

Bion's Theory on Thinking and its Application to Groups : Basic Assumptions as Forms of Evasion*

Mohamed HAFSI

Nara University, Faculty of Social Research

ABSTRACT

The literature concerning Bion's work is characterized by a divorce made between the latter's contribution to groups and the one to psychoanalysis, as if there are two Bion with different identities. However, after carefully reading Bion's work, the author found it difficult to separate the two facets of his work. For, although not clearly acknowledged by Bion, these facets constitute a whole theme whose grasp is of value, if not indispensable, to a fuller understanding of, for instance, the phenomena described in *experiences in groups*. In the present article, the author has attempted to apply Bion's theory of thinking, proposing a new interpretation of the phenomena of *basic assumptions* and *work group*. The three basic assumptions which Bion adumbrated are usually interpreted (including by Bion himself) as defence processes against the fears and anxieties characterizing early mental positions (described by Melanie Klein). The mobilization of these defence processes is regarded as the result of the group's massive regression. While not refuting this interpretation, the author proposed a different one. According to the latter, *work group* is the result of the development of thinking, which involves the development of thoughts and the one of an apparatus to deal with or think these thoughts. This two-fold development is the result of a mating of the group's *preconception* (about the group experience) with a positive *realization*. On the other hand, the basic assumptions are a consequence of 1) a mating of this preconception with a negative realization, and the resulting inhibition of the two-fold development of thinking, and 2) the consequence of the group's inability to sufficiently tolerate the frustration resulting from this negative mating. The basic assumptions are interpreted here as forms of evasions of this frustration. While allowing us to integrate the two facets of Bion's contribution to psychoanalysis, this hypothesis sheds also light on the reason why group researchers have held contradictory conceptions of how the group is experienced (good group vs. bad group) by the members.

It is a general belief that Bion's contribution to the study of groups has ended with the publication of his *experiences in groups* (Bion, 1961). Ganzarain (1989), for instance, writes that Bion abandoned his research on groups for the reasons that he felt that his two "masters", Melanie Klein and Paula Heimann, did not like working with groups, and that he thought that he had already made his contribution to that area, moving to individual psychoanalysis, especially to the topic of psychotic thought. Although widely

*Received September 30, 1998.

spread this belief is not shared by all those interested in the work of Bion. Lyth (1981), followed by James (1981), emphasized that Bion's work on groups and his latter work on individual psychoanalysis are interrelated and complementary. In other words, Bion has not ceased to think about group phenomena, and the role played by the group experience in shedding light on individual phenomena such as regression and transference, for instance. His discussion about groups at length and in depth in his latter work *Attention and Interpretation* (Bion, 1970) constitutes an attempt to bring psychoanalysis and group theory close again. The present author shares thus the less widely spread belief that Bion did not give up his research on groups. As put by James (1981), Bion "followed-up in psychoanalysis some of his findings, notably the importance in normal and neurotic individuals of the psychotic elements and the need to deal with them in psychoanalysis or in groups.

Introduction to Bion's Theory of Thinking

Based on this belief, the present author will now apply Bion's theory of *thinking* 1) to understand the difficulties encountered by the group to develop and function as a work group, and 2) to integrate the theory of basic assumptions (Bion, 1968) into the theory of thinking. In his *A Theory of Thinking*, Bion (1962) proposes a series of condensed hypotheses about the psychic apparatus and its development. He conceives of thinking as a successful result of two fundamental developments, namely the development of thoughts and the development of an apparatus which deals with them, and which Bion temporarily called *thinking*. This implies that the emergence of thoughts is prior to that of thinking; which differs from the generally held conception that thoughts are the product of thinking.

Furthermore, Bion (1962) classified thoughts into *preconceptions*, *conceptions* or *thoughts*, and *concepts*, based on the nature of their developmental history. The preconception, which is the equivalent in psychoanalysis of Kant's concept of "empty thought", has for prototype the infant's inborn expectation of a breast. The conception is described as the outcome of the mating of a preconception with a realization. To illustrate this hypothesis, Bion uses as a model the infant's relationship to the breast. He writes that

"Psychoanalytically the theory that the infant has an inborn disposition corresponding to an expectation of a breast may be used to supply a model. When the preconception is brought into contact with a realization that approximates to it, the mental outcome is a conception... This model will serve for the theory that every junction of a preconception with its realization produces a conception. Conceptions therefore will be expected to be constantly conjoined with an emotional experience of satisfaction" (p. 179).

Regarding the case when a preconception is mated with frustration, Bion reserves the term "thought". To explain what he means by this concept, he proposes the model of an

infant whose preconception of the breast is mated with a negative realization or, to use his words, "a realization of a no-breast available for satisfaction" which will be experienced by the infant as a bad internal object, a thing-in-itself. When the infant is faced with this situation, the infant, depending on its capacity for toleration of frustration, has two alternatives: evading the frustration (evasion) or modifying it (modification).

If the capacity for toleration of frustration is sufficient, this no-breast inside becomes a thought, and an apparatus for dealing with, or "thinking" it develops. This leads to a mental state characterized by a dominance of the reality principle (as discussed by Freud, 1911) and a synchronous development of an ability to think. In this case, the infant's capacity for tolerating frustration enables thus the psyche to develop thought in order to make the already-tolerated frustration more tolerable.

If, however, the infant has an inadequate capacity for toleration of frustration, the psyche is confronted by the bad internal no-breast to decide between evading frustration or modifying it, depending, here again, on the infant's degree of intolerance. That is, if the infant's intolerance of frustration is not too great, modification would be the choice. As discussed by Grinberg et al. (1977), modification of frustration which, in the case of the infant, results in the production of alpha-elements and thoughts representing the thing-in-itself, may take two forms: "(1) developing a rudimentary scientific sense with a distinction between true and false, and (2) substituting the scientific focus for the moral focus, with development of omniscience" (p. 50). However, if the infant's intolerance is such that the psyche opts for evasion, what should be a thought becomes a bad object, a thing-in-itself. Consequently, the development of thoughts and thinking as an apparatus is inhibited, and an hypertrophic development of an apparatus for projective identification takes its places. This latter apparatus is used to deal with all the thoughts, perceived as bad internal objects undistinguishable from things-in-themselves which should be evacuated at any cost. For evacuation is equated with obtaining sustenance from a good object. Moreover, these thing-in-themselves are thus evacuated by means of excessive projective identification to annihilate space and time, perceived also as identical with bad objects that are destroyed, or as "no-breast". This dominance of excessive projective identification will, as a result, lead to confusion between the self and the external object.

According to Bion, the capacity for tolerance of frustration is a determinant factor for *learning from experience*. That is, if the infant can tolerate frustration, "the mating of conception and realizations whether negative or positive initiates procedures necessary to learning from experience". However, if the infant's tolerance is inadequate, the mating of the preconception (or conception) with the negative realization leads the personality to develop omnipotence and omniscience instead of learning from experience by means of thoughts and thinking. The Psyche is, therefore, characterized by a lack of a psychic activity for discriminating between true and false. Omniscience leads to a substitution of this discrimination with an absolute belief that "one thing is morally right and the other wrong... There is thus potentially a conflict between assertion of truth and assertion of

moral ascendancy. The extremism of the one infects the other" (Bion, 1962, p. 181).

Bion attributes the infant's capacity for tolerance of frustration to the experience of a positive or well-balanced mother-child relationship. This kind of relationship is characterized by what Bion calls "realistic projective identification". The mother is able to contain and process her child projected beta-elements, and thanks to her alpha-function, translate them into alpha elements that can be reintegrated by her child, contributing thus to the development of his/her thinking. For the infant personality by itself is unable to deal with the sense data, but has to evacuate these beta-elements into the mother, relying on her capacity for *reverie* which corresponds to the receptor organ for the infant's self-sensation obtained by its conscious (Bion, 1962). In conclusion, Bion regards pathological development as being related to the breakdown in the two-fold development of thoughts and the apparatus for thinking the thoughts which he called temporarily "thinking".

Thinking and Group Development

The above described theory on the development of thinking seems, at first glance, limited to the individual infantile experience, and remote from group experiences. However, a close examination of this theory hints at the relevance of its application to the understanding of the group experience and, especially the phenomena Bion (1968) called *basic assumption group* and *work group*. The attempt to apply a theory, which is basically concerned with the individual, to the group can be justified if one takes into consideration the fact that psychoanalysis has never made any clear cut between the individual and the group. Freud (1921) himself wrote that any psychology is a social or group psychology. Moreover, although Melanie Klein did not write about groups, object relations theoreticians working with groups regards the group as a kind of theatre for individual regression and transference. For instance, regression is a core concept in Bion's group theory (Konig, 1985). Applying Kleinian concepts, Bion concluded that the group experience leads to massive "regression to early psychotic positions, namely paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions described by Klein (1952). Consequently, the group is thus led to experience early anxieties (paranoid and depressive) against which such primitive defences as projective identification are mobilized.

As a result of regression, the group can not function as what Bion (1968) called a *work group*. When functioning as a work group, the group is involved in a real or basic task, and is characterized by a high sense of reality, cooperation among its members, scientific thinking, awareness of the passage and importance of time, and, consequently, by maturity and possibility of development. According to Bion, the group is often prevented from functioning as a work group by three different mental states or basic assumptions which he respectively called basic assumption of dependency (baD), basic assumption of fight/flight (baF), and basic assumption of pairing (baP). These basic assumptions have in common the fact that they are not oriented towards reality, but toward fantasy, and are anonymously expressed or formulated by any one member in the group. The group caught in a basic assumption has no notion of time, is unable of communication,

cooperation, learning and growth. Bion concluded that these basic assumptions are defensive reactions to psychotic anxieties experienced in the group as a result of regression.

The present author believes that the integration by Bion of his theory of basic assumptions into the Kleinian theoretical edifice had reduced its importance and originality. By applying Kleinian concepts to explain his theory, Bion reached an answer about the nature of the basic assumptions (defensive reactions), and the cause of their appearance (regression). However, he also put an end to his creative and pioneer work, leaving the reader with the unanswered question of whether the group can avoid regression and its consequences, and function continually as a work group without falling a prey to the basic assumption group. The author will therefore try to apply the theory on thinking described above, to answer this question and shed new light on the basic assumptions phenomena from a vertex different from that of regression.

To illustrate his idea, the author will present some clinical vignettes of Tavistock-style groups which he conducted with students as a part of training in psychoanalytically-oriented T-groups, or diagnostic groups (D-group). This training constitutes a part of the curriculum for students in psychology. The aim of these D-groups is 1) to provide the participant with an opportunity to experience the different group phenomena described by Bion under the concepts of basic assumption group and work group, and 2) to have a general point of view concerning the method used in psychoanalytically-oriented groups. The group comprises usually 16 to 20 members. The experience which lasts three days, consists in six sessions of one hour and half each (see Hafsi, 1990, for a detailed description of the method used).

As represented in Figure 1, people come to groups with the positive pre-conception that participating in a group will help them to enhance their academic knowledge and knowledge about themselves, resulting thus in a narcissistic satisfaction (Kaës, et al., 1973, 1976). They come with an idealized representation of the group, the content of the training programme, and the trainer. The group is expected to provide them with not only training and knowledge about group dynamics, but also with warmth, understanding and friendship. This pre-conception is expressed by two participants in the first session in the following:

A : I introduce myself... my name is A, I am a second year student... the reason I selected this course is that I attended Prof. H...'s lecture last year (a class on applied psychoanalysis), and I found it very interesting... I read also the introduction of this course in the University's Syllabus, and I found the idea of experiencing group phenomena before attending any theoretical lecture interesting, so I decided to take this course to learn about group dynamics... I hope also to be able to make friends in the group..."

B : My name is B...I share the same idea with A...when I read the syllabus, I thought this must be interesting...it is different from other courses...A friend of mine who participated in this kind of group last year recommended it to me...I am very excited to be here today, I was looking forward to participating in the group and

Thinking and Groups

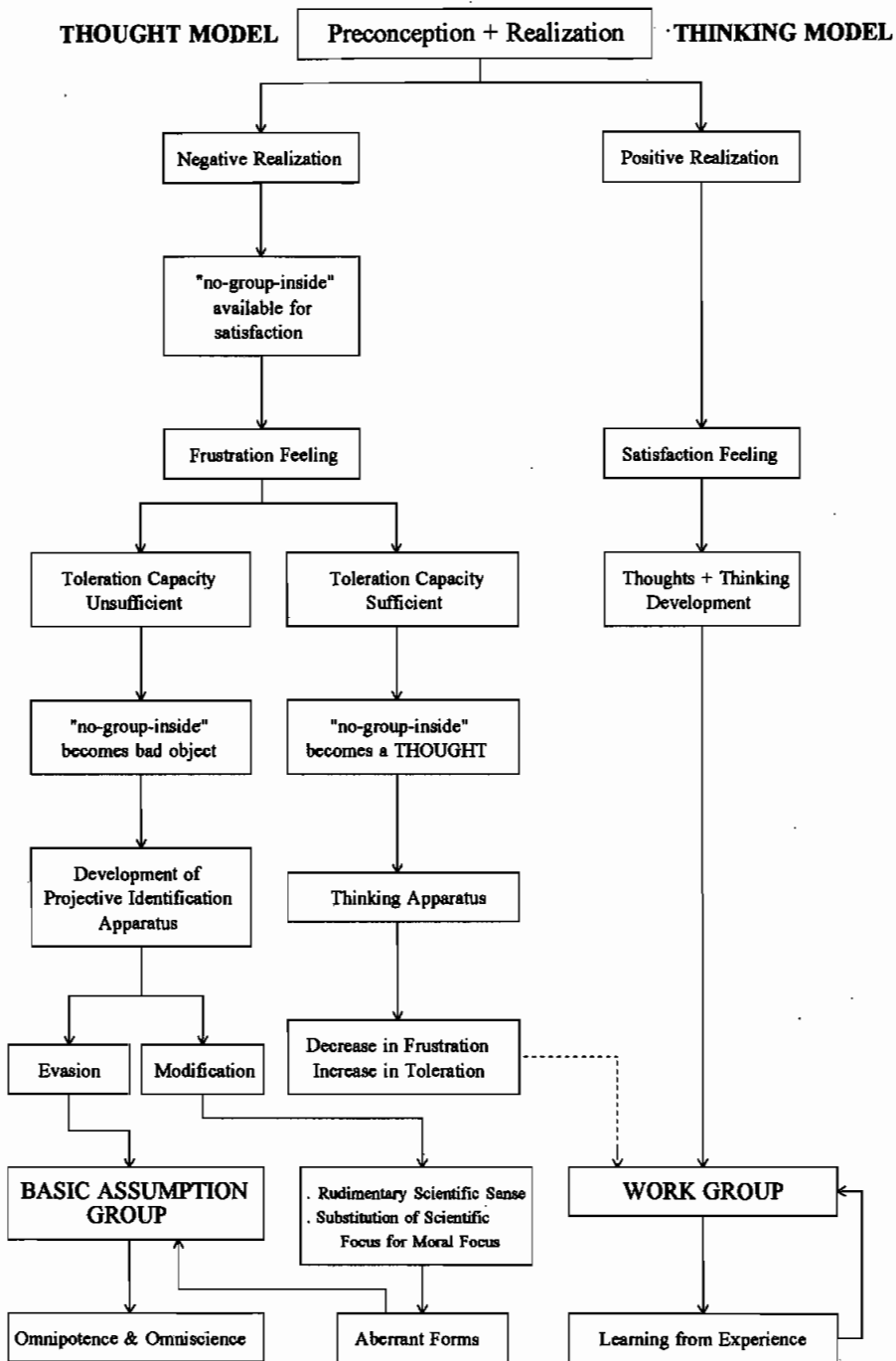


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of the Application of Bion's Thinking Model to the Group

learning about group psychology in this way... (and jokingly) my girlfriend left me two weeks ago...I feel free, but lonely...".

As shown by these participants' statements, group members preconception of the group is, like the infant's inborn preconception of the ever gratifying and ideal breast, characterized by a strong expectancy to be satisfied by the group experience. Therefore, like in the case of the infant, the group's preconception may mate with a positive or negative realization. As indicated in Figure 1, if this preconception is brought into contact with a positive realization, that is a realization that corresponds or approximates to it, the group's *psyche* (Anzieu, 1984; Kaës, 1976a) will experience the development of a conception or a thought, and that of an apparatus to think it, or "thinking". For, like in the case of the infant, this development is synchronous of an emotional experience of satisfaction. Thanks to the emergence of thoughts, the group experience becomes thus a source of satisfaction for its members, and is therefore experienced as a "good mother" (Slater, 1966; Grotjahn, 1972; Hearst, 1981). This corresponds to a "normal" development, or the "thinking model" represented in Figure 1.

The end result of the development of thoughts and thinking is that, like in the case of the infant, the group becomes able 1) to use symbols and think symbolically and logically, 2) to learn from experience, 3) to discriminate between true and false, make rational use of verbal communication and publication (Bion, 1962), and 4) to cooperate for a real task, and 5) be able to grow. In a few words, the group become able to display the characteristics of what Bion (1961) called the work group.

However, like in the case of the infant, the mating of a preconception with a positive realization is not always possible. That is, the group's preconception may mate also with a negative realization, which leads to frustration and disappointment within the group. This corresponds to Bion's "thought" model, which I will try now to apply to demonstrate what will happen to the group's thinking capacity in this case. As put by some researcher (Sutherland, 1985; Wisdom, 1985), what characterizes Bion's method of working with groups, and Tavistock-style groups in general, is the fact that the therapist or the leader waits for the developments to occur spontaneously, refusing any demand of help from the group. For instance, to the question "what is the activity or the aim of this group", the leader gives no answer, no hint, and no instruction. In this situation, the group would, naturally, feel frustrated, deprived, and angered. This will consequently lead to a juxtaposition of the group's preconception with a negative realization. One group expressed, through the then-leader, its frustration in the middle of the first session in the following:

Leader: (addressing the therapist in a frustrated voice) We have been asking you questions, but you didn't want to answer...this is not going to help the group...if you don't give us instructions we can't move...we don't know what to do...we are obliged to shut up or keep saying anything just to keep talking...we have been doing this since the beginning of the session...we came here to learn something about group psychology not to sit down and keep

silent...we can do this outside, we don't need to come here to shut up. It is a personal opinion, but I think everybody feels the same thing..."

Like for the infant, this juxtaposition of a preconception with frustration is experienced as a no-group (no-breast), or "no-group-inside", namely, a no-group available for satisfaction, a bad internal group (Ganzarain, 1989). This "no-group-inside" experience is often expressed by some group members denying consciously the very existence of the group. The following extract from the first session is very illustrative of this denial.

Th.: Since the beginning of the session, the group has been acting as a needy child waiting to be fed by me, but, I have nothing at the moment to feedback to the group...I have no idea about what and how the group must do now. I have already said all what is needed by the group to start functioning, that is, the basic rules of the group...

A.: (interrupting me) You and other members have been using the word group like if it is a real group...but, as everybody knows, we have nothing of a group...we don't exchange opinions or ideas, we have nothing in common...A real group has something to do, and the members know each other, most of us don't say anything, some others sleep...How can we call this a group...it is only sixteen different people gathered together randomly...

Th.: It seems to me that A is speaking for the whole group, isn't he ?

K.: ...If A is not speaking for the whole, he is speaking at least for me...It is depressing to be here...personally I can't stand the silence and all the group atmosphere...There is nothing to get or learn from here (meaning the group).

Under these conditions (when the group is perceived as a "no-group-inside"), further development will depend on the group's capacity for toleration of frustration, and on whether to opt for evading the frustration or modifying it. As discussed in the case of the infant, if the group is sufficiently able to tolerate frustration, the "no-group inside" becomes, as indicated in Figure 1, a thought, and "thinking", or the apparatus for thinking this thought, emerges. The thought will thus enable the group to further tolerate frustration, and consequently display some of the characteristics of work group, making thus the sessions relatively more animated and less boring for both the therapist and the group.

However, if the group's capacity for toleration of the frustration experienced is not sufficient enough, the "no-group-inside" becomes a bad internal object, and confronts the group *psyche* with the need to decide between modification or evasion of the frustration. As discussed in the case of the child's development, the group's attempt to modify the frustration takes two forms. As indicated in Figure 1, the group may develop a rudimentary scientific sense and, consequently, be able to distinguish between true and false. In this case, the group is characterized by an elementary capacity to think logically, and by an awareness of the source of its frustration. In other words, the group

knows that its frustration is due to the group's actual behavior, or "group mentality" (Bion, 1961), and attempts are consequently made, using the trial-and-error method, to remedy to the situation. Methods to help the group to get out of the impasse are thus proposed. The group tries to express and discuss ideas, and makes attempts to set rules. At first glance, the group may seem entering a new developmental phase that may last for a whole session. However, this metamorphosis should not be confused with the work group which requires the twofold development of thoughts and thinking apparatus. This seeming metamorphosis, which aims at "magically" modifying the group's frustration, may be interpreted, as indicated in Figure 1, as the result of the group's resorting to what Bion called *aberrant forms*. Modification may also, as a second alternative, lead the group to develop omniscience which, as put by Bion (1962), "substitutes for the discrimination between true and false a dictatorial affirmation that one thing is morally right and the other wrong". In other words, as indicated in Figure 1, a substitution of the scientific focus for the moral focus takes place.

However, if the group opts for evasion of the frustration, like in the case of infant, the outcome is that the "no-group-inside" becomes, like all thoughts, a bad object, indistinguishable from a thing-in-itself, fit only for evacuation. Therefore, the development of both, thoughts and the apparatus of thinking, are thus inhibited, and like in the case of the infant, an apparatus of projective identification develops to fulfil the evacuation function.

Basic Assumptions as Forms of Evasion

The hypothesis developed in the present article is that in the case of the group, evasion of frustration is made by resorting to what Bion (1961) called *basic assumptions*. In other words, the basic assumptions adumbrated by Bion correspond to different forms of evasion of frustration. The lack of thoughts concerning the group, and, consequently, the lack of an apparatus of thinking, and the intolerance of frustration lead the group to avoid work group functioning, for this will remind the members of this lack and the subsequent frustration and suffering described by Bion. As discussed by Bion there are three different ways, or basic assumptions, to keep the work group at bay, namely the basic assumption of dependency (baD), the basic assumption of fight/flight (baF), and the basic assumption of pairing (baP).

Besides their common characteristics described by Bion (1961), these assumptions share the common aim of evading the perception of frustration by destructive attacks on all the group aspects through excessive projective identification. As mentioned previously, thoughts are perceived as things-in-themselves and, like in the case of the infant, evacuated through projective identification to annihilate (kill) the group's time and space. For space and time are perceived as identical with a bad object. For, as put by Bion (1970), "space, either as a representation, or the representation the term derives from or represents, becomes terrifying or terror itself" (p. 20).

In this case, regardless of the type of basic assumption dominating the group, thoughts and ideas are anarchically and illogically evacuated in the group to fill it and make it

explode. Sentences are unfinished or, to use Bion's expression, "mutilated", and pointless. The group talks, but does not communicate anything. For the aim of the group is not at communication but discommunication by cutting of or attacks (by explosion) on linking (Bion, 1959) within the group. Moreover, unlike in the work group, in the basic assumption group, the evacuated ideas are not analyzed, and translated into action for group development. The impression one has is that of the group trying to inflate the "balloon-group" by putting more ideas than it can contain in order to explode it. In the dependent group it is the leader who is assigned to this destructive task; in the fight/flight it is the whole group, and in the pairing group, the pair or the small group which embodies the group's messianic hope. This "group inflation" tendency was clearly observed in a 17-member group of students experiencing the basic assumption of dependency which I conducted a year ago. In one of the sessions, the group's leader (L) spent thirty five minutes talking about trivial subjects, such as Japanese cakes (*omanju*) and alcohol (sake), jumping from one subject to another without taking in consideration the group's manifest lack of interest. It was like if he was under a strong pressure to find a subject for the group to talk about. He sometimes stop his monologue to ask a member what he/she thinks about what he said. However, when there is no reaction from the group (G), he either continued talking or changed immediately the subject for a new one. I (Th.) intervened thus by interpreting the group's behavior in the following:

Th.:...Since the beginning of the session, the group has forced A to behave like an automatic machine for subjects...as if the group wants him to fill the space and the time of the group session with subjects that interest nobody...in order to explode it...By exploding the session's time and place, the group hopes to get ride of the fears that have paralyzed the group since the beginning of the session...if the group does not talk about these fears, there is no way to move further, and the machine for subjects will endlessly continue working until the Big Bang! (The group burst into laughter).

L: You said machine, but its worse than an automatic machine...at least the machine stops when it run of products...but I can't stop. I don't want to, but I have been talking alone since the beginning (laughter).

Attacks on the group may take direct forms such as in the case of acting outs. Among the most frequent forms of acting outs, are attacks on the disposition of the chairs and the circle formed by the chairs, by changing and filling the empty space in the middle (Anzieu, 1984), enlarging the interval between the chairs to perforate and destroy the circle in order to create exits. The therapist's chair is also often object of attacks from the group. It is sometimes occupied by a member before the therapist's entrance, or by simply discarding it out of the group place. These acting outs can be interpreted as attempts by the group to annihilate the group space.

Evasion of frustration by means of a basic assumption has also another negative consequence, namely a lack of ability to learn from experience which is, as discussed

above, a feature of the work group. As a substitute for *learning from experience* by means of thoughts and thinking, the basic assumption group develops, as indicated in Figure 1, omnipotence and omniscience which are based on what Bion calls the principle of *tout savoir tout condamner*. As omniscience denies reality, the basic assumption group is characterized by a lack of psychic activity to discriminate between true and false, and therefore by dogmatic judgement and extremism.

As discussed above the infant's, as well as the group's, capacity for toleration of the frustration resulting from the mating of a preconception with a negative realization is a determinant factor of further development of thoughts and thinking. As discussed above, Bion (1962) concluded that this capacity is intimately linked with the contact with and the perception of the mother and her capacity for *reverie*. The same explanation applies also to the group.

Regarding the activity of knowing (K), as defined by Bion (1970), the basic assumption group is characterized by *minus K* ($-K$). Unlike K activity, which is characterized by such emotional factors as "tolerated doubt", and "tolerance of a feeling of infinity", $-K$ activity involves envy, and greed, and aims at evading the pain inherent in knowledge. Moreover, the container-contained ($\varphi \cdot \sigma^?$) relationship observed in the $-K$ is of *parasitic* type, that is, spoiling and destructive for both, the container and the contained. Since in this type of container-contained relationship meaning and emotions are denuded of sense, and morality is substituted for scientific thought, discovery and development become impossible.

As discussed above, owing to their lack of structure and to the non-directivism of the leader (therapist), groups led based on the Tavistock method are experienced as source of frustration. However, this does not mean that the leadership characterizing these groups is of a *laissez-faire* style, having no role to play. On the contrary, the role played by the leader or the therapist is of great importance to group development. His or her role, like the well-balanced mother's one, consists in sensing, containing, processing the beta-elements the group is trying to evacuate on him/her through projective identification, and feeding them back (by means of interpretation) in a form of alpha-elements that are less frightening, more understandable, and that can be, therefore, reintrojected in a secure way by the group. This function of the leader or therapist, which corresponds to the capacity for *reverie* described in the case of the mother-infant relationship, is a prerequisite for the development of the capacity for toleration of frustration, and normal development of the group. Breakdown in the therapist's capacity for *reverie*, that is to say, if he/she can not respond therapeutically by tolerating the group's projection, will further force the group to resort to excessive projective identification in its relationship with the therapist (vertical projective identification), and in the relationship between the group members (horizontal projective identification). Consequently, when under the influence of a basic assumption during the session, the group behaves (non-verbally, and verbally), like in the case of the infant, in a way that can not be expected from a group who is capable, in an ordinarily meaning, of thinking.

In *his experiences in groups*, Bion's (1961) concludes unconditionally that in the long

run, it is the work group that prevails over the basic assumption group. Although it was denied by Meltzer (1978), Bion seems thus to take for granted the victory of the work group. However, based on what I have discussed up to now, for a group to be able to display aspects characterizing the work group, it is indispensable to develop thoughts and the apparatus for thinking them. Whether this has been reached through the juxtaposition of preconceptions (or conceptions) with positive realization, or as a result of the capacity for toleration of frustration resulting from the mating with a negative realization seems to be of minor importance. This answers thus the question, raised above, of whether it is possible for a group to continually function as a work group without falling prey to the basic assumption group.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in the beginning of the present article, Bion's contribution to psychoanalysis is often divided in two parts, namely his contribution to group dynamics, and his contribution to individual psychoanalysis (Blay-Neto, 1985). According to Ganzarain (1989), Bion himself tended, in the beginning, to think in this way. However, there are a number of statements, even in his early works, that hint at the fact that these two parts of his contribution are inseparable. As pointed out by Lyth (1980), the continuity in the development of Bion's theories, and link between them is clearly demonstrated in *Attention and Interpretation* in which Bion (1970) deals again with the group. In few words, this shows that the work of Bion hides an overall theme which is of value, if not indispensable, to a fuller understanding of his work on groups.

In this article, I have chosen Bion's theory on the development of thinking and applied it to groups, interpreting the phenomena of basic assumptions and work group from a different perspective. As discussed above, these phenomena are usually described (even by Bion himself) from the regression perspective. That is, they were interpreted as defensive reactions against early fears and anxieties characterizing the infant's early psychotic positions, described by Melanie Klein (1955), to which the group massively regresses. However, while not refuting this interpretation, the hypothesis discussed in the present paper states that it is more useful to interpret the different basic assumptions as indicators and results of a lack of thoughts and of an apparatus to think or deal with them, and their negative consequences (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience) previously described. For these basic assumptions constitute forms of evasion the group is forced to opt for, owing to its inability to tolerate the frustration which results from the mating of preconceptions (conceptions) with negative realization. On the other hand, according to this hypothesis, work group is interpreted as the outcome of the mating of a preconception with a positive realization and feeling of satisfaction, and its positive effect, namely development of thoughts and thinking, and the consequences indispensable for growth (e.g., learning from experience). Thus, the main conclusion of the present article is that the group's ability to function as a work group and develop is a function of the nature of the realization (positive or negative) with which the group members'

preconception about the group experience is mated, and the group's capacity for toleration of frustration.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that the application of Bion's theory on thinking to groups has a twofold value. It allows to reintegrate the two facets (experience in groups, and latter works) of Bion's contribution to psychoanalysis for a better understanding of his group theory. For, as I have tried to demonstrate it in the present study, the two facets of Bion's work are meant to illuminate each other. Moreover, the second value this application has is that it helps, as discussed previously, to understand the reason beneath the dichotomy (the group as a "good object" v.s. the group as a "bad object") characterizing the literature (Ganzarain, 1989) about the group experience. It shows thus that the way the group is experienced (as a good or bad object) is function of the group's ability to experience the twofold development of thoughts and thinking. Finally it is noteworthy that the present article constitutes only one attempt to understand Bion's work on groups from a Bionian vertex ; there are undoubtedly many others. For, as can be noticed by any reader, each time one re-read Bion's work, one ends up with a new understanding of it.

REFERENCES

- Anzieu, D., 1984. *The group and the unconscious* (B. Kilborne, trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bion, W.R., 1959. Attacks on linking. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 40, 308–15.
- Bion, W.R., 1961. *Experiences in group and other papers*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bion, W.R., 1962. A theory of thinking. In E. S. Spillius (Ed). *Melanie Klein Today Vol 1*. London: Routledge.
- Bion, W.R., 1970. *Attention and interpretation. A scientific approach to insight in psychoanalysis and groups*. New York: Basic Books.
- Blay-Neto, B., 1985. The influence of Bion's ideas on my work. In M. Pines (Ed.), *Bion and group psychotherapy*. London: Routledge & Kagan Paul
- Freud, S., 1911. *Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning*. Standard Edition 12.
- Freud, S., 1921. *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego*. Standard Edition, 18.
- Ganzarain, R., 1989. *Object relations group psychotherapy: The group as an object, a tool, and a training base*. Madison: International Universities Press.
- Grotjahn, M., 1972. Learning from dropout patients. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 22, 287–305.
- Grinberg, L., Sor, D., Tabak de Bianchedi, E., 1977. *New introduction to the work Bion: Revised edition*. London: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Hafsi, M., 1990. The leadership function in training groups: A psychoanalytical approach to group dynamics. *Psychologia*, 33, 230–241.
- Hearst, L., 1981. The emergence of the mother in the group. *Group Analysis* 14, 25–32.
- James, D.C., 1981. W. R. Bion's contribution to the field of group therapy: An appreciation.

- In L. R. Wolberg et al. (eds.), *Group and family therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Kaës, R., 1976a. *L' appareil psychique groupal: Construction du group*. Paris: Dunod.
- Kaës, R., Anzieu, D., Thomas, L. V., & Le Guerinel, N., 1973. *Fantasme et Formation*. Paris; Dunod.
- Kaës, R., Anzieu, D., Béjarno, A., Scalia, H., & Gori, R., 1976b. *Désir de former et formation du savoir*. Paris; Dunod.
- Konig, K., 1985. Basic assumption groups and working groups revisited. In M. Pines (Ed.), *Bion and group psychotherapy*. London: Routledge & Kagan Paul.
- Klein, M., 1955. Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. In *Developments in Psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Lyth, O., 1980. Obituary: Wilfred Ruprecht Bion (1907 – 1979). *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 61, 269–273.
- Lyth, I. M., 1981. Bion's contribution to thinking about groups. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 8 (1).
- Meltzer, D., 1978. *The Kleinian development Part III: The clinical significance of the work of Bion*. Perthshire, Scotland: Clunie Press.
- Pines, M. (Ed.), 1985. *Bion and group psychotherapy*. London: Routledge & Kagan Paul.
- Slater, P., 1966. *Microcosm*. New York: John Wiley.
- Sutherland, J.D., 1985. Bion revisited: Group dynamics and group psychotherapy. In M. Pines (Ed.), *Bion and group psychotherapy*. London: Routledge & Kagan Paul
- Wisdom, J.O., 1985. Types of groups: Transitions and cohesion; emergent properties. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 12, 73–85.