

## What does it mean to dream? Bion's theory of dreaming

"What is man?  
What is man not?  
Man is only the dream's shadow."

from the *Eighth Pythian Ode of Pindar*

Bion's extension of Freud's theory of dreaming had been quietly germinating in his earlier works (e.g. Bion, 1962b, p. 16, etc.). His interest in dreams and dreaming coincided with his formulation of the concepts of container and contained (♀♂) and  $\alpha$ -function (Bion, 1962b, p. 91). The latter—a *model*, not a theory—had an interesting and complicated sojourn with his concept of dreaming under the inclusive term, "dream-work- $\alpha$ "—a concept that he never published, only confined to his private notebook, published posthumously as *Cogitations* (Bion, 1992, pp. 56–63). Bion finally concluded (p. 186) that the two concepts, though related, did not belong together.<sup>1</sup>

### *Freud's theory of dream-work*

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900a) says:

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the

dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. [Freud, 1900a, p. 277]

Further on, he goes on to say:

It thus seems plausible to suppose that in the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by some means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. [p. 307]

Then:

[D]reams have no means at their disposal for representing these logical relations between dream-thoughts. For the most part dreams disregard all these conjunctions, and it is only the substantive content of the dream-thoughts that they take over and manipulate. The restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the interpretive process. [p. 312]

What Freud seems to be saying is that dream-work is necessary to *disguise* the emotional truths explicit and implicit in latent dream-thoughts. One of the way of distorting or altering them is via a *disarticulation* of the conventional links between thoughts and a *transvaluation* (p. 330) of the emotional valence attached to objects in the latent dream-thoughts. All in all, Freud emphasizes the need for dream-work to assume the role of an encoding or encrypting agency to keep latent truths *private—from their dreamer*.

To dream-work, Freud (1900a) assigns four functions: (1) condensation; (2) displacement; (3) considerations of altered representability, including the use of symbols; and (4) secondary revision. *Condensation* refers to the syncretistic process whereby a symbol may shrink or condense a limitless number of entities within its embrace. *Displacement*, the forerunner of projective identification, accounts for the transfer of attributions or qualities from one object or self to another. Considerations of *representability* require the dream-work to fictionalize the dream narrative paradoxically into a credible narrative—into a dream that works. *Secondary revision* is probably a function of the contact-barrier: it separates the Systems *Ucs.* and *Cs.* and seeks to guarantee that separation. (Secondary revision may be what Bion is referring to when he says that the analysand's free associations represent his dreaming.)

From Freud's perspective it seems that the purpose of dream-work is to *protect the conscious ego* from being overwhelmed by hidden, forbidden thoughts and impulses in the id. Bion, as we shall soon see, agrees with this rationale *and with its obverse* as well: that dream-work must also protect the unconscious from being overwhelmed by external stimuli.

*Bion's theory of dreaming:  
the relationship between dreaming and  $\alpha$ -function*

In notes written early on, in 1959, Bion seems to have conflated dreaming with  $\alpha$ -function (Bion, 1992, pp. 62–101) and then differentiated between them, as I suggested above. He conceives of  $\alpha$ -function as an *analogue model* to indicate the hypothetical process whereby the sense impressions of emotional experience become transformed from raw, inchoate, non-mental proto-emotions (impressions made by the intersection of evolving O on the subject's emotional frontier), known as " $\beta$ -elements" (Bion, 1962b, p. 11), into mentalizable " $\alpha$ -elements". These are then relegated to notation (memory), repression, maintenance, and reinforcement of the "contact-barrier" between consciousness and the unconscious (Bion, 1962b, p. 17), and thinking itself, as well as imagistic (principally visual) supplies for dream elements: that is, supplying dreaming with irreducible dream elements for use in dream-narrative production:

The sleeping man has an emotional experience, converts it into  $\alpha$ -elements and so becomes capable of dream thoughts . . . and therefore of *undisturbed consciousness*. [1962b, p. 15; italics added]

Dreaming and/or  $\alpha$ -function occur throughout the day and night. The emotional *vocabulary* furnished by  $\alpha$ -function is used in dreaming<sup>2</sup> to construct imaginative, preponderantly visual narratives as *truthful "archival fictions"*, which contain emotions that have emerged from transformed and transduced  $\beta$ -elements. These  $\beta$ -elements result from sense impressions on the subject's emotional frontier cast by intersections (interactions, confrontations) with the evolution of the "Absolute Truth" about an infinite, cosmic, *impersonal* "Ultimate Reality", "O", into a mercifully tolerable, finite, and personally acceptable truth about one's own *personal*, subjective relationship to one's objects in inner and outer reality. In other words, *impersonal O becomes transformed into personal O in a "transformational cycle"* with detours in K,<sup>3</sup> and, failing that,  $-K$  (falsehood). O designates an ever-expanding force

field of inner *and* outer stimuli (as sense impressions) presenting as a cosmic impersonal chaos, *uncertainty*,<sup>4</sup> and proliferating infinity moving in the direction of increasing incoherence and absolute symmetry or indivisibility—that is, *entropy* (Bion, 1965, 1970; Matte Blanco, 1975, 1988). Britton (2006) presents the notion of the principles of “probabilism” and “indeterminacy” to encompass what Bion means by O. The ancient Greeks referred to this phenomenon as “*Ananke*” (Necessity), and I would translate it as ever-evolving, ever-approaching “raw, impersonal Circumstance”. It is important to realize that O is always evolving—always in flux.

How does a dream evade frustration? By *distortion* of facts of reality, and by *displacement* of facts of reality. In short, by dream-work on the perception of facts—not, in this context, dream-work on the dream-thoughts except in so far as the dream-thoughts are thoughts portraying the facts. Freud attributes to dream-work the function of concealing the facts of internal mental life, the dream-thoughts, only. *I attribute to it the function of evading the frustration to which the dream thoughts, and therefore the interpretation of dream-thoughts, would give rise if allowed to function properly—that is, as mechanisms associated with the legitimate tasks involved in real modification of frustration.* Consequently, since such legitimate tasks always carry an element of frustration, excessive intolerance of frustration short-sightedly leads to the attempt at evasion of the frustration intrinsic to the task of modification of the frustration.

$\alpha$  is concerned with, and is identical with, unconscious waking thinking designed, as a part of the reality principle, to aid in the task of real, as opposed to pathological, modification of frustration. [1992, p. 54; italics added]

One can see how Bion integrates dreaming with  $\alpha$ -function. For him  $\alpha$ -function and/or dreaming serve “the legitimate task in . . . real modification of frustration” (not evasion). Furthermore, he thinks of  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha$ -function) and, thus, dreaming as serving the reality principle. He considers toleration of frustration to be pivotal in the capacity to think. Although he never formally integrated this concept with his theory of container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained, I believe that it should be.

Godbout (2004) discusses the ability to tolerate frustration:

[T]he fact of the intolerance or “intolerability” of frustration in relation to awareness or discovery indicates how representational activity, for Bion, does not spring out of absence of gratification alone, but out of *tolerated* absence. When intolerable, this absence on the contrary *compromises* seriously representation. [Godbout, 2004, p. 1125]

Proto-emotions—that is, sense impressions of emotional experience,  $\beta$ -elements—are processed by  $\alpha$ -function to yield  $\alpha$ -elements, the irreducible elements suitable for mentalization and dreaming. The  $\alpha$ -elements are thereupon selectively distributed to notation (memory), repression, further thought processes, and support for the contact-barrier between consciousness and the unconscious and for deployment as constructive units for dreaming. The deployed  $\alpha$ -elements, as they proliferate and link together to form more complex structures, are like letters of the alphabet (" $\alpha$ - $\beta$ ") that combine to produce versatile images, symbols, words, sentences, and, ultimately, thoughts or dream narratives. Furthermore, for Bion the act of dreaming constitutes a paradoxical process in which two opposing masters—the pleasure principle *and* the reality principle—are mediated in a dialectical relationship. Thus P-S (pleasure)  $\leftrightarrow$  D (reality), where P-S conducts personalization and subjectivization conducts transformations—a sorting out of O—and D allows for objectification. P-S projects, and D introjects.

### *Bion's hypotheses about dreaming*

Bion (1970), in extending Freud's ideas on the functions of dreaming, believed that, rather than thoughts emerging from the unconscious into consciousness only *sequentially*, as Freud (1900a) had suggested, (1) consciousness and the unconscious functioned *simultaneously* (Bion, 1970, p. 48) as well as sequentially, and (2) sensory stimuli had to become unconscious(dreamed) first before the subject could become conscious of them—or be able to be kept unaware of them for realistically expedient reasons. According to Bion:

It is in the dream that the Positions [the paranoid-schizoid and depressive—JSG] are negotiated. [1992, p. 37]

*My belief is that the dependence of waking life on dreams has been overlooked and is even more important. Waking life = ego activity . . . the dream symbolization and dream-work is what makes memory possible. [p. 47; italics added]*

We psycho-analysts think you do not know what a dream is: the dream itself is a pictorial representation, verbally expressed, of what happened. What actually happened when you "dreamed" we do not know. All of us are intolerant of the unknown and strive instantaneously to feel it is explicable, familiar. [1977b]<sup>5</sup>

Bion further states that the *analyst must dream the analytic session* (1992, p. 120).

Having concentrated on Bion's theories about the dependence of waking life on dreams, the progression of sensory stimuli from consciousness to the unconscious, and the simultaneity of conscious and unconscious mental processing, I now ask the question that I shall try later to answer: Why do stimuli have to be processed (dreamed) by the unconscious before consciousness can either utilize them or "choose" not to be bothered with them—that is, when they are kept unconscious? The answer that Bion offers us is that dreaming functions as a filter that sorts, categorizes, and prioritizes emotional facts that are stimulated by this incoming data, much like the motto of the *New York Times*: "All the news that's fit to print."

### *Suggested models*

The following four models may help to explain Bion's thinking with regard to dreaming:

- A. The *Möbius Strip* can, as already described, be thought of as a ribbon that is cut, given a half-twist, and then reattached. This results in a twisted continuous surface, so that in travelling along the ribbon, one finds oneself initially on the outside and then gradually on the inside surface of the ribbon—in other words, a paradoxical course of *discontinuous continuity* has been constructed. This model depicts the status of the paradoxical relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. The Möbius strip may also be represented as a *labyrinth*. The Möbius strip model depicts my conceptualization of dreaming (aka  $\alpha$ -function) configured as a psychic-emotional immunity frontier with a figure-8 structure, like the Möbius strip—one in which one can visualize a discontinuous continuity of dreaming and its cognates, including the contact-barrier and others extended throughout consciousness and the unconscious. The figure-8 structure accounts for the intensity of "unconscious wakeful thinking" at the frontier (contact-barrier) between Systems Ucs. and Cs.
- B. *Reversible perspective* (Bion, 1962b, p. 25) can be understood as an alternation for perspective dominance between foreground and background in a picture. Bion uses the picture of a vase to illustrate the "reversible perspective" (1963, p. 50). Imagine an outline of a dark vase against a light background. From one perspective, this is what one can see. From another perspective, the background

becomes the foreground and one can see, instead, two light faces confronting one another. The point is that although two different pictures emerge, *one can nevertheless not observe both pictures simultaneously*. Thus when we are awake, we observe from a conscious vertex or perspective. When we are asleep, we see from the unconscious perspective of the consciousness of the dream.

- C. *Binary opposition* (Lévi-Strauss, 1970) is a structuralistic concept in which two opposing forces are cooperatively opposed to one another so as to be mutually regulating of one another.

The relationship in Bion's scheme between consciousness and the unconscious is exemplified by all three of the above models. When there is consecutive movement of a stimulus from consciousness to the unconscious, the Möbius-strip model is operative. When the activities of consciousness and the unconscious function simultaneously, then the reversible-perspective or binary-oppositional model is in operation. Dreaming begins as a sequential function so as to induce a normal state of simultaneous and parallel activity in consciousness and the unconscious.

It is my belief, following my reading of Bion, that he conceives that one of the purposes of dreaming is—similarly to the function of the contact-barrier (Bion, 1962b, p. 17)—to maintain the distinction or separation and binary-oppositional functioning of consciousness and the unconscious. Rather than being obligatorily *conflictual*, which is Freud's (1915e) view, Bion conceives of them as *cooperatively oppositional*—to triangulate O, the Absolute Truth, about an infinite and indifferent or impersonal Ultimate Reality. In so doing, Bion has extended Freud's two-dimensional perspective of the relationship between the two consciousnesses to a third dimension, with O as the third vertex. O, it must be remembered, represents both the intersection of one's emotional frontier by sensory stimuli from within and without and the release by these stimuli of the inherent pre-conceptions—the Ideal Forms, the things-in-themselves. It is important to realize that dreaming converts impersonal O into personal O and then into K and that Bion (1992) ultimately substituted "*infinity*" for the unconscious. (p. 372) and *finiteness* for consciousness.

- D. *Binocular perspective* (or dual-track perspective) in which any and all phenomena can be observed from two or more vertices to achieve a stereoscopic perspective.

*What is dreaming?*

I hypothesize that dreaming constitutes a “proto-language” (Fitch, 2005), one similar to the conscious and unconscious “communicative musicality” between infants and mothers postulated by Trevarthen (1999)—but with the following difference: I suggest that dreaming is the proto-linguistic communication within the System *Pcs.* between its two frontiers—the lower frontier with System *Ucs.* and the upper frontier with System *Cs.* It is communication between the “dreamer who dreams the dream” and the “dreamer who understands the dream”—that is, the “ineffable subject of the unconscious” and the “phenomenal subject of consciousness”—respectively (Grotstein, 2000a, p. 11). The relationship between the two “dreamers” is best represented by the ancient Greek “middle voice”, which connotes the simultaneity of the active and passive modes of being (Greenberg, 2005; Peradotto, 1990).

Dreaming constitutes a continuous sensory (usually visual) process whereby the sensory stimuli (internal and/or external) of emotional experience undergo a transformation and an aesthetically honed reconfiguration, making them suitable for being experienced affectively, thought about cognitively, and recalled in memory. The sensory stimuli of emotional experience, *O*, seem initially to *surround* one until one has successfully dreamt them, after which one feels that one has some grasp of *O* by becoming *O*. In other words, dreaming acts as a narrative container (Ferro, 1999, p. 50). It is my impression from my reading of Bion that he places consummate importance on the dreaming process and strongly suggests that ultimately *psychopathology becomes an indicator of unsuccessful or incomplete dreaming*.

Dreaming constitutes an intermediary buffer zone, a veritable ozone layer, which protects us from the blinding glare of *O*. It constitutes an ongoing, mediating, detoxifying filter that also undertakes such transformative processes as (1) transducing the infinity of impersonal *O* into practical, personal, finite, third-dimensional categories (e.g. good versus bad; inside versus outside, etc.); (2) reconfiguration of its original complex meaning into personal meaning; (3) encryption into a linear narrative, and (4) the transformation of the indifference or impersonalness of *O* into personal *O* (personal meaning).

Dreaming can be thought of as a generation of ongoing “archival fictional truths” in which the Absolute Truth about an impersonal Ultimate Reality is aesthetically and kaleidoscopically reconfigured and balanced between the Scylla of the pleasure principle and the Charyb-

dis of the reality principle—a dialectical binary-oppositional operation under the hegemony of the reality and truth principles, respectively (Grotstein, 2004b). With regard to dreaming, imagination operates in the service of the pleasure *and* reality principles as well as, ultimately, the truth principle, to extract and reconstruct the truth from its initial context and background and transform it as an invariant incognito within the dialectical functioning of the Positions ( $P-S \leftrightarrow D$ ) into personal subjective truth. Dreaming, like stories, functions through its ability to achieve *vicarious* applicability, correspondence, and resonance with the subject's unconscious conflicts.

Winnicott (1971b), in one of his critiques of Klein, stated that she had been more interested in the *meaning* of children's play than in the *act of playing* itself. The same principle may apply to the practice of psychoanalysis, which has traditionally been more interested in the meaning of dreams than in the act of dreaming. According to Freud (1900a), the purpose of dreams is to preserve sleep. Bion (1962b) considers dreaming to be necessary to enhance the contact-barrier that, by effectively separating Systems *Ucs.* and *Cs.*, allows sleep to take place, so that the subject is able to distinguish wakefulness from sleep, unlike the psychotic, who cannot distinguish between them (p. 17).

To summarize Bion's theories on dreams:

- A. Psychopathology is essentially the result of impaired dreaming, and this impairment is more significantly experienced by the System *Ucs.*
- B. The importance of the contact-barrier is not only to protect the System *Cs.* from the System *Ucs.* but the reverse as well—and also to shield both of them from *O.* The contact-barrier is reinforced by  $\alpha$ -elements donated by  $\alpha$ -function, but the reverse is also true. Dreaming and/or  $\alpha$ -function depend on the operation of an intact and functioning contact-barrier.
- C. The significance of the analyst's interpretations of unconscious phantasies (including dreams) is not to discredit their function but to *acknowledge* their reparative mythic function and, by acknowledging them, to restore their narrative recalibrating (generalizing and abstracting) and containing functions, which run parallel with a cooperative binary opposition with the original latent content of consciousness, laying the groundwork there for *metaphor*. Put another way, the mind functions along two distinctly different

but interconnected lines of operation. The unconscious functions under the hegemony of the pleasure principle (albeit with some contribution from the reality principle). There is minimal negation; thus everything is connected and symmetrical. It is the autochthonous (self-created) universe of objects and emotions—that is, self-created, personal, phantasmal. The second is the domain of consciousness, of a reality that has been clearly defined and refined by the application of negation. The human being needs both layers. Psychoanalysis addresses the former, both overtly and covertly. Bion (1992) states this dichotomy as one between “*narcissism*” and “*socialism*” (p. 103)—in other words, dreaming (no negation) attends to the personal aspects of the self and Aristotelian thinking (ruled by negation) to the more objective aspects.

- D. Dreaming, unconscious wakeful thinking, *is* thinking as well as being the prerequisite to thinking, feeling, and being. Bion (1954) states: “It must mean that without phantasies and without dreams you have not the means with which to think out your problem” (pp. 25–26).

Here Bion first hints at an idea that has never been fully explored by others—that the psychotic suffers not from too much primary process but from a defectively functioning primary process—that is, *defective dreaming*. He formulated the idea that the psychotic’s thought disorder is due in part to a difficulty with phantasies (day dreaming) and dreams (by night) that would make thought possible. He will later unite and conflate the primary processes with secondary process and “ $\alpha$ -function” (Bion, 1962b, p. 54), which, like Matte Blanco’s (1975, 1988, 2005) “bi-logic”, contains two complementary and opposing strands, *mythification* and *clarification*. The analyst dreams the patient’s dream and thereby completes the dream.

The unconscious is, in Bion’s view, the setting of an “undisciplined debate” that dreaming seeks to transform into a “disciplined debate” (Bion, 1979)—a Platonic (respectful) dialogue between the antinomies (internal objects) that comprise it. Dreams prepare the ground for the debate, thesis  $\leftrightarrow$  antithesis  $\rightarrow$  reconciling synthesis: “. . . Where ignorant armies clash by night” (“Dover Beach”—Matthew Arnold, 1867).

Dreaming “licks the emotional wounds of care” to heal them. Dreaming weaves the disparate elements of experience into a tapestry of poetic, aesthetic, cognitive, and ontological coherence.

I believe that dreaming does this by virtue of its autochthonous creativity: that is, the “dreamer who dreams the dream” (Grotstein,

2000a) first narcissistically *creates* the dream narrative as it encounters the incoming O sensory stimuli. Dreaming stands between *sensation* and *perception*.<sup>6</sup>

"Nameless dread" (Bion, 1965, p. 79) is the experience of the destruction of the dream-work's capacity to function and to heal.

The following points integrate Bion's theory of dreaming with his ontological and epistemological metatheory for psychoanalysis, to which I add my own speculative hypotheses:

- A. We dream continuously—that is, by day as well as by night (Bion, 1992, p. 63).
- B. Normal dreaming is characterized by an *introjection* of the results of the dreaming process, whereas the psychotic utilizes dreaming for the *projective* expulsion of the realizations of the dreaming process (Bion, 1962b, 1965, 1992, p. 43).
- C. All sensory stimuli, whether originating within the internal world or coming from the external one, must first be dreamed and relegated to the unconscious in order to be processed, encoded, encrypted, and assigned to different faculties of the mind—that is, to memory, to repression, to supply dream elements for further dreaming, for reinforcement of the contact-barrier, and to supply the ingredients of emotional and abstract thought (Bion, 1992, pp. 112, 139).
- D. The contact-barrier (Bion, 1962b, p. 17), which makes dreaming possible but which also depends on dreaming for its own maintenance, is a caesura (Bion, 1977a) that effectively separates fetal mental life from postnatal mental life (Bion's imaginative conjecture) and functions as a two-way selectively permeable membrane between consciousness and the unconscious,<sup>7</sup> conducting transformations, transductions, and encryptions of stimuli in transit from either source and creates the effective two-way boundary that makes dreaming possible. Moreover, it constitutes a continuation of Bion's (1962b) concept of the container. The contact-barrier can be linked as an analogue with the discipline of the *analytic frame*: the need to maintain the discipline of the frame parallels the need to maintain an effective separation between analyst and analysand and between consciousness and the unconscious so that each can function separately (autonomously), complementarily, and, thus, effectively.
- E. One of Bion's (1962b) tools is the stereoscopic model of "binocularity" (p. 54), which is, in turn, associated with Niels Bohr's

theory of complementarity. Specifically, Bion views the relationship between the Systems *Ucs.* and *Cs.* as complementary as well as oppositional, rather than primarily conflictual. Bion also applies the binocular principle of complementarity (Bion, 1965, p. 153) to the relationship between the paranoid–schizoid and depressive positions ( $P-S \leftrightarrow D$ ). Consequently, Bion is able to recruit the Systems *Ucs.* and *Cs.* and  $P-S \leftrightarrow D$  as two separate sets of autonomous and yet simultaneously oppositionally connected structures (binary-oppositional structures) to function complementarily according to the rules of their respective natures *and* at the same time to mediate binocularly or stereoscopically cooperatively and triangulate a third object, *O* (the “analytic object”), the Absolute Truth about an imminently intersecting and evolving infinite Ultimate Reality. In other words, as evolving *O* intersects the individual’s emotional frontier, the latter’s sentinels intercept, triage, and process its stochastic “noise” into personal, then objective, and finally transcendent meaning—“personal *O*”—thus completing the transformational cycle.

- F. Bion (1962b, p. 56), at variance with Freud (1911b), conceived of the *inseparability*—or really the coterminousness or contiguity—of the primary and secondary processes when he postulated  $\alpha$ -function as a transformational model. In other words, he believed that a combination of the primary and secondary processes worked intimately, cooperatively, but in different ways in the unconscious and in consciousness. Bion implied (and I hypothesize explicitly) by suggesting this juncture, but to my knowledge he never formally stated that he believed that the pleasure and reality principles were similarly conjoined normally but not pathologically. In other words, the pleasure principle and the primary processes function in complementary collaboration with the reality principle and secondary process—as subordinate functions in consciousness and as predominant functions in the unconscious, in which circumstance the reality principle and the secondary process subsume subordinate functions.

The above model finds its corollary in Matte Blanco’s (1975, 1988) conceptions of “bi-logic” and “bivalent logic” (Carvalho, 2005). Matte Blanco believes that the unconscious is dominated by the principle of symmetry (the erasure of differences and the equation of opposites), whereas consciousness is dominated by the principle of asymmetry (the progressive development of differences). Yet if the unconscious were absolutely symmetrical, no signs, symbols, or

dreams would be possible. Matte Blanco therefore conceived of “bi-logic” for the unconscious and “bivalent logic” (Aristotelian logic) for consciousness. Bi-logic and bivalent logic both use varying portions of symmetry and asymmetry in their respective binary-oppositional structures or systems, but bi-logic, the logic of the unconscious, is dominated by the principle of symmetry, which can be equated with the pleasure principle, and bivalent logic, the logic of consciousness, is dominated by the principle of asymmetry, which corresponds to the reality principle. Thus, these two antithetical structures of logic utilize symmetry and asymmetry dialectically but under different supraordinating organizations—along the lines of the model of conjoined twins, where the pleasure and reality principles occupy two separate structures in which they are both conjoined and separate.

Matte Blanco's scheme seems to me to be identical to Bion's concept of the dialectical binary-oppositional structures located both in the unconscious and in consciousness, respectively. In other words, *primary and secondary processes, the pleasure and reality principles, symmetry and asymmetry combinatorially comprise both unconscious  $\alpha$ -function and conscious  $\alpha$ -function—and find their counterpart functions in dreaming (dream-thinking) and cognitive reflective thinking.*

- G. I hypothesize that  $\alpha$ -function implies the existence of at least two mirror-image binary-oppositional structures, each consisting of dialectically opposing primary and secondary processes—and that they both subserve dreaming. (1) One binary-oppositional (binocular) structure— $\alpha$ -function 1—exists in the unconscious and is responsible for the transformation (mentalization—dreaming) of  $\beta$ -elements into  $\alpha$ -elements, which are then relegated for use as dream thoughts, repression, memory, and reinforcement of the contact-barrier. Although this structure consists of the dialectical operations of both the primary and secondary processes, it is under the hegemony of the pleasure principle. (2) Another binary-oppositional structure— $\alpha$ -function 2—situated in consciousness and/or in the preconscious and under the hegemony of the reality principle, transforms (dreams)  $\beta$ -elements emanating from stimuli in the external world so as to render them unconscious. In other words, there is spectrum of  $\alpha$ -functioning that extends from the most elemental to the most advanced. Ferro (2005) speaks about this gradient and uses the term “ $\alpha$ -megafunction” for the most sophisticated aspect—the one responsible for the creation of narrative. (3) Bion implies that even the pleasure and reality principles

constitute a binary-oppositional structure. I posit that this dialectical structure exists in the unconscious *and* consciousness, with the pleasure-principle “twin” predominating in the unconscious and the reality-principle “twin” in consciousness.

- H. I further hypothesize that a supraordinating function oversees and mediates the multiple, complex binary-oppositional structures previously elaborated. This supraordinating function, which I call the “*truth principle*”, inaugurates the “*truth drive* or *instinct* and ultimately mediates dreaming as the messenger of truth (Grotstein, 2004b). Britton (2006) posits also the existence of an “uncertainty principle”.
- I. All incoming sensory stimuli, whether from the internal or external world, are considered  $\beta$ -elements by Bion (1962b, p. 7) and inchoate  $\alpha$ -elements by me—that is, sensory imprints or impressions of O (O’s shadow or ghost) that must be transformed and relegated to the unconscious through the apertures of the selectively permeable membrane of the contact-barrier. Yet I should like to introduce an alternative perspective, one that would modify Bion’s view slightly. Ferro (2005) speaks of “*balpha-element*” (p. 46): combinations of  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -elements, such as in “undigested facts” (Bion, 1962b, p. 7). Thus, one may speculate that  $\alpha$ -function occupies a gradient normally and pathologically. Bandera (2005) postulates a gradient of  $\alpha$ -function in hysteria, which includes a range of categories of maternal capacities to contain their infants (Rather, 2005).
- J. Bion distinguishes between mentalization and thinking. Mentalization is the process whereby  $\beta$ -elements—the sensory stimuli of emotional experience (Bion, 1962b, p. 7)—become transformed into mentalizable (mentally “digestible”) ingredients for mental “metabolism”. Thinking constitutes a more advanced process—abstract ion  $\leftrightarrow$  concretization (Bion, 1962b, p. 52)—with the use of functions and categories whereby the alpha-bet(a)-ized  $\beta$ -elements *cum*  $\alpha$ -elements become the irreducible components of thinking—that is, thought manipulation (analogous to glucose, fructose, fatty acids, and amino acids in gastrointestinal digestion).
- K. Bion seems over time to link the following functions together in various ways in a veritable consortium: container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained ( $\text{♀} \text{♂}$ ),  $\alpha$ -function, transformation, contact-barrier, Grid, and dreaming. At one point he conflated  $\alpha$ -function and dreaming as “dream-work- $\alpha$ ”: Bion, 1992, p. 150) but then separated them again because of his

realization that he was mixing a model ( $\alpha$ -function) with a theoretical formulation and realization (dreaming) (P. Sandler, 2005). Furthermore,  $\alpha$ -function supplies  $\alpha$ -elements to participate in dreaming as dream thoughts. I, however, postulate that dreaming,  $\alpha$ -function, contact-barrier, caesura, and they are all interchangeable—that is, are cognates of each other.

- L. Bion also seems to associate containing, dreaming, phantasying, and mythifying along a continuum and all but equates them and their functions. When one considers the operation of  $\alpha$ -function, for instance, one can readily see that it constitutes a contact-barrier—or creates a contact-barrier in its own image, so to speak. Furthermore, I believe that the application of  $\alpha$ -function to  $\beta$ -elements constitutes a—separating, triaging, classifying—function.
- M. Do the distortions of dreaming involve  $-K$  (negative knowledge)? According to Bion (1962a),  $-K$  is characterized by a total opposition to the analytic work or the striving for truth (pp. 96–97). A better term for the operation of disguise may be “falsification” as opposed to “Lies” (de Bianchedi, 1993). I propose the alternative term “fictionalization”. Whereas  $-K$  characterizes lying, falsification may constitute what the individual unconsciously believes is a necessary modification of O, Truth, in order to be able to tolerate truth, albeit altered.
- N. Bion states:

One of the points I wish to discuss is related to the fact that *the actual events of the session*, as they are apparent to the analyst, *are being “dreamed” by the patient* [italics added] *not* in the sense that he believes that the events observed by him are the same as the events observed by the analyst (except for the fact that he believes them to be a part of a dream, and the analyst believes them to be a part of reality), but in the sense that these same events that are being *perceived* by the analyst are being perceived by the patient and treated to a process of being dreamed by him. That is, *these events are having something done to them mentally, and that which is being done to them is what I call being dreamed*. . . . [italics added]. [1992, p. 39]

In other words, in so far as he freely associates, the patient is *dreaming* the latent content of his associations; correspondingly, the very way in which the analyst listens to the analysand's associations itself constitutes *dreaming*. Bion states elsewhere that the analyst *must* dream the clinical situation (1992, p. 120). Thus, *all perceptions as*

*well as other mental transformations constitute dreaming.* By extending Bion's revolutionary idea, could we now say that all human relations, particularly loving ones like those with family and friends, function as a co-dreamer—especially when we need to share our experiences with others?

- O. While I think that sensory perception of emotional stimuli may initially become a  $\beta$ -element, I also believe that the infant (of any age) has its own  $\alpha$ -function from the very beginning, as I stated earlier. As a result I believe that the infant *communicates* with his mother via his own pre-lexical version of  $\alpha$ -elements, which the mother's  $\alpha$ -function processes further. It is her failure to process them adequately that renders them into what Ferro (2005) terms "balpha-elements."
- P. Dreaming—both waking dreaming and night-time dreaming—are either isomorphic with or cognate with  $\alpha$ -function, transformation, contact-barrier, caesura, the Grid (which occurs in consciousness as well as in dreams), and L, H, and K linkages. They all have the same function: triaging, sorting out, deconstructing, reconfiguring, processing, mediating, encrypting, and transducing O. I include them all under the embrasure of the "*dream ensemble*", which finds its neurological parallel in the reticular activating system, a supraordinating system that monitors and mediates the intensity of incoming afferent stimuli for neuronal tolerability as well as for consciousness.

As an aside, scientists say they have found a code beyond genetics in DNA (Wade, 2006)—one that oversees the ultimate destiny of the gene components and vouchsafes their arrival at their appropriate destination. This genetic function sounds like an analogue for an as yet unidentified mental function of dreaming and/or alpha-function which oversees the syntactic future of the alpha-elements.

### *How does dreaming work?*

Dreaming seems to function like a sensitive emotional computer that aligns new events, converting them into personal experiences, first through careful *deconstruction* and then through imaginative *reconstruction*, recombination, and aesthetic reconfiguration of the events, correlating them with past experiences in order to achieve personal, subjective categorization of the events and their transformation into personal—and personally *meaningful*—emotional experiences. This

categorization—or, really, re-categorization—of experiences seems to be one of the chief functions of dreaming. Perhaps one can imagine that before it is dreamt, the initial event engulfs the subject's mind, whereas once dreamt, the subject's mind engulfs the event as a category. Dreaming constitutes story-telling and seems to have a remarkable and ineffable narrative-developing capacity. Dreaming is paradoxically *revelatory* and protectively *disguising*. It utilizes the function known as "triage", which constitutes an instrument for prioritization and marginalization—that is, the assignment of foreground versus background status.

One may also employ the idea of the *anagram*: A patient reported a dream in which he was asked to supply the anagram for the phrase, "problem in China". In the dream itself he came up with "incomprehensible". When one deconstructs the phrase and the anagrammatized word to which it corresponds, one can readily see that the same *letters* are reconfigured in a different sequential order, but the letters themselves faithfully maintain their invariant nature. I believe, consequently, that the anagram is a very important constituent model for dream-work.

Freud (1900a) stressed the importance of the falsification, distortion, and secondary revision of the latent content of dreams by the dreaming process (p. 488). Bion (1965), emphasizing the subject's hunger for truth (p. 38), hypothesizes that dreaming escorts the truth in disguise. Thus, the original Absolute Truth becomes altered by dream-work, but the nucleus of the Truth will endure and persist as an invariant through all its transformations in the transformational cycle, albeit encased within falsifications (fictions) until interpreted. Dreaming transforms the infantile neurosis into the transference neurosis. Dreaming disguises truth in order to protect truth and also aesthetically enhances, elaborates, and augments it.

The act of dreaming strongly suggests that the human being must be born with a propensity for story-telling, story-seeking, and story-responding, one that issues from the aesthetic vertex (Bion, 1970, p. 21). Dreaming also seems to ferret out hidden constant conjunctions (strong linkages or "marriages" of ideas) and establish new ones *in statu nascendi*. Dreaming consists in a unique and uncanny choreography of images: I (Grotstein, 2000a, 2005b) assign the role of the unconscious "choreographer", a "daimon", "intelligence", or "presence", to the "dreamer who dreams the dream". Dreaming also involves the transduction of  $\beta$ -elements from infinity and total symmetry, Absolute Time, and Absolute Space—acting simultaneously—to binary

opposites in linear, diachronic sequence portrayed as narrative in the form of unconscious phantasy, constituting the emotional “CNN” or “BBC” of the System *Ucs*.

The human being possesses a narrative propensity, perhaps even drive, to offset evolving O’s regressive destabilizing effect on the psyche. Narrative, in its linearity, binds infinite O’s trajectory by offering credible rationales for the occurrence occasioned by O’s intersection with one’s emotional frontier. O can be thought of as a myriad unknowables lurking simultaneously and vertically (right-hemisphere mode). Dreaming realigns them longitudinally (left-hemisphere mode). The rationales may at first be fictional—in the form of dreams, unconscious phantasies, conscious daydreams, or myths. The human being seems to be a story-teller and a story-requisitioner. The purpose of the story is to bind the anxiety created by O by transforming (transferring) it into a fictive but credible narrative structure that restores the subject’s sense of cosmic causality and coherence. “The Holocaust occurred because of the will of God” constitutes such a fiction, which would be credible to some and would give closure to the inexplicability of the Holocaust.

The unconscious demonstrates a narrative function—that is, a propensity or drive for narrating and narrative-seeking, which both narrates (fictionalizes) incoming events into personal experiences and seeks narratives, stories, myths, novels, and so on in order to bind the anxieties of uncertainty and chaos left in the wake of intersecting O. In the course of fictionalizing O, the narrative function is able to preserve the emotional truth as an invariant that is implicit in O’s encounter with one. In the course of creating a fictional narrative, the raw data from O—that is, the infinite impersonal data within the  $\beta$ -elements—become initially *personified* (Klein, 1929), as in children’s cartoons, into personalized unconscious dreams or phantasies, which thereupon undergo a reconfiguration of story structure, disarticulation of the object-linkages in the original cosmic event, and transvaluation of the emotional relationships to new unimportant entities for purposes of disguise.

In other words, the unconscious, along with the contact-barrier, functions in part as an emotional frontier, an immunity shield, filter, or grating, which, much like an antibody (with an inherent “memoir of the future” antigen it is destined to encounter) hastens to counterattack the antigen from O via (1) an emotional registration of O’s impact, and (2) attempts to neutralize the impact by dreaming—that is, narrativization, fictionalization. The final result will be (1) a somatic *emo-*

*tional* categorization that anticipates being *felt* by the mind (Damasio (2003) and (2) a dream or unconscious phantasy, which has mythified, personified, and personalized the story in terms of subjective meaning for the recipient. A story has emerged from the creative process of the unconscious. Other stories will be sought from other sources (e.g. novels, plays, etc.) in order to protect the credible fiction of coherence and meaning. The subject projectively identifies with the characters in these other sources and unconsciously adjust himself and his own unique story-needing aspect to the characters and plot at hand, vicariously participating in the story.

Stories, dreams, phantasies, and myths have, as their purpose, the creation of credible fictions of coherence and plausible understanding about personal and interposing cultural events. Ultimately an unconscious phantasy must be either summoned from the analysand's unconscious reservoir of inherent and/or acquired phantasies or sought from the analyst's interpretation, to allow it to accommodate the immediate O incident that has occurred. This spontaneous or supplied phantasy (story) must, in turn, correspond to a "hidden order of art" (Ehrenzweig, 1967) that accommodates the required constraints of a universal or acquired myth, such as the Oedipus myth, the myth of Prometheus, of the Garden of Eden, of the Tower of Babel, and so on. Once confirmed by and within the authority of myth, the patient experiences a sense of an inner cosmic unity that bespeaks an acceptable personal *truth* and, with it, security.

Just as one of the functions of  $\alpha$ -function, according to Bion (1962b), is the production of  $\alpha$ -elements to reinforce and maintain the integrity of the contact-barrier (p. 17), so dreaming produces dreams and phantasies that proliferate to form a phantasmal network of unconscious structures, which subserve an unconscious system of predominantly symmetrical operations (Matte Blanco, 1975, 1988).

Matte Blanco (1975, 1988) conceives of the unconscious as consisting of infinite sets of all objects and as being the seat of ever-expanding symmetry as one descends into the unconscious. Bion sees the unconscious as the dialectically collaborative partner of consciousness in the apprehension and transformation of  $\beta$ -elements issuing from O. It may be reasonable to conceive that, contrary to Freud's (1915e) statement that the unconscious lacks structure, it does have one (albeit in terms of infinity and ever-expanding degrees of symmetry). The structure of the unconscious would consist not only of the drives, the Ideal Forms, and things-in-themselves (the latter two comprising one arm of Bion's conception of O, the other arm being the "sensory stimuli of emotional

experience”), but also of mythic or dream-phantasy structures that serve as ongoing protective transformational templates to intercept, filter, triage, reconfigure, process, encode, and transduce the  $\beta$ -elements from impersonal O finally to one’s personal fiction (dream, phantasy) about one’s relationship to the O of the moment. Put another way, that aspect of the unconscious that sponsors the emergent “thoughts without a thinker” (the Ideal Forms, the noumena) constitutes *entelechy*—the activation of one’s inherent (irruptive) potential—whereas dreaming constitutes one’s *conatus* or *conation*.

It is my hypothesis that the unconscious becomes the continuation of the infantile state of innocence and coherence, a quality of infancy to which infant developmentalists refer as “contingency” (Beebe & Lachman, 1988; Schore, 2003a, 2003b). The concept of contingency designates a symmetrically responsive caretaker who “does not miss a beat”, so to speak, in her caring and attuning of the infant. As the infant begins to separate from its mother, more and more non-contingent relations become tolerated. It is my hypothesis that as non-contingent, separating, asymmetrical interrelationships develop, the original bid for contingent symmetry goes underground and becomes an unconscious propensity guarded over by dreaming-phantasying, under the sway of the pleasure principle.

To reiterate: the unconscious and consciousness function as a binary-oppositional structure within which the functions of the pleasure and reality principles, respectively and in dialectical combination, are played out. Together, they intercept, monitor, register, encode, and transform O, raw Circumstance, “*Ananke*”. Psychopathology is an indication of a rent in the otherwise seamless mythical, phantasmal dreamworld of symmetry, which exists side by side in the unconscious with scar-tissue objects—unhealed (undreamed) veterans of ancient wars with O. From this point of view all internal objects constitute unsuccessful containers of O from bygone times—awaiting the dreaming, the analysis—that can rescue and redeem them.

The visual aspects of dreaming seem to be a predominant characteristic:

But the important and striking feature revealed by a comparison of the mental counterparts of visual with other vertices is *the superior power of the visual vertex to illuminate . . . a problem over that of all other mental counterparts of the senses*. Reversal of direction in the system of which the vertex is a part is associated with what are ordinarily known as hallucinations. *The supremacy of the visual vertex contributes*

*to my belief that the solution of the problem of communicating psycho-analytically will have to be found through row C elements to geometrical formulation and thence to row H elements [of the Grid—JSG]. [1965, pp. 90–91; italics added]*

### *What is the function of dreaming?*

Freud (1900a) considered the function of dreaming to be to preserve sleep from disturbing latent content from day residues (pp. 233–234). Bion, in extending the range of dreaming to occur throughout the day *and* night, postulated that dreaming, which is at times indistinguishable in his writings from  $\alpha$ -function, serves to process and meaningfully transform incoming stimuli from within and without. These stimuli are the sensory stimuli of emotional experience, as alluded to earlier. When Bion (1962b) applies the act of dreaming to the analyst, and to the analysand as well, he suggests yet another function for dreaming: creative revelation or scanning of clinical as well as non-clinical phenomena (p. 105).

Bion (1970), exhorts the analyst to “abandon memory and desire” (p. 32) so as to be conversant with the “Language of Achievement” (the empty language dedicated for emotional revelation through intuition), as opposed to the “language of substitution” (of representative images or symbols), and resonate with the fundamental emotional theme, O, within oneself as it matches that of the analysand. In other words, for the analyst dreaming is an observational technique (perception itself) that is uniquely qualified to apprehend emotional qualities in oneself and the other. (I develop this theme further when I discuss the contributions of the art critic, Anton Ehrenzweig.)

The epitome of the analytic process is in the analyst “becoming” the analysand—that is, when the analyst is able to recreate, to “give birth” to, to “become” the analysand from within himself (Bion, 1965, p. 146; Brown, 2006; Ogden, 2004a). *Through dreaming, the analyst “becomes” his own, native version of) the analysand.*

The normal subject must have experienced his mother’s (and father’s) caring consciously as a healthy attachment and unconsciously as the effect of their reverie, containment, and use of  $\alpha$ -function, and of their dreaming of his experiences in order to process them for healthy internalization. As the infant develops, he becomes able to exercise these functions autonomously.  $\alpha$ -function is the servant and supplier of dreaming, and both function continuously, day and night.

Dreaming constitutes the monitor par excellence of the subject's interface with intruding object-stimuli from the inner and outer worlds. Its function is to render all stimuli into unconscious correlated categories that allow the subject to bind the anxieties that the dreams intercept. Dreams are ingeniously conceived "archival fictions" or "novels" that maintain the integrity of Truth as an invariant in the context of a protective fictive backdrop arranged by encryption or encoding, so that the integrity of System *Ucs.* and System *Pcs.* can be maintained and continually restored.

According to Bion, first cause in both normal development and psychopathology is the success or lack of success of dreaming—that is, the containing of experiences. System *Cs.* possesses the faculty of reflective reasoning and perception, but this faculty fundamentally depends on support from the emotional foundations of Systems *Ucs.* and *Pcs.*, all of which participate in triangulating and modulating *O.* Dreaming repairs the protective structures and functions of all three Systems, but, above all, it *monitors and repairs the Unconscious Systems* (*Ucs.* and *Pcs.*) by reconfiguring unconscious phantasies that can collectively, as a phantasmal or mythic network, subtend and support System *Cs.* and the far reaches of our being. Bion's view of dreaming, especially dreaming-by-day, devolves into what the subject *does* to his perception of the object, which can be condensed into what perception *does* to the image of the object. Thus, the analyst dreams his conscious *and* unconscious experience of the analysand, and the latter does the same with the analyst. Ogden (2007) applies this theme of Bion's to the very act of speaking.

Finally, it is my opinion that dreaming mediates and integrates the two major streams of *O* and their convergence in experience. The sensory stimuli of emotional experience summon their inborn counterparts, the inherent pre-conceptions ("memoirs of the future"), and unite as the latter incarnate or become realized as conceptions and then concepts. Dreaming orchestrates this continuing union and infusion.

### *Ehrenzweig's The Hidden Order of Art*

What Bion means by dreaming and what he seeks to achieve by abandoning memory and desire (secondary process) is shown by Ehrenzweig (1967) when he reminds us of Piaget's (1926) concept of "syncretistic vision"—a visual mode characterized by condensation and non-differentiation:

Creative work succeeds in coordinating the results of unconscious undifferentiation and conscious differentiation and so reveals the hidden order in the unconscious. [Ehrenzweig, 1967, pp. 4–5]

Unconscious scanning makes use of undifferentiated modes of vision that to normal awareness would seem chaotic. Hence comes the impression that the primary process merely produces chaotic phantasy material that has to be organized and shaped by the ego's secondary process. *On the contrary, the primary process is a precision instrument for creative scanning that is far superior to discursive reason and logic.* [p. 5; italics added].<sup>8</sup>

A hidden order guides soft-focusing or scanning. [p. 9] [*Bion again—JSG*]

Unconscious scanning grasps the widely scattered derivatives in a single immediate act of comprehension. [p. 10]

This recognition of objects from cues rather than from the analysis of abstract detail is the beginning of syncretic vision. Analytic vision would only obstruct the recognition of the object. [p. 15]

Undifferentiated unconscious scanning extracts from the many variable details a common denominator or fulcrum which serves as the "cue" [*selected fact—JSG*]. [p. 17]

Ehrenzweig seems to be saying that primary process is associated with syncretistic, soft-focusing scanning and is necessary for creative attention.

*Autochthonous creativity, adaptive editorial transformation, and censorship as the main functions of dreaming*

Bion's theory of dreaming was revolutionary. Extending and modifying Freud's dream theory, he conceived of it almost like an immune frontier that, by day and by night, intercepts  $\beta$ -elements, proto-emotional messages laced with primal O impressions from the Absolute Truth about Ultimate, Infinite Reality, and grades, sorts, and processes them to convert them into tolerable personal archival *fictions* about the Truth, now rendered as *personal emotional truth*. In the course of this numinous dreaming venture, the unconscious creative process of *autochthony*, which I believe to be the principal component of dreaming, is at work, artistically reordering the raw ore of  $\beta$ -element truths according to the "hidden order of art" that is inherent as one's aesthetic capability (Ehrenzweig, 1967). Put another way, the act of dreaming, which includes mythifying and phantasying (containing and fictionalizing),

preserves the veil of innocence for the infant and child and the sense of security for the adult by effectively reordering and reconfiguring the unconscious reception and thus perception of O into tolerable yet realistic fictions—or fictional realisms that one can live with. *The fiction must, however, always contain the invariant truth*. I call this function “adaptive editorial transformation and censorship”. Autochthony, the birth myth of being born from the self and the self being the creator of the universe of objects (see *Genesis*), is the unconscious phantasy of creation in all its possibilities.

The distinction that Freud (1911b) made between the primary and secondary processes is only apparent, according to Bion. Although he did not use the term, Bion leads us to believe that the primary and secondary processes normally comprise a *binary-oppositional structure* (Lévi-Strauss, 1970)—one in which each functions in cooperative or collaborative dialectical opposition to the other. I suggest, in consequence, that the pleasure–unpleasure and reality principles also function as a binary-oppositional structure. This dreaming is conducted by a prophylactic fictionalization of incoming  $\beta$ -elements utilizing the pleasure–unpleasure principle *under the hegemony of the reality principle*. If the binary-oppositional structure is impaired by challenges to the contact-barrier, the functioning of the two principles begins to go awry—they split-off from one another and go their separate ways, and delusion replaces dreams and phantasies.

This narrative fictional ploy on the part of dreaming or  $\alpha$ -function thus fundamentally depends on the cooperative functioning of the *pleasure* and *reality principles*—and now, following Bion (1970) and Britton (2006), we add the supraordinating function of the uncertainty principle, with the former being the prime organizers in the unconscious and the latter in consciousness. In cases of severe pathology, however, this binary-oppositional cooperation does not obtain. Instead, we see that the pleasure and reality principles abrogate their alliance, as a result of which Column 2 becomes a *Lie Column*, not just a benevolently *falsifying* (fictionalizing) or *negating* Column.

I had long wondered why Bion believed it was necessary to include a category in the Grid whose function was deliberate falsification—in other words, how would falsification (–K) be *adaptive* to the individual? My first tentative answer was to suggest the obligatory operation of Freud’s (1911b) pleasure–unpleasure principle, which seeks to offset and counterbalance the reality principle. Then I began to realize that  $\alpha$ -function itself, which to me represents the model for Bion’s unique

conception of dreaming, must uniquely blend the operations of the reality *and* pleasure–unpleasure principle in order for a “wild thought” (a “thought without a thinker” in Column 1 “Definitory Hypothesis”) to proceed through the successive categories before qualifying as a formal “thought-about” thought. This idea follows Bion’s hypothesis that the primary and secondary processes are not as separated as Freud (1900a, 1911b) thought they were.

Inherent in this radical reformulation is the conception that  $\alpha$ -function, the model, and/or dreaming, the ineffable, actual, living process, both of which imply the container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained, occur earlier in the forging of the constant conjunction that constitutes the original, emergent Definitory Hypothesis and then later in Column 2 in forging the objective, abstract thought as a more developed and sophisticated version of the original constant conjunction. To repeat, this reformulation presumes that the pleasure–unpleasure principle and the reality principle constitute a *binary-oppositional (dialectical) structure*. The intactness of the structure, which allows for an optimal dialectical tension between the activities sponsored by each principle, fundamentally depends, in turn, on the integrity of the contact-barrier, whose own intactness depends on  $\alpha$ -function/container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained/dreaming.

It is when we follow Bion in locating the concept of the Establishment in Column 2 (Bion, 1977a, p. 38) that the adaptive function of this column is clarified:

In recent years there has grown up the use of the term Establishment; it seems to refer to that body of persons in the State who may be expected usually to exercise power and responsibility by virtue of their social position, wealth, and intellectual and emotional endowment. . . . I propose to borrow this term to denote everything from the penumbra of associations generally evoked, to the predominating and ruling characteristics of an individual, and the characteristics of a ruling caste in a group (such as a psycho-analytical institute, or a nation or group of nations). [1970, p. 73]

The mystic is both creative and destructive. I make a distinction between two extremes that coexist in the same person. The extreme formulations represent two types: the “creative” mystic, who formally claims to conform to or even fulfil the conventions of the Establishment that governs his group; and the mystic nihilist, who appears to destroy his own creations. I mean the terms to be used only when there is outstanding creativeness or destructiveness, and the terms “mystic”, “genius”, “messiah” could be interchangeable. [p. 74]

The function of the group is to produce a genius; the function of the Establishment is to take up and absorb the consequences so that the group is not destroyed. [p. 82]

The governing body of the society I call the Establishment; the counterpart in the domain of thought would be the pre-existing disposition or pre-conception. [p. 111]

The reaction of the Establishment is to prevent the disruption, and this it does by incorporating the mystic within itself. [p. 112]

The common features are: containment of the messianic idea in the individual; containment of the messianic individual in the group; the problem for the Establishment that is concerned with the group on the one hand and the messianic idea and individual on the other. [p. 116]

In reading Bion's comments on the concept of the Establishment, which he seems to locate both in Column 2 of the Grid and as a pre-conception, one begins to conceive of the existence of a supraordinating "homunculus" or human "gyroscope" who possesses an unerring awareness of the individual's tolerance of the "dosage of Truth" with each incoming salvo from O and its sensory descendant, the  $\beta$ -element. Hooke's Law, which applies to inanimate objects, states that the stress in an object is equal to the strain that exists within its structure times the modulus of its elasticity. I suggest that a human counterpart to Hooke's Law exists, and that Column 2 constitutes its operations room. Put another way, the liar seems to have a valid (for him) conception of his tolerance of truth. This agency stands behind  $\alpha$ -function and calibrates the dosage of sorrow and truth to its hapless ward, the subject. Moreover, the Establishment must find a substitute for genius and mediate between the creative and the destructive mystic or messiah, as Bion (1970, p. 73) points out. Put another way, the Establishment serves a container function as a mediating agency, concerned with the messianic idea in the individual on the one hand and the group messiah on the other. It thus constitutes a binary-oppositional structure involving the pleasure *and* reality principles.

*Final verdict: Column 2 constitutes a container-dreamer-thinker function!* In chapter 22 I suggested that there are two Grids: one for the secondary process, in Freud's (1911b) terms, and another for the primary processes of the unconscious. *Negation* is the principal function in the former, and *fictionalization* in the latter.

In the final analysis we must remember that Truth (about the Reality of indifferent, impersonal O) is the cargo that is being transported

by emotion, its vehicle, through the sluices of Transformation's categories, as through locks in a canal. The transformational cycle is completed when it reaches its destination, not only in our filtered and adulterated version of it known as K, but in our becoming it in personalized subjective, meaningful O.

*An analysand's dream*

A 76-year-old married college professor with three grown children who has been in five-times-per-week analysis for four years presented the following dream in the first session of the week:

I was entering a school which seemed to be an elementary school for young children. It was being taught by a man in his forties, someone who was charismatic and spoke authoritatively—even menacingly—to the young children. The children didn't appear upset. When the teacher saw me, he grimaced and gave me a chilling look. Then he came after me. I found that I had a gun in my hand, which surprised me. I became terrified, lost control, and fired a shot, which I saw enter his abdomen. He yelled with pain and exclaimed, "Why did you do that?" He appeared to become unconscious and then suddenly reawakened and said that he knew how much life energy he had left and now he was going to kill me! I shot again and the same sequences repeated themselves. He wasn't to be deterred in his plan to kill me. I noticed that all the while this was happening the children didn't seem disturbed.

I awoke in terror, then went back to sleep, and had another brief dream. *I observed young children sucking on their fingers.*

*Adaptive context and associations.* These dreams occurred during the long Thanksgiving weekend break. On the day before the dream the analysand and his wife had gone to see a film—*Good Night and Good Luck*—about Edward R. Murrow and his epic television battle with Senator Joseph McCarthy. He recalled the McCarthy era and revealed how terrified he had been of McCarthy. When he saw the film clips of McCarthy in the movie, he became terrified all over again. Even though he knew that Murrow had prevailed and McCarthy had been disgraced, he felt the issue to be in doubt as he watched the film. The analysand is currently writing a book that has to do with his professional field. He believes that he may be putting

forth some ideas that might be considered radical and provocative to others in the field, and especially in his department. The teacher's face reminded the analysand of a younger colleague, for whom he has great respect and affection, and he was thus surprised at his demeanor in the dream.

*Analysis of the dream and my reverie (my emotional and objective observations):* I had immediately experienced the analysand's own experience of terror as my own and felt a desire both to protect him (and now myself) from this deadly, maniacal teacher and to calm him so that he would not have to use the gun. It was as if the dream—actually the nightmare—was still happening, and I had personally entered into it. Later I came to realize that he had come to me for protection against the other me—the mad teacher, whom that me ultimately represented—along with his projections into me. I then spontaneously recalled how he had once informed me that the “devil” in Greek is “*diabolos*”, and this means “the scatterer”. I subsequently realized that the evil, charismatic teacher represented O, an evolving, scattering force-field (paranoid–schizoid anxiety), which got steadily worse over the prolonged break. Senator McCarthy was a signifier who represented incompletely dreamed aspects of the analysand's personality relevant to that period of time. I remembered that I, too, had feared Joseph McCarthy: I had been compelled to sign a statement of my loyalty to the State of California when I became a psychiatric resident at the UCLA School of Medicine. I “became” (my internal version of) his anxiety—his anxiety and his demon became mine.

That evening I had a nightmarish dream in which a McCarthy-like figure was chasing me. Between hearing the patient's dream and dreaming my own dream, I had encountered another colleague at a restaurant whom I had not seen in almost 40 years. He had been on the opposite side in a bitter dispute at my analytic society when the Kleinians—of whom I was one—had been in great peril of expulsion. In my nightmare I conflated my patient's image of Joseph McCarthy with a signifier of my own personal demons from long ago. In so doing, I “became” the patient and dreamed him into life within my unconscious (Bion, 1965, p. 146; Brown, 2006; Ogden, 2004a).

Put another way, as the analysand shared his dream with me, it had been incompletely dreamed. As I listened to him, I unconsciously entered his continuing dream and “became” his “dreaming co-pilot” in order to complete the dream.

The demonic teacher also represented me, his "analytic teacher", who had become unconsciously filled with the analysand's hate—because of his having been "abandoned" over the long weekend—and had also become a harsh "superego editor" who enviously attacked and disapproved of his forthcoming book.

The analysand then recalled in the dream that he had shot the teacher four times (the number of days of the analytic interruption), and the last three times he had had a difficult time aiming at the teacher because of his fear of hitting one or more of the children. He wondered why the children seemed not to have been upset. I interpreted that perhaps the children were mine—who did get to spend the holiday weekend with me—and that they may have been under his or my special protection. (Here I was thinking of Klein's, 1928, concept of the special, "unborn children" who are privileged to remain inside the mother's body.)

The analysand, who is Jewish, then recalled that the teacher had reminded him generically of the young gentile men he had known in his earlier life. He recalled a charismatic anti-Semitic Baptist minister. His parents are Holocaust survivors. Thus, another of the determinants of the dream was his dread of another Holocaust, with someone like Joseph McCarthy creating it. In addition, it appeared that the mad teacher also represented the omnipotent and cruel authority of his own envious and moralistic superego.

The second dream, which was apparently dreamed to patch the first unsuccessful dream, represented an awareness of childhood times when he had had to soothe himself by licking his thumb and fingers.

*Note:* Space limitations prevent me from presenting all the patient's associations to his dreams. He did mention that the dreams were far more elaborate and detailed than he could reveal, suggesting secondary revision. It is perhaps secondary revision that Bion is referring to when he says that when the analysand freely associates, he is dreaming. Furthermore, all the hypotheses I enumerated above came to me while I was "dreaming" the session and seeking to complete the analysand's dream by entering it as a "co-pilot dreamer".

One can see the effects of condensation and displacement in who it was that the mad teacher came to represent. Conditions of representability can be noted in the way the plot—especially of the first dream—was laid out. His fear that he could not kill the mad teacher before the latter killed him represents his unconscious awareness that I

was the teacher and that he did not really want me to die. The ultimate mythic templates that subtended the analysand's unconscious phantasies were archaic oedipal ones with the addition of Bion's conception of the hyper-moralistic "super"ego (1962b, p. 97).

About this murderous, moralistic "super"ego, Bion says:

I shall assume that the patient's fear of the murderous super-ego prevents his approaching the Positions. This in turn means that he is unable to dream, for it is in dreams that the Positions are negotiated. [1992, p. 27]

His statements that he feels anxious—"I don't know why"—may, in addition to being denials, support very strongly, in view of their constant reiteration, my idea that there is a breakdown of dream-work- $\alpha$ , which makes it impossible for the feelings to be ideogrammatized and so verbalized. This breakdown is due to the need to prevent the synthesis, in the depressive position, of a frightening super-ego. [p. 59]

Dreaming prepares the individual to accept modulating the paranoid-schizoid position so as to attain the depressive position. It is then that the analysand must face being confronted of the horror of his creations in P-S—that is, the murderous, hyper-moral "super"ego.

## NOTES

1. The reader is referred to P. Sandler's (2005) in-depth review of the many changes in Bion's thinking about the relationship between  $\alpha$ -function and dreaming. The relationship between " $\alpha$ -function" and "container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained" has come to be better known. That between *dreaming* and container  $\leftrightarrow$  contained has only been touched on recently by Grotstein (1981c, 2000a, 2002), Ogden (2004a), Paulo Sandler (2005), Schneider (2005), and others.

2. Further on in this chapter I conjecture that dreaming subsumes  $\alpha$ -function, that it may *be*  $\alpha$ -function and/or its cognate, a characteristic it shares with contact-barrier, transformations, containment, the Grid, and L, H, and K linkages.

3. The mystic does not need to take this detour.

4. O is not uncertain: our emotional experience of it is.

5. I am grateful to P. Sandler (2005) for these citations.

6. Weisberg (2006), speaking of Nicholas Humphrey's (2006) work on perception, states: "Humphrey holds that blind sight demonstrates the dissociability of sensation (the feel of experience) and perception (our awareness of the world). He adopts the bold suggestion that sensation is not part of the casual chain leading to perception. Instead, he argues, sensation makes up a separate, more primitive system that plays no direct role in our perception of the world. Sensation is self-contained evaluative activity . . ." (Weisberg, 2006, p. 577).

7. Freud (1915d) conceived of a repressive barrier that defends consciousness from the unconscious but not the reverse. Bion's concept of the contact-barrier, which he derived from Freud's (1950 [1895]) "Project for a Scientific Psychology", functions as a mediating protective barrier in both directions.

8. This idea is totally congruent with Bion's view of dreaming.