

To dream or not to dream that is the question: The reality of dreams from a Bionian perspective

Med Hafsi*

Nara University, Department of Sociology

Abstract

Bion has contributed a number of concepts and theories which are now widely used by psychotherapists regardless of the difference in their theoretical orientations. Among these contributions, his conception of dreams and dreaming is the most original and revolutionary one, although it has never been discussed separately. This is mainly due to the fact that Bion did not integrate his ideas into a theory, favourating scattering them throughout his works. Therefore, in the present study, I have, after providing a brief summary of Freud's conception of dream, tried to gather his scattered ideas on dream into what may be called a Bionian theory of dream, and then apply them to the group situation. Then to illustrate the theory I discussed two dreams: The first one was related in a group wherein the trainer could, as a container, use his alpha-function to process the dream on behalf of the group, helping thus the latter to further process it, develop its ability to think, learn from experience, and consequently grow. While the second one is an example depicting a group which could not have its dream contained, and the consequences of this lack of containment, namely a massive regression to the basic assumption group functioning, and resort to projective identification as an evacutory, defensive and destructive procedure.

Keywords: *dream, alpha-function, group, Bion*

Dreams are the best friends of Man. They have always been present with him, accompanying him through his long pre-historical and historical journey. That is why all civilizations have always been attracted by them, seeking ways to shed light on their origin and meaning. Their attraction to and curiosity about dreams have therefore led these civilizations, depending on the epoch, to various conceptions and theories of dreams.

Experimental psychological research on dreams began only in the middle of the XIX century. This was due, among others, to the facts that, as object of research dreams were too complex and contained daily-life images and concepts vaguely defined, and the fact that during the Renaissance people's striving for knowledge was rather oriented towards the immediate and perceptible reality of things. The first attempts to experimentally study dreams were made by Louis Alfred Maury on his own self-induced

* Accepted September 6, 2007. Graduate school of Sociology

dreams to which Freud (1900) has referred in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Mauray, for instance, compared dreams to forgotten memories. Furthermore, in the years 1880, Robert argued that if the dream exists, it means that it is the result of a need, and fulfils a given function. According to him, dreams serve to eliminate residual images, and free the mind. A person who can not dream would sink into madness. The reader will easily notice the resemblance of this idea with the one developed by Freud and Bion few decades later.

The main purpose of the present paper is 1) to introduce Bion's ideas on dreaming and dream, by comparing them with those of Freud, and 2) to illustrate them by presenting and discussing two dreams from two different Diagnostic groups (D-groups) conducted by the author (see, Hafsi, 2004 for instance). In order to allow the reader to evaluate the originality of Bion's ideas, the author will first begin by a brief discussion of Freud's conception of dream.

Freud on Dream

Freud's conception of dreams is fully developed in his famous work, *The interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900). According to Freud, dream is a source for real self-knowledge. He called it the "Royal road" leading to our unconscious and its dynamics, and regarded dream study as the best way to understand the basic psychoanalytical theories.

For Freud, dreaming and dreams is at the reach of every human being. Dream, says Freud, has a function which consists in allowing the sleeper to continue sleeping by removing any stimulus that may disturb the sleep. In other words, the sleeper dreams to be able to realize one's basic desire to continue sleeping. Freud concluded thus that dreams are thus the fulfilment of a wish, a repressed, unconscious, and consciously unaccepted infantile wish.

Note that in the case of adults, the fulfilment of the wish is made in a disguised manner. That is why dreams, or their manifest content, must be interpreted to decipher their hidden or latent content, or the instigating and underlying dream thoughts. However, in the case of children, dreams are the fulfilment of wishes following privation and frustration during the day.

Freud (1900) distinguishes two levels in the dream, the level of the manifest content (the narratable visual, olfactory, tactile, and auditory impressions and images) and the one of the latent content (the unconscious and repressed wish, feeling, etc.). The unconscious and consciously unaccepted wish which seek satisfaction through the dream, is subjected to a system of transformations before it is displayed in a form of manifest content, and be accepted to consciousness. Freud called this system "dream-work", and regarded it as a set of operations which consists in 1) producing raw material (physical sensations, impressions, day's residues, or dream thoughts) for the dream, and 2) transforming the dream raw material into a dream with its manifest content. He emphasized, however, that it is this very second operation which constitutes the dream-work (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1983), and

described four mechanisms involved in it, namely "condensation", "displacement", "considerations of representability", and "secondary revision".

Condensation consists in combining into a one element ((theme, image, figures, representation, feeling, etc.) a number of dream-elements, making the manifest dream more compact, condensed, and therefore illogical and senseless for the dreamer. Displacement is a mechanism which allows to detach the strength, importance, intensity, emotion from a given representation or idea to place it into another seemingly unrelated, with less importance, and intensity, but with which it is, for the dreamer, unconsciously related or associated. Considerations of representability is a particular kind of displacement. It allows the dream-work to turn the abstract thoughts underlying the dream into a pictorial and concrete language so that they can be used in the manifest content of the dream.

The last mechanism, or secondary revision, consists in operating again on the elements previously transformed by the three mechanisms adumbrated above, in order to make the dream narratively more coherent and logical. This is done by filling in the gaps, reshaping partially or completely some of the dream-elements, and selecting and making adjunctions of elements to create a pictorial scenario or a sort of day-dream.

Finally, it is noteworthy that for Freud the dream has a meaning only for its dreamer; it is the product of his/her own individual unconscious, and is linked to his/her personal infantile and recent history. A same dream by two different persons will have different meanings. This is one of the differences between Freud and his disciple Jung, and a number of other modern psychoanalysts. However, this can not be discussed here, for it goes beyond the scope and the purpose of the present paper. Next, the author will, integrating many of his ideas, try to introduce Bion's ideas on dream.

Dream as seen from Bion

Bion has contributed to our psychoanalytical knowledge numerous creative ideas. Among the most known concepts, conceptions and models are the container/contained model, the links (L,H, K and their negative counterparts), alpha function and his conception of the group's dynamics in terms of two mental activities: the work group and basic assumption group. However, among these original psychoanalytical ideas, his conception of dream and dreaming constitutes the most important alteration and innovation of the Freudian psychoanalytic thinking (Grotstein, 2002). In spite of its importance, Bion's conception of dream has not attracted the attention it deserves. This is due mostly to Bion's difficult writing style, and also to the fact he has never tried to integrate fully his ideas on dream, preferring to spread them in many of his contributions, especially, his posthumously published *Cogitations* (Bion, 1991).

Like in his theory of thinking (Bion, 1962, 1963) wherein he differentiated between thoughts and thinking, Bion started by distinguishing between dreams and dreaming. He then argued that people do not dream to just protect sleep as thought by Freud (1900), but they also dream to make sense of, learn

from, and think their emotional and sense experience. The ability to dream in the ordinary meaning of the term, characterizes only non-psychotic (including healthy persons and neurotics) individuals, and the non-psychotic part of the personality (Bion, 1967). As discussed later, psychotic patients do not dream, they hallucinate only; their dreams are mere illusions aimed at evacuating unprocessed psychic elements. Compared to Freud, who was interested more in the meaning of dreams, Bion tried rather to shed light on how dreams are produced, displaying thus a vertex shift from biology to epistemology.

Unlike Freud, who limits the term of dreaming to the activity observed while sleeping, Bion, sees dreaming as a continuous process which commences from our waking time to sleep. For him, we dream both when sleeping, when awoken, when the mother is breast-feeding her baby, during an analytical session, and during a conversation with a friend, for instance.

According to Bion, dreaming is a function of a normal dream-work-alpha, or *alpha-function*. The latter is conceived by Bion (1991) as an emotional sense organ. The dream itself is a result of a transformation process performed by alpha-function on raw emotional sense experiences. To put it differently, dreaming began with the person's experience of a sense impression, or an emotional experience when awake. For the ego to be able to link this sense impression with the awareness of it, the availability of one's (personal) or other's (the mother's, the analyst's, and any other container's) alpha-function is indispensable for transforming this sense impression into a thinkable content and dreaming it. Applying this idea to psychoanalytical session Bion stated that every session is a dream that should be dreamt by the therapist or analyst for the benefit of the analytical couple.

Developing further this idea Bion (1963) explains that alpha-function is activated by the sense impression or, as Bion calls it beta (β)-element. Alpha-function will thus operate on this β -element by transforming it into alpha (α)-elements (auditory, olfactory, visual and digital images, feelings, unconscious phantasies, memories, or thought-about thoughts) or dream thoughts. This corresponds to the Freudian "primary process". Under favorable mental conditions, the thus obtained α -elements can be stored and used by alpha-function for thinking, daydreaming and night dreaming, and therefore for creating the communicable and manifest content of the dream. This corresponds to what Freud called the "secondary process".

Moreover, Bion (1970, 1992) distinguishes between two sorts of dream: 1) introjective dreams which depends on the existence of a normal capability to dream, and 2) evacuatory (hallucinatory) dreams which characterize psychotic patients and the psychotic part of the personality, and can eventually be exhibited by non-psychotics and neurotics too. One of the most important difference between introjective dreams and evacuatory ones is the fact that the former, when displayed, stimulates the audience's (a person like the analyst for instance, or a whole group) associative capacity, leading to enough free associations to be interpreted by the analyst. Whereas the latter will, instead of free associations, stir confusion, fear, and further projective identification as an evacuatory means. Therefore, Bion believed that evacuatory dreams are symptoms of mental indigestion resulting from a lack of, or a defec-

tive alpha function, and use of visual imagery in the service of projective identification.

Dreaming requires also another factor associated with alpha function and its byproducts, alpha-elements: *contact barrier*. The latter is a result of the introjection, storing, organization and categorization of the alpha elements resulting from the transformation process made by alpha function. This hypothetical barrier allows the person to 1) distinguish between dream and reality, between being asleep and being awake, 2) think, and employ fantasy, 3) be conscious or unconscious of one's emotional (internal) experiences and external reality, make use and learn from them, and 4) fulfill several functions such as resistance and censorship which Freud located between conscious/pre-conscious and unconscious.

When for developmental or accidental troubles, the subject's alpha-function is not available, and a need for the object's (the container's) alpha-function is felt, the emotional (sensuous) experience is thus evacuated onto the latter through projective identification. The aim here is to make the object transform, process it, in a word, dream it so that the subject can dream to his turn. If this fails the subject's will be deprived of α -elements and, therefore, of the capacity to dream.

As suggested by Bion (1992), failure in alpha-function is the result of attacks from and destruction by a severe Superego. Concerning the capacity to dream, this destruction leads to two principal consequences, depending on the severity of the subject's mental disorder. First, as a result of a savage superego and dread of depressive anxiety (characterizing the depressive position) the subject's will experience a feeling that he can dream. In this case, he can produce only α -elements that can not be synthesized. Second, he will exhibit an actual inability to dream, producing only disjointed β -elements, good for only evacuation through one's senses by means of projective identification. Unable to produce dreams, he will instead resort to hallucinations. Bion (1958) sees these hallucinations as a form of dreams aimed at evacuating emotional or sense experiences

Dreams in the Group

What function does the dream have in a group context ? Is the dream when related in the group a mere individual intrapsychic product ? Many group researchers, trainers and conductors would respond negatively. The response to which most of them would identify is that a dream ceases to be merely an individual matter when told in the group (Neri et al., 2002). Even Foulkes (1984) who wrote that "the dream is particularly an individual creation, not meant for publication, for communication to others" (pp.165-6), tends, according to Pines (2002), to contradict himself by saying that dreams in the group should be treated like any other form of communication. Thus, whether the dream attracts the group attention or is ignored and rejected, it is related to the group in the here-and-now, and therefore belongs to the group context.

Bion's position concerning the difference between the individual and the group is very explicit.

Following Freud (1921) who holds that any psychology is both individual and social, Bion (1961), believes that man is basically a gregarious animal, suggesting that no individual, even if living in isolation, is free from "the active manifestations of group psychology, even when the conditions to demonstrate this are not present" (Grinberg, et al., 1993; p. 4). For Bion the group is permanently present within the individual, and vice-versa. Psychoanalytical observation of the individual allows us to detect many group phenomena; and the observation of the group and its products (myths for instance) has a lot to teach us about the individual.

This implies that what Bion has taught us about dream is not limited to the individual alone; it can be also applied to the group-as-a-whole. In a group situation, a dream reported by a member is thus an individual production stimulated in, by and for the whole group. It is a continuous process launched following an emotional experience within and by the group as a result of mutual projective identification (Hafsi, 2006). In other words, it is a continuous process starting from an experience in waking life and ending when this experience has been transformed into a manifest content.

The dream is reported by an individual and seems always to relate an individual manifest experience. However, like any group phenomenon, although they are displayed by one individual they are the property of the whole group. Although it is stirred at first by an intrapersonal emotional experience by and within the group, once communicated to the group a dream loses its individual character becoming thus one of the products of the "group matrix" (Bion, 1961).

With the exception of the case of those groups whose main purpose is sharing and discussing dreams, like in social dreaming (Lawrence, 2002), and oneirodrama group (Tsegos, 2002), dreams (in a Bionian meaning) are, according to my experience, rarely reported in groups (Avron, 2002) of short duration (up to few weeks). One of the reasons for the rarity of dreams in the group is the fact that the group is not always a safe place where dreams are paid attention to, encouraged, or contained. The other most important reason is that dreaming requisites the capacity to transform the initial emotional experience or β -elements (Bion, 1962b, 1963, 1965) of the group into dream-thoughts or α -elements, and, as a result of regression to paranoid-schizoid position, the group does not have this capacity. When thus the group reports dreams through one of its member, this proves that the group has acquired, even if embryonic, an alpha-function, and is beginning to think its experience, and display some of the group work characteristics.

If the group is equipped with an alpha-function and able to alphabetize or make sense of its emotional experience (sense data, or β -element), then why does it need to tell its dreams. The answer is that this intrapersonal processing of the emotional experience is insufficient, and therefore should be further enriched by an interpersonal processing as suggested by Ferenczi, 1913; Kanzer, 1955; Friedman; 2002). Seen from a Bionian perspective, the intrapersonal processing which carried out within the dreamer corresponds to a first step in the grasp of "O" (Bion, 1965), the initial sensuous experience. Whereas the interpersonal processing is the result of a successful interaction between the dreamer and a

container, the analyst, therapist, or the whole group. This secondary processing of the dream includes such mental activities Bion (1967) called "publication", "communication". These activities are associated with what he called "correlation", "common-sense", "catastrophic change", vacillation between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive possible (PS \leftrightarrow D), and eventual growth.

Moreover, dream-telling represents thus a search or a request by the dreamer for a container to contain and process the dream for the use in group thinking (Friedman, 2002). This need and quest for containment is based on a "pre-conception" (Bion, 1962a), or a mental state characterized by expectancy to find a container ready and willing to contain the group beta-elements. If a container is available, the group's pre-conception is mated with a positive realization, and its need for containment is therefore satisfied, this will enhance the group's alpha function, thinking ability, and will strengthen the work group activity (Hafsi, 2000). This will also further improve the group's dreaming and dreaming processing ability, because these mental activities constitute also forms of thinking. However, if on the contrary, the group can not find a container, then the group will experience a regressive thread towards a psychotic state characterized by a defective or destroyed alpha-function, and consequently no thoughts for thinking, no dreaming and no dreams. In this case the group is left with only one issue to deal with its sensuous experience: resorting to evacuation by means of projective identification, and therefore sinking into the basic assumption group activity. Instead of dreaming its emotional experience, the group will thus act them out (Khan, 1972) displaying many protomental elements, in order to put pressure on the therapist, to force them into him/her, and then resorts to manipulation to stir action in him/her.

Concerning whether to interpret or not dreams, Bion (1992)'s, work suggests we should. However, the therapist or analyst must not be too hasty when responding to the dreamer's quest for clarification. He must provide the group with the opportunity to either identify with, or reject the dream and its message (Solomon, 2002). Since dreams are rarely obviously clear, he must be able to tolerate uncertainty and being not able to understand at once, displaying what Bion (1970) called "negative capability, term he borrowed from Keats (1970). This term refers to a state wherein "man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact...reason" (p.43) and, one would add, hasty interpretations. Armed only with "no-memory, no-desire and no-understanding" in a state of "reverie" (Bion, 1970), the therapist should, before interpreting, wait until he has sufficiently contained the dream, and the group has produced enough free associations supporting the interpretations he has been hutching up in silence (Spotnitz, (1985).

The following two dreams illustrate the two containment possibilities. The first one depicts a group which could find in the trainer a container able to help it process further its dream. While the second one is an example depicting a group which could not have its dream contained, and the consequences of this lack of containment.

Dream 1: The shipwrecked boat

The dream, here below, was reported by a member (M.) of a group constituted by 10 participants (6 men and 4 women) in the middle of the fourth session. The group which lasted six 70-minute sessions (two sessions per week) was of a D-group (diagnostic group) type. D-group is a psychoanalytically oriented closed training group (Anzieu, 1984; Hafsi, 2004). The purpose of the group wherein the dream was reported was educational. The participants participated in the group as a requirement for the group psychology credit, to learn about group psychodynamics.

In the session previous to the one where the dream was related, the group, especially the then leader proposed to find a theme to discuss to save the group from stressful silence, boredom, and lethargic group atmosphere. However, with the exception of a shy and supportive head-shaking from few participants, there were no encouraging response. Discouraged by the group's lack of motivation and total dependency on him, he confronted the group saying that he does not want to think alone, instead of the whole group, renouncing thus his role as an informal leader. This increased further the group's confusion, anxiety, and plunged it into a deep and pregnant silence which lasted more than fifteen minutes, before it was interrupted by the intervention of a female participant (T.). Convinced that she was speaking on the behalf of the group, T. expressed her disappointment with the group, especially the leader, then she turned to the trainer who was observing and thinking about the change that was taking place in the group, refraining from any hasty intervention. After reproaching him of being not talkative and not supportive, she started questioning about what does he expected the group to do, and how. Supported by the passive look, attention and pressure of the group, it was clear to the trainer that T. was trying to involve, manipulate, and put pressure on him so that he will play the then vacant role of a dependable leader. This reflected the group's greedy need for an ideal leader which will completely take the group in charge, and meet unconditionally all its needs for dependency. However, the trainer did not respond to the group unconscious and greedy needs, reminding the group that his role was to help the group in its basic task, namely studying group dynamics, and not performing the task in the place of the group. Useless to say that the group was not satisfied with the trainer's response to its unconscious demands. Few minutes before the end of this session, S. told the group that he went to see the movie "Titanic", but "did not like it, because but it was really a stupid movie", and that he really did not understand why it was highly evaluated by the critics and the public in general.

In the middle of the following session, after an emotion-laden silence, N. intervened addressing the group in the following: "We are not going to stay mute during the whole session, are we? Someone has to say something". Then, after waiting few minutes, and gazing at each participant, he continued: "There is no reaction, so, I feel like I am the only one who feels the needs to speak here...Yesterday I had a strange dream yesterday....I don't know if it is appropriate to tell it here, but I am going to tell it anyway...It is better than nothing, isn't it ?" Following some few supportive head-shakings from few

members, he reported the following dream: "I was travelling to an unknown country with strangers in a cruiser, when suddenly the boat was hit and sunk by a huge wave. With the exception of ten people including myself, all the passengers died in the accident. We lost almost everything, and had nothing to eat. All what was left was a small boat. We jumped on it and rowed with all our strength without knowing where we were facing; we had neither a compass nor a captain. We had already exhausted all our provisions and began to lose self confidence and hope, when a small foreign island appeared ahead. There were three persons enjoying themselves. We shouted as long as we could to attract their attention and help. However, they were so absorbed in their conversation that they could not hear us. The dream ended here. When I woke up I had the feeling that I had been shouting for hours, and was relieved that it was only a dream".

N. had just finished relating the dream when K. exclaimed "Oh! it's like an adventure movie!" This was followed by the following free association by O. : "This reminded me of what S. thought about the Titanic movie in the previous session". Then, he jockingly continued: "I hope your dream was not as stupid and boring as the movie". He was then interrupted by M. who spoke about a documentary she saw in TV about the Bermuda Triangle and all the shipwrecks. The last free association came from G. who reported having seen the therapist and the two observers enjoying eating and talking at the students' restaurant. She had a strong conviction that they were talking about the group session.

After waiting until the group has finished free-associating to the dream, the trainer, with certitude and a strong self-confidence, interpreted the dream linking the shipwreck and the 10 shipwrecked persons to the actual group and its annihilation fear and anxiety in the here-and-now. He also suggested that the group was afraid of losing everything in the group, their freedom, their privacy, their personal space, their (student) identity (Anzieu, 1984), their right to be taught. Owing to the trainer's neutrality and passivity, the group was obliged to teach itself, and be therefore in a boat without a compass (alpha-function) and a captain (container) willing to row the boat in the place of the whole group. This interpretation stirred, besides a few smiles, a strong reaction in G. who said: "You can be proud of yourself...the group has nothing to hide now. Yes, you're right we are afraid... besides how can't we be afraid when we have a mute teacher and two observers stirring at us all the time ? Of course, I don't deny the fact that we are not making enough effort to find a common task or common theme to discuss, and have been expecting you to play a more active role and lead the group". In response to this, the trainer noted that G.'s use of "we" proves that he was not only speaking for himself, but for the whole group, his fear is not only his own, but the whole group's one. This led another member (P.) to state: "If he is not speaking for the whole group, he is speaking for me...I want to speak my mind freely as you (the trainer) told us, but I am afraid of what you would say if I say something here. I think telling us we are free to talk is not enough to make the group work, if we don't overcome this fear, first". G. and P.'s interventions led to an animated discussion about what the group was afraid of, and the ways to overcome those fears, which lasted until the end of the session. Consequently, many suggestions and

counter-measures were proposed to help the group overcome its stagnation and grow.

Dream 2: The Angler

The dream was brought to the group by S. (an outspoken and assertive member) in the first session, which is a very rare event. For as mentioned above at this stage of the group history, the members' paranoid-schizoid anxiety and fear prevent them from making deep self-disclosure. And the dream, even if related to the group situation, is, before verbalized, an intrapersonal experience *par excellence*. Here is the dream as related by S.: "I was fishing in a circular pound..., wait a minute...I am not quite sure it was fishing...Anyway, I tried casting many times but I could not reach the target point. I was beginning to feel frustrated, so I looked around for a while and found that I was not alone. There were also eight other people around the pound which seemed having trouble with their tools which looked more like shovels, pickaxes than rods. This confused me a lot, because I did not know whether we were fishing or tilling. I wanted to know what we were doing, so turned to the nearest person to me to ask him, and I realized that it was a robot. I was very scared because the robot started to move towards me as if he wanted to catch me, speaking a language I could not understand. The tool I had in my hand, which was supposed to be a rod, became something I have never seen before; something that had nothing to do with a fishing tool. So I threw it away, and rushed up the hill. But, the more I ran the more the robot's voice became louder inside my head. When I reached the top of the hill, I turned back, and found that there was no pound, and nobody. When I woke up I was sweating and confused. It took me nearly a minute to realize that I was awake. It was really a frightening experience".

The dream was related in a ton so emotionally charged that the trainer had the feeling that S. was really experiencing in the here-and-now the content of the dream he was relating. There were no free associations to the dream. With the exception of M. who said that he was wondering whether it was appropriate to report dreams here in the group, the dream did not stir a single a reaction or free association from the group members. On the contrary, the group did not show any interest in the dream, and regarded S.' insistence to relate it as a result of provocation and arrogance. There was a clear lack of identification with, and denial and denegration of the dreamer and the dream. Thus instead of stimulating the group process (Avron, 2002), the dream had a negative effect on the group; it added to the group's fear, confusion and plunged the group in a long silence.

The effect the dream had on me (as a trainer) was even greater. Usually, when a dream or any other element has been brought to the group by a member, I don't react immediately to the group. I wait until I am sure that the group has sufficiently identified with that element and made of it a group property, before interpreting or making clarifications. However, in this case, I felt a mixture of pressure and urge to respond to S. immediately. Although I could not make any (free-) association with the dream, I made a simultaneous and lengthy interpretation. The interpretation was not based on any clinical

impression, or belief. It was no more than a product of an immature intellectualization, based, as understood later, on a conscious fear of and a desire to please and impress the group. I also felt intellectually paralyzed, unable to think and understand the dream. Given the condition under which the dream was told, I had a suspicion that the dream was more meant for relieving the group from whatever it may be experiencing than for communication. However, my thinking and interpretative ability at that moment did not allow me to go further beyond this suspicion. In order to stimulate the group process, I invited the group to free-associate to the dream, but there were no meaningful association. All what my invitation did was strengthening the group's silence. In reaction to this situation, I resorted to intellectual and superficial interpretations and confrontation of the group with what I thought was resistance and basic assumption group, especially the one of dependency (Bion, 1961; Hafsi, 2002, 2004). However, this did not have any positive effective on the group which remained trapped in a mental state characterized by lack of thinking ability, stagnation, lethargy, boredom, and despair, until the end of the session.

Discussion and Conclusion

Bion has contributed a number of concepts and theories which are now widely used by psychotherapists regardless of their theoretical orientations. Among these contributions, his conception of dreams and dreaming is the most original and revolutionary one, although it has never been discussed as a separate topic. This is mainly due to the fact that Bion did not integrate his ideas into a theory, favourating scattering them throughout his works. Thus in the present study, I have, after providing a brief summary of Freud's conception of dream, tried to gather his scattered ideas on dream into what may be called a bionic theory of dream, and then apply them to the group situation.

Freud (1900) conceived of dream as mainly an intrapsychic activity whose purpose is preserving sleep by protecting the sleeper from conflictual and tension-inducing emotions. He also regarded dream as an hallucinatory fulfilment of an unconscious wish, a waking-state wish, and a repressed infantile wish. This wish fulfilment is made possible thanks to a set of transformative operations Freud called "dream-work", describing it as including four main mechanisms, namely condensation, displacement, considerations of representability, and secondary revision.

Approaching the dream from a complete novel perspective or vertex, Bion while still adhering to Freud's basic ideas, regards dreaming as a continuous process. According to him, dreams occur while we are awake as well as in sleep. They are products of the transformative operation of alpha-function. Alpha function transforms our emotional or sensuous experience, or β -elements into dream thoughts or α -elements that can be used for thinking, dreaming and dreams. Therefore if, for a given reason, the subject's and the container's alpha-function is, like in the psychotic patient or the psychotic part of the personality, lacking or unavailable, no dreaming and no dream is possible. In this case, dreams are replaced by hallucinations, or evacuation of one's emotional experiences into an object which conse-

quently will become a persecutory superego (Grotstein, 2000).

In the present paper I applied Bion's conception of dream to understand dreams occurring in the group situation. In the group situation, the dream when related is no more an individual, but the whole group's property; it relates and reflects the group's here-and-now story. Dream-telling represents a request by the dreamer for a container to contain and process the dream for the use in group thinking (Friedman, 2002), and further processing of the dream by a mature alpha-function, a function which is not always at the group's disposal. A lack of effective containment, will lead the group to a massive regression to basic assumption group activity and its inherent destructive and growth-inhibiting characteristics. As an example I discussed two dreams related in two different D-groups I conducted.

In the first dream the group could identify with the dreamer, and free-associate to the content of the dream, providing thus the therapist with enough β -elements to contain and process by means of his alpha-function. The trainer was thus able to exert his containment and reverie ability. That is, he could wait until the group has adopted the dream as its property without resorting to any hasty intervention. At the same time, he was also able to tolerate being object or recipient of the group's projective identification of its nameless dread, anxiety, and let himself be penetrated by and bear them, without resorting to memory, nurturing any desire, or intellectualizing this painful experience. In a few words, he was able to display what Bion (1970) referred to as "negative capability", term borrowed from the poet John Keats (1970). By being able to tolerate this mental state, the trainer could use his alpha-function to process or dream further the dream on behalf of the group, making sense of or transforming the group's nameless dread into α -elements more tolerable and more suitable for thinking. Hence after introjecting and digesting, to use Bion's digestion model, the group's dread, he was able to move further to the stage of communication through interpretation, and confrontation. Consequently, the trainer's interpretation had a positive and stimulating effect on the group's thinking and "learning from experience" (Bion, 1962b), relieving it momentarily from its fear, and helping it thus to get out of the impasse wherein it was trapped.

The second dream is an example depicting a negative contained-container interaction. Unlike in the case of the first dream, the group including the trainer was unable to contain the dream. According to Bion's dream typology, and the effect it had on the trainer, it was an evacuatory dream. Owing to a defective alpha-function, the group could produce only α -elements that can not be synthesized; they can be only condensed. The dream related here is the result of this condensation. Deprived of an effective alpha-function, the group was unable to reintroject and identify with the dream. Which explain the group's cold and rejective attitude towards the group member serving as the dream-carrier (Kaës, 2002), and the silence which followed the dream-telling. Thus, unable to tolerate and contain or dream the dream, the group resorted to projective identification to evacuate it onto the trainer, as a defensive measure. Projective identification was thus not used as a communicative mean to seek containment for the dream. It was rather used as a defense against any attempt to make sense of the dream and bring to

light the group's nameless dread and anxiety which the group, due to its insufficient toleration and thinking capability, could not deal with. Moreover, the trainer, especially his alpha-function, was subjected to destruction by means of projective identification, because he was experienced as being able to make sense of this dread and lead the group to face it. As shown by the trainer' feeling of intellectual paralysis, emptiness, and inability to think, the group succeeded in its destructive attacks. The trainer lengthy, emotional, and experientially-unbased interpretations were the results of this destructive operation. Hence, like the whole group, the trainer lost his capacity to dream the group's dream. All he could do to defend himself against the nameless fear projected onto him, was to evacuate it back onto the group through his interpretations.

To conclude, it is noteworthy that seen from a Bionian perspective, dreaming and dream is not simply "the royal road to the unconscious" (Freud, 1900), but it is also the "royal road" to psychic growth and sanity. The therapist must thus help the group to be able to dream in the safety of his presence (Bion, 1991), and report dreams for further processing by the group-as-a-whole. For, whether for the individual or the group, to dream or not to dream that is the most important question in psychoanalytical treatment.

References

- Anzieu, D. (1984). *The group and the unconscious*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bion, W. (1958). *On hallucinations*. In *Second thoughts*, 1967. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in groups*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Bion, W. (1962a). A theory of thinking. In *Second thoughts*, 1967. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1962b). *Learning from experience*. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1963). *Elements of psychoanalysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1965). *Transformations*. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1967). *Second thoughts*. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1970). *Attention and Interpretation*. London: Heinemann.
- Bion, W. (1977). Two papers: Grid and Caesura. F. Bion (Ed.). Karnac Books.
- Bion, W. (1992). *Cogitations*. London: Karnac Books.
- Ferenczi, S. (1913). To whom does one relate one's dreams ? In *Further Contributions to the Theory and Techniques of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Bruner/Mazel.
- Foulkes, S.H. (1984). *Therapeutic group analysis*. London: Karnac Books.
- Freud, S. (1900). *The interpretation of dreams*. Standard Edition 4. London: Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1921). *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego*. Standard Edition, 18. London: Hogarth Press.
- Friedman, R. (2002). Dream-telling as a request for containment in group therapy. In C. Neri, M. Pines, R. Friedman (Eds.), *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler Publishers.
- Grinberg, L.; Sor, D., & Tabak de Bianchedi, E. (1993). *New introduction to the work of Bion*. London: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Grotstein, J.S. (2000). *Who is the dreamer who dreams the dream ? A study of psychic presences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Grotstein, J.S. (2002). "We are such stuff as dreams are made on": Annotations on dreams and dreaming in Bion's works. In C. Neri, M. Pines, R. Friedman (Eds.), *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler

Publishers.

- Hafsi, M. (2000). The "basic assumption group" reconsidered: A shift from regression to thinking (In Japanese with English Abstract). *Journal of The Japanese Association of Group Psychotherapy*, 16, 75-82.
- Hafsi, M. (2004). *Orokasa no seishinbunseki* (in Japanese). Kyoto: Nakanishiya Publishing Co.
- Hafsi, M. (2006). Mutual projective identification in groups: A case describing the trainer's enactment of the basic assumption of dependency. *Annual Reports of the Graduate School of Nara University*, 12, 1-9.
- Keats, J. (1970). *The letters of John Keats: A selection*. ed. Gittings, R., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaës, R. (2002). The polyphonic texture of intersubjectivity in the dream. In C. Neri, M. Pines, R. Friedman (Eds.), *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler Publishers.
- Kanzer, M. (1955). The communicative function of the dream. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 36, 260-66.
- Khan, M. (1972). The use and abuse of dream in psychic experience. *International Journal of Psychoanalytic psychotherapy*, 1.
- Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J. B. (1983). *The language of psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Neri, C., M. Pines, & Friedman R. (Eds.) (2002). *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler Publishers.
- Pines, M. (2002). The illumination of dreams. In C. Neri, M. Pines, R. Friedman (Eds.), *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler Publishers.
- Spontitz, H. (1985). *Modern Psychoanalysis of the Schizophrenic Patient: Theory of the Technique, Second Edition*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Solomon, R. (2002). Reflections on dreams: Their implications for groups. In C. Neri, M. Pines, R. Friedman (Eds.), *Dreams in Group Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsler Publishers.