemned to bear the burden of this writer's limitations.

That this volume can be at least minimally useful and can serve as an invitation to further readings of Bion's writings is my wish to you, dear reader.

Conventions:

EG *Experiences in Groups*, Heinemann Medical Books, 1961.

ST *Second Thoughts*, Heinemann Medical Books, 1967 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

LE *Learning from Experience*, Heinemann Medical Books, 1962 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

EP *Elements of Psycho-Analysis*, Heinemann Medical Books, 1963 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

T *Transformations*, Heinemann Medical Books, 1965 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

AI *Attention and Interpretation*, Tavistock Publications, 1970 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

BLI *Brazilian Lectures, I*, Imago Editora, 1974.

BLII *Brazilian Lectures, II*, Imago Editora, 1975.

AMF *A Memoir of the Future*, Imago Editora, 1975, 1977 and Clunie Press, 1979 and reprinted by Karnac Books, 1991.

CSOW *Clinical Seminars and Other Works*, Karnac, 1994.

BNYSP *Bion in New York and São Paulo*, Clunie Press, 1979.

C *Cogitation*, Karnac Books, 1997.

TLWE *The Long Week-End*, Fleetwood Press, 1982 and reprinted by Karnac Books, 1991.

AMSR *All My Sins Remembered*, Fleetwood Press, 1985 and reprinted by Karnac Books.

WM *War Memoirs*, Karnac Books, 1997.

In brackets: The first number refers to the page of the editions mentioned above and the second number refers to the itemized paragraphs, when available.

Except when indicated, the bold and italics are by Bion himself. When applicable, the concepts contain:

📖 *suggested further readings.*

🕒 *evolution of the concept within Bion's work.*

& *suggested clarifications or extensions by other authors starting from Bion.*

Usefulness indications of uses when they are not often seen in the literature.

The entries direct the reader to two types of cross-references:

1. Recommended—the entries are mutually complementary and the reading of both (or more) is a must.
2. Suggested—the entries are mutually enriching and the reading of both (or more) augments the reader's scope.

A

Absolute truth: An imaginary, lying entity created by paranoid states. It has at least three factors:

- (i) An attempt to deal with the animate with methods that are fairly successful in dealing with the inanimate. It is an offshoot of a state of mind that tries to turn dynamic situations into static ones. The static state seems to the “beholder” to be one that is “amenable” to be owned, in phantasy.
- (ii) An attempt to replace the discrimination of true and false (or reality and hallucination) with moral values, to dictate how things, events or people should be.
- (iii) Primary envy, primary narcissism and disregard for truth and love.

The “beholder” abhors movement, transient evolution, development and reality. “How” is replaced by “ought to”, “have to”. Autism and “independence” are some of its perceptible manifestations.

Suggested cross-references: Analytic view, Atonement, Becoming, Common sense, Compassion, Correlation, Disturbed personality, Enforced splitting, O, Jargon, Lies, Manipulations of

Symbols, Mystic, Philosophy, Real psycho-analysis, Reality Sensuous and Psychic, Sense of Truth, Thinking, Truth, Truth-Function, Ultra-sensuous, Unknowable, Unknown.

Ad hoc theorising Please refer to the entries, Manipulations of symbols and Multiplicity of theories.

Alpha (α) An early concept that was discharged in favour of the concept of α -function. It was also used as a shorthand notation for dream-work- α . In consequence, it is part of the development of this theory. Please refer to the entries, α -function and dream-work- α .

It was used almost exclusively as a heading for papers written during the year of 1959. Curiously, after sixteen years it would resurface, in isolated form, in 1975 (AMF, I, 59).

Alpha-elements Hypothetical elements belonging to an observational model. The model tries to deal with an unknown chain of events. The chain itself can be known through manifestations of its beginning and ending situations. Sensory stimuli are the beginning; manifestations of the psychic realm linked to the stimuli are the end. How is it that sensory stimuli are transformed, in order to get access to the inner mental realm? The mysterious pathway of such a transformation remains unknown; only the transformation itself is acknowledged.

Alpha-elements are defined as the end-product of the action of alpha-function in ultimate reality, the things-in-themselves, which are apprehensible as inner or outer sensory stimuli. Bion called the latter, beta-elements (q.v.).

Bion names the model that depicts that such a transformation has occurred alpha-function (q.v.). The process itself remains unknown. One can grasp the meaning of the function using the words, "traduction" or "translation". It seems to this author that a precise term may be borrowed from physics and neurophysiology: "transduction". Microphones, loudspeakers, Meister and Paccini corpuscles are transducers. Alpha-function "transforms" Beta-elements—raw sensory impressions—into alpha-elements. Alpha-elements are the transduced products of this operation that could be named, "betalphalization". Therefore, alpha-elements are transduced beta-elements.

In a second phase, hypothetical Alpha-elements are “put into use”. They can be regarded as elementary immaterial particles, building blocks, amenable to be used to dream, to think, to store in the memory.

Usefulness: The mystery lingers on. How is it that sensuous impressions can ever gain the status of psychically useful inputs? Bion does not resolve the problem, which borders one of the most mysterious secrets of life itself. It has to do with no less than the transition from inanimate to animate. The most gifted authors from time immemorial tackled the same issue. This was the research of the ancient writers of myths, and of the Bible; Plato, Kant, Goethe, Freud, Dobzhansky, Schrödinger and a list too long to mention made attempts to deal with the issue.

To ask how this occurs equals asking, what is life? Many times the answer—if it exists at all—is represented by flights into religion. Bion’s scheme of an alpha-function and alpha-elements is restricted to a specific path, namely, from non-mental to mental. In Freud’s terms, from material to psychic reality.

Bion started critically from Freud’s suggestions of consciousness as the sense organ for the perception of psychic quality. He also started from Freud’s theory of instincts. It provides a practical working model for the practising analyst. The analyst who profits from this theory is armed with a tool that enables him to detect some inanimate features in the analysand’s discourse that usually passes for “normal”. Also, it provides a fresh approach to the dream work made when the person is awake.

& Parthenope Bion Talamo, at the unofficial second meeting of “Bion’s Readers Around the World”, organized by Thalia Vergopoulo at the IPAC, San Francisco, 1995, compared the alpha-elements to “LEGO”™ blocks.

Antonino Ferro suggested the existence of narrative derivatives of alpha-elements, as seen in the clinical material (1999).

Suggested cross-references: Alpha Function, Bizarre Elements, Dream-Work- α , K

Alpha-element oedipal pre-conception An inborn pre-conception of Oedipus. This apparently cumbersome term is shorthand for a precise definition in Bion’s work. It encircles the most profound mystery of mankind, that of procreation, first studied in its psychic sense by Freud. It is a synthetic unification of Freud and Klein:

Analysts need . . . to consider that the Oedipal material may possibly be evidence for primitive apparatus of pre-conception and therefore possessing a significance additional to its significance in classical theory. I am postulating a precursor of the Oedipal situation not in the sense that such a term may have in Melanie Klein's discussion of *Early Phases of the Oedipus Complex*, but as something that belongs to the ego as part of its apparatus for contact with reality. In short I postulate an aelement version of a private Oedipus myth which is the means, the pre-conception, by virtue of which the infant is able to establish contact with parents as they exist in the world of reality. The mating of this a-element Oedipal pre-conception with the realization of the actual parents gives rise to the conception of parents. [EP, 93]

Procreation is one of the bridges from inanimate to animate.

Suggested cross-references: Alpha-Elements, Alpha-function, Concept, Conception, Pre-conception.

Alpha-function A mental function that transforms sensuously apprehensible stimuli into elements useful for thinking, dreaming, memory.

But there are no sense-data directly related to psychic quality, as there are sense-data directly related to concrete objects. [LE, 53]

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs. [Freud, 1900, p.613; Freud's italics]

The theory of functions and alpha-function are not a part of psycho-analytic theory. They are working tools for the practising psycho-analyst to ease problems of thinking about something that is unknown. [LE, 89]

We do not know what is concerned in the transformation from inanimate to animate though we know, or think we know, something of the change from animate to inanimate. [AMF, I, 129]

The verbal formulation "alpha-function" refers to a model that developed into a theory. It was created by Bion around 1960 and

first published in 1961. It was an attempt to deal with a puzzling question: how do sensory stimuli achieve the status of psychic facts? Conversely, why in some cases do they not achieve it?

In order to realize what this function is all about, one should keep in mind:

1. The concept of function, borrowed from Euclidean geometry. A simple formulation is: a given variable **functions** in some given way *vis-à-vis* another given variable. The two have a relationship with each other.
2. Alpha-function is a model that tries to deal with a cognitive issue, namely, the apprehension of reality.
3. The “port of entry” of reality into us is the sensuous apparatus.
4. Freud’s model of consciousness as the sensuous organ for the apprehension of psychic quality (Freud, 1900).

The theory of alpha-function has a philosophical (Kantian) and a biological (neurophysiological) foundation.

It is linked to Kant’s work in the sense that it deals with phenomenal manifestations (sensuous impressions, which Bion names beta-elements). It is linked to neurophysiology to the extent that it bridges the Autonomic Nervous System (the receptors and transducers of the sensory apparatus) with the Central Nervous System. The study of this passageway had been neglected hitherto.

Bion’s model of alpha-function purports to describe the fact that human beings’ ANS takes raw sensuous apprehensible facts and then couples with the CNS in order to translate them into something else. This “something” is not just a “thing”; it has an immaterial nature. In brief, we human beings are able to “de-sense-fy” the stimuli that comes from exterior reality and from inner reality. Bion uses the terms “translate” and “transform”. One may borrow from physics and from neurophysiology and use the term “transducer”. Transducers are devices that transform one kind of energy into another, without debasing the invariances conveyed by them. For example, a microphone and a loudspeaker are transducers. The former transforms a mechanically conducted form of energy—sound—into electric energy; the latter does the obverse. The human body’s corpuscles of Meissner and Paccini do the same.

The stimuli are things-in-themselves. This means that alpha-function allows for a recognizance that one cannot have a direct contact with ultimate reality. Things-in-themselves are called, in the frame of the theory of alpha-function, "beta-elements" (q.v.). When one is not able to "de-sense-fy" the things-in-themselves, either stemming from the sense apparatus or inner feelings, one is pervaded by sensations of "ownership" with regard to absolute truth. In this case, beta-elements remain undigested.

🕒 In his first published definition, Bion still did not posit the "existence" of beta-elements:

"I have described . . . the use of a concept of alpha-function as a working tool in the analysis of disturbances of thought. It seemed convenient to suppose an alpha-function to convert sense data into alpha-elements and thus provide the psyche with the material for dream thoughts and hence the capacity to wake up or go to sleep, to be conscious or unconscious" (ST, 115). To study the development of the definition of α function as well as that of β -elements, please refer to the entries, β -elements; Dream-work- α .

One can state that alpha-function is a "de-sense-fying" function of the mind.

This definition includes particulars that would be greatly expanded in the ensuing four years: the sense data would be seen as phenomena betraying the thing-in-itself, which would be called beta-elements (in 1962) and thereafter, "O" (1965). The dream-thoughts would be seen as an ongoing daytime activity. Concepts such as contact barrier (q.v.) would be created to deal with consciousness and its relationship with the unconscious. The particulars of the theory were to be expanded and polished like jewels; meanwhile the definition itself remained unchanged (EP, 4).

A second definition of it appeared one year later. It augments the scope of the theory that was created to deal with patients with disturbances of thought. It was in 1962 that its more general character was fully recognized:

Alpha-function operates on the sense impressions, whatever they are, and the emotions, whatever they are, of which the patient is aware. In so far as alpha-function is successful alpha elements are produced and these elements are suited to storage and the requirements of dream thoughts. [LE, 6]

This broader range of application coincided with Bion's growing awareness that a permanent underlying layer of psychosis permeates the so-called "normal" personality. It also coincides with Bion's movement towards revising his concepts of cure and pathology. They were made more explicit in 1967—in the Commentary to *Second Thoughts*. In 1970 they reached a more mature form—with a critical view on using ideas of cure derived from medical goals as a model to analysts—in *Attention and Interpretation*.

An analogy with the functioning of the digestive system was put forward in the second, expanded definition of Alpha-function. If mind can "process", "digest", beta-elements, they are transformed into "something else" that was called "alpha-elements" (q.v.).

Alpha-elements can be used to think, to store in memory and to dream. Alpha-function abstracts the "concreteness" of sensory impressions. Conversely, beta-elements are only suitable for projective identification. The similarity between the metabolism of a meal is striking. Alpha-elements can be compared with glycogen being stored in the liver, or ATP. Beta-elements can be compared with faeces. Both are by-products of a process that transforms raw material into nourishment and faeces.

Alpha-elements are postulated to be present in infant life—if and when a good enough mother is capable of "reverie" (q.v.). The exercising of reverie is a kind of temporary borrowing. Infants, so to say, "borrow" from their mothers' alpha-function. Therefore the mother detoxifies the child's beta-elements; they are returned to the infant in a digested form. "Reverie" refers to an ability of mothers to contain their own anxieties of annihilation. A continuous exposure to someone who does this may allow learning that such a state—not to become unstructured, fragmented before anxiety—may be achieved.

Some personalities have a low capacity to tolerate frustration and the pain associated with it. This capacity seems to be innate. The first frustration to be coped with seems to be the absence of the idealized breast. There is no possibility of abstracting immaterial qualities from a breast. The baby who does this is enabled to use warmth, solace and understanding. Conversely, these personalities cannot apprehend more than, or cannot go beyond the concrete breast, nipple and milk. An enforced splitting ensues (q.v.)

The concept appeared first under the somewhat vague denomination of α . It was then, perhaps, too attached to the theory of dreams. In this epoch it was called dream-work- α . When Bion was more at peace with Freud's theory of consciousness, as well as when he was more able to use his findings with psychotics, it acquired its status of a mental function. Please refer to this specific entry, dream-work- α .

The first time that a published paper mentions α function was placed by Francesca Bion in *Cogitations* as in about January or February 1960 (C, 120). In her own introduction to this book, she describes her careful, quasi-Sherlockian methods used to determine the dates when Bion's undated papers were written. When translating *Cogitations* into Portuguese, the author gathered data linked to the content of the studies. Actually, this data strongly suggested that this paper belongs to a later time. Francesca Bion agreed—for the inception of this theory as a final replacement of dream-work- α occurred at a later time, as can be gathered from the contents of all the papers printed in *Cogitations*. It more probably took two years to be elaborated; in the Brazilian version, with Mrs. Bion's authorization, the paper was duly moved to a later ordinal position in the book.

The concept of α -function was to be revived in *A Memoir of the Future*. The possibility of emerging from states of non-integration and disintegration evolve to the use of dreams. From there, to real thinking in a dialogical form held by imaginary characters. They can be seen as Bion's part-objects according to his own life experiences. The latter perform the function of β -elements. The books are a product of Bion's (and the reader's) alpha-function.

Misuses and misconceptions: Many readers mistake alpha-function for thinking itself; and many mistake it for dreaming itself. Perhaps this confusion arises from a persistent difficulty, namely, reading phrases of Bion's texts excised from the whole.

Those readers seem to lose sight of the fact that the model of alpha-function is just a model. It exists in the reality that human minds can construe models. Alpha-function is a model purporting to describe immaterial functions of the human mind. **It does not exist concretely.** It purports to describe a fact that is a prelude both to thinking and dreaming. It refers to a kind of permeable boundary or filter that transforms the unthinkable into building blocks for thinking and/or dreaming and remembering.

Bion's preparatory papers about alpha-function (1959–60) display his doubts in discerning thinking, dreaming and hallucinating. He named alpha-function differently then, calling it "dream-work-alpha". In due course he gave up this term; this was possible when he separated alpha from dreams. Those papers were released only in 1992; some readers dismiss the chronology and the fact that Bion revamped the theory. To quote Bion as if he had written exclusively about dream-work-alpha equals quoting Freud as a supporter of trauma theory. This would restrict his work to pre-1900.

The terms alpha and beta were used in a way that tried to get precision into communication. Bion tried to emulate the mathematical sense of notation (rather than mathematics proper). Like mathematical unknowns, they had no previous meanings and should be left unsaturated. Anyway, as occurred with Freud's models, they are often taken as existent-in-themselves, as entities. Bion left many warnings about this. One of them, issued at the end of his life, reads:

P.A. These primitive elements of thought are difficult to represent by any verbal formulation, because we have to rely on language that was elaborated for other purposes. When I tried to employ meaningless terms—alpha and beta were typical—I found that "concepts without intuition which are empty and intuitions without conceptions which are blind" rapidly became "black holes into which turbulence had seeped and empty concepts flooded with riotous meaning". [AMF, II, 229]

Another misuse is not specific to this theory. It plagues the grasping of theories in psycho-analysis in general. It may be a manifestation of the mythical prohibition of knowledge. Perhaps it is ironical that one concretizes a theory that was planned to mark the "de-concretizing" or "de-sense-fying" ability of mind (Sandler, 1997a). Many other theories have met this fate.

Another misunderstanding is due to a split reading coupled with a posture of "being more royal than the king". Namely, some readers refuse to define the concept. The "split reading" seems to be aided by item 7, page 3 of *Learning from Experience*:

The term alpha-function is, intentionally, devoid of meaning ... Since the object of this meaningless term is to provide

psycho-analytic investigation with a counterpart of the mathematician's variable, an unknown that can be invested with a value when its use has helped to determine what that value is, it is important that it should not be prematurely used to convey meanings, for the premature meanings may be precisely those that it is essential to exclude. [LE, 3]

This paragraph clearly refers to the use of the concept in **analytical practice**, rather than to the definition of the concept itself. For this concept forms a theory, and a theory is just a model. Theories are attempts to present realities—but they are not realities in themselves, as Bion writes in the Introduction to *Learning from Experience*. Any scientist and practising analyst should know this.

Just after writing the text quoted above, Bion sets out the “area of investigation” to be covered by the theory. The pre-condition for using the theory effectively is to know what a mathematical variable is all about. An unknown in mathematics is just this: an unknown, whose value may or may be not determined. Nevertheless, the theory that introduces the concept of variables or the unknown is not vague or indefinite. Bion stresses the issue again and again, for example, on page 38 of *Learning from Experience*. Therefore, those who refuse to define the function mistake the theory with its use.

✂ Roger Money Kyrle's papers “Cognitive development” and “The aim of psycho-analysis” (1968 and 1970, IJPA) can be seen as the earliest investigation of some issues linked to alpha-function. He can be regarded as the first to expand Bion's work.

Imprecision There are exceedingly few places where one is able to spot a lack of precision in Bion's writings. Up to now the author has been able to spot only four of them.

The definition of alpha-function is given precisely in all parts of his work with the possible exception of two. The student can see that in the beginning of chapter 14 (LE). Instead of using the term “sense impressions”, Bion uses the term “emotional experience”. Perhaps this is not exactly an error; as late as 1965 Bion felt that there were no conditions for discriminating between feelings—which he definitely puts, in the very definition of alpha-function, as belonging to the sensuous realm—and emotions. He sees “feelings” as internal sense impressions.

Also, in *Attention and Interpretation*, page 11, in synthesizing his earlier contributions about a model of “mental space”, Bion states that “*In thought I include all that is primitive, including alpha-elements as I have so far described them*”. In all his previous descriptions alpha-elements were the raw material that eventually could be used to think. They were never regarded as thinking or thoughts. If taken separately, this text becomes somewhat imprecise; it may give rise to misunderstandings.

Usefulness The mystery lingers on. How is it that sensuous impressions can ever gain the status of psychically useful inputs? The fact is that they do; this fact is inferred and constitutes Freud’s first steps towards psycho-analysis. It is the basis of his elaboration of the concept of psychic reality.

Bion does not set himself to solve the problem, which borders one of the most mysterious secrets of life itself. It is about no less than the transition from inanimate to animate. The most gifted authors of mankind from time immemorial have been trying to tackle the issue—at least since the epoch of the writers of the myths, of the Bible, and then Plato, Shakespeare, Kant, Goethe, Freud, Dobzhansky, Schrödinger and a list too long to mention.

It is necessary to add these authors’ readers to the list; the unsung onlookers of all epochs tried equally to tackle the same issue. In order to do this they listened to myths, to music, to philosophers and mystics, flocked to theatres, and read written works.

To ask how this occurs equals asking, what is life? Many times the person who feels that he (she) has the answer—if it exists at all—takes flight into religion and belief. Bion’s scheme of an alpha-function and alpha-elements is restricted to scrutinizing the path from non-mental to mental.

It is a theory purposely limited. It was devised to be a non-explanatory theory; it is just an observational theory. This limited theory of Bion’s at least provides a practical working model for the practising analyst. The analyst who profits from his theory is enabled to detect some inanimate features in the analysand’s discourse that usually pass for “normal”. Also, it provides a fresh approach to the daytime dream work.

As regards the usefulness of a theory, Bion recommended often that one should not discharge a useful theory, albeit in some aspects

it could well be flawed, when no other that proved to be better was available (for example, T, 4). This seemed to be his own path. He was at first critical of Freud, but afterwards accepted Freud's suggestions about consciousness as the sense organ for the perception of psychic quality; ditto, for Freud's theory of instincts. But it is exactly his non-destructive criticism coupled with his final acceptance of both Freud's theories that led him to formulate the theory of alpha-function.

Suggested cross-references: Alpha Elements, Bizarre Elements, Dream-Work- α , Mind, Minus, Reversal of Alpha-Function, Thoughts without a Thinker

Analogy: Bion resorted to analogies, metaphors and aphorisms. He wrote in a way that seems to hark back to the great French writers of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, as well as English thinkers of the Enlightenment. Freud did the same in order to depict the mental realm, which is ultimately ineffable and unknowable.

In fact, any scientific model is an analogy. It belongs to the "correspondence" sense of science, as established by Spinoza and Kant. That is, science tries to construe models that have a correspondent, or counterpart, in reality. Kant called the models "schemes".

Bion was worried about the future of psycho-analysis because of the effects of the establishment. This tends to crystallize the achievement of knowledge, or knowing, in the form of an ossified final knowledge. It seems that the psycho-analytic movement has a tendency to miss the point in taking the analogy as the thing-in-itself. The analogic value of a model or theory is lost; the concrete sense of the analogy prevails.

One of the main analogies used by Bion is mathematical. Please refer to the entry, "Mathematization of psycho-analysis". This matters both scientifically and during a session. To lose sight of what the meaning of an analogy implies losing sight of the very reality that the analogies strive to depict.

The issue at stake is the fact that we perceive phenomena and intuit noumena; analogies belong to the realm of phenomena. This is the same one that characterizes, according to Kant, the "naive realist"—one who believes that one is able to apprehend reality through the exclusive use of one's five basic senses—and that reality is that which is apprehended by the senses.

The psycho-analytical approach, though valuable in having extended the conscious by the unconscious, has been vitiated by the failure to understand the practical application of doubt by the failure to understand the function of “breast”, “mouth”, “penis”, “vagina”, “container”, “contained”, as analogies. Even if I write it, the sensuous dominance of penis, vagina, mouth, anus, obscures the element signified by analogy. . . [AMF, I, 70–1]

Suggested cross-references: Atonement, Analytical view, Mathematization of Psycho-analysis, Models, Real Psycho-analysis, Thoughts-without-a-thinker.

Analytic view

. . . we regard analytic procedure as essential if people are to understand what beliefs they hold and by which they are held. [AMF, II, 332]

It is difficult to conceive of an analysis having a satisfactory outcome without the analysand’s becoming reconciled to, or at one with, himself. [AI, 34]

In psycho-analytic methodology the criterion cannot be whether a particular usage is right or wrong, meaningful or verifiable, but whether it does, or does not, promote development. [LE, Introduction, 3]

An explorer’s knowledge of instruments must be such that he can use them in situations of stress. The analyst must use instruments that are altered by the circumstances they are devised to study. [T, 75]

This entry is a depiction of some views about a frequently asked question: “What is psycho-analysis?” Bion addresses it throughout all his written work.

P.A. I try to demonstrate the qualities of the individual. Whether they are assets or liabilities he can then decide for himself. [AMF, III, 541]

The hope is that psycho-analysis brings into view thoughts and actions and feelings of which the individual may not be aware and

so cannot control. If he can be aware of them he may, or may not, decide—albeit unconsciously—to change them. [AMF, III, 509–10]

In New York, 1977

The analytic procedure is an attempt to introduce the patient to who he is, because whether he likes it or not that is a marriage which is going to last as long as he lives. [BNYSP, 40]

P.A. I have great respect for the individual. Do you think that is wrong?

FIFTY YEARS No, but it is not in keeping with the growth of the Herd. I can see P.A. will be in serious trouble if the Herd develops faster than he does

P.A. If the development of the Herd is incompatible with that of the individual, either the individual will perish, or the Herd will be destroyed by the individual who is not allowed to fulfil himself. . . Some of us think that the development of the individual needs careful supervision. [AMF, III, 461]

The ethos of psycho-analysis

These formulations summarize the ethos of psycho-analysis. The texts depict the clinical situation and its philosophical origins, namely, the highest goals of the Enlightenment, which were continued in part by some offshoots of the Romantic Movement. The defence of the individual being and his caring development has been the ethos of psycho-analysis since Freud discovered it.

In other words, there is a lack of subservience to authority; there is freedom, defence of the individual; the use of science and medicine as methods developed to help suffering individuals. This unslavish state includes the recognizance of the unconscious and attempts at knowing something about its functioning and manifestations. To know, albeit imperfectly, something about some of the manifestations of the unconscious is a way of not being enslaved by them. It is more than a philosophical recognizance; it is a practical application of it at the service of suffering individuals, in a novel and basic way.

To display the ethos of psycho-analysis means also trying to discriminate psycho-analysis from anything else. There is a need to

recognize what it is—and what it is not. In other terms, what are its “qualities”; in the same sense that Shakespeare, through Hamlet, looked for real actors and asked them, “*Come, give us the taste of your quality*” (*Hamlet*, II, ii, 408). Both Hamlet and patients in need of analysis are looking for truth.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that Bion spent a great deal of his psycho-analytic life, first and foremost, in trying to assess what an analyst does intra-session: “*It seems absurd that a psycho-analyst should be unable to assess the quality of his work*” (AI, 62).

The issues that Bion emphasizes are:

- (i) human interest, or in his own terms, concern for life and truth (C, 125, 247);
- (ii) becoming who one really is;
- (iii) detailed, attentive scrutiny of what is taking place in the here and now of the session;
- (iv) problems of communication of that which is observed (either to the patient, which implies in the use of colloquial language, models and myths);
- (v) obstacles to observation, which implies certain problems of perception and cognition;
- (vi) the immaterial nature of underlying patterns that call to be intuited.

Broadly speaking, the analytic view is concerned with a “*matter of interest*”, as a former analysand of Bion’s, Kenneth Sanders, puts it. Or, compassion and truth (C, 125). It is an amiable, growth-promoting, life-oriented interest in the individual being, in the wake of the achievements of the Enlightenment and Romantic movements. Analysis is a collaboration that “*should be healing*” rather than “*wounding*” (T, 25).

“*Psycho-analysis is concerned with love as an aspect of mental development and the analyst must consider the maturity of love and ‘greatness’ in relation to maturity*” (T, 74). The analytic view includes a capacity for “*mature compassion*” (T, 143).

The issue of development is mentioned often: “. . . *the analyst is concerned with development of the personality*” (T, 169); “*We consider the attempt to improve humans both worthwhile and urgent*” (AMF, III, 528).

In less colloquial terms, Bion's statements do not differ from Freud's last proposals on analysis as a method of investigation of the mind with therapeutic implications.

The task confronting the analyst is to bring intuition and reason to bear on an emotional experience between two people (of whom he is one) in such a way that not only he but also the analysand gains an understanding of the analysand's response to that emotional situation, and does so through an appreciation of the evidence to which the analyst is drawing attention in the course of his interpretations. It is not enough for the analyst to be convinced that there is evidence for the truth of his interpretations; he must have enough evidence available to afford the analysand the opportunity of being persuaded, by his reason, of the cogency of the interpretation. [C, 91]

There is no trace of an authoritarian or pedagogical posture. The patient's function is not only stated as seminal in the process of insight, which would be a truism. Instead, there is a description of how or why it is seminal.

... psycho-analysts do not aim to run the patient's life but to enable him to run it according to his lights and therefore to know what his lights are. [T, 37]

P. A. You need not be sheep. We do not aspire to be leaders or shepherds; we hope to introduce the person to his "real" self. Although we do not claim to be successful, the experience shows how powerful is the urge of the individual to be led—to believe in some god or good shepherd. [AMF, II, 266]

Bion's posture would remain essentially unaltered throughout his work, albeit improved in some technical details. Compare these quotations with the last phrases of the character "Myself", in volume I, *A Memoir of the Future*, which is reproduced below in this same entry. It depicts the act of obscuring something in order to make this same something clear (pages 202–4).

The analytic view concerns "*what is taking place*" (T, 7). It corresponds to Freud's "here and now"; its goal is the achievement of insight into the truth about oneself. An analysis is conceived as a living, unrepeatable life experience impossible to obtain anywhere else. This experience always includes paradox.

We may now consider further the relationship of rudimentary consciousness to psychic quality. The emotions fulfil a similar function for the psyche to that of the senses in relation to objects in space and time. That is to say the counterpart of commonsense view in private knowledge is the common emotional view; a sense of truth is experienced if the view of an object which is hated can be conjoined to a view of the same object when it is loved and the conjunction confirms that the object experienced by different emotions is the same object. A correlation is established.

A similar correlation, made possible by bringing conscious and unconscious to bear on the phenomena of the consulting room, gives to psycho-analytic objects a reality that is quite unmistakable though their very existence has been disputed. [ST, 119]

One example, where one may vouch for a humanistic and caring approach, can be seen when Bion was investigating the dream, dreaming during the session, fears of dreaming, presence of cruelly annihilating superego and the possibility of a “dream-work- α ”:

The starvation of the psyche of all elements needed for growth and development gives extreme urgency to the patient's inability to dream. But this activity is extra-sessional and impregnated with the dangers incidental to a restored super-ego. The fear of this conflicts with the necessity to restore the capacity to dream, for the fear is of nothing less than annihilation. Consequently the patient...needs to restrict these attempts to sessions. Then, and only then, is he sure of the external aid that the presence of the analyst affords. It is this that leads to the events I have already described in which the patient strives to dream in the session. [C, 97-8]

This means that analysis will perhaps continue to be a subject that is disparaged by people who have never experienced it. The experience of analysis precludes any learning that does not come from experiencing it. It does not differ from any practical endeavour.

The analytic view needs to be put into action in the way the analyst expresses himself. He *“should not express himself in any terms other than those used by an adult; theoretically this excludes certain categories (notably column 2) [please refer to specific entry, Grid-column 2; in brief, this category expresses statements that are lies] . . . the analyst is under an obligation to speak with as little ambiguity as possible, in fact his aims are limited by the analysand who is free to receive*

interpretations in whatever way he chooses . . . The analyst is not free except in the sense that when the patient comes to him for analysis he is obliged to speak in a way which would not be tolerable in any other frame of reference and then only from a particular vertex. The patient's response would also be intolerable if there were no psycho-analytic indulgence to excuse it, or, if it were not for a psycho-analytic vertex" (T, 145).

Bion tries to classify the material that comes as the final views construed by the patient after receiving any stimulus, in order to construe that which he must tell the patient. He names the original stimulus or experience as "O", ultimate reality (q.v.) and the "material" (which also comprises an immaterial dimension), the final products of the transformations effected by the patient in "O", as $Tp\beta$ (q.v.).

The problem of classifying the material is complicated because it contains elements of all three: T, $Tp\alpha$ and $Tp\beta$. It is a matter of consequence because the decision depends on what is most convenient for the analyst . . . The problem is to reformulate $Tp\beta$ in conversational, but precise, English. [T, 26]

Like Freud and other authors such as Reik, for Bion psychoanalysis is impossible without regard for truth, "*. . . healthy mental growth seems to depend on truth as the living organism depends on food* [T, 38]

Correct interpretation

Regard for truth implies absence of lies: thus the correct interpretation must be free of lies. A correct interpretation, being an approximation to the patient's truth-O, a pursuit of truth-O, depends on the evolution of the unknown. It admits no authority and, much less, official speakers. The analytic couple has an opportunity to assess, or to glimpse in a transient way, parts of it. It stems from the non-spoken, the negative or numinous realm. This has a seminal significance for the work of the analyst concerning what he will or will not say, of his choice of issues, of the rationality or lack of it that is involved:

Nobody need think the true thought: it awaits the advent of the thinker who achieves significance through the true thought. The lie

and its thinker are inseparable . . . The only thoughts to which the thinker is absolutely essential are lies . . . Whether the thoughts are entertained or not is of significance to the thinker but not to the truth. If entertained, they are conducive to mental health; if not, they initiate disturbance . . . Since the analyst's concern is with the evolved elements of O and their formulation, formulations can be judged by considering how necessary his existence is to the thoughts he expresses. The more his interpretation can be judged as showing how necessary *his* knowledge, *his* experience, *his* character are to the thought as formulated , the more reason there is to suppose that the interpretation is psycho-analytically worthless, that is, alien to the domain O. [AI, 103 and 105]

In Bion's terms, an analytic interpretation must illuminate a relationship that concerns knowledge (or in other terms, apprehension of reality or truth) and must necessarily be far from lies. Bion's terms focused for many years on one of the links or relationships as specific to the analytic view as well as, in the negative sense, as something to be avoided. Namely, the K link, which means "knowledge" (q.v.), is specific to the analytic view. In the negative sense, the links H and L and column 2 are specific in terms of being avoided or subjected to a discipline to diminish their influence. In any case they shall not prevail (q.v.):

The peculiarity of a psycho-analytic session, that aspect of it which establishes that it is a psycho-analysis 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. [EP, 69–70]

Bion changed his view a few years later; even though K has to do with psycho-analysis, it is still not enough. Analysis belongs ultimately to the numinous realm and transcends knowledge:

Formulations of the events of analysis made in the course of analysis must possess value different from the formulations made extra-sessionally. Their value therapeutically is greater if they are conducive to transformations in O, less if conducive to transformations in K . . . The analyst must focus his attention on O, the unknown and unknowable. The success of psycho-analysis

depends on the maintenance of a psycho-analytic point of view; the point of view is the psycho-analytic vertex; the psycho-analytic vertex is O. With this the analyst cannot be identified: he must *be* it. [AI, 26–7]

The symbol “O” (q.v.) stands for the noumena, truth. To be identified with it means either collusion or pretensions to knowing absolute truth.

The issue of truth and sincerity obtrudes in the language that the analyst must use too:

ALICE Punning is a very low form of life.

P.A. Life fundamentally is really “low life”—cock-roaches, and “bloody cunt” and swimming in a sea of amniotic fluid and meconium, and now psycho-analysis. Even the fetus is involved with *non-fetus*. One cone intersects another cone. Here the eyes of each of us can be described as sweeping out an area of space more or less cone-shaped. But these cones intersect other cones whose focal origin is different. These points of intersection could be pictorially depicted by resorting to geometrical figures. That is an over-simplification which, as Robin said, is complex enough to make any further description redundant. However, I do not see why the universe in which we live should oblige us by being comprehensible to us mere human beings. This is true of our own bodies and minds in which we have to live. Even if we don’t trouble with the “universe”, the *not-us*, we find that merely trying to know who “I” am involves an intolerable amount of discovery of what we have never been able to tolerate and which, as likely as not, we are right not to tolerate . . .

ROLAND You remind me—Britannia reminds me—of the mother who on her death-bed collected her children because she wished to confess that she had never loved her husband, their father, and had been constantly unfaithful and promiscuous. The eldest, recovering first from the stupefying information, announced, “Well, I don’t know about you other bastards, but I’m going to the movies”, and they all fucked off.

ALICE Very amusing. I regret that my facial muscles do not express my entertainment.

ROBIN I expect you are not perceiving how amused you are at being not-amused.

ALICE Though I said it was “very amusing” I did not expect you to believe I meant just that.

P.A. Though you do not call it psycho-analysis, you interpret naturally and expect others to interpret your behaviour, including the language you talk. These diagnoses, interpretations, are intrusions, outrages perhaps, on your privacy—our privacy.

ALICE If you are right that seems to me to be one more reason for behaving in a reasonably civil manner.

P.A. Certainly. But in reality, as far as I am capable of perceiving reality or truth, the more I am aware that reality is not civilized or reasonable or considerate of our feelings or ideas. This applies to you and me; we are not polite, civilized, considerate *only*. So, in so far as we achieve “civilized” character, our capacity for lying, murdering, robbing, being in *rude health*, “fusts in us unused”, as Milton puts it.

ALICE Milton certainly did not mean what you say he meant.

P.A. I am ready to believe that Milton did not mean to mean that. It requires, at least, considerable training to achieve any idea now of what Milton meant—or Nietzsche, or Newton, or any other great figure of the past. In the present we do not have to bother because there are not perceived to be any great figures. In fact we are learning to regard them as figments or our imaginations.

ROLAND I remember the fashion for “Father Figures”; the mental landscape was such that one could not see one’s genetic father the air was so thick with Father Figures.

ROBIN I smell a Father Figure; I see him in the Air; I will nip him in the Bud.

ROLAND Call me Buddy—so much more friendly.

P.A. Technical terms are not safe from de-value-ation; hence my resort to spelling out the word in a hope that the return to that childhood learning difficulty might re-inforce my communication. Must we keep our technical terms in constant repair? The bloody cunt which is *not* anything to do with anatomical sex, not masculine, not feminine, not haematology, not religion but could be said to be sacred, has nevertheless an almost universal—western at least—comprehensibility. It made Alice angry; even articulate. It degrades the user almost as much as the recipient.

ALICE Then why use it?

P.A. I am not advocating or deprecating its use. Since it is there it seems wise to acknowledge or respect its presence as one should respect any other fact, whether we like it or not.

ROBIN I can see Alice's point—why go out of your way to look for the unpleasant?

P.A. If it were only a matter of pleasant or unpleasant that would depend on the character or person, and on his or her likes or dislikes. I suggest it also involves *is* or *is not*. If it *is* then the individual should respect the *is-ness* or *is-not-ness* of it. *You* think these "things" are so rare that it is perverse to go out of our way to find them. I say they are so universal that it is perverse to make great mental detours to avoid being aware.

ROBIN But who uses language like that?

P.A. I do, for one. So do you. So does Alice.

ALICE I beg your pardon—I don't . . .

P.A. But you said "fucking bastard" a little while back; you reacted as to the manner born to Roland saying "bloody cunt". If it were a foreign language I would say you must have been born to it, lived it, loved it as your very own favourite language. I agree with you that you spoke to it as if you had forgotten it and didn't want to be reminded of it. [AMF, III, pp. 490–93]

The issue of Truth in analysis is not exactly an "issue". It has a meaning that approximates it to the social usage to the extent that it is an ethical posture. Truth in analysis concerns self-knowledge: "*. . . self-knowledge is an aim of psycho-analytic procedure. . .*" (EP, 91).

Psycho-analysis brought home the fact that truth is not a theoretical problem of the philosopher of science: "*. . . the psycho-analyst is concerned **practically** with a problem that the philosopher approaches **theoretically***" (AI, 97).

Psycho-analytic procedure pre-supposes that the welfare of the patient demands a constant supply of truth as inevitably as his physical survival demands food. It further presupposes that discovery of the truth about himself is a precondition of an ability to learn the truth, or at least to seek it in his relationship with himself and others. It is supposed at first that he cannot discover the truth about himself without assistance from the analyst and others. [C, 99]

I assume that the permanently therapeutic effect of a psycho-analysis, if any, depends on the extent to which the analysand has been able to use the experience to see one aspect of his life, namely himself as he is. It is the function of the psycho-analyst to use the experience of such facilities for contact as the patient is able to extend to him, to elucidate the truth about the patient's personality and mental characteristics, and to exhibit them to the patient in a way that makes it possible for him to entertain a reasonable conviction that the statements (propositions) made about himself represent facts.

It follows that a psycho-analysis is a joint activity of analyst and analysand to determine the truth; that being so, the two are engaged—no matter how imperfectly—on what is in intention a scientific activity. [C, 114]

If we—as Bion did—start from Freud, we will pay attention to his coining of the term “psychic reality” vis-à-vis material reality, both being different forms of the same reality—a fact often overlooked. We must consider that psycho-analysis has Platonic-Kantian-Hegelian roots. That is, it deals in practice with the noumena, the “absolute” and its negative, immaterial nature. Psychic reality, which corresponds to the numinous realm, remains ultimately unknowable for our consciousness, if we regard it, as Freud and Bion did, as the sense organ for the apprehension of psychic quality. It is the same case with material reality, which remains ultimately unknowable to the senses.

What must be perceived and expressed underlies the phenomenal realm. We analysts look for **underlying, immaterial patterns**: “*The interpretation given the patient is a formulation intended to display an underlying pattern*” (ST, 131). The underlying pattern is unconscious: “*The psycho-analyst tries to help the patient to transform that part of an emotional experience of which he is unconscious into an emotional experience of which he is conscious*” (T, 32).

The search for underlying patterns would remain for the rest of Bion's professional life:

I put forward, herewith, a theory of ψ with a recently proliferated sense organ known as the “end”, in which various functions, usually associated with psycho-analysis (the Oedipus situation, aggression, rivalry) are supposed to be observed (on the model of

forms of dis-order, dis-ease, sex, fear, love). In reality they are patterns, configurations, insignificant in themselves but, if delineated, indicative of an *underlying* reality by their perturbations, regroupings, shifts in pattern and colour; they reflect a category and kind that the human mind cannot formulate or conjecture in their presence. [C, 121–2]

The detection of those patterns is dependent on analytically trained intuition (T, 49); there are immaterial constant conjunctions that can be perceived and confer meaning to something. Bion proposes some terms borrowed from mathematics to depict what composes the underlying patterns: selected facts and invariances.

Another ever-present feature underlying appearances is emotion:

Superficially, an analytic session may appear boring, or featureless, alarming, or devoid of interest, good or bad. The analyst, seeing beyond the superficial, is aware that he is in the presence of intense emotion; there should be no occasion on which this is not apparent to him. The intense experience is ineffable but once known cannot be mistaken . . . if such a contact is maintained the analyst can devote himself to evaluating and interpreting the central experience and, if he sees fit, the superficialities in which it is embedded. [T, 74]

Bion states that all psycho-analysts would agree that “*correct analysis*” demands that the analyst’s verbal formulations obey a need, namely, to “*formulate what the patient’s behaviour reveals; conversely, that the analyst’s judgement should be embodied in an interpretation and not in an emotional discharge (e.g. counter-transference or acting out.*” (T, 35).

This is the march into the unknown, the exploration into the *unbewußt*, which means “not-known” in German. It is usually translated as “unconscious”. Freud, Klein, Bion and Winnicott practised it: the continuous *becoming* that elicits who the patient in reality is, unknowingly.

The numinous or negative nature of the ever-evolving psychic reality dictates that the analytic view is obtained intra-session through the scrutiny of that which one is *not* but one thinks one is.

The supreme importance of transference lies in its use in the practice of psycho-analysis. It is available for observation by analysts

and analysts. In this respect it is unique—that is its strength and its weakness; its strength, because two people have a “fact” available to both and therefore open for discussion by both; its weakness, because it is ineffable and cannot be discussed by anyone else. The failure to recognize this simple fact has led to confusion. [C, 353]

One may add that this demands not only concern for life and truth, but also an ability or willingness to tolerate paradoxes. Patients come but their willingness to be analysed cannot be taken for granted:

Psycho-analysis tells you nothing; it is an instrument, like the blind man’s stick, that extends the power to gather information. The analyst uses it to gather a *selected* kind of information: the analysand uses it to gather material that he can use (1) for purposes of imitation, (2) to learn the analyst’s philosophy, (3) to learn how to conduct his life in a socially acceptable manner, and (4) to become acquainted with his Self. Although it is true that it is not his intention to satisfy (1), (2) and (3), or any other desire other than (4), it is impossible to make any statement that gratifies only (4) because the lack of precision of spontaneous English speech. The analyst can try not to pollute his interpretation on the one hand, or to speak as if he were a living computer, stranger to human heartedness, or the life that the rest of our human companions are familiar with as members of our universe. Certain words and phrases appear to be necessary for the communication of “happenings” recurring in that part of human experience with which I am most familiar, and which happens also to be that part of my life that is my profession—what, for the lack of power to describe adequately, I call “mental suffering”. [C, 361]

Also, it is paradoxically an amiable and dangerous activity: “*An analyst is not doing his job if he investigates something because it is pleasurable or profitable . . . anyone who is not afraid when he is engaged on psycho-analysis is either not doing his job or is unfitted for it*” (AMF, III, 516–7).

Perhaps the analytic view and its consequent analytic posture are better illuminated in Bion’s late works. Modifying his earlier attempts at clarity and concision through the use of mathematical and philosophical models, his clearer formulations about the

analytical view appear in *A Memoir of the Future* through verbal formulations more akin to theatrical and poetical prose.

One may read there a practical application of the fine perception that Bion had regarding the “negative”, that is, the numinous realm and its relationship with insight and the psycho-analytic interpretation. The negative realm of the noumena was first described by Plato; insights about it, despite strong denials from Aristotle, Descartes and many others, re-emerged with Hamann, Kant (who delimited it more precisely), Maimon, Von Herder, Goethe, Fichte and Hegel (who perhaps was the first to name it as the “negative”).

Freud gave practical use to it, with his formulation of psychic reality, of the unconscious and of the Id. Bion, after Freud and Klein, was able to focus his research on the Id as the pure analytical posture. In this sense, more than thirty years after Bion having written it, it seems that very few authors worldwide could apprehend the profoundly psycho-analytical ethos of *A Memoir of the Future*, in terms of the unconscious and of the Id. One of them, albeit belatedly, is André Green (2002). Not coincidentally, he is one of the very few authors that Bion quotes explicitly in the Trilogy, side by side with Freud, Money-Kyrle, Strachey, Rickman and Klein.

The texts of the Trilogy are self-explanatory, but to be grasped they require analytic experience and a discipline over theoretical prejudices about how one ought to write psycho-analytical texts.

BION I don't understand.

MYSELF Perhaps I can illustrate by an example from something you *do* know. Imagine a piece of sculpture which is easier to comprehend if the structure is intended to act as a trap for light. The meaning is revealed by the pattern formed by the light thus trapped—not by the structure, the carved work itself. I suggest that if I could learn how to talk to you in such a way that my words “trapped” the meaning which they neither do nor could express, I could communicate to you in a way that is not at present possible.

BION Like the “rests” in a musical composition?

MYSELF A musician would certainly not deny the importance of those parts of a composition in which no notes were sounding, but more has to be done than can be achieved in existent art and its well-established procedure of silences, pauses, blank spaces, rests. The “art” of conversation, as carried on as part of the conversational

intercourse of psycho-analysis, requires and demands an extension in the realm of non-conversation . . .

I have suggested a "trick" by which one could manipulate things which have no meaning by the use of sounds like "α" and "β". These are sounds analogous, as Kant said, to "thoughts without concepts", but the principle, and a reality approximating to it, is also extensible to words in common use. The realizations which approximate to words such as "memory" and "desire" are opaque. The "thing-in-itself", impregnated with opacity, itself becomes opaque: the O, of which "memory" and "desire" is the verbal counterpart, is opaque. I suggest this quality of opacity inheres in many O's and their verbal counterparts, and the phenomena which it is usually supposed to express. If, by experiment, we discovered the verbal forms, we could also discover the thoughts to which the observation applied specifically. Thus we achieve a situation in which these could be used deliberately to obscure specific thoughts.

BION Is there anything new in this? You must often have heard, as I have, people say they don't know what you are talking about and that you are being deliberately obscure.

MYSELF They are flattering me. I am suggesting an aim, an ambition, which, if I could achieve, would enable me to be deliberately and *precisely* obscure; in which I could use certain words which could activate precisely and instantaneously, in the mind of the listener, a thought or train of thought that came between him and the thoughts and ideas already accessible and available to him.

ROSEMARY Oh, my God! [AMF, I, 189–191]

Is this the most colloquially written illumination of the realm of "minus", in the sense that it is constantly conjoined with the realm of "plus"? In philosophical terms, it displays the Hegelian realm of the "negative", which must, anyway, as Freud showed, remain linked to the material reality, namely, the instinctual endowment.

This realm can also be seen as the Platonic realm, or the numinous realm later described by Kant, which was later on mapped by Freud in his investigation of psychic reality. Its insight is a conjoint work of analyst and analysand. Let us follow with Bion. His next step seems to follow a hint by Freud, when he realized the hallucinatory realm of transference. (Freud, 1912) This is a need for an immersion in psychic reality and in hallucination (slave of pleasure

or desire and avoidance of pain) which also is part of psychic reality.

Or, as the author proposed elsewhere (Sandler, 1997), psychic non-reality, an inseparable companion of psychic reality, in the same sense that the production of nourishing chemical products (such as ATP, adenosine tri-phosphate) is inseparable from the production of faeces, or the storage of oxygen in the blood cells is inseparable from the production of carbon dioxide.

P.A. My problem is the relationship when two minds, persons, characters, meet. Freud drew attention to one aspect of that relationship which he called "transference". I think he meant that when a man meets his analyst he transfers to him characteristics which were probably once consciously, and not unreasonably, thought to inhere in some member of the parental family. These characteristics are inappropriate when felt about a stranger—the analyst.

PAUL Why the analyst? Why not other people?

P.A. The analyst is typical of these "other people". In analysis these characteristic "transfers" can be discussed.

ROBIN *Only* by the patient?

P.A. No; the analyst also reacts to the patient. But in so far as he is unconscious of it, it is known as the counter-transference. You can read all about this in the literature, or better still, find out for yourself by having a psycho-analysis. I do not want to go into that because here, at best, we can only "talk about it"—not experience it. [AMF, II. 249–50]

To talk about analysis means a splitting of material reality from psychic reality (as defined by Freud in chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams*). To experience analysis means to live both material reality and psychic reality, or "reality sensuous and psychic" as Bion puts it in *Attention and Interpretation*.

In 1975, he recommended, as an invitation to attaining the analytical view, that analysts should try to avoid formalism, or rational, clever manipulations of symbols, as well as "investigations in psycho-analysis":

SHERLOCK The simple part of it has been dealt with by Watson. You heard that fellow Bion? Nobody has ever heard of him or of

Psycho-analysis. He thinks it is real, but that his colleagues are engaged in an activity which is only a more or less ingenious manipulation of symbols. There is something in what he says. There is a failure to understand that any definition must deny a previous truth as well as carry an unsaturated component. [AMF, I, 92]

... The most profound method known to us of investigation—psycho-analysis—is unlikely to do more than scratch the surface. [BLI, 52]

MYSELF The practical point is—no further investigation of psycho-analysis, but the psyche it betrays. *That* needs to be investigated through the medium of *mental* patterns; *that* which is indicated is *not* a symptom; *that* is not a cause of the symptom; *that* is not a disease or *anything* subordinate. Psycho-analysis itself is just a stripe on the coat of the tiger. Ultimately it may meet the Tiger—The Thing Itself—O. [AMF, I, 112]

In his short papers, “Evidence” (1976) and “Emotional turbulence” (1977), Bion first adumbrated his hypothesis on the risk of the whole of psycho-analysis becoming “*a vast paramnesia intended to fill the void of our ignorance*”. In 1979 he would summarize the whole issue:

ROLAND Yes; but is there any evidence for a mind at all? It has no colour, smell, or any other sensuous counterpart. Why should not the whole of psycho-analysis be just a vast, towering Babel of paramnesias to fill the gap where our ignorance ought to be? [AMF, III, 540]

Bion tried to endow psycho-analysis with the scientifically sound foundation that Freud tried to attain. With his observational theories, Bion looked for evidence and ways to refute interpretations. Freud established them in “Constructions in analysis”; they were based on the patient’s reactions before the analyst’s interpretations, in terms of free associations.

Bion’s attempts at refutations appear in *Elements of Psycho-Analysis and Transformations*; during his last phase of courtship with his own modified form of neo-positivism. He observed the “truth value” of verbal statements made in sessions, through a precise formulation of the vertexes under which both analyst and

analysand's verbal statements were made. Refutations can be seen as scientific "devil's advocates". If an interpretation can survive the refutation, it may undergo a development, or correction.

P.A. I do not think that Freud or any psycho-analyst would welcome such an extension; it is typical of the devaluation to which the language we use is subjected. I am prepared to entertain the possibility that any cloud-capp'd tow'rs of human imaginative structures may disappear like the insubstantial vision of a dream. I do not have any difficulty in thinking that the human race itself might disappear in a puff of smoke. Suppose the sun were to flicker as a prelude to its disintegration, would any human survive? This world is only a grain of cosmic dust and our sun an ordinary star—so the astronomers tell us. We know of no other world to which we could fly as a new home.

ROBIN On the other hand it would be extraordinary if amongst the many millions of solar systems there were not some other accident similar to that which produced "homo-sapiens".

ROLAND A fat lot of use that would be to us.

P.A. In the meantime we should remain true to our nature and endeavour to make the best of ourselves.

ROLAND Is P.A. also among the moralists? I thought you people prided yourselves on being above that.

P.A. I am not aware that we pride ourselves or deprecate ourselves on account of our being ordinary members of the human race. Like my fellows I would be gratified if I discovered that I was in some way excellent; in fact I have found no evidence of my "excellence" as a psycho-analyst.

ALICE Your colleagues think highly of you.

P.A. Some do, luckily; I am not unappreciative of the fact, but it tells me more of the generosity and affection of my colleagues than of *my* merits. I think we could discuss something of greater interest than me and my qualities and defects."

Concerning the too often overlooked issue of the analyst's prejudices, disguised as morals:

ROLAND Doesn't your working day consist in discussing the qualities and defects of others?

P.A. I try to demonstrate the qualities of the individual. Whether they are assets or liabilities he can then decide for himself. [AMF, III, 540–41]

The analytic view must entertain a critical appraisal of the concept of cure. Freud demonstrated the universality of the neuroses; Klein, the same for the psychosis; and Bion sees the curative model in a critical way (q.v.).

One of the deadliest enemies of the analytic view is the use of jargon (q.v.), which enables a pre-patterned mode of non-thinking that passes for real thinking. Jargon is a clothing to feelings of “already known”. In contrast, the analytic view enables one to march into the unknown. Bion simply rescues Freud, who once wrote that we must tell the patient that which he *does not know*:

PAUL Timidity is a fact of our nature. We cling to anything which gives us the chance of saying “Thus far and no further”. Any discovery is followed by a closure. The remainder of our thoughts and endeavours is devoted to consolidating the system to prevent the intrusion of yet another thought. [AMF, II, 265]

🕒 Bion saw the necessity of keeping his analytic view in the emotional tempest created by the so-called psychotics and borderlines (a fashionable term in the sixties) who were predominantly narcissistic, coupled with disturbances of thought. They resorted to projective identification in order to turn analysis into a game of emotional responses instead of a march towards knowledge. The development of this necessity came when Bion, after Klein, observed how the universality of the psychotic nuclei functions, with a seminal paper on the psychotic and the non-psychotic personalities (1956).

This meant that the phenomena he observed in so-called psychotics were present, albeit in a modified form, more subtle and in the guise of hallucinosis, in so-called “normal” or “neurotic” patients—and vice-versa. The subtleties of the presentation of the psychotic phenomena dictated that the analytic view could be even more difficult to attain and to keep. This problem would occupy the rest of his life as a practitioner.

First he tried to ensure the truth-value of the analyst’s statements through the Grid (q.v.). He came to state that the analyst

must avoid statements belonging to categories of column 2—lies. Truth became the criterion; *Elements of Psycho-Analysis* and *Transformations* mark his attempts inspired by the neo-positivists such as Carnap, who also attempted to establish the truth-value of scientific statements (see entries Grid, and Transformations and Invariances).

But he abandoned this; he resorted to other traditions of apprehension of reality as it is, in order to keep the analytic view, that of the so-called mystics (both the Lurianic movement and the Christian Cabbala). At this moment he states that the numinous realm, which he calls “O”, must be the compass of the analyst; to analyse equals the “pursuit of truth-O”, of becoming, of turning transformations in K into transformations in O. In order to do this one must eschew memory, desire and understanding.

This would mark his work *Attention and Interpretation*, which can be seen as his great attempt towards attaining the analytical view under a commonsensical vertex. The analytic view is closely related to the analyst’s ability to dream the patient’s material (refer to specific entry under this heading). The “trained intuition”, already adumbrated in *Transformations*, is seen as the analytic tool.

Pain

The analytic view always deals with pain. Intuition is linked to pain to the extent that it composes a kind of analytical ethics:

The emotion to which attention is drawn should be obvious to the analyst, but unobserved by the patient; an emotion that is obvious to the patient is usually *painfully* obvious and avoidance of unnecessary pain must be one aim in the exercise of analytic intuition. Since the analyst’s capacity for intuition should enable him to demonstrate an emotion before it has become *painfully* obvious it would help if our search for the elements of emotions was directed to making intuitive deductions easier. [EP, 74]

An analytic view cannot be achieved if one tries to avoid pain, which is inimical to the unknown. Conversely, to avoid pain is the ally of desire, as Freud observed. Explanations are one of the tools for avoiding pain—in illusion, hallucination and delusion.

Pain cannot be absent from the personality. An analysis must be painful, not because there is necessarily any value in pain, but because an analysis in which pain is not observed and discussed cannot be regarded as dealing with one of the central reasons for the patient's presence. The importance of pain can be dismissed as a secondary quality, something that is to disappear when conflicts are resolved; indeed most patients would take this view. Furthermore it can be supported by the fact that successful analysis does lead to diminution of suffering; nevertheless it obscures the need, more obvious in some cases than in others, for the analytic experience to increase the patient's *capacity* for suffering even though patient and analyst may hope to decrease pain itself. The analogy with physical medicine is exact; to destroy a capacity for physical pain would be a disaster in any situation other than one in which an even greater disaster—namely death itself—is certain. [EP, 61–2]

To deal with pain in analysis is fundamental to achieving the analytical view. It requires the notion of reversible perspective (q.v.)—a special use of projective identification in order to render a dynamic situation static.

The work of the analyst is to restore dynamic to a static situation and so make development possible . . . the patient manoeuvres so that the analyst's interpretations are agreed; they thus become the outward sign of a static situation . . . In reversible perspective acceptance by the analyst of the possibility of an impairment of capacity for pain can help avoidance of errors that might lead to disaster. If the problem is not dealt with the patient's capacity to maintain a static situation may give way to an experience of pain so intense that a psychotic breakdown is the result. [EP, 60 and 62]

A good-humoured paper of this time was kept unknown but was published posthumously by his dedicated wife; its title is "Predictive psycho-analysis and predictive psychopathology: a fable for our time" (*Cogitations*) This paper subsumes and synthesizes his warnings about the loss of the analytic view, the dangers that encircled the psycho-analytic movement as a social fact, the attacks the members of the movement made against the analytic view and many expressions of the death instinct. His *Trilogy A Memoir of the Future* would cap all those attempts and integrate them in a novel form of presentation, where poetry and much more

of the mystics are included in order to show how the analytic view may and must be maintained during the sessions.

The analytic view is precluded if the professional tries to replace the need to develop an analytically trained intuition with pre-patterned theories, explanations: *"The erudite can see that a description is by Freud, or Melanie Klein, but remain blind to the thing described"* (AMF, I, 5). Those explanations usually function as pain relievers.

Binocular vision and correlation

The analytic view demands an ability to make a couple, or marriage. The concept of container and contained works during the here and now of the analytic session; binocular vision (q.v.) provides the confrontation of at least two vertexes, allowing the formation of a commonsensical view. Kant's criticism re-emerges in the analytic session; the confrontation—in the sense of *vis-à-vis*—is the condition for growth. This contrasts with autism. Or, in other words, the idea that there is such a thing as "total independence". This is perhaps the most profound basis of hallucinosis (q.v.) hitherto observed. Correlation, relationships between objects allow for emotional experiences; they cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship (LE, 42). *"... I assume that correlation is a necessary part of confrontation and that confrontation is a necessary part of analysis"* (AI, 93).

The improvement of the analysis includes the "circular argument" (q.v.). It is a concept destined to gauge the effectiveness of an interpretation given by an analyst *vis-à-vis* the patient's statements. The "correct interpretation" (q.v.) must be such that one avoids restricting it to "knowing about" but reaches "becoming" (q.v.).

The analytic view would receive a lasting expansion when the concept of $\bar{Q} \bar{O}$, container/contained, was introduced. It would integrate Oedipus and the sexual component in the here-and-now of the evolving session. Refer to the entry, container/contained.

The personal equation

That an analytic view is only achieved through personal analysis is beyond any doubt in Bion's work. There are many mentions and

even recommendations that an analyst should look for the best analysis he can. The same sense is conveyed when he warns that his books are to be read by practising analysts.

Freud was the first to coin the expression "personal equation" and the possibilities for dealing with it; it encircles the interference of the observer in the object observed in terms of gauging them and disciplining them—up to a point (1925, "On negation", SE, XIX; 1938, "An outline of psycho-analysis", SE, XXIII). Ferenczi would return to the issue (1928, "The elasticity of the psycho-analytic method") but it seems that up to 1965 no other analysts would emphasize this factor that is fundamental to an analytical view.

The first requisite for the use of a theory is proper conditions for observation. The most important of these is psycho-analysis of the observer to ensure that he has reduced to a minimum his own inner tensions and resistances which otherwise obstruct his views of facts by making correlation of conscious and unconscious impossible. The next step is for the analyst to bring his attention to bear. Darwin pointed out that judgement obstructs observation. The psycho-analyst however must intervene with interpretations and this involves the exercise of judgement. A state of reverie conducive to alpha-function, obtrusion of the selected fact, and model-making together with an armoury limited to a few essential theories ensure that a harsh break in observation of the kind Darwin had in mind becomes less likely; interpretations can occur to the analyst with the minimum disturbance of observation" [LE, 86–7]

I shall ignore disturbance produced by the analyst's personality or aspects of it. The existence of such disturbance is well known and its recognition is the basis for analytic acceptance of the need for analysts to be analysed and the many studies of counter-transference. While other scientific disciplines recognize the personal equation, or the factor of personal error, no science other than psycho-analysis has insisted on such a profound and prolonged investigation of its nature and ramifications . . . I shall assume an ideal analyst and that $Ta \alpha$ and $Ta \beta$ are not distorted by turbulence—though turbulence and its sources are part of O " [T, 48]

Usefulness It may sound disposable and pleonastic to state the possible usefulness of such a concept. In simpler terms, to establish the analytic view is to establish the borders between psycho-analysis

and anything else. The pursuit of such an improvement is the basic reason for the existence of the analyst's own analysis (the so-called training analysis). This effort was made first by Freud himself in many well-known papers. Thereafter some distinguished and experienced analysts such as Karl Menninger tried to establish a theory of technique, and others such as Reik tried to establish the purely analytic posture; in the nineties, the outstanding attempts of André Green. Many others tried to transplant other models to analysis; even though I do not do justice in this text both to all involved and the many ways they tried to do it. For example, James Strachey's attempt was through a careful translation of Freud, Winnicott tried to warn Klein about politics interfering in science, Clifford-Scott and Wisdom in respect to the clinical posture, and many "good enough" analysts in more isolated countries—I refer to the attempts at a purely analytic posture.

An analytic view would enable one to attain a specific success, an **analytic** success. This is in entire agreement with Freud: "*If analysis has been successful in restoring the personality of the patient he will approximate to being the person he was when his development became compromised*" (T, 143). Judgement does not belong to analytic practice, except when a judgmental posture is part of the patient's personality.

What is at stake here? The possibility of making analysis a real, truthful and useful activity for patients in the first place, and analysts and mankind. In the long run, it means survival or oblivion.

& Bion tried to unearth Freud's pure psycho-analysis. On the basis of his work in the Trilogy, it can be said that he avoided by every means two kinds of splitting, which the author named elsewhere the "naïve realistic" and the "naïve idealistic". "Naïve realism" is the concretization that favoured and still favours material reality. It was initiated with Broca's and Penfield's highly speculative schemata fitting rationally with Freud's models of mind, and returned in the guise of the more recent "neuro-psycho-analytic", "neuro-scientific" and positivistic minded research. "Naïve idealism" comprises the disordered flights of imagination that plagued the psycho-analytic movement from its inception. The famous warning of Freud, namely, "that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar" addresses this issue. Since the late seventies "naïve idealism" mani-

feats itself in textualist, semantic, post-modernistic trends and many other kinds of “evidenceless”, improbable, brainy, paramnesic manipulations of symbols and imaginary causal chains framed in quasi-psycho-analytical wording. It is a characteristic of written works from the thirties to the seventies. Such writing imagines a disembodied mind (Sandler, 2001, b, c)

Suggested cross-references: Atonement, Becoming, Circular Argument, Compassion, Container/Contained, Cure, Disaster, Disturbed personality, Dream the patient’s material, Dream-work- α , Intuition; Jargon, Judgmental values, Mind, “O”, Principle of Uncertainty, Real analysis, Thoughts without a thinker, Truth, Ultra-sensuous.

Animate and inanimate: Already in his earlier papers Bion had noticed that people try to deal with the animate with methods that are appropriate to the inanimate realm. He observed people who could not go to sleep or be wide awake; who could not dream or think; their state could neither be described in terms of being alive nor dead.

Having killed, from the violence of their emotions, the living aspect of the breast (love solace, understanding), the truthful nature of the breast was denied and split off; all that remained was the concrete milk (LE, 10). The issue is important not only from a theoretical point of view. It may discriminate between real analysis and imitative practices. This may explain the present tribulations of the psycho-analytic movement, which was not able to profit, as a whole, from Bion’s attempts to rescue Freud and Klein’s contributions, which are not concrete. The psycho-analytical movement is lost in the search for concrete, neurological, inanimate or social causes and solutions. In this sense the psycho-analytical movement functions just like patients. For, during analysis, the patient cannot deal with interpretation without a craving for love that remains unsatisfied; it “*turns into overweening and misdirected greed*” (LE, 11).

The patient tries to force the analyst to furnish concrete cure, solutions, answers, wisdom, counsel, and more and more interpretations that are swallowed as if they were truth-in-themselves or things-in-themselves, with no working through. The patient “*does not feel he is having interpretations for that would involve an ability to establish with the analyst the counterpart of an infant’s relationship with*

a breast that provides material wisdom and love. But he feels able only to establish the counterpart of a relationship in which such sustenance can be had as inanimate objects can provide; he can have analytic interpretations that he feels to be either flatulent or contributions remarkable for what they are not rather than for what they are" (LE, 11–12).

The issue has consequences for science and epistemology. Bion borrowed formulations from the philosopher. The object of study of psycho-analysis and of philosophy is sometimes the same, namely, the human mind. Bion stressed the fundamental difference between the philosopher's and the analyst's tasks; namely, the practical objectives of the analyst.

With regard to science, there are difficulties for the positivistic-minded person who mistakes science for that which Kant called "naïve realism". The problem obtruded and carried on obtruding with Darwin and Einstein in the fields of biology and physics. It emerged with full force with Freud in the field of medicine.

To the same extent that Freud's discoveries are misunderstood, forgotten and debased, the issue obtrudes again *within* the psycho-analytic movement:

The scientist whose investigations include the stuff of life itself finds himself in a situation that has a parallel in that of the patients I am describing. The breakdown in the patient's equipment for thinking leads to dominance of a mental life in which his universe is populated by inanimate objects. The inability of even the most advanced human beings to make use of thoughts, because the capacity to think is rudimentary in all of us, means that the field for investigation, all investigation being ultimately scientific, is limited, by human inadequacy, to those phenomena that have the characteristic of the inanimate. We assume that the psychotic limitation is due to an illness: but that that of the scientist is not. It appears that our rudimentary equipment for "thinking" thoughts is adequate when the problems are associated with the inanimate, but not when the object for investigation is the phenomenon of life itself. Confronted with the complexities of the human mind the analyst must be circumspect in following even accepted scientific method; its weakness may be closer to the weakness of psychotic thinking than superficial scrutiny would admit. [LE, 14]

One may see that Bion was circumspect in criticizing directly that which he names, "accepted scientific method". Max Planck

faced the fierce opposition of Ernst Mach in the same way that Freud faced the opposition of the medical establishment. More of the same, with Klein, who faced the opposition of the self-entitled “Freudian” establishment. Bion’s work faced the opposition of many parts of the psycho-analytic establishment during the eighties—this fact had already crept in during the attempts to co-opt him during the sixties, as well as in the attempt to exclude him in the ensuing years. Green mentioned the last occurrence in his book review of *Cogitations* in the IJPA [1992]

Learning and Experience was written around 1960–61. One may consult the various chapters on “Scientific Method” published in *Cogitations*, which date from 1959. They were preparatory studies to that text. During 1964–65, in *Transformations*, Bion would put the issue in a slightly different manner—with regard to the human equipment for knowing reality. That which is animate came to be equated with the immaterial realm of psychic reality.

In order to get a model for discussing the situation, Bion resorted to Kant’s terminology: noumena and phenomena. Bion now more confidently puts the phenomena into the realm of the concrete, sensuously apprehensible facts. They can be seen as emanations of ultimate reality: the latter (including psychic reality) is a negative realm. Once one had attained a glimpse of its existence, there is no need to search, to prove, or to multiply the concrete formulations of it:

It can be represented by terms such as ultimate reality or truth. The most, and the least that the individual person can do is to be it. Being identified with it is a measure of distance from it. The beauty of a rose is a phenomenon betraying the ugliness of O just as ugliness betrays or reveals the existence of O . . . O, representing the unknowable ultimate reality can be represented by any formulation of a transformation—such as “unknowable ultimate reality” which I have just formulated. It may therefore seem unnecessary to multiply representations of it; indeed from the psycho-analytical vertex that is true. But I wish to make it clear that my reason for saying O is unknowable is not that I consider human capacity unequal to the task . . . [T, 139–40]

Truth may be the most synthetic formulation that marks that which belongs to the immaterial, animate reality. The animate is

ineffable. The inanimate can equally express truth and untruth. The inanimate can be put into words.

Arrogance: Bion observed that a triadic behavioral conjunction appears when one feels prevented from making projective identification. The person may feel that he is prevented. It can actually be prevented. The triad is made of arrogance, stupidity and curiosity. Clinically, every time that a psychotic personality cannot function through projective identifications, he or she resorts to this triad or to a variation of it in which one or two of each of these behaviours prevails (ST, 86, 92).

Suggested cross-references: Curiosity, Stupidity, Projective Identification.

Atonement, at-one-ment:

P.A. I do not think we could tolerate our work—painful as it often is for both us and our patients—without compassion (AMF, III, 522).

The central postulate is that atonement with ultimate reality, or O, as I have called it to avoid involvement with an existing association, is essential to harmonious mental growth. [ST, 145]

An observational concept belonging to the realm of the psycho-analytic posture, psycho-analytical view (q.v.) and formulations in the decisive moment of the here and now of the session. It borrows a term from the mystic tradition (especially from the Jewish and Christian Cabbala, as well as from some of the Reform postures). This is done in order to depict a mental state. It is a tool for attaining “real psycho-analysis” (q.v.). To grasp the meaning of the concept one must have an idea of that which Bion named “O”, a quasi-mathematical notation for the realm of the noumena, the unconscious, the id (q.v.). Bion proposed the symbol “O” to denote “*ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself*”.

At-one-ment is a verbal (written) indication describing situations that are experientially alive and truthful, with no taints of lies. It formulates an evolving ultimate reality during the here and now of the session. It is not a tool to *know* one’s own psychic reality, but to *apprehend* it in a transient way. A given reality as it evolves and

becomes amenable to be formulated under a series of guises: literary, musical, among others. This is done, partially, as a glimpse. At-one-ment is a passageway to insight.

It is not a tool for knowing psychic reality due to the fact that psychic reality, as any form in which that reality eventually may present itself, *"is not something which lends itself to being known. It is impossible to know reality for the same reason that makes it impossible to sing potatoes; they may be grown, or pulled, or eaten, but not sung. Reality has to be 'been': there should be a transitive verb 'to be' expressly for use with the term 'reality'"* (T, 148).

Reality-O, or "truth-O" (AI, 29) is the leitmotiv of analytic pursuit (AI, 29). It can "become", but it cannot be "known" (AI, 26). The analyst "becomes O" (AI, 27), being expressions of O, the emotional experience as experienced by the analysand and analyst, towards the reality of the patient as he or she really is.

In so far as the analyst becomes O he is able to know the events that are evolutions of O" (AI, 27). Therefore the experience of atonement or at-one-ment cannot be described. It can be lived. It is not a matter of mere feelings—that Bion ascribes as appertaining to the realm of inner sense impressions. As a preparation for the concept of atonement, he paves the way: ". . . people exist who are so intolerant of pain or frustration (or in whom pain and frustration is so intolerable) that they feel the pain but will not suffer it and so cannot be said to discover it" (AI, 9).

This quotation allows the introduction of a factor of at-one-ment: pain and its dialectical pair, nourishment. Bion had previously illuminated this in *Transformations*.

This was one of his first forays into the observation of methods to make approximations to "O". The tolerance of frustration and pain allows experience of the "No-(something)", or the negative by means of which reality as it is emerges. From the renouncing of achieving whatever it is, there emerges the truth or reality-O of that which was the object of nourishment of that which was regarded as nourishment. I'm proposing to differentiate nourishment, which includes frustration, from fulfilment or satisfaction (see below on atonement and satisfaction).

To qualify O for inclusion amongst the column 1 categories by defining its definitory qualities I list the following negatives: Its existence as indwelling in an individual person or in God or Devil;

it is not good or evil; it cannot be known, loved or hated. It can be represented by terms such as ultimate reality or truth. The most, and the least that the individual person can do is to be it. Being identified with it is a measure of distance from it. The beauty of a rose is a phenomenon betraying the ugliness of O just as ugliness betrays or reveals the existence of O. [T, 139–140]

The experience of “to be at-one” is strictly linked to the moment of the analytic interpretation. It is not an act of knowing but of being: *“Formulations of the events of analysis made in the course of analysis must possess value different from that of formulations made extra-sessionally. Their value therapeutically is greater if they are conducive to transformations in O; less if conducive to transformations in K . . . the analyst must focus his attention on O, the unknown and unknowable. The success of psycho-analysis depends on the maintenance of a psycho-analytic point of view; the point-of-view is the psycho-analytic vertex; the psycho-analytic vertex is O. With this the analyst cannot be identified: he must be it . . . the psycho-analyst can know what the patient says, does, and appears to be, but cannot know the O of which the patient is an evolution: he can only ‘be’ it . . . the interpretation is an actual event in an evolution of O that is common to analyst and analysand”* (AI, 26, 27).

“To be” and “become” depends on having regard to truth: *“There can be no genuine outcome that is based on falsity. Therefore the outcome depends on the closeness with which the interpretative appraisal approximates to truth”* (AI, 28).

The state of at-one-ment is described thus: *“To put it in more popular terms, I would say the more ‘real’ the psycho-analyst is the more he can be at one with the reality of the patient”*. This experience is real, but it does not rely on split factual, concrete, and sensuously apprehensible situations such as the universe of the patient’s discourse, statements and the like: *“Conversely, the more he [the analyst] depends on actual events the more he relies on thinking that depends on a background of sense impression”* (AI, 28) The already known, or the tendency to state *“thus far and no further”* (AMF, II, 265) precludes the at-one-ment: *“The impulse to be rid of painful stimuli gives the ‘content’ of the memory an unsatisfactory quality when one is engaged in the pursuit of truth O . . . an analyst with such a mind is one who is incapable of learning because he is satisfied”* (AI, 29).

"O" stands for the absolute truth in and of any object; *"it is assumed that this cannot be known by any human being; it can be known about, its presence can be recognized and felt, but it cannot be known. It is possible to be at one with it. That it exists is an essential postulate of science but it cannot be scientifically discovered. No psycho-analytic discovery is possible without recognition of its existence, at-one-ment with it and evolution"* (AI, 30).

Atonement and truth

"It may be wondered what state of mind is welcome if desires and memories are not. A term that would express approximately what I need to express is 'faith'—faith that there is an ultimate reality and truth—the unknown, unknowable, 'formless infinite'" (AI, 31). The issue is not the particular truth(s); even less "the truth"; but truth itself. There is a hope that truth is strong and shall prevail. Faith, here, is faith in the existence of truth and reality.

Atonement and interpretation

The interpretation should be such that the transition from *knowing about* reality to *becoming real* is furthered . . . The interpretations that effect the transition from knowing about O to becoming O are those establishing . . . the material through which the argument circulates. [T, 153]

Bion examines the properties of the number "one" and at the same time he states that mystics are people who seem to have had some kind of contact with O. They rest in a capacity to tolerate paradoxes, as in the example of St John of the Cross, whose descriptions of "repellent" qualities *"may be an unconscious tribute to his identification of absolute real evil with absolute real good"* (T, 139). Isaac Singer describes the same in many of his novels, such as in *The Moskat Family*. The main character, Asa Herschel, discovers that the Jewish people's Messiah is Hitler.

In 1967 Bion resorts to Wordsworth to express the posture:

If psycho-analysts can abandon themselves to analysis in the psycho-analytical sessions, they are in a position when recollecting the experience in tranquillity [this is Wordsworth's wording to

convey his "sense of poetry"; Wordsworth, (1798, p.171)] to discern their experience as part of a greater whole. Once that is achieved, the way is open for the discovery of configurations revealing yet other and deeper groups of theory. But the discoverer must be prepared to find that he has started another round of group oscillations. Persecution \leftrightarrow Depression. [Cogitations, 285]

The practical point is—no further investigation of psycho-analysis, but the psyche it betrays. *That* needs to be investigated through the medium of *mental* patterns; *that* which is indicated is *not* a symptom; *that* is not a cause of the symptom; *that* is not a disease or *anything* subordinate. Psycho-analysis itself is just a stripe on the coat of the tiger. Ultimately it may meet the Tiger—The Thing Itself—O. [AMF, I, 112]

Atonement and science

The failure to apprehend the use of analogy may hamper the realization of the scientific nature of atonement; and by extension, of psycho-analysis:

The scientific approach, associated with a background of sense impressions, for example the presence of the psycho-analyst and his patient in the same room, may be regarded as having a base. In so far as it is associated with the ultimate reality of the personality, O, it is baseless. This does not mean that the psycho-analytic method is unscientific, but that the term "science", as it has been commonly used hitherto to describe an attitude to objects of sense, is not adequate to represent an approach to those realities with which "psycho-analytical science" has to deal. Not is it adequate to represent that aspect of the human personality that is concerned with the unknown and ultimately unknowable—with O.

The criticism applies to every vertex, be it musical, religious, aesthetic, political; all are inadequate when related to O because, with the possible exception of the religion of the mystic, these and similar vertices are not adapted to the sensually baseless. The realities with which psycho-analysts deals, for example, fear, panic, love, anxiety, passion, have no sensuous background, though there is a sensuous background (respiratory rate, pain, touch, etc.) that is often identified with them and then treated, supposedly scientifically. What is required is not a base for psycho-analysis and its theories but a

science that is not restricted by its genesis in knowledge and sensuous background. It must be a science of at-one-ment. It must have a mathematics of at-one-ment, not identification. There can be no geometry of "similar", "identical", "equal"; only of analogy. [AI, 88–9]

Atonement is linked to dream-work; refer to the entry "Dream the patient's material".

Misuses and misconceptions: Bion makes explicit that he borrows some terms from other disciplines. Sometimes he does this intentionally to profit from the penumbra of associations of the terms.

Many of the terms he borrowed already had known, widely-accepted meaning and connotation. He wants the reader to be reminded of them. For example, "transformations and invariances", "hallucinosi". Sometimes he uses the term giving specific warnings that the reader must see that the term is used differently in his work when compared with the common usage. For example, the non-hyphenated term "preconception" (q.v.). Sometimes he creates new terms to avoid any associations with existing terms such as "O" and " α ". Finally, sometimes he stresses some meanings already ingrained in a given term and sticks with them, such as "hyperbole".

Does lack of attention to these warnings and explanations of the use of a term arouse confusion and polemic? Do prejudices hamper the full realization of Bion's use of terms derived from mystic experience, such as faith and atonement?

The use of a known term facilitates communication without resorting to neologisms. Concrete-minded people cannot grasp the fact that the mystic tradition, as well as art and philosophy, were early human attempts to approach human nature and mind's functioning before the obtrusion of science and psycho-analysis. Some of the mystic's insights gained durability, to the extent that they were truthful, quite independent of time and the forms in which they were first couched and then conveyed. Does the concrete-minded reader take these words literally as if Bion had used them in their religious sense, or with religious purposes? Was he trying to impinge religion on psycho-analysis?

Bion did not attack religion—nor did Freud. This statement runs contrary to the current prevailing (religious) belief that attributes to

Freud an anti-religious posture. This belief turns the psycho-analytic movement into another form of religion. It would suffice to read with real attention that which Freud says about religion in "The question of a *Weltanschauung*".

Bion had described the religious states of mind that characterize human mindlessness:

... I wonder how many plausible theories have been used and bewildered the human race. I would like to know. I am not sure of the ease with which "plausible" theories are produced. In this context of "plausible theories" about which we are talking, the plausible theory, or "convincing interpretation", may be hard to come by. It can be plausible and false. Witness the idea that "the sun rises"—what trouble that has caused! We do not know the cost in suffering associated with the belief in a Christian God, or the god of Abraham's Ur, or Hitler's Germany, or peyotism—or god of any kind. [AMF, I, 172]

And the danger that religious states of mind represented a real capacity for faith or belief that truth exists:

BION If all else fails you could rage, as I too can, against yourself, your youth or your age, your strength or your weakness. It is one of the uses you can make of God—if you can believe in God.

ROBIN Well, can't you?

BION Which god are you referring to?

ROBIN Allah Akbar!

BION I don't think you are being serious. I shall use psycho-analytic licence to take jokes seriously. To start with, you show you are aware that you have a choice.

ROBIN You think of me as joking. It would not be so easy to suppose that, if I were in fact a member of a Muslim culture. Nor would you suppose that you could "choose" to take it seriously "because" you are a member of a psycho-analytic group. You would be compelled to take it seriously. It has nothing to do with being a member of a particular group, profession or culture, but that particular "culture" has a great deal to do with some underlying, unobserved, constant conjunction of beliefs; an actual God of which the various religious formulations are only approximations to the underlying configuration of facts.

BION You are asking me to suppose that there is a “thing-in-itself”, noumenon, Godhead, which, using Kant’s terminology for my purposes, becomes “manifest” as a phenomenon; “God” as contrasted with “Godhead”, “finitude” as contrasted with “infinity”; “won”, as Milton says, “from the void and formless infinite”; a geometrical, Euclidean figure, a triangle with sides of 2, 4 and 5 units, as contrasted with an algebraical deductive system. But a rational fact gives no scope for “belief”. Belief itself is destroyed if it is transformed to find a “reason” for belief. [AMF, I, 179–80]

Bion respected the contributions that some people who were nourished by religious tradition gave to mankind. He differentiated between the mystic tradition and bigotry. The dialogues between the characters “Priest” (first called “Paul”) and “P.A.” in volumes II and III of *A Memoir of the Future* plainly shows this. Please refer to the entry, “Science versus Religion”.

All the references to St John of the Cross, John Ruysbroeck (in *Transformations*), Isaac Luria (after Georg Scholem, in *Attention and Interpretation*), the Bhagavad Gita (especially *A Memoir of the Future*, I, p. 69, 79, 140, 147; II, 333; *Cogitations*, p. 371), Israel’s God (*A Memoir of the Future*, I, p. 80) and Christ (*A Memoir of the Future*, I, p. 140) indicates his way: a respect for the wisdom contained in mystic tradition, outside of religious rites or submission.

Bion’s reverence and awe before the unknown equals that of Einstein, Freud and Heisenberg, to quote a few. On this basis some have accused Bion of being a deteriorated man, gaga. They try to base their accusation, in part, on Bion resorting to these models (for example, Meltzer, 1981; Segal, 1989; Joseph, 2002). The fact was reported, albeit talking about religion rather than mystics, by Joan and Neville Symington. Do they fail to see the analogic value of models (q.v.) in psycho-analysis?

Bion tried to use other models, such as mathematical notation. Also, he tried to formulate the analytic experience in more colloquial terms. In this he was influenced by the British Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth.

Analytic communication was degenerating into jargon (q.v.) and controversy (q.v.). But to be colloquial is not enough: there is the issue that analysis includes, and is, an emotional experience. Therefore Bion uses some terms that are derived from realms that take emotional experiences into consideration. The religious realm

is one of them. Words such as intuition, mystics, faith, were brought to the fore.

If the psycho-analytical situation is accurately intuited—I prefer this term to “observed” or “heard” or “seen” as it does not carry the penumbra of sensuous association—the psycho-analyst finds that ordinary conversational English is surprisingly adequate for the formulation of his interpretation. Further, the emotional situation serves to make the interpretation comprehensible to the analysand although resistances require some modification of this statement as too optimistic. [ST, 134]

The verbal formulation “atonement” derives from religious experience. Taking into account the scarcity of better terms, made more scarce after the way that the psycho-analytical movement debased the original psycho-analytical formulations of Freud and Klein, it is no wonder that one resorts to verbal formulation derived from other realms. There are no indications of Bion’s alleged mystic religiosity. As concerns O, *“the religious mystics have probably approximated most closely to expression of experience of it”* (AI, 30). The key here may be that one must differentiate mysticism from the mystic tradition.

If one reads it in a respectfully Ruskinian way, one will notice “expression of experience”. This definitely encircles the issue as a matter of verbal formulation, of analogic expression intended to communicate something. This something is the ability to apprehend reality. One may verify this when Bion specifically quotes the so-called mystics.

Verbal expressions intended to represent the ultimate object often appear to be contradictory within themselves, but there is a surprising degree of agreement, despite differences of background, time and space, in the descriptions offered by mystics who feel they have experienced the ultimate reality. Sometimes the agreement seems close even when, as with Milton, the individual seems to know of it rather than to have experienced it.

The rising world of waters dark and deep

Won from the void and formless infinite” [Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 3]

... The process of binding is a part of the procedure by which something is "won from the void and formless infinite"; it is K and must be distinguished from the process by which O is "become." [T, 151]

This is not a question restricted to theoretical issues:

The psycho-analyst accepts the reality of reverence and awe, the possibility of a disturbance in the individual which makes atonement and, therefore, an expression of reverence and awe impossible. The central postulate is that atonement with ultimate reality, or O, as I have called it to avoid involvement with as existing association, is essential to harmonious mental growth. It follows that interpretation involves elucidation of evidence touching atonement, and not evidence only of the continuing operation of immature relationship with a father ... Disturbance in capacity for atonement is associated with megalomaniac attitudes. [ST, 145]

Atonement is incompatible with greed, fantasies of satisfaction, idolization, or religious "contact with God" as a father or an omnipotent incarnate God.

Suggested cross-references: Analytic View, Correct Interpretation, Dream the Patient's Material, O, Real Analysis, Religion versus science, Thoughts without a thinker, Transformations in O, Ultra-sensuous.



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B

Basic assumptions: In dealing with small groups, Bion observed some expressions of the paranoid–schizoid position. They corresponded to a kind of prejudice that shaped the outcome of the group’s functioning, in a specific sense: these assumptions precluded the formation and/or development of a work group.

Bion, influenced by his analysis and further collaboration with John Rickman, who in turn profited from Klein’s work, was enabled to exercise that which he would later name the “analytically trained intuition” (q.v.).

The author has proposed elsewhere to specify the exercise of “analytically trained intuition” as belonging to the posture of psycho-analytic “participating observation”. Bion used it in group settings. Psycho-analysis is a “two-body psychology” in the terms coined by Rickman; therefore it qualifies to be seen as a group setting. Moreover, in the fullest sense of the Aristotelian dictum, “man is a political animal”, there is no humanity in isolation or *in abstractio*. Psycho-analytically speaking this would correspond—at its best—to autism, depression or masturbation. Conversely, the sense of solitude (Alves, 1989) differs from the sense of loneliness. In the sense of solitude, the person is with him/herself. Therefore

even if we consider a single person, when he or she realizes the existence of his or her mental life, this “whole entity”, a single person, can also be regarded as something endowed with a “two-ness” (Bion, 1977) Aristotle perceived this and wrote about the *nous*—the mind thinking about itself. Therefore, these group functions and modes of functioning also occur in a single mind, in terms of introjected objects.

In his early studies, Bion’s analytic intuition allowed the detection of three underlying modes of organization/disorganization of groups, which he named “basic assumptions” of a group:

- i. *Fight/flight*: the group splits itself in mutual destruction of its members; the aggression is often overt and there is a hostile search for and choice of culprits.
- ii. *Pairing*: the fragmentation consists of the members forming pairs that would bring forth a saviour; those pairs have a “Homo” nature. The members of the group, frozen in the paranoid–schizoid position, cling to each other due to features they attribute to each other that are felt (invariably in a hallucinatory way) to be similar or identical.
- iii. *Messianic or dependence*: the group agglutinates itself around a leader felt to be a saviour, a superior being. Those attributes are hallucinated products of shared projective identifications of the members of the group, who feel they are able to divest (in a phantastic way) themselves of their self-responsibility. Mind itself is extruded, in phantasy, and “placed” into another person, the “saviour”. This messianic leader is felt as *the* —and not only *a*—source of wisdom, authority and knowledge.

The three basic assumptions occur many times in succession; sometimes the pairing group paves the way to the messianic group; sometimes flight/fight groups are a prelude to the pairing group. The messianic group can lead to renewed fight/flights. The cycles follow on in a kind of feed-back with no possibility of change. The group can die, starved of truth; it cannot nourish itself through work, because it forms no work group, just “basic assumptions groups”. Therefore the self-feeding cycles are characterized by a primitive (emotionally speaking) destructive intra-group relationship, almost wholly based on hallucination and delusion. This