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**Processus transformationnels et champ analytique :**

**Un nouveau paradigme pour les modèles et les pratiques cliniques**

**Transformational processes and the analytical field: A nex paradigm for models ans  
clinical practices *I***

Thomas Rabeyron 1\*

1 Professor of Clinical Psychology and Psychopathology, Clinical Psychologist, Université de Lorraine, Interpsy (Psyclip), 23 Boulevard Albert 1<sup>er</sup>, 54 000 Nancy, France

\*Author for contact: M le Pr Thomas Rabeyron  
Email address: [thomas.rabeyron@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:thomas.rabeyron@univ-lorraine.fr)

1 Translated by Emily Lechner, clinical psychologist, 118, avenue du Général Leclerc 75014 Paris.  
[lechneremily@gmail.com](mailto:lechneremily@gmail.com)

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## 1. Introduction

Studies that evaluate different psychotherapies show that different theoretical approaches produce effects that are generally equivalent in terms of their effectiveness [1-4]. Nonetheless, clinical practice also shows that there are significant qualitative variations in the effects induced in patients, depending on which approach is used. It is therefore essential to clarify these variations in order to better understand the psychotherapeutic processes at work, and to improve the quality of work with patients in the mental health field, especially since the effects of psychotherapies are sometimes superior to those achieved with psychotropic drugs for certain pathologies [5]. Several studies suggest that the psychoanalytic approaches are distinguished by the cumulative character of their effects *after* the end of the therapy [6, 7]. Analytic practices would then produce a specific, more durable form of psychic transformation due to their work with the subject's psychic depths [5]. In the same vein, several studies underscore that more frequent psychotherapy sessions [8], as well as a longer period of treatment [9] – both essential characteristics of psychoanalytic practice – produce more pronounced effects in the long term.

Along with these elements taken from quantitative studies, the qualitative evaluation of psychotherapeutic processes [10, 11] furthers the understanding of transformational processes and the way in which these can sometimes engender veritable subjective metamorphoses *1*. In this perspective, the works of Wilfred Bion [12] *2* and, more precisely, his use of the notion of transformation, prove to

1 Psychoanalysis and, more broadly, psychotherapy, do not have a monopoly on transformations of the psyche; the latter are frequently seen outside of therapeutic settings. However, psychotherapy aims to catalyze these processes. The psychoanalytic approach is distinguished, in particular, by its drive to transform subjects' relationships with themselves, as well as their modes of subjectivation.

2 Bion's work initially aimed at “desaturating” psychoanalytic theories in order to get at the essence of the analytic practice. Bion's intuitions were later taken up by the post-Bionian current, which attempts to clarify them. Reading the works of Bion and of his successors brings to mind a metaphor of an explorer who clears a path through the jungle with a machete, a path that is sometimes difficult to see and to follow, and that can lead to certain dead ends. This first exploration can't become a clear path until it is walked by others who will determine its destination. The path thus becomes a dirt road, then a paved road – fully “saturated,” to use Bion's term – that in turn allows for the exploration of unexplored territories. Bion's writings, in particular *Transformations: Change from Learning to Growth*, are like this first path, mapped out within the confines of subjective experience and of its theorization, and veritably utilized by the post-Bionian movement. Like Ferro [13], one could wonder if “the great revolution, not yet rooted deeply enough in psychoanalytic thinking, is[n't] Bion's” ([13], p. 60).

be very useful in the comprehension of these metamorphoses. In this article, I will examine the principal characteristics of the notion of transformation, as well as its clinical implications, in the post-Bionian movement [14]. Numerous authors – in particular Green [15], Neri [16], Ogden [17], Ferro [18], Grotstein [19], and Citivarese [20] – have, in effect, participated in the development of Bionian thought and insist upon the theoretical and clinical implications of the notion of transformation. This notion has been progressively associated with theories related to the analytic field [14, 18, 21] that I will describe in the second part of this essay. This conceptual evolution of notions of transformation and of field is paired with a transformation of the epistemology and of the clinical positioning of psychoanalysis itself [20, 22]. This paper will propose a synthesis of this contemporary and paradigmatic evolution of psychoanalytic models and practices, with the aim of better understanding the processes of transformation that psychoanalysis, in particular, is capable of producing <sup>3</sup>.

## **2. Bion's notion of transformation: dream, relation, and meaning**

The notion of transformation became a truly psychoanalytic concept with the publication in 1965 of Bion's book *Transformations*. Since its publication, many articles and books have integrated this notion from Bion's metapsychology into theories from the analytic field [21], another notion that has its origins in the 1960s <sup>4</sup>. Bion initially proposed a typology of processes of transformation, eventually leading to his famous grid [25] and to a new psychoanalytic paradigm that extends the Freudian paradigm of the hallucinatory satisfaction of desire and its derivatives. The British psychoanalyst insists on the fact that psychic transformations are the necessary product of the *relationship* between the analyst and the analysand in *the present moment* of the psychoanalytic session. Bion thereby insists

<sup>3</sup> The present essay develops, on a more clinical level, certain reflections on the properties of psychoanalytic epistemology [22].

<sup>4</sup> In reality, the notion of “field” is, in some ways, a return to the origins of psychotherapeutic settings; the whole of Mesmer's theories [23, 24] are linked to this notion of field through the concept of animal magnetism, itself derived from the magnetic fields that physics brought to light.

on the role played by relationships and by intersubjective recognition in the construction of the psyche. Thus, as Civitarese writes, “nowhere in Freud's writings do we find the idea that it takes another mind to create a mind” ([20], p.1333). To understand the origins of the psyche, Bion forgoes an intrapsychic reading and proposes, rather, a profoundly intersubjective perspective: instead of looking for traces of repressed elements – the object of a process of deformation [26] –, he focuses on the way in which the clinical dialogue allows for the emergence of *wild thoughts* or *unthought thoughts*. The evolution of the evidential paradigm (one that deciphers the clues of unconscious functioning) towards an aesthetic paradigm (one centered on the emergence of experience and its meaning) leads Bion to focus more on being and on the destiny of unexpressed thoughts, rather than on the decryption and the interpretation of the unconscious [20].

Bion offers a more precise description of the multiple forms of transformation that are made possible through the work of psychoanalysis [14, 20]: *rigid-motion transformations*, *projective transformations*, and *transformations in hallucinosis*. These can be distinguished by the nature of the transformational process and its intersubjective expression: (1) *rigid-motion transformations* happen within and thanks to the transference and can be formulated as “I see X the way I saw Y.” This type of transformation can take the form of the Oedipus complex, for example: “I see my therapist the way I saw my father” or “I see my spouse the way I saw my mother.” This type of transformation is most often found in the field of the neuroses; (2) *projective transformations* can be formulated as “I am you.” There is a higher degree of deformation due to the process of evacuation described by Melanie Klein [27] with the notion of projective identification. This transformation is typical of borderline patients; (3) *transformations in hallucinosis* can be summed up by the phrase “I don't see you” and are most frequent in the field of the psychoses. The subject was not able to develop a container strong enough to receive and transform her/his anxieties, leading to an inability to adapt to reality and to an invasion of the subject's internal world by external reality.

Several authors have extended and refined Bion's list of transformations. For example, Ferro

[13] has strongly insisted on *transformations in dreaming* and on *transformation in playing*; Civitaresse [20] speaks of *narrative transformations*; and Brown [14] of *transformations through humor*. Compared to a more structuralist approach, the notion of transformation is helpful in delineating processes through which growth can be spurred on. This leads to a dynamic representation of psychic functioning that opens up original therapeutic perspectives, particularly for serious pathologies in which the processes of subjectivation are damaged, often considered – incorrectly – as outside of psychotherapy's purview [28]. The notion of transformation is also easy to articulate with the notion of symbolization [29, 30]. These two notions share a process-centered representation of the psyche, one that is profoundly dynamic and intersubjective. Transformation as well as symbolization purport that the suffering mind has an *evolutive potential*. However, the notion of transformation differs from that of symbolization in that the former attempts to describe the most originary forms of the processes of symbolization, and in that its epistemic perimeter can seem wider 5.

For Bion, the dream is the essential modality through which these transformational processes emerge. The nocturnal dream is thus conceived of as a partial form of the dream process that is carried out in the background of the psyche both day and night. Dreams allow us to *translate our experiences*; and Bion tries to understand how this process operates in the production of thoughts that allow for a passage between an infinite space (the unconscious) and a finite space (consciousness). Free association – like the dream – is no longer considered the royal road to the unconscious, but rather as the motor of psychic production itself. To associate, to dream, is to think the unthought. Transformational processes imply, therefore, that the patient has the capacity to dream – a capacity that the analyst should support and develop. Thus Ogden [17] envisions the analyst's task as accompanying the patient in her/his dreaming of undreamt experiences that have degenerated into psychic suffering and symptoms.

5 Ferro [13], not without provocation, asks if the use of the term “symbolization” remains relevant, and considers that the notion of transformation is richer. He thus compares symbolization to an optical microscope and transformation to an electronic microscope; Levy [31] arrives at a similar conclusion.

The emergence of thoughts through dreams also requires the emergence of unexperienced and unsubjectivated emotions through the intermediary of the therapeutic relationship. Thus, for Bion, “[a]n emotional experience cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship” ([32], p. 83). He insists on the here-and-now experience of the session and on the fact that an experience can only be transformed by the current relationship. This allows for the emergence of emotions that can have diverse meanings: “there is no possible meaning outside of a relationship; and, on the contrary, each meaning is *necessarily* born out of a relationship” [20]. The relationship engenders the emergence of a kind of truth of the experience that is no longer, as in the Freudian model, the consequence of the somato-psychic link, but, instead, the product of an encounter. Thus the truth appears, in this model, as the consequence of a *relationship* that inspires a drive for truth, one that makes use of the other, as Bion writes: “I am reminded that healthy mental growth seems to depend on truth as the living organism depends on food. If it is lacking or deficient the personality deteriorates.” [12] This idea will be taken up and expanded upon by the post-Bionian current, which posits that thought is supported by the “human need for truth” [17]. Bion studies the conditions that allow this intersubjective truth to emerge by studying the functions of the personality. In this he pursues a project articulated by Kant [33], aiming for the description of the capacity for creative imagination and its synthetic function.

Thus, for Bion, the newborn child, a glimmer of consciousness, perceives without comprehending. This child progressively develops the capacity to think, one that can distinguish between conscious and unconscious psychic elements. Bion calls this the “alpha function” – a function “by which sense impressions are transformed into elements capable of storage for use in dream and other thoughts” ([34], p. 12). This function brings perceptions together and synthesizes them in an original unit that gives the mind the material of dream thoughts ([34], p. 57). The origin of the process of psychic transformation thus depends on the integration of this function, catalyzed by the analytic situation. Bion's development of this theory is particularly indebted to concepts and tools from philosophy (Kant, Hume) and mathematics (Poincaré) – hence the name of “function” given to this

process. Bion suggests that the first bricks of the activity of thought are raw emotional elements to which he gives the name of “beta elements,” proto-thoughts that cannot be elaborated, things-in-themselves that cannot be treated psychically and that cannot be integrated by the process of thought. These raw elements of biological matter are “projected” into the mother, who “detoxicates” them, thus transforming them into “alpha elements.” Bion divides the alpha function into three factors: maternal day dreaming, the contained-container relationship, and the fragmentation-synthesis dialectic.

There is a passage from biological matter to psychic matter thanks to an other who “humanizes” an experience that is not directly accessible by thought. The alpha function leads to the production of alpha elements, constituting a contact barrier or a membrane – an entity that separates elements into two groups. One group forms consciousness, the other the unconscious. When psychic elements are not integrated through the alpha function, they remain things-in-themselves that thought cannot use, and that return, for example, as hallucinations or acting-outs. We are beyond the Freudian epistemology's simple model of rendering the unconscious conscious: this is a theory of psychic production itself. More precisely, “psychoanalysis doesn't seek change for change's sake, but, rather, a transformation that kickstarts and nourishes the process of subjectivation and that is thus the fruit of a fortunate intersubjective encounter” [35]. This implies, on the part of the clinician, a receptive position characterized by the capacity to be “without memory and without desire,” in order to access a state of reverie shared with the patient.

Bion's approach also has major consequences for the way in which psychic causality is conceived. He criticizes the use of causal relationships, preferring, instead, to speak of *relationships of meaning* at the origins of transformational processes: “But I shall not assume that one causes the other, though for convenience I may [...] employ a theory of causation to express myself” [12]. He refuses analyses that naively link biographical elements with certain psychopathological disorders, since “the field of the unknown is saturated at that moment with that which is already known” [20]. On the contrary, one must avoid creating “theoretical myths” from objective and historical facts. Later on,



Bion will criticize some of his earlier writings, abandoning a form of reasoned writing that followed the Freudian model as well as an imaginary causality, roundly criticized by Lacan <sup>6</sup>, <sup>7</sup> and by certain followers of the phenomenological current [36]. The notion of transformation is thus associated with several notable evolutions in psychoanalytic theories. This notion insists on the role of the dream in the production of thought and on the emergence of emotions through the relationship, while suggesting an epistemological reworking of psychoanalysis as concerns the notion of truth. The approach that emerges is therefore profoundly phenomenological [36, 37] since it focuses attention on the emotional and relational experience in the present moment of therapy.

### **3. The sources of transformational processes: O and its invariants**

At the end of his description of different psychic transformations, Bion moves towards their point of origin, to which he gives the name of O, for origin. Bion describes O using the metaphor of the river god Alpheus ([34], 111). The deeper one plunges into the most primitive, the most obscure forms of psychic life, the more frequent the confrontations between a reassuring objectivity and the indeterminate spaces of pure subjectivity. Words' definitions tend to diffract under the weight of a multiplicity of possible meanings <sup>8</sup>; and O

<sup>6</sup> Note the similarity to Lacan's admonition: "beware of understanding!" On the points of convergence and the differences between Bion's and Lacan's positions, the reader can refer to Pierre-Henri Castel's seminars from 2006 and 2007.

<sup>7</sup> This epistemological evolution also creates a clean break with the medical and psychiatric approach that consists, on the contrary, in teasing out causal relationships between the origin of the disorder and the subject's past. Indeed, this presents a challenge for young psychiatrists hoping to "demedicalize" their initial training.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan [38] met with the same difficulty, which he attempted to work around with the notion of the real. The closer that one gets to the real, equivocations, multiple meanings, and paradoxes multiply and limit the power of the rational and causal analyses of secondarized thought. The frontier separating the equivocal and the impasse becomes porous, making the coherence of these models (and their transmissibility) all the more complex [39].

refers to a constellation of meanings that cannot be reduced to one unequivocal signifier: thing-in-itself, truth, God, divinity, ultimate reality, infinity, language, real, numen, Platonic form, unknown, One, etc. Civitarese [20] thus suggests grouping these different terms together into three complementary vertices: (1) Kant's thing-in-itself; (2) the intersubjective and prelinguistic negotiation of the meaning of experience; (3) the role of the social and of language in the processes of subjectivation and of knowledge <sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the first acceptance of the meaning of O, we can recall that, for Kant [33], the thing-in-itself is linked to the transcendental: there can be no direct comprehension of the real, which is inaccessible to the limits of human cognition. This leads Kant to study the conditions of the possibility of knowledge as *a priori* forms of sensible intuition. Bion, however, distances himself from this model, which cannot explain the genesis of *a priori* forms of intuition and intellect (space, time, and categories). Hegel's contributions (metaphysical dualism) to this question – taken up by Bion – lead him to the idea that a mind is created by “a couple characterized by the fact that one of the members has not yet achieved self-knowledge” [20]. The concept of O thus allows us to avoid the pitfalls of the representationalist paradigm that guided Kant and Freud, and of which Bion offers a radical critique: there is no need to decipher the world nor phenomena-in-themselves, since phenomena are already the result of a subjective operation.

Bion thus attempts to comprehend the intersubjective genesis of thought and of concepts. He emphasizes the role played by sensations and emotions as the basis of subjectivity, and attempts to determine the functions that would found psychoanalysis as an intersubjective theory of truth built on the concept of O. One famous example can help our understanding of the processes of transformation from this point of origin through the later developments of the psyche:

<sup>9</sup> Note the similarity between Bion's model and the Lacanian triptych (real/imaginary/symbolic). O seems to condense that which Lacan separates into three distinct elements.

Suppose a painter sees a path through a field sown with poppies and paints it: at one end of the chain of events is the field of poppies, at the other a canvas with pigment disposed on its surface. We can recognize that the latter represents the former, so I shall suppose that despite the differences between a field of poppies and a piece of canvas, despite the transformation that the artist has effected in what he saw to make it take the form of a picture, *something* has remained unaltered and on this *something* recognition depends. The elements that go to make up the unaltered aspect of the transformation I shall call invariants. ([12], p. 7)

The painting of a field of poppies is thus not the field of poppies itself, but a transformation of this field. Here we move from an infinite and formless O to different forms of transformation, the result of an initial transformation (T0). This perceived real leaves a mark in the painter's psyche, a second transformation (T1), transferred to the canvas and thereby becoming a third transformation (T2), before producing a fourth transformation (T3) that comes from the subject's reaction upon viewing the painting. O's original structure is maintained throughout its quadruple transformation from one step to the next.

According to Bion, the work of transformation initiated by a work of art is similar to that of psychoanalytic practice. The clinician allows her/himself to be pervaded by the patient's psyche; and the two embark on a process of co-narration and co-reverie. The analyst thus situates her/himself “between the point where a man [sic] receives sense impressions and the point where he [sic] gives expression to the transformation that has taken place” ([12], p. 23). This produces transformations in the depths of the subject and promotes an incarnation of O (the transformations of O) – as opposed to intellectualized representations (transformations of K, Knowledge). In effect, there is a risk that the latter will lead to a causal, secondarized, and linguistic understanding incapable of producing a real transformation. Betty Joseph [40] refers here to “plausible interpretations” [40] that give rise to theoretical discussion with the patient, to the detriment of emotional expression. This will also lead Bion to base his model of learning on that of *psychic growth*, from *transmission* to *transformation* [41]

**10.** Later, Bion will attempt to define the invariants of the transformation process – that which remains

10 Bion points out that this quest for truth and for growth is linked to psychological turbulence, which he also refers to as “catastrophic change,” creating a feeling of disaster that precedes the integration of split-off and non-represented elements.

unaltered – as something analogous to water, which retains the same molecular structure despite its different configurations (liquid, ice, gas, etc.), the invariant in this case corresponding to the association of two hydrogen atoms with one oxygen atom *11*. Bion's goal is to produce a model that will allow him to think through the ensemble of transformations that invariants undergo, that is, to “find the terms that can summarize a variety of configurations that are fundamentally similar” [20], a sort of periodic table of psychic elements *12*.

The invariants of the transformational process allow experiences to make sense, and gradually lead to the development of consciousness, through the work of representation. The invariants of the origins of the thought process flow, more precisely, from a state of *at-one-ment* *13*. “Any O not common to both is incapable of psycho-analytic investigation” [12]. The point of origin of the process of transformation is thus not found in any existing reality: “If one understood the invariant as an objective and intrinsic quality of a given reality, and one that is independent of the vertex of observation, this would lead one to postulate the existence of a certain absolute truth, with a play on words: un-alter-ed, that is, untouched by the other” [20]. Thus, for Bion, even the staunchest certainties and the most arid models from the experimental sciences have their roots in this at-one-ment and the truth that flows from it. Bion links truth to Platonic forms and to an Hegelian absolute, leading him to an intersubjective reading of the truth whose nature appears as radically social. As Civitarese [20] sums it up, for Hegel “the consciousness of an 'us' is first born out of this relationship between two,” whereas

11 This leads to an interrogation of the nature of psychic matter. What exactly *is* a psychic component? One must recall that every physical composition is necessarily perceived through a filter composed of psychic elements. A scientist always studies biological or physical matter with the help of her/his own psychic matter. This leads to a certain awkwardness for physicists specialized in the infinitely small when it comes to interpreting the results that they obtain when the system being studied is the object – or not – of a unit of measurement.

12 In this sense, the different psychoanalytic currents, even psychotherapeutic currents broadly speaking, could be considered less as scientific models and more as artistic movements, each working with different types of transformation. However, they have a specific methodology, a rigor, and a form of rationality that cannot be reduced to simple, arbitrary trends.

13 In more contemporary terms, this happens thanks to the moments of encounter that Stern describes so effectively [42]. In this sense, Bion clarifies the true nature of these moments of encounter that represent the tip of the iceberg of the therapeutic relationship [14].

for Wittgenstein, “knowledge is based on recognition.” In consequence, “the ego is always an us;” and Bion interrogates the social field in which each human dyad inserts itself. Here we can think of Lacan's reflections in the continuity of Hegel's intuitions on “the divine nature of language” that attests to its transcendental character.

For the same reason, Bion also makes use of the concepts of God and of Divinity – not for their religious signification, but, instead, in order to describe the transcendental nature of the language that surrounds us and that organizes the emergence of meaning. Bion became increasingly interested in the mystic, underscoring the fact that humanity cannot access the divine, but that it can nevertheless come close through mysticism and through poetry: if I cannot say something with words, I can attempt to become it at the limits of the subjective experience **14**. Bion thus tries to “restitute in the language of psychoanalysis the truth of what the mystic or the religious person expresses in their idiosyncratic language” [35]. He joins Heidegger and the phenomenological current in an attempt to theorize the pre-reflexive basis from which subjectivity emerges [37]. This dive into the real leads to the search for the first “bedrock” – Freud's rock-bottom of the biological [45] – made up of the other and of language: “Just as all speech positions itself dialectically in relationship with all the other elements of language, each interlocutor always addresses somebody else. This is why emotion – as a transformation of a proto-affect – would already imply a relationship” [35] **15**. The Bionian paradigm thus implies an intersubjective theory of the origin of the concept that underscores the non-existence of an objective “basis” of the real, but, instead, an intersubjective and dreamlike spiral situated at the source of the process of subjectivation. Bion's work thus attempts to guide the clinician's attention to the properties of this dreamlike **16** space from which unthought thoughts can emerge, and in which s/he will play an

14 In this sense, all religions attempt to put words to an originary that is inaccessible to the intellect. The same dimension, catalyzed by the religious prism, can be found at the heart of exceptional experiences where there is a confrontation between the unspeakable and the limits of the subjective experience [43, 44].

15 The importance of language in the constitution of the subjective can also be found in Lacan's writing on the child's arrival in the symbolic [38].

16 Note that the notion of a basis in dreams is also present in Merleau-Ponty, who writes, in *Institution and Passivity*, of “the dream basis of all perception,” which he develops through the Dora case, explaining that “the unconscious basis

active role.

#### 4. Theories of the analytic field and clinical implications of transformations in dreaming

I will now present several elements related to the notion of field, in order to demonstrate how this notion articulates with the notion of transformation for Bion and for the post-Bionian current. I should begin by pointing out that, just as physicists study the particularities of different physical fields, the above-mentioned transformations appear within a *psychic field*, whose conditions of emergence can be described. This was one of the objectives set by Willy and Madeleine Baranger, two French analysts who emigrated to Argentina, in an article <sup>17</sup> published in Spanish in 1961 on the theories of field. The Barangers [21] hypothesize an analytic dyad that creates a bi-personal and dynamic field that cannot “be considered to be the sum of the two internal situations. It is something created between the two, within the unit that they form in the moment of the session, something radically different from what each of them is separately.” ([21], p. 11). They draw inspiration from the Gestalt, from Lewin, from Klein, and from Merleau-Ponty's work [47] on “man in situation.” <sup>18</sup> Bion's work on groups also lays the groundwork for the notion of field, leading the Barangers to this definition of the analytic field:

« Le champ analytique est un terrain commun au patient et à l'analyste (. . .) différent aussi bien de ce qui peut être observé chez chacun des membres que de la somme de ce que chacun y a apporté. De ce point de vue, l'objet n'étude n'est ni le patient ni l'interaction avec l'analyste, mais le champ même de la situation analytique en tant qu'il engendre des pathologies et des phénomènes originaux » [21].

<sup>17</sup> This article was published in translation in the *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* in 1985. A second article [46] published in the same journal expands upon certain themes from the first article.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding “man in situation,” Merleau-Ponty supposes a certain relationship to the world that organizes and undergirds every relationship: “In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator” ([47], p. 407).

This field – the basis – is composed of three complementary elements: (1) the setting, or the formal aspects and the basic contract; (2) the relationship, or the interaction between the clinician and the patient; (3) the unconscious bi-personal fantasies underlying this relationship. The regressive situation and the fundamental rule of free association that characterize analytic practices produce a new Gestalt that takes the form of a bi-personal fantasy, whose dynamic can be perceived within the analytic field. As discussed above, regarding the concept of transformation, it is less important to decode the dynamic of the transference than it is to insist upon the relationship that emerges in the analytic space. The clinician allows her/himself to be penetrated by split-off elements of the patient's personality, which crystallize in the intersubjective field in the form of “bastions.” These bastions, through the mechanism of projective identification, become “micro-neuroses” or “micro-psychoses” experienced by the clinician, whose ability to cast a “second look” on them contributes to their introjection by the patient. This process requires “mutative interpretations” – which will allow for the bastion's dissolution and an increased capacity, on the part of the patient, for insight. The clinician thus accompanies the patient towards the emergence of emotions and the co-narration of her/his experience.

Several generations of Italian analysts have expanded upon this notion of field [16]. Antonino Ferro [18] is certainly one of the most influential voices. His approach pays special attention to sensations, bodily experiences, the atmosphere of sessions, and the emotional contact with the patient. Ferro's definition [18] of the properties of the field is thus in direct continuity with Bion's theories:

- The field becomes a place and a moment where the emotional turbulences activated by the analytic encounter are manifested.
- The field becomes the place-and-time of the promotion of stories and narrations that are the outcome of the process of alphabetization of the proto-emotions present in the couple.
- The field is the matrix which, by way of the capacity for reverie and availability for being in unison, promotes the development of the ability to contain and of the  $\alpha$ -function. ([18], p. 21)

Other authors have participated in the development of these theories of field and the praxes that they imply, such as Thomas Ogden [17] with his notion of analytic third, conceived of as “the result of

an exchange between the analyst's and the analysand's states of reverie.” The analytic third is considered a third subjectivity created by the analytic situation, resulting from the intermingling of the analyst's and analysand's subjectivities. The relational psychoanalysis current [48] has also insisted upon the fact that “[t]he analyst always participates in and, inevitably, co-creates precisely what she is also collaborating with the patient to try to understand” ([48], p. 62). In France, several authors have developed similar notions. Outside of André Green's work [15] on the analytic third, other notions such as figurability and regredience [49], the chimera [50], or co-thought [51] point to the profound interrelatedness of psyches within the analytic framework. The work of René Kaës [52] on the group and the “common and shared dream space” also underscores this mix of thought in the psychoanalytic setting as “a porous, strange, and sometimes disturbing space. [...] a system of exchanges between the dream spaces and waking spaces of multiple subjects.”

A clinical practice that makes use of notions of transformation and field is, thus, more attentive to context, to receptivity, to the acceptance of doubt, and to interpretative modulation. One particular challenge is tolerating the emotional contact with the patient, which produces, for the analyst, a pressure to act in the here and now of the analytic situation. Made up of lines of force, of vectors, of crystallized processes, the depth of field evolves with the broadening of the subject's psychic life; and therapy enlarges a space that it subsequently explores. The analytic session can be likened to a matrix that generates meaning, a field made up of analytic matter and populated by characters [53] whose psychic frontiers become porous, much like the membranes between the unconscious and consciousness, between body and mind, between past and future. During the session, there is a meeting of two worlds, which gives birth to a common analytic “stage” on which transformations, *via* emotions and meaning, are produced. Condensed, split-off, non-subjectified experiences take the form of images, of words, of scenes, and of stories that themselves become containers for the emotional expression of traumatic experiences. The analyst becomes a co-dreamer and co-narrator, encouraging being and becoming through subjective listening – a “listening to listening” [54] that acts upon the listening



process itself. Singular mental operations thus play out in the analytic field, fostered by a “dreaming together” that reboots the patient's capacity to dream her/his unsymbolized experiences turned symptoms.

This approach, based on *transformations in dreaming* [53], profoundly modifies clinical work.

Civitaresse sums up the basic principles:

- a) the entire session can be seen as a dream
- b) the dream is dreamt neither by the patient nor by the analyst, but by the common unconscious field that emerges from their encounter
- c) what matters are the narrative transformations that take place in the analytic field, especially if these transformations increase the significance of the shared emotional experience. ([20], p. 176)

One can consider everything the patient says during the session as a potential dream. On this subject, Civitaresse [20] offers a technical tip: “imagine that everything the patient says is preceded by the little phrase 'I dreamed that...' or 'I'm dreaming that...',” as this vignette from Claudio Neri demonstrates:

Today, [Renato] is talking about something that has to do with his daily life: washing dishes. He explains that using very hot, sometimes boiling water for washing dishes is useless, sometimes even counterproductive. Out of curiosity I ask him for a clarification. Renato clarifies that the soap enzymes are already active at forty degrees and that a higher temperature is not necessary. I tell him that I didn't know about it and that I think it's a noteworthy piece of information. The patient continues: “if you put the plates under boiling water, it creates a film that is very hard to remove.” I thank him. “I'll keep it in mind the next time I wash dishes.” [18]

A banality uttered by the patient is thus given the same attention as if it were a dream. Is the patient asking the analyst to be careful when dealing with him? Could the patient's words burn the analyst and put him on the defensive, rendering him incapable of helping the patient elaborate? The analyst refrains from proposing an interpretation; instead, he makes adjustments to his mode of intervention, preferring a way of being to an interpretation.

The clinician's ability to daydream is supported by Bion's advice [12] to be “without memory, without desire, without comprehension;” and this position of profound receptivity echoes Winnicott's

[55] primary maternal preoccupation. Winnicott didn't consider this to be one of psychoanalysis's technical tools, properly speaking, whereas Bion insists upon the importance of developing this shared oneiric activity in the space of the sessions, both to contain anxiety and to generate meaning. A discipline of subjectivity is thus necessary for the analyst's developing of her/his negative capability [22] **19**. This state of reverie will encourage the emergence of quasi-hallucinatory images – for the clinician and for the patient both – the fruit of what Bion calls *transformations in hallucinosis* (TH): “TH has the vivacity and the force of conviction that the dream does while we are dreaming it, and just after waking up when we are still bewitched by its images” [20]. The clinician should thus be attentive to “dream flashes” that invade her/him during the sessions. These flashes bear witness to the psyche's roots in the dream, and to the dream as background to secundarized mental activity, which takes the form of “photograms” with a “high hallucinatory value, that is, with an extraordinary sensorial vividness” [20]. “Unborn” ideas that belong to the present, to the past, to the future, thoughts without a thinker thus appear in this hallucinatory crucible that allows for the emergence of processes of figurability [49]. Working through this hallucinatory experience, from multiple perspectives, or from multiple “semiotic chora” [56] is a way of making sense of the infinite, of the formless and the senseless, as Civitarese writes: “The capacity to change one's vertex, to consider things from another point of view – but also to allow oneself to be troubled by what emerges from within oneself – often has a more therapeutic effect than a perfectly constructed interpretation” ([35], p. 113). Therapeutic work thus consists in the emergence of these vertices that link up analytic elements in the form of meaning.

19 Bion borrows the notion of negative capability from the English poet John Keats, who sensed it in Shakespeare's works. Keats' description of the negative capability is given in a letter from December 22, 1817, addressed to his brothers: “I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” This concept emerges from Keats' interrogations about the artist's ability to produce shareable and generalizable truth out of personal truth. This process requires an ability to tolerate uncertainty, which allows a form of truth – experienced as remembrance – to emerge. The negative capability is also associated with “a divinatory intuition based on faith in the clinical material, to which it gives an allegorical perception” [20]. This is then linked to a receptivity and to a for of patience, which are only possible when one has attained the unshakeable certainty that this state can foster the emergence of the unthought.

This approach leads clinicians to invoke their own associations more freely, as Ogden [18, 57] does ([57], p. 166). The clinician is no longer obligated to push aside the personal images and feelings that arise during the session, since these are considered to be elements of the field ([57], p. 167). This leads to greater authenticity in the care of patients and in one's way of sharing one's clinical experience, culminating in the capacity to reveal more of one's intimate experiences during sessions with patients.

Finally, theories of field imply that one recognize and tolerate the limits of knowing: “Tolerance – actively and tenaciously exercised, session after session – promotes a specific configuration of the analytical field, which allows 'the shadows of being' to pause, thus maintaining their own obscurity” [18]. This means emancipating oneself from an adaptative therapeutic model that runs the risk of hindering the states of daydreaming that are necessary if psychic transformation is to take place. On the contrary, psychic transformation implies a tolerance for unknowing and the unknown. Ultimately, Bion's project of formalization culminates in the recognition of “our foundations' lack of foundation” [20], of an impenetrable and opaque “groundless ground” [58]. One must, then, accept this relationship to the unknown [59] that leads to a form of relativism regarding the truths that emerge within the field.

## **5 Conclusion: transformations and metamorphoses within the aesthetic paradigm**

Numerous philosophers (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, etc.) have underscored the essence of intersubjectivity in the emergence and in the development of the psyche; these conceptions were then progressively integrated by psychoanalysis, leading to an evolution of its models, from the Freudian intrapsychic to Winnicott's intersubjective and finally to Bion's transsubjective. In this paper, I have attempted to describe the principal characteristics of this last model, which has developed, in particular, around the notions of transformation and of field. This theoretical evolution has been accompanied by a transformation of psychoanalysis's clinical practices through a paradigm that places the emphasis on dreams, emotions, the contact with O, the present moment of the therapy, the negative

capability, vertices, and a tolerance of doubt, all with the goal of catalyzing the processes of psychic transformation.

This paradigm has also occasioned an evolution in the relationship to theories themselves, exposing the risks of a reductionist or biologizing tendency in psychoanalysis [22] and proposing a conception of causality freed from a purely linear understanding of psychic functioning. These elements constitute an alternative to the model of the “scientist-practitioner” [60] whose procedural and manifest logic are liable to hinder the symbiogenic potential of the human psyche. On the contrary, Bion considers that “analysts should be like painters: they must know how to use their palette of colors, that is, their emotions and their dreams” [20]. Thus, we move from an evidential paradigm (the search for evidence) to an aesthetic paradigm (the search for an emotion) [61, 62] that promotes the process of subjectivation [20]. The clinician thinks of her/his own therapeutic activity as an artistic one, allowing her/him to demonstrate creativity and originality in each clinical encounter <sup>20</sup> within an analytic field taken as a potential space of dreams and of play. The profoundly transsubjective nature of the therapeutic space can thus be deployed, allowing for the appearance of a form of truth through the subject's contact with the real, and through the emergence of emotions and unthought thoughts, to which, then, meaning is ascribed through the processes of personification and of narrativity.

In conclusion, I will briefly evoke two perspectives that could help be used to build on these theoretical and clinical evolutions in the future. The first one is related to the study of transformational processes on a continuum whose origin would be the study of change (a state), towards processes of transformation (a form), and finally metamorphosis (being). In this sense, the notion of metamorphosis could describe an enlarged transformation of the subjective experience, a meta-transformation, that brings about a new subjective structure, as we can sometimes observe during long therapies. The aim would be to better understand the emergence of these subjective metamorphoses in order to more

<sup>20</sup> This also changes the way clinicians think of psychoanalytic observation: as a *proof founded on practice* rather than a *practice founded on proof* [63].

precisely evaluate the therapeutic effectiveness of extreme forms of psychic change. In complement to this perspective, a second perspective to be explored would concern the improvement of the modelization of these transformative processes – which was, notably, what Bion was attempting to do with his grid. Taking inspiration from the models used in mathematics and in cognitive science [64, 65] could prove relevant when attempting to illuminate, from a non-reductionist and extra-clinical perspective, the most intimate and transformational dimensions of psychoanalytic practices.

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