

## **"This is not a pipe", it is a transformation, a lie: Magritte diagnosed by Bion**

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### ABSTRACT

The present study constitutes an attempt to understand René Magritte's famous works "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe), and "Les deux mystères" (The two mysteries), from a psychoanalytical point of view, especially Bion's theory of transformations. First, Michel Foucault's famous work, "This is not a pipe" was reviewed. According to the author, the latter's main interest was to demonstrate how Magritte has managed to deny and make disappear the pipe by trapping it in a calligram, constituted by a text and a shape, then unraveling the latter, so that the pipe disappears. However, he did not discuss what does Magritte want to convey through his works. Therefore, applying Bion's theory, the author has tried to shed light on the latent message reflected in the artist's two works, from an angle different from Foucault's one. The two works were reinterpreted in terms of two stages: a stage where the artist confesses (confession stage) his failure to represent the truth (the real pipe), and a stage to repair (reparation stage) one's failure by restoring the pipe turned into a *nature morte*, and a *lie* in a bionic meaning of the term. Moreover, applying Bion's concept of *group of transformations*, the author argued that Magritte's uses in his painting the three types of transformations described by Bion, namely *rigid motion transformation*, *projective transformation*, and *transformation in hallucinosis*.

*There is a inherent truth which must be disengaged from the outward appearance of the object to be represented. This is the only truth that matters. (Henri Matisse, quoted in Read 1974, p.44)*

While re-reading Foucault's (1984) essay on Magritte's "this is not a pipe", I had the feeling that I was reading a report on a criminal trial. There is a public prosecutor, Foucault, a criminal named René Magritte (1898-1967), and a victim referred to as a pipe; and the essay is a detailed description of the crime. The French surrealist painter Magritte is thus accused of causing the disappearance (killing) of the pipe in his famous drawing "This is not a pipe" (see Plate 1).



Plate 1. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1926). Private collection. Photo courtesy of Draeger, Maître Imprimeur.

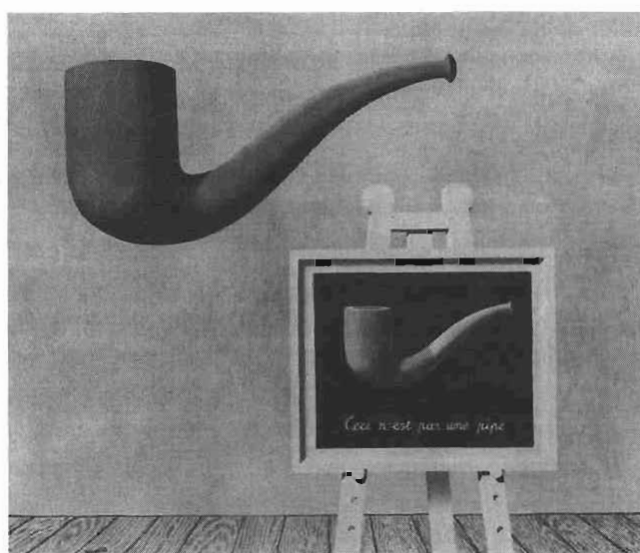


Plate 2. *Les Deux mystères* (1966). Private collection. Photo courtesy of Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

## I. Magritte's trial

According to Foucault, the public prosecutor, Magritte has, like a magician by a malicious and minutiously calculated operation, made the pipe disappear. Regarding the weapon used in this operation, Foucault argued that Magritte resorted to the calligram. The calligram represents a poem whose words are arranged in such a way as to draw a picture of the object or the topic depicted in the poem. This way of expression, of which the poem represented in Plate 2 is an example, is usually associated with the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, one of Magritte's favorite writers. Foucault (1984) attributes

three functions to the calligram. That is, the functions

*"to augment the alphabet, to repeat something without the aid of rhetoric, to trap things in a double cipher. First it brings a text and a shape as close together as possible. It is composed of lines delimiting the form of an object while also arranging the sequence of letters. It lodges statements in the space of a shape, and makes the text say what the drawing represents...The calligram is thus tautological...It uses the possibility of repeating the same thing in different words...the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization : to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read" (pp. 20-21).*

According to Foucault (1982), he used it first to trap the graphic representation of a pipe into an undivisible ensemble constituted by a drawing and a text. Then he secretly and carefully reopened or unraveled the calligram so that the frontier between the text (This is not a pipe) and the represented pipe is restored, differentiating between the two, and confusing the reader-viewer. The latter is put in a situation such as he cannot avoid connecting the text to the drawing, cannot "say that the assertion (This is not a pipe) is true, false or contradictory" (p. 20), and cannot exactly assert what is meant by the demonstrative pronoun "this", and therefore can not state what the pipe is differentiated from.

Foucault (1983) gives three different interpretations of Magritte's assertion or denegation of the pipe. He suggested that Magritte denies the pipe's existence in relation to the drawn pipe, implying that "this" (the drawing of a pipe) *is not* "(substantially bound to, is not constituted by, does not cover the same material as)" a pipe (the word one knows). The other attempt of denegation is that "this" (the statement beneath the pipe) *is not* "(could neither equal nor substitute for, could not adequately represent)" a pipe (the object above the text). The third way of denegation consists in stating that "this" (the statement and the pipe) *is not* "(is incompatible with)" a pipe "(the mixed element springing from discourse and the image..)".

However, to continue using our metaphors, Magritte's crime does not end here. According to Foucault (1982), he did not only confuse his reader-viewer by his unraveled calligram, but has, like by a magic trick, made disappear the pipe itself.

*The pipe that was at one with both the statement naming it and the drawing representing it... has vanished...the text confirms with amusement: This is not a pipe. In vain the now solitary drawing imitates as closely as possible the shape ordinarily*

*designated by the word pipe...Nowhere is there a pipe* (p. 29).

According to Foucault, this interpretation concerning the vanishment of the pipe helps to understand the second version of Magritte's pipe ("Les deux mystères") performed later (see Plate 3). In this drawing, we can see two pipes. One immobile, imprisoned with the drawing of a written statement serving as a legend in a frame put on a solid wood tripod; and the other, which has a more dominant presence, can be seen floating freely in a relatively unlimited space overhead, like a prisoner enjoying his first moment of freedom. This freedom of the pipe was, as suggested by Foucault, made possible by the unraveling of the calligram.

As can be noticed by any careful reader, Foucault's report of Magritte's "crime" can be convincing but still uncomplete. For he successfully describes the crime (making the pipe disappear), the way it was carried out, the means or the weapon (unraveled calligram), however, he failed to discuss the motive behind Magritte's crime. In other words, we do not know why the latter resorted to this crime, or what does he want to transmit to his reader-viewer through this confusing drawing. It seems to me that by principally focusing on the crime and the weapon, Foucault has not attached enough importance to the motive. This is normal if one sticks to the metaphore developed here. For Foucault's role, as a public prosecutor, is more to prosecute and demonstrate the culpability of the suspect than to defend the suspect by considering the motive behind his or her criminal act.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to discuss the motive, or the message Magritte wants to convey to his public, from a psychoanalytic perspective, especially from Bion's theory of transformations and other related concepts such as the absolute truth and the lie.

## **II. Bion' Theory of Transformations**

Bion (1965) has, on different occasions, compared psychoanalysis, the analyst, and the psycho-analytic experience to respectively, painting, the artist and the painting process which starts from the encounter of the artist with his object and ends with the final painting of the object.

The theory of transformations proposed by Bion (1965) drew our attention to the obvious fact that we are permanently observing, feeling, and performing transformations of the results of our physical and mental activities. In other words, we are permanently transforming our experiences into words, sentences, pictures, thoughts, and behaviors depending on the required and available means, and on what Bion (1970) calls the *vertex*

(stance) (see further) . Accordingly, the patient's associations (words, feelings, emotions) are also the results of transformation of real or fictive events experienced by the patient. Similarly, the analyst's interpretations are the products of his/her emotional reaction to the patient's free-associations and their transformations which are, according to Bion, the result of, besides his psychoanalytic training and experience, his love of truth and his aesthetic sensibility. He thus concludes that the psychoanalyst's work consists, like that of the artist, in the "transformation of action (the real psychoanalytic experience) into an interpretation or a series of interpretation" (Grinberg, et al., 1993, p. 66). Like the artist, the psychoanalyst also may become blinded by his/her pre-conceptions (Bion, 1967), failing therefore to experience and transform adequately what he/she is experiencing.

The theory of transformations, distinguishes between three fundamental components, namely, the original reality to be transformed, the process of transformation, and the end product of the transformation process. Bion refers to the original fact, using a number of expressions; for instance, the unknowable "ultimate reality", "absolute truth", "the infinite", "the thing-in-itself", or "O" (for origin). According to Bion, O is by definition unknowable and therefore uncommunicable to oneself and others; in other words, it can not be known, it can only be (becoming O). In other words, we can not know our and other's O, but we can know about it through the process of transformation which Bion calls T-alpha ( $T\alpha$ ). The result or end product of the  $T\alpha$  is referred to as T-beta ( $T\beta$ ). The latter corresponds thus to a transformed O; and can be anything, a painting, a mathematical formula, a statement, an interpretation, a narrative. (Hafsi, 2001), etc..

According to the theory of transformations, there could be a number of various possible transformations of a same O. That is, a same person may produce different  $T\beta$  of the same O, and depending on the individual vertex, different persons may produce similar or different  $T\beta$  (two psychoanalysts belonging to two different schools may transform differently a same clinical material from a patient, for example). Moreover, in a given relationship, like a therapeutic relationship between a patient and an analyst, the  $T\beta$  of one is "O" for the other. The initial experience or truth, O, is transformed by the  $T\alpha$  of the patient [ $T(p)\alpha$ ], into a  $T\beta$  [ $T(p)\beta$ ]. This  $T(p)\beta$ , or  $O'$ , is unknowable to the analyst, it constitutes for him an O, different from the patient's initial experience. In trying to know it, the analyst will, in his/her turn use his T-alpha ( $T(a)\alpha$ ) to transform it into a new  $T\beta$  [ $T(a)\beta$ ] ( $O''$ ) which is different from both O and  $O'$ . Both transformations,  $T(p)\beta$  and  $T(a)\beta$ , are transformations from O, related to what Bion calls knowing about O, and the links  $K$  and its counterpart  $-K$  (minus K) (another of Bion's concepts that can not be discussed here).

## From "Transformation from O" to "Transformation in O"

Bion (1967) distinguishes *transformations from O*, and *transformations in O*, or becoming O which goes beyond knowing about O. Unlike transformations from O, transformations in O correspond to a mental state akin to "being or becoming what one is". According to Bion, only the latter kind of transformations leads to insight and mental growth, though it is usually accompanied by "emotional turbulence" which has a disruptive character, and may thus lead to what Bion called "catastrophic change", a change characterized by violence, subversion of the system, and invariance in the process of transformation.

Depending on the group of transformations (discussed below) used the  $T\alpha$ , becoming O may correspond, for instance, to being conscious of one's incestuous feelings and castration anxiety, of one's greed, sadistic feelings, and of madness, and murderer tendency and being able to tolerate them. That is the reason why becoming O is feared and consequently resisted.

### Different groups of transformations

Bion (1967) calls the methods and techniques used to carry out transformations, *groups of Transformations*. He adumbrated three groups or types of transformations: *rigid motion transformation*, *projective identification*, and *transformation in hallucinosis*. The terms designating the former two groups of transformations were borrowed from projective geometry, and transferred by Bion for use as models in psychoanalysis.

*Rigid motion transformations* result, relatively speaking, in a little change or deformation of O. That is, a considerable number of aspects, elements and meanings are left invariant, and can be therefore easily observed, understood, transformed, and interpreted. In other words, when in a therapeutic relationship a patient resorts to this transformation method, the analyst will have less difficulty to reconstruct the process going from the patient's O to  $T(p)\beta$ , and interpret the patient's material, or transform it into  $T(a)\beta$  in his/her turn.

Moreover, as a method of transformation, rigid motion transformations are used in the domains of thought, emotions, and words. According to Bion (1967), the tendency which consists in repeating in action a given repressed event as an actual experience, in lieu of remembering it as fragment of the past, which Freud called transference, is a transformation that implies a minor deformation. It shows how thoughts and feelings (e.g.; oedipal feelings) are transferred from one sphere to another, or from a past relationship (with early objects) to a current relationship (patient-psychoanalyst relationship, for

instance). The transference phenomenon can thus be used as a model of rigid motion transformation which is typical of the neurotic personality.

*Projective transformations*, on the contrary, are typical of the psychotic part of the personality (Bion, 1967). They are the result of the personality resorting to excessive splitting and projective identification, and are, therefore characterized by a state of confusion so accentuated that the patient can not apparently distinguish between himself and the analyst. Transformation is also carried out through these mechanisms. The patient splits off, and projects (projective identification) thoughts, events he/she can not tolerate because of their frustrating nature, perceiving them consequently as bad internal objects, "undistinguishable from things-in-themselves" (Bion, 1967). Owing to these mechanisms, events, thoughts, and feelings, spatially and temporally unrelated to the here-and-now, are thus treated as parts of the session or aspects of the analyst's own personality. The resulting  $T(p)\beta$  does not respect the usual limits of space, time, distance, and age, and are often excessively deformed and exaggerated through what Bion (1965) calls *hyperbole*. Therefore, the object, unlike in the rigid motion transformations, can not be easily detected, which may create a wide gap between the patient's  $T\beta$  and analyst's  $T\beta$ , and renders correlation impossible.

The third group of transformations discussed by Bion (1967) is *transformations in hallucinosis*. In this case, the result of the transformations may be, among others, a hallucination which may not be always clinically manifest. The difficulty the observer or the analyst encounters in detecting and understanding the content of these transformations is much greater than in the case of projective transformations. Like the latter, the group of transformations in hallucination pertains to the psychotic part of the personality with its characteristic hatred of psychic reality, intolerance of frustration, and the use of the mind as an apparatus or a muscular organ of expulsion at the disposal of projective identification. Moreover, behaviors, actions, and the language type characterizing this part of the personality are often, according to Bion, expressions of transformations in hallucinosis.

The fundamental difference between the two other groups of transformations is a lack of a container (mother or her substitute) (Bion, 1963) whose function would have been to help the patient to contain, process and integrate his/her projections. Bion argues that transformations in hallucination are linked to 1) an early "disaster" or "catastrophe" and the absence of a container able to contain (through *reverie*), process, give sense to and transform the patient's painful and dreadful emotional experience, or beta-elements, into less dreadful alpha-elements, and 2) to the patient's intolerance of the frustration and psychic pain resulting from the unavailability of a container.

Transformations in hallucinosis are thus used by the patient as a method to evade frustration and pain. Any other method or interpretation the analyst may provide him/her

with that counters his/her evasion of pain, and impose reality is thus rejected as inferior. Because the patient perceives this reality as restrictive, oppressive and threatening. The only reality he/she recognizes and believes is his/her reality, or the hallucinated reality. Recognizing this kind of transformation helps the analyst to reorientate himself in the patient's material, and get out of the trap and blind alley which usually characterizes the therapeutic relationship with patients resorting to transformations in hallucinosis.

### Invariance and invariants

Albeit their differences,  $T(p)\beta$  and  $T(a)\beta$  share some basic characteristics that have not been altered by the transformation process ( $T\alpha$ ) of both analyst and patient. Bion termed the state of remaining unaltered and the unaltered characteristics *invariance* and *invariants* respectively. The invariants are those elements that allow the observer or analyst to recognize in the end product ( $T\beta$ ) the initial thing that has been transformed. As discussed above, these invariants will depend on the group of transformations used in the  $T\alpha$ , and the degree of deformation of O.

Bion (1965) gives again the example of painter trying to paint a landscape to illustrate his theory. According to Bion's terminology, the landscape the painter is contemplating corresponds to O, the thing-in-itself or the original reality that can not be fully known or grasped. The painting that would result from the contemplation, would be the end product of a series of transformations performed by  $T\alpha$  of the painter, that is,  $T\beta$ . The transformation process, lasts, here, from the artist's visual impression of the landscape to the moment the painting is completed. However, regardless of the degree of deformation and difference between the painting and the landscape, there are always certain basic features that remain unaltered, enabling us to recognize the latter. These features correspond to what Bion calls *invariants*.

In psychoanalysis, the equivalent of the finished picture, are the patient's free associations, thoughts, behavior (mimics, gestures, postures, acting-out, etc.), or  $T(p)\beta$ . They contain invariants that the analyst must detect in order to be, in his/her turn, able to transform them into new end products or  $T(a)\beta$ , in form of interpretations, continuing thus the transformation process.

However, this does not imply that there is only one way possible of transforming the  $T(p)\beta$ . As mentioned previously, provided with the same  $T(p)\beta$ , analysts with different vertices (e.g., Freudian and Kleinian), would, as mentioned above, produce different  $T(a)\beta$ . Similarly, the same analyst would produce a different  $T(a)\beta$  if he/she changes his/her *vertex*. For as put by Bion (1965), "the vertex of the psycho-analyst, and changes of vertex corresponding to moment-to-moment changes in a session, effect the transfor-



mations made manifest in associations and interpretations" (p. 93). There is an infinite number of possible vertices (scientific, religious, social, political, moral, aesthetic, financial, ocular, auditory, psychoanalytical, and so on.) from which the  $T(p) \beta$  can be apprehended or transformed. Symington & Symington (1996) compare the psychoanalyst to a photographer with a camera. Thanks to the variety of vertices available to him/her, the psychoanalyst can, like a photographer taking shots of an object, approach  $T(p) \beta$  from different angles. The change of vertex may occur consciously or unconsciously; it usually occurs when the analyst suddenly gets the impression of understanding a given behavior which did not make sense to him/her until now. However, it is noteworthy that both conscious and constant change of vertex, and holding tenaciously and continuously to a same vertex may also serve as a defence against catastrophic change from the part of both the psychoanalyst and the patient.

Moreover, the context within which transformations took place is also an important factor for understanding the end product of a transformation. Bion (1965) gives as example the word "water" as an initial reality. Depending on whether the transformation is a physical, verbal, or artistic context, water would be transformed respectively into such  $T \beta$  as ice or steam, a symbol or word, and painting, piece of music, etc. In psychoanalysis, the contexts in which transformations take place are the body (e.g., hypochondriacal symptoms), the mind, or the external world.

Bion suggests also that the analytical couple's vertices must keep a "distant-enough" distance, namely, a distance that renders *correlation* possible and lead to a *binocular vision* of the problem at hand. The term *binocular vision* is another concept which pervades Bion's whole work. It refers to *a capacity similar to that which is in evidence when the two eyes operate in binocular vision to correlate two views of the same object* (Bion, 1962, p. 86). There are many examples of conditions that generate binocular vision. The use of both conscious and unconscious to understand and interpret O is an instance of binocular vision in psychoanalysis. When correlated, the analyst's transformation (in a form of an interpretation or statement or emotional experience) and the analysand's one will also provide both of them with a binocular vision of O. To put it differently, binocular vision is the result of two different but correlated views, emitted from two different vertices (e.g. the analyst's and patient's vertex), and also the capacity of its holder to tolerate the coexistence of the differences between the two monocular points of views.

### III. Confession and Reparation Stages

Having discussed Bion's theory of transformations, I will now return to Magritte's work, and try to speculate about the motive lying behind his provocative work. The

hypothesis which will be developed here holds that the message conveyed through Magritte's painting "*This is not a pipe*" is simple, and clear, and should be understood literally. That is, "this", the drawing of an object resembling a pipe which is in front of you, "is not (does not and can never represent really and accurately) a pipe", or the pipe I saw, contemplate, examined thoroughly, thought of/about before painting it. This interpretation would lead some to say, as remarked by Foucault (1982), "My God! how simpleminded!...Who would seriously contend that the collection of intersecting lines above the text is a pipe?" (p. 17). It is true that nobody is so simpleminded to confuse between the pipe and its drawing, however one should not forget that the way of thinking which holds that any drawing is expected "to elicit recognition, allow the object it represents to appear without hesitation or equivocation" (pp. 19, 20) is still dominant. In other words, there is a tendency to carelessly believe that a drawing is what it represents. In his introduction to the translation of Foucault (1982)'s work, Harkness write:

*Yet is exactly from the common vantage that, when asked to identify the painting, we reply "It's a pipe"...Nor is the confusion of words with things merely a minor mix up, an easily remedied accident of everyday conversation. From antiquity to the present, persistent strains of Western thought have conceived the bond between language and reality as fundamentally mystical, a mutual sharing of essences (pp. 6-7).*

Magritte was aware of this conception of the drawing, and that is why he wanted to attract our attention to the obvious, and carelessly forgotten fact that an object represented is different from the real object, it is a a merely transformed one, a partial object, as compared with the whole real, and unlimited object. This idea can be seen reflected in a number of his drawings, such as, for instance, *La Condition Humaine* (1933), *La Condition Humaine* (1935), *La Cascade* (1961), *Représentation* (1966) (see Plates 4 to 7). All these works comprise a landscape—the one being contemplated by the artist—and a drawing of this landscape set within a frame placed upon an easel as if the artist wanted the viewer to compare the two, namely the landscape and its partial representation carried out by the artist.

One of Magritte's manifest purpose was probably to incite his reader-viewer to say: "*My God ! How forgetful I was ! Yes, these things are different !*", confirming thus an obvious fact. Of course, Magritte's intention is not confined to leading the viewer to be aware of this fact; one can speculate that there is further a latent meaning conveyed through "*This is not a pipe*". He wanted also the person who is contemplating his work to come to the conclusion and recognize that the object-pipe that he, as an artist, has observed can not be accurately represented. For even if the artist can successfully draw

some invariants of the object, he does have at his disposal any method to draw, for instance, the same object in movement, its nicotine smell, the texture and quality of the wood used to make it, and its temperature when filled with tobacco and lighted up. For instance Magritte's work, *the magician* (Plate 7), can be interpreted as a vain experiment on how to transmit or describe the object's movement. For, as can be seen in this painting, the artist has succeeded to draw a few movements of the object (apparently Magritte himself) and not the object in movement. Such aspects of the object as smell, temperature, taste, and movement constitute inherent features that can not be drawn or transmitted directly by the artist, and therefore can not be known by the artist's public. Comparing the object which he calls "tangibly visible" and its drawing (painted image), Magritte writes in a letter to Foucault (1982) that "it is evident that a painted image —intangible by its nature— hides nothing, while the tangibly visible object hides another thing —if we trust our experience" (p.57).

The "tangibly visible object" corresponds in Bion's terminology, to the whole object embodying all these aspects, or O. Unlike painted image, this O is, as discussed previously, unknowable in the usual sense, one can only *intuit* and *be at-one* with it to apprehend it. Whereas the painting is a dead object (as suggested by the French expression *nature morte*, or still life), an object in the literal sense of the term. It is, therefore, an object that has been engulfed, immobilized, and confined to by means of a given artistic method or, in Bion's terminology, *groups of transformation* into such a reduced space that is a canvas, and consequently transformed by the artist's  $T\alpha$ . Therefore, compared with O, the original pipe, the object (drawing of a seemingly pipe) resulting from Magritte's  $T\alpha$ , namely  $T\beta$ , is a transformation. It does not correspond to, or does not have similitude relationship with the real pipe, and is thus false and a lie. The confusing statement "this is not a pipe" drawn beneath the pipe, may be interpreted thus as an indicator that Magritte wanted to demonstrate that he is not pretending having represented the original pipe he saw, but only a painted image, or a thought of it.

If this is the case, Magritte comes here close to Bion's idea on truth, falsehood and lie. According to Bion, truth exists independently of the person (container) who claims it. Truth does not need a container (a thinker, an artist, mother, etc.), it exists independently of and outside it. Once contained by a container, truth became contaminated, influenced by it and ceases therefore to be truth; it becomes a lie. On the contrary, the lie is in perpetual need for a container. For without a container there is no lie. In Bion (1970)'s words,

*the lie gains existence by virtue of the epistemologically prior existence of the liar. The only thoughts to which a thinker is absolutely essential are lies. Descartes's tacit*

*assumption that thoughts presuppose a thinker is valid only for the lie* (p. 103).

To return to Magritte's "*This is not a pipe*", we can now speculate that he has first tried to represent a true pipe, however, as soon as he has finished it, he discovered the falsehood of his drawing, and consequently the lack of similitude between his drawing and the pipe itself. Which led him to confess, though the statement "this is not a pipe", that this  $T\beta$ , the painting, was untrue; it was a lie. I therefore, suggest to understand Magritte's first drawing as a confession revealing his inability to represent truth, his unwillingness to lie to his public as demonstrated by the written statement, and paradoxically, at the same time, a confession of his "crime" of having confined the true pipe (the truth) to a static image, transforming it into a lie.

If the first drawing is a confession, how about the second drawing ("*Les deux mystères*")? What is the relationship between the two works? Is there any continuity between the two? Was Magritte repeating again the same confession? Or was he merely repeating himself? If so, what has motivated him then? Those are questions that deserve answers, even if temporary. Of course, Magritte was neither repeating his confession nor even making a confession in his second work. The latter is more the result of a desire to repair his "crime" than a confession which constitute the purpose of the first work. That is, unlike in the latter, Magritte does not try here to confess but to act, in order to repair his "crime" of having contained and transformed the truth into a lie. In other words, the two works can be interpreted as two sequences or stages in Magritte's relationship to truth, the true pipe. In the first stage or work, he confesses that what he is representing does not correspond to reality (pipe) but to a lie, and in the second he attempts to repair his by freeing the pipe. Foucault (1982) has mentioned similar fact (freeing the pipe) when describing Margritte's second work.

*[The] lower pipe is wedged solidly in a space of visible reference points: width...; height...;and depth...A stable prison. On the other hand, the higher pipe lack coordinates. Its enormous proportions render uncertain its location...Is the disproportionate pipe drawn in front of the painting, which itself rests far in back? Or indeed is it suspended just above the easel like an emanation, a mist just detaching itself from the painting...? Or might we suppose, in the end that the pipe floats behind the painting and the easel, more gigantic than it appear in a space henceforth without reference point, expanding to infinity? (p.17).*

As shown by this quotation, Foucault (1982) has pointed out at the contrast between the two pipes: the lower one smaller and trapped in a spatial prison (the frame), and the

other larger and gigantic floating freely in a visibly undefined space. However, he does not discuss the reason why Magritte needed to draw two pipes and set free one of them. My interpretation of the two works in terms of two stages, namely *confession* and *reparation* stages, constitutes a new attempt to shed light on the mystery characterizing Magritte's two paintings.

#### IV. Correlation, Confrontation, and At-one-ment with Magritte's Pipe

As demonstrated by Foucault (1982), Magritte's second work is better understood if one interpretes it in terms of interaction between three factors, the painting itself, a person (the school master and its pointer) lecturing on the painting and an audience of students listening to the teacher's explanation. Of course, the teacher and his audience are invisible factors, they do not appear in the painting, but they play an indispensable backstage role for the freedom of the pipe. Here is how Foucault describes their interaction.

*A zealous instructor shows that a pipe is really what is meant...But scarcely has he stated, "This is a pipe," before he must correct himself and stutter "This is not a pipe", but a drawing of a pipe," "This is not a pipe but a sentence saying that this is not pipe," "The sentence 'this is not a pipe' is not a pipe." "In the sentence 'this is not a pipe,' this is not a pipe: the painting, written sentence, drawing of a pipe -all this is not a pipe." Negations multiply themselves...The baffled master lowers his extended pointer, turns his back to the board, regards the uproarious students, and does not realize that they laugh so loudly because above the blackboard and his stammered denials, a vapor has just risen, little by little taking shape and now creating, precisely and without doubt, a pipe. "A pipe, a pipe," cry the students... (pp. 29-30).*

As shown in this excerpt Foucault has tried to describe the emergence process of the gigantic pipe seen in the second painting by imagining a scene wherein a zealous teacher and a negating statement (this is not a pipe), which obviously represents its author Magritte, interact. Foucault's interpretation is illuminating, but still fails to provide us with a clear explanation about what might have led to the emergence of the gigantic pipe. I will now thus try to develop my own interpretation.

My hypothesis is that, as discussed previously, Magritte wanted to free the pipe as a means of reparation of the fact that he has transformed (*rigid motion transformation*) the original pipe (O in Bion's terminology) into a *nature morte*, a lie. The task Magritte was confronted with was thus to repair, restore, or set free the pipe, a task he has designed to be carried out in collaboration with his public. In other words, to conduct this task he

resorted to the complicity of his public. He was aware of the dominant and universal tendency to believe that words, images, in sum any artistic representation of objects, are what they represent. He was sure that regardless of the *vertex* people will undoubtedly recognize the pipe in his two drawings; because the group of transformation used by the artist is the rigid motion transformation. Owing to this group of transformation which does not involve a great deformation, a correlation between the public's image of a pipe and the one they have in front of them is thus made possible. Since, as discussed above, correlation facilitates and renders more effective confrontation, Magritte resorted to it, denying the public's perception by drawing beneath the pipe (in both drawings) "this is not a pipe". But why does Magritte need to confront his public ?

Confrontation is considered in psychoanalysis in general and in number of clinical psychology and psychoanalytical schools as an effective therapeutical tool, that is a tool which lead to change. As discussed previously, Bion, for instance, links confrontation, binocular vision, transformation in O, and the possibility of being at-one-ment with O. He argued that confrontation will provide both partners (therapist and client) with a binocular vision of the problem, and the opportunity to enter in contact with the unknowable and ultimate truth O.

This can be also applied to the relationship between Magritte and his public. By confronting his public Magritte provide them with an opportunity to have a binocular vision, that is an ability to examine the object-problem (pipe) from at least two different vertices: the vertex of a person contemplating a finished drawing of an object, and the vertex of the artist who has been in contact with the real object which he has tried to draw. Thanks to their binocular vision, the public can now, like Foucault's school master, accept that "this [the small pipe in the frame] is not a pipe", it has not the features of a pipe, one can not fill it with tobacco and smoke, for instance. Since it is no longer a pipe, it is thus freed from the burden imposed upon it by the artist's rigid motion transformation, and from the frame-prison, to which it was confined until now, to an undetermined and unlimited space. On the other hand, thanks to the binocular vision, the public may begin to consider the possibility that there may be another true pipe, rambling freely and fleeing any possibility of encounter with an artist or any kind of thinker, for fear of being transformed into a lie. This marks the beginning of the transformation in O, the initial true pipe, which Magritte has tried to suggest by the gigantic pipe in his drawing, "*Les Deux Mystères*" (Plate 3).

## **V. The Groups of Transformation Used By Magritte**

At first glance, Magritte's two paintings, especially "*This is not a pipe*", seem very

easy to apprehend due to the group of transformation used by the artist to transform his experience of the original pipe, or transformation from O. As mentioned above Magritte resorts to what Bion (1965) calls *rigid motion transformation*. This type of transformation, which involves a little deformation or variance and a great invariance of the object, is a neurotic way of transforming one's initial experience, or the thing-in-itself. The detailed study of the pipe, the large number of sketches made, and the minuteness characterizing Magritte's execution of the final drawings betrays his neurotic care to represent or reproduce the thing-in-itself.

However, as a close review of Magritte's works reveals, neurotic transformation is not the sole way of describing his experience of the thing-in-itself. His work is also characterized by the two other psychotic types of transformations, namely the *projective transformations* and *transformations in hallucinosis*.

Unlike rigid motion transformations, the latter group of transformations is characterized by a great metamorphosis of the object; few if not any of the invariants are left by the subject (artist)'s  $T\alpha$ . The object is therefore unrecognizable; and gives rise to confusion within the viewer if it is a painting, for example. The latter found himself in a situation such as he or she can not produce a self-satisfying description of what his/her visual experience of the object of transformation. In spite of their similarities, these two groups of transformations present also some specific features.

When projective transformation is used, the end product is often characterized by an unusual use of concepts, words, space, time and distance. Magritte has produced a great number of painting using this transformation method. One of his famous works, "*Le Soir qui tombe*", makes a unusual and funny use of the French verb *tomber* (fall) for a "serious" man like him. His "*The Empire of Light*" an example where the chronological succession of noon and evening is not respected or interpreted in a bizarre way, so that the viewer is unable to say whether the drawing is describing a day scenery or a night one. Magritte has produced also a number of drawings wherein distance, space and proportions are not respected which I can not discuss here.

On the other hand, the method of *transformation in hallucinosis* is rather characterized, as discussed above, by what is called in psychoanalysis (especially object relations theory) *splitting* of the personality and projection (*projective identification*) parts of the personality or unwanted bad ego-parts into external objects, so that these ego-part will dominate and control these objects, transforming them, as shown in Magritte's works "*Bottlet*", "*La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*", "*Le Modele Rouge*", "*La Belle Liaison*", into frightening *bizarre objects* (Bion, 1956, 1957a, 1957b). It goes without saying that I have confined myself here to the enumeration of Magritte's works; for discussing them goes far beyond the scope of this study. The purpose here is merely to suggest that Magritte's

work can be roughly categorized based on the method he, as an artist used to transform his visual, auditory, and emotional experience of the initial object, the ultimate truth, or in Bion's words, O.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the present work I have tried to discuss both Foucault's famous book, *This is not a pipe*, and René Magritte's work itself from a psychoanalytical point of view applying Bion's theory of transformations. Concerning Foucault's work, I have suggested that it seems to me that it was structured as a report of a trial, where Foucault played the role of a public prosecutor accusing Magritte of having caused the disparition and destruction of the pipe by means of the calligram. Although convincing Foucault's arguments failed to provide the reader with information concerning the reasons behind the artist's "crime".

Therefore, based on Bion's theory of transformation, I took the defense of the latter suggesting that Magritte's did not, in the final analysis, destroy the pipe. Like Foucault, I related the two versions of Magritte's pipe, namely "*This is not a pipe*" and "*Les deux mystères*", arguing that the two works can be interpreted in terms of two respective stages. In the first one, which corresponds to a "confession stage", Magritte makes the confession of the "crime" that he has transformed (by means of *rigid motion transformation*) the true pipe, the thing-in-itself or O, into a *nature morte*, a "non-pipe" (as suggested by his "This is not a pipe) confined to a restricted and narrow space of a frame on an easel. In few words, he transformed his object into a *lie* in Bion's terminology. The second one, "reparation stage", is a stage where Magritte passes to action in order to repair his crime by freeing the pipe; allowing it to return to its initial natural state of being uncontained, unknown and unknowable.

The other characteristic of the second stage is that, unlike the first one, it involves not only the artist Magritte, but also his public, and their interaction or complicity. For, as discussed above, without this complicity, the reparation process could not be possible. I suggested in the present work that owing to his confession (this is not a pipe), Magritte succeeded to confront and provide an opportunity to his public to compare their commonsense perception (this is a pipe) with the artist's one, and come to the conclusion that they are, in a bionic sense, correlated but not similar. Since they can realize now that both can be equally right and wrong. The artist's statement can be right if he was comparing his drawing of the pipe to the real pipe, and wrong if the statement is merely suggesting that what people are seeing does not look like a pipe. Hence, by confronting his public Magritte provided them with an opportunity to validate their commonsense perception and knowledge, and consequently, become able to see the same object from two dif-



ferent but correlated vertices, or to acquire a *binocular vision* of it. They became able to detach their eyes from the *nature morte* that is the painting of a pipe, and be able to perceive, be conscious of the existence of, and be at-one with the other pipe, symbolizing here the true pipe, the thing-in-itself, or O. Hence, It is by this minutiously planned operation that Magritte has, with the unintentional help of his public, succeeded to free the pipe from their monocular regards, and, consequently, from the necessity of being confined to a canvas on an easel. For the obvious reason that a pipe painted on a canvas is no more a real pipe, but a lie.

Finally, Bion's theory of transformations, especially the idea of groups of transformations, was also used here to categorize some of Magritte's works. A close study of a large number of Magritte's paintings has revealed that, as suggested here, he used the three types of transformations discussed by Bion, namely, rigid motion transformation, projective transformation, and transformation in hallucinosis.

In conclusion, I want to return to the metaphore of the "crime" used at the beginning, pleading "not guilty". Magritte did not, as argued by the public prosecutor Foucault, make the pipe disappear. He freed it, restore to it its truthfulness, and resuscitated it; it is no more a *nature morte*. Consequently, If Magritte has really committed a crime, it is a crime against the commonsense vantage that a word, a thought, or an image is what it represents.

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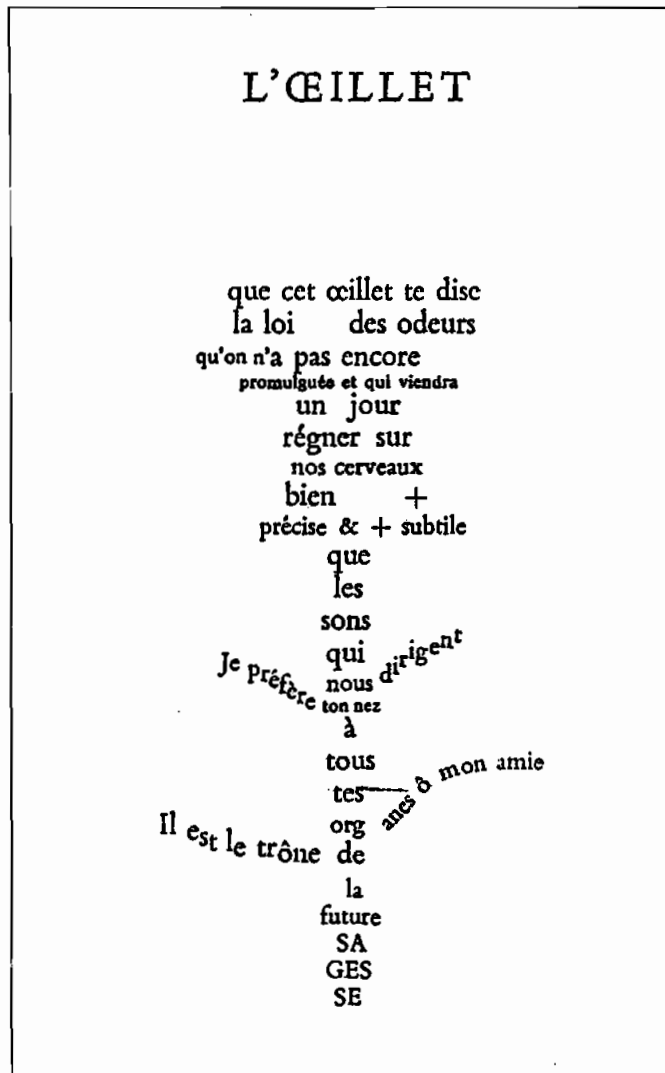
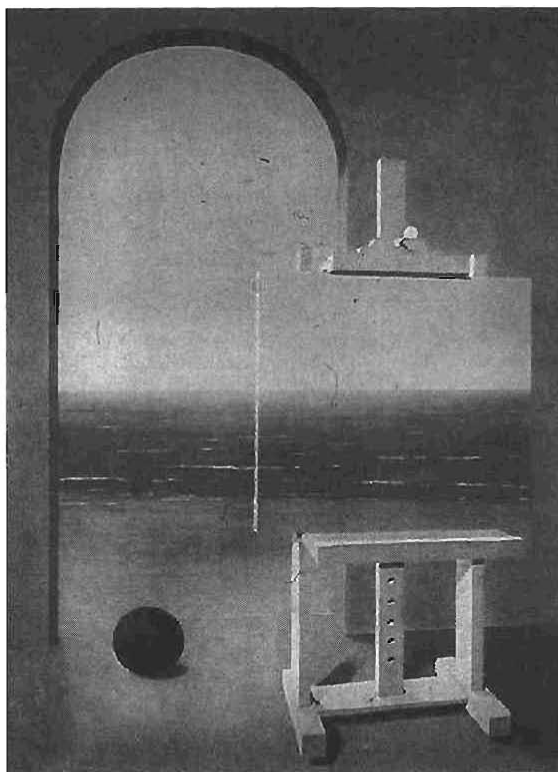


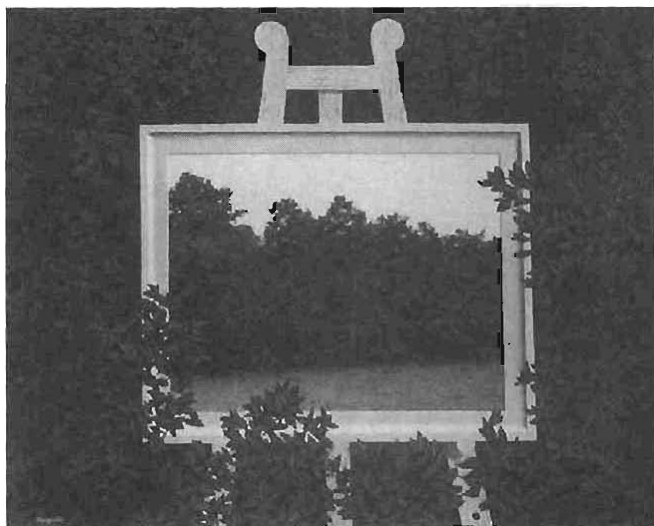
Plate 2. "L'Œillet," by Guillaume Apollinaire.



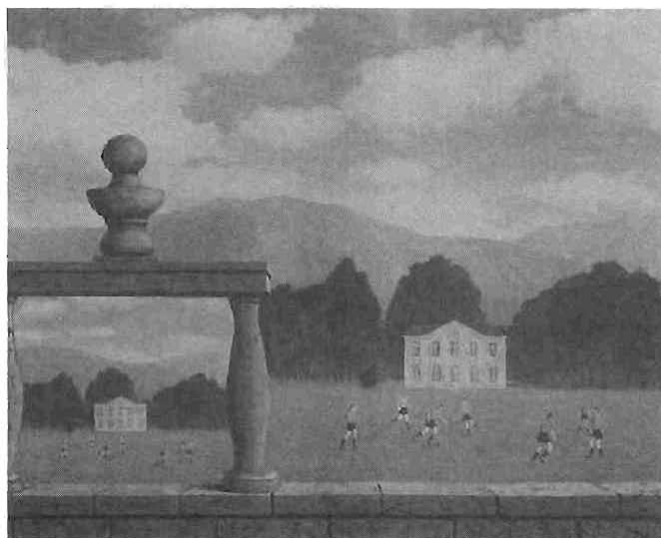
**Plate 4.** *La Condition humaine* ((1933).  
Private collection. Photo cour-  
tesy of the State University of  
New York at Albany.

**Plate 5.** *La Condition humaine* (1935).  
Private collection. Photo cour-  
tesy of Draeger, Maître  
Imprimeur.





**Plate 6.** *La Cascade* (1961). Collection of Cavalieri Holding Co., Inc. Photo courtesy of the owner.



**Plate 7.** *Représentation* (1962). Collection of Selma and Nesuhi Ertegun. Photo courtesy of the owner.