Encountering and exploring the ultimate reality "O":
A review of Bion's clinical and exploratory tools

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Abstract

It is widely believed that Bion is one of the most influential psychoanalyst after Melanie Klein. We have inherited from him a great amount of stimulating and provocative ideas. Those ideas have now gone beyond the narrow borders of psychoanalysis and are now used even by psychologists and psychotherapists who are not affiliated with any psychoanalytic school. Some reviewers of Bion's work have suggested that Bion's legacy can be divided into theoretical and clinical concepts or tools. Although Bion's tools are widely referred to, they are still not correctly understood. Therefore, in the present article, I have tried to review those tools confining myself to the most principal ones, those which Bion regarded as indispensable for any investigation of the object of psychoanalysis, O, the ultimate truth of the session. I discuss, among others, Bion's idea of at-one-ment and becoming, negative capability, faith and act of faith, reverence, and the selected fact. Those who have criticized Bion's work as unscientific and as the product of a mystic either did not go beyond a superficial reading of his works, or they have failed to understand their real meaning. Bion borrowed many concepts from not only scientific fields, but also from non-scientific fields, and used them as mere tools and models (not theories) which can be discarded whenever they are no more useful. To those critics Bion would answered that it is not psychoanalysis he advocates that is not scientific, but it is rather science that is too narrow to deal with the object of psychoanalysis.

Key Words: Bion, O, faith, at-one-ment, becoming, negative capability

Introduction

It is widely accepted that Bion can be considered as one of the most innovative and influential psychoanalyst. Compared with Freud and Klein, Bion has penned only a few works. However these works are so "dense, syncretistic, and repetitive" (Grotstein, 2007) that Bion has gained the reputation of being, obscure, difficult, and "unreadable", especially for those lacking analytical experience, and those that have confined themselves to a superficial reading of his works (Sandler, 2005). The evaluation of Bion's may be categorized into two tendencies; one highly evaluates and worshipped (Grotstein, ibid.) him, and the other evaluates his early contributions but rejects, like Meltzer (1978) the late ones as the production of a senile man (Symington &
Symington, 1996). Lopez-Corvo (2003) has an explication for this evaluation differences:

"I have a hypothesis: there is the feeling, when we follow his work sequentially, of a successive tendency toward a greater complication and a more elusive writing style...I feel Bion was obscure with the British, sober with Americans and charming and understanding with Brazilians" (p. xvi).

In spite of their differences in terms of evaluation of the work of Bion, most of his readers agree that he is a poor writer. However, according to Grotstein (2007), his writing style may reflect his intention to distance ’readers from projectively—and then introjectively—identifying with him, and leaving them 'orphaned' so as to find their own way in the wilderness of new, unprocessed thoughts" (p.14). As a result, the reader often become frustrated by Bion’s way of expressing his ideas and answering questions. However if one has a sufficient toleration capacity, he or she will be able to transform Bion’s unsaturated ideas into more meaningful ones and use them for further thinking and learning from experience (Bion, 1962a, 1962b). In this case, Bion’s reading comes close to an experience of psychoanalysis, and a way to experience what Bion’s theories try to convey instead of only learning about them (Hafsi, 2003). This idea is also shared by Ogden (2004) when he states that "The experience of reading early Bion generates a sense of psychoanalysis as a never-completed process of clarifying obscurities, and obscuring clarifications..." (p. 285)

Moreover, when reading Bion I have the impression that this way to address his readers is natural and spontaneous, it reflects thus his own valency (Bion, 1961), namely a flight valency (Hafsi, 2006, 2010). It is my impressions that his flight valency pervades most of all the concepts, and theories he contributed to psychoanalysis. What characterizes a person with this valency type is avoidance of interpersonal conflicts, and dependency, because both are viewed as leading to the loss of one’s individuality and even to the destruction of interpersonal relationship itself.

In fact, Bion was initially trained by Rickman then by Klein. He remained faithful to them, but has always managed to be faithful also to his own clinical experience, intuition, and belief in the freedom of thought, distancing thus himself from the internal confrontations and controversies characterizing the psychoanalytical world of his time. He did not appreciated being affiliated with any psychoanalytical current. For does not believe in affiliation labels; he sees them as a kind of caesura (Bion, 1977) that may obstruct the analyst’s search for and encounter with "O," or the ultimate truth of the session. The label that would please Bion is "psychoanalyst", no more and no less than this. To Bion’s view, the different psychoanalytic theories speak of similar phenomena but from different vertices (Bion, 1970).

Bion’s contributions to psychoanalysis were made from a scientific vertex even if, from time to time, he changes the vertex to shed light on a phenomenon from a different angle, rendering
it thus less obscure. In spite of the fact that he has been mistaken by a number of his readers as mystic, Bion remained through all his life a faithful and passionate scientist.

Bion’s legacy to psychoanalysis is too wide to be treated completely in this modest work. I will therefore confine myself to the technical and methodological aspects of his legacy. In other words, the main purpose here is to explore the inside of Bion’s doctor bag and discuss those clinical and epistemological tools and recommendations he bequeathed us.

I . Psychoanalysis and its object

Every science has its own object; the object it seeks, investigates, dissects, think about, and transforms into further objects. What is then the "psychoanalytic object"? (Bion, 1962a, p. 68). The answer Bion has suggested is "O."

O, a letter used as an abbreviation of the term "origin", represents a "quasi-mathematical symbol" (Lopez-Corvo, 2003) created to denote the numinous realm of the unconscious, where the human and individual truth – ultimate reality, absolute reality" of the session, lying beneath and behind the manifest discourses of both the therapist (or analyst) and his/her patient (or client) resides. In Bion’s (1965) words:

"I shall assume that the material provided by the analytic session is significant for its being for its being the patient's view (representation) of certain facts which are the origin (O) of his reaction" (p.15).

Therefore, Bion's recommendation is that it is "O" (the patient’s and his/her own) that the analytically-oriented therapist should be seeking during the session. However, this is not an easy task, for, as defined by Bion, "O" goes beyond the reach of our five senses. It can not be seen, heard, or touched; it has no particular smell or form. In a few words, O represents the absolute reality or truth that is unknown and unknowable to both, therapist and patient. It can not be apprehended or known as such, because it is not fixed in time and space; it is constantly evolving, or becoming. Bion (1965) explains what he meant by "unknowable" as follows:

"I wish to make clear that my reason for saying that O is unknowable is that I consider human capacity unequal to the task but because K, L, or H are inappropriate to O. They are appropriate to transformations of O but not to O" (p. 140).

If O transcends our senses and, as Bion (1977) puts it, "is, by definition, something indestructible and not subject to, circumscribed by beginnings and ends, rules of nature or any construct of the human mind" (p. 88), what shall we do about it? Bion (1970) suggested the
following:

"The analyst must focus his attention on O, the unknown and unknowable. The success of psycho-analysis depends on the maintenance of a psycho-analytic point of view... [or] vertex. With this[O] the analyst cannot be identified: he must be 'it" (p. 112).

Hence, as suggested by this statement, the only method to be in touch with O is to allow oneself to enter a mental state characterized by a feeling of being united to, or "at-one with" O. This mental state which Bion (1965) called "at-one-ment", is possible only if the analyst has gone through a strict training and mental discipline which will be discussed later.

Moreover, O is as put by Grotstein (2007), the most basic or "first cause, the deepest source" (p.115) of all the therapist’s or patient’s anxieties and malaise. As a cause Bion’s O goes thus beyond Freud’s and Klein’s libidinal and death instincts.

The origin of the concept of O as well as the mental state required for entering in contact is believed to reside in different philosophical and religious sources. For instance, the author has traced them back to the Bhagavad Gita (Hafsi, 2001). Others (Sandler, 2005; Lopez-Corvo, 2003, Eigen, 1998) have linked them, among others, to Zen Buddhism. However, this does not mean, as certain critics have pointed out, that Bion has deviated from the psychoanalytic vertex. For Bion believes that psychoanalysis is the sole means at our disposition which can help us to get in touch with O.

I will next discuss what Bion sees as basic requirements to become or be at-one with the object of psychoanalysis O. For the sake of facilitating the task, I will divide these requirements into two broad categories: requirements concerning the interaction in the here-and-now between the analytical or therapeutical couple, and requirements for the analyst when continuing thinking outside or between the sessions.

II. Requirements during the session

1. Focus on the here-and-now

The concept of here-and-now which is associated especially with object relations theory is now widely accepted by most of the theoretical currents. Bion is one the most active proponent of this idea; it pervades most of his theoretical contributions, especially his clinical concepts. Bion’s concepts suggest that the analyst should focus his therapeutic practice, interpretative function onto what is taking place in the consulting room. He should consider only what the patient is saying, and what is he feeling, or ruminating in silence within himself, and relate them to the therapeutical relationship at the present. When it is the past that is related, Bion suggests that it should be "presented" to be dealt with in the session. References to the past and future
may fulfil a defensive function. The object (analyst or patient) uses these references to evade the painful experience inherent in the here-and-now, or the present. To put it differently, analysis can be conducted only in the present. According to Bion (1980), "the past is finished, there is nothing we can do about it" (p.62); and the future can not be known, so there is no need to spend our energy thinking about it.

Using Grotstein's (2009a, 2009b) analogy of psychoanalysis as a theater play, we can say that the present is par excellence the stage where the play of psychoanalysis should take place. It is also within the frame of this stage that the couple meet, link through valency (Hafsi, 2006a, 2010), experience the fundamental links of L (love), H (hate), and K (knowing) described by Bion (1962a, 1962b, 1970), learn from their common experience, and finally separate. It is for this reason that Bion has, at many occasions, reminded the analyst that he or she can rely only on his sole companion, the patient in the present. In other words, each time the analyst meets his patient, he/she has to behave and think as if he/she is meeting him/her for the first time. In his Notes on Memory and Desire, Bion (1967b) recommends forgetting that the patient has a past and a future in relationship to the analyst. Moreover, in one his seminars held in Sao Paulo, Bion (1980) speaks of this matter in the following:

"Don’t be taken in by the fact that you think you have seen this patient before – you have not. What you have seen before doesn’t matter. What does matter is what we, the analyst and the patient, have not seen before" (p. 13).

The emphasis put on giving priority to the present or the here-and-now, is not confined to the presence to the analysand or patient, but concerns every aspects of the analytic encounter. This emphasis applies also, to the patient’s as well as the analyst’s statements, emotions, behaviors, and feelings. For instance, a "I feel anxious" said today, should not be understood as the same with the one said in the previous session, even if the twos sound and seem identical. When a given statement or behavior is repeated again the analyst should refrain from thinking that it is the same one, because often the appearances are misleading. However, forgetting about the past and future of the therapeutical relationship is not an easy task. It depends on and is associated with another of the Bionian clinical tenet, namely the discipline of eschewing memory, desire and understanding.

2. Eschewing memory and desire

The statement of "no memory, no desire, no understanding" (Bion, 1967b, 1970) is one of Bion’s famous and controversial technical recommendation. Bion suggests that following this recommendation will liberate the analyst from the prison of the past and the seduction of the future. Due to the fact that a psychoanalytic session is centered on, and carried out in the here-
and-now, it should have no past and no future because these chronological points are deeply rooted in memory and desire respectively.

Bion (1967b) was dissatisfied with memory and desire for they are associated with sensorial elements whose presence saturates the analyst's mind so that he is no longer receptive to new discoveries, experiences and facts. Memory may be misleading and deceiving because it is permanently distorted by our unconscious wishes.

In *Attention and Interpretation*, Bion (1970) distinguished between two different types of memory: recalled memory, and dreamlike memory. The former type of memory corresponds to what is usually called memory; it includes what one knows in advance and can consciously remember about a fact, a person (patient) or an event which, for example happened during an analytic session. It is the result of the analyst's conscious memorization activity. It is thus this kind of memory that "saturates the psychoanalyst's preconceptions and obscures the goals to the single point where clarity of judgment coincides with the field where it is exercised: the ongoing session..." (Bion, 1970, p.70). Whereas the latter, dreamlike memory, designates the type of memory which springs into the analyst's mind during the analytic session. Unlike recalled memory, dream-like memory is independent of the analyst's conscious will to remember. It is "innerved" as a result of the establishment of a growth-inducing container-contained relationship between two objects, the analyst and his patient for instance. Moreover dream-like memory can be understood thus as the third object the couple shares for the advantage of the three. Bion concluded that it is dream-like memory that constitutes "the memory of psychic reality, and...the stuff of analysis" (ibid.).

Therefore, Bion's recommendation of eschewing memory concerns only the recalled memory. The latter concerns every element that was experienced and recorded as a memory, and that can be consciously recalled. It includes impressions, preconceptions, prejudices, insights, conclusions from previous sessions, previous evaluations of the session and clinical material from the patient, and those theories one has learned during his training. Bion goes even further by, as mentioned previously, suggesting that we forget the memory of our patient, or the fact that we have met the patient before. He (Bion, 2005) explains this idea as follows:

"I would like to consider the patient you will see tomorrow. I have a great advantage because I know nothing whatsoever about it, so I am not so easily misled as you, who probably think that you saw or heard that patient today. But I suggest that while it has its advantages, it is also a bit of nuisance because it stands in the way of the fact that the patient has gone on living and thinking and will not be the same patient tomorrow as today - or at the end of the session as today" (p. 16).

Concerning theories we have learned, he exhorted us to discard them, for they may not suite
the phenomenon we are facing in relation to our patient in the here-and-now. Concerning theories, Bion (1980) suggested thus:

"that we cannot be sure that these theories, which are so convenient and which make us both as individuals and as a group feel better because they appear to make an inroad into the enormous area of ignorance, are therefore final" (p. 30).

"I think they (theories) are quite useful for about three sessions if you are lucky enough to see the patient on three successive occasions...never mind about all these theories of what analysts ought to be..." (p. 38).

And again, in The Tavistock Seminars, Bion (2005b) states:

"I am not very interested in the theories of psychoanalysis or psychiatry or any other theories; the important point is what I call 'the real thing', the practice of analysis, the practice of treatment, the practice of communication" (p. 16).

It is noteworthy that what Bion is trying to convey through his recommendation of eschewing memory, is not merely "forgetting", but remembering. The latent message conveyed by this recommendation is that to be able to apprehend the psychoanalytic object O one must strive to remember to forget. This is an active process that requires hard and strict discipline.

Concerning desire, Bion regards it as an element which interferes with the operation of judgement, evaluation and distorts it, by selecting and suppressing the material to be judged. Desire includes all kinds of desire, including sexual desire, desire for ending session, desire to understand, and even the desire to cure the patient. In this sense, Bion is echoing here Freud’s rule of abstinence.

To recapitulate, Bion (1970) recommended that to be able to apprehend the unknown and unknowable O, it is absolutely imperative that we deliberately keep at bay our recalled memory and desires. We must strive to remember to forget theories we have learned, past sessions, past impressions and preconceptions and prejudices about the patient. The greater the impulse to recall what have been said or done by the patient before, the more the need to resist and counter it. No memory should be allowed to disturb our thinking mind during the session. The more the analytic session is free of memory the more O has a chance to be encountered by the analytic couple when it is evolving. Containing our desires so that they that don’t influence our interventions, interpretations and decisions during the session is likewise an important recommendation. For memory is an element from the past, desire an element for the future, but psychoanalysis is concerned only with the present (here-and-now) or the "past presented" (Bion,
1991). In Bion's (1970) own words:

"It is necessary to inhibit dwelling on memories and desires. They are two facets of the same thing: both are composed of elements based on sense impressions: both imply the absence of immediate sensual satisfaction...It is important that the analyst should avoid...memory and desire (p. 41)...one is the past tense and the other the future..." (p. 45).

The technical implication this recommendation has is to focus on the present; the patient you met in the previous session and the analyst himself are no more what they used to be. Therefore, there is no need for recording, or taking notes of what is taking place in the here-and-now, because it will not be useful in the next session. The meaning of a given statement said during the session is confined to the present. Outside the limits of the present a recalled statement or interpretation is like a spoke in the wheel of growth. According to Grotstein (2009b), "Bion exhorts analysts not to take notes because the very act of note-taking is honoring memory, which Bion eschews" (p.31). Taking notes is useful for other purposes, such as communication with colleagues, or thinking outside the session for training, or what Bion calls "analytic game", and should not replace the interaction and observation in the here-and-now.

Moreover, by eschewing recalled memory and desire, the analyst will achieve a state of mind wherein he will feel that the patient in front of him/her is a new one whom he/she has not met before. Bion humorously stated that if the analyst does not have this feelings towards his patient it means that he is treating the wrong one.

3. **Negative capability and Faith**

Bion went further declaring that the aim of analysis is not confined to knowing about, O but "becoming" it. Therefore, being in a mental state of no memory, no desire and no understanding is not enough. Bion (1970) described another psychic capacity he called "negative capability", borrowing the term from the poet John Keats. In a letter written to his brother, the latter describes what he means by this term:

"...several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (quoted in Bion, 1970, p. 125).

Bion described negative capability as a mental state which when achieved allows the analyst to be tolerant of not-knowing (ignorance), being uncertain about why the patient is speaking and
acting in the way he or she does. When facing ignorance, the analyst is always tempted to fill the gap, left by ignorance, with memories and desires, as a defensive move against the pain inherent in not-knowing. Therefore this is a hard discipline, only men of achievement can endure.

To be able to face the pressure from the patient to provide answers and guidance, and the painful experience of not being able to meet the patient's needs and demands, the analyst needs to achieve another mental state Bion (1970) called "Faith", and display "act of faith".

Borrowed from Lurianic Christian cabbala (Lopez Corvo, 2003), Faith, according to Bion (1970), corresponds to a "scientific state of mind" (p. 32) characterized by the conviction "...that there is an ultimate reality and truth – the unknown, unknowable, formless infinite" (pp. 31-32). O of the session. For those aspects of which the analyst's personality can be aware during the session, faith is not necessary. Because these objects, which can be apprehended by our senses and conscious mental functions, are aspects of, but not "the evolved O" itself (ibid.). Therefore, Bion concludes that the analyst pays attention to these sensuous aspects only because, he" is concerned with the working of the analysand's mind" (ibid.).

Although Bion did not clearly distinguish between faith and act of faith, the author believes that the latter corresponds to the procedure by which faith is expressed or exercised. An act of faith, according to Bion (1970), is

"a scientific procedure (which)... must be distinguished from the religious meaning with which it is invested in conversational usage...is not a statement...is not associated with memory or desire or sensation. It has a relationship to thought analogous to the relationship of a priori knowledge to knowledge. It does not belong to the ±K system but to the O system. It does not by itself lead to knowledge 'about' something...has as its background something that is unconscious and unknown because it has not happened" (pp. 34-35).

Moreover, the act of faith is an essential analytic tool. When memory and desire have been eschewed, the analyst can enter the domain of act of faith and hallucinosis. And it is by having faith in O and exercising act of faith that the analyst "can become at-one with the patients' hallucinations" (Bion, 1970, p. 36). And owing to the act of faith he will be able to transform O into knowledge.

4. Waiting for the selected fact

What does the analyst precisely do when he has eschewed memory and desire? In response to this question, Bion would suggest keeping silent and waiting. During the session the analyst is permanently confronted with and bombarded with various facets of, or transformations from O, which seems unrelated and therefore incomprehensible for not only the analyst but the
analysand as well. It is a painful experience that the analyst may be inclined to evade at any cost. As on evasion means, the analyst may resort to bombarding back the analysand by hasty and empty interpretations. An empty interpretation is, like an "empty concept" (Bion, 1980), not based on intuition; it is rather the product of the analyst's negative containment (Bion, 1970; Hafsi, 2011), or "defensive" intellectualization.

Bion (1967a) suggests another option besides evasion, namely, "modification". In this case the analyst has to display tolerance of the fact of not being able to integrate what he is hearing, seeing, and feeling, and endure the frustration and pain inherent in this experience. Bion (2005a) warns us that "pain is a fact of existence – not very different from pleasure" (p. 4); the two constitute different poles of a same sensual spectrum. He suggested that if the analyst is not willing to suffer "the inescapable pain", and modify or transform it into a source of understanding then he isolates him/herself from the patient.

Suffering the pain involves waiting in a state of no-memory, no-desire, no understanding, for the element (statement, a word, a gesture, emotion, etc.) that will make order in the disorder characterizing the patient’s material. Bion (1962a) called this ordering element, a "selected fact", a term he borrowed from the mathematician and philosopher Henri Poincare (1908). According to Bion the selected fact is that emotional experience which, quoting Poincare, "suddenly introduces order where the appearance of disorder reigned...it enables us to see at a glance each of these elements in the place it occupies in the whole" (p. 72).

"The selected facts", adds Bion (1962a), "together with the selected fact that appears to give coherence to number of selected facts, emerge from a psycho-analytic object or series of such objects" (p. 72). That is, it can spring from the analyst as well as the patient or analysand. That is why Bion suggests to wait for it actively. The analyst must be in a mental state where negative capability, and "patience" prevails; "patience...without (quoting Keats) irritable reaching after fact and reason". When the selected fact has emerged, the analyst will experience a sudden "sense of discovery and coherence" (p. 72). Seen from a different vertex, this emotional experience, which involves a transition from a state of disintegration to a one of integration, is equivalent to the one characterizing the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position as described by Klein (1946).

5. Intuiting, reverie, dreaming, and alpha function,

When the analyst has succeeded to suspend memory, desire, and understanding, the road leading to the unconscious of each of the analytic couple, which I have referred to as the "emotional channel", or the "emotional umbilical cord" (Hafsi, 2006b, 2010), is now freed. A great number of interfering obstacles have thus been removed, allowing the emotional flow to circulate -relatively speaking- smoothly between the analyst and the analysand.

When the analyst has undergone what Grotstein (2009a) calls "sensory deprivation" (p. 315)
he/she is able to intuit and become more aware of and tolerant towards the result of his/her intuition.

**Intuition:** Bion has reintroduced intuition in psychoanalysis. The concept has been for decades suffering "distrust and abhorrence" (Lopez-Corvo, 2003) from the psychoanalytic movement. Because of the general belief that a science that relies on intuition is not science. To this Bion has suggested that it is not psychoanalysis that is not science, but it is science that is not complete enough to deal with what we encounter during the session, that is, "O", or that element that transcends our limited five senses. For O, suggests Bion (1970), intuition is the most adequate exploratory tool we have at our disposition at the moment.

When Bion (1965) speaks of intuition he means "analytically trained intuition". Bion (1977) devised the grid as mean to provide the analyst with an opportunity to play analytic game and train one's analytical intuition outside the session. In Bion's (1965) words,

"...the psycho-analytical games may develop the analyst's intuition (as a musician's exercises facilitate his capacity to perform an actual musical creation though not themselves being more than scales and other manual exercise) in preparation for the work required of it in analysis" (p. 130).

This kind of intuition, which Freud regards as a requirement for a person to be called an analyst, represents the ability of the mind to apprehend reality without interference of logical thinking. According to Bion (1965),

"Analytically trained intuition makes it possible to say the patient is talking about the primal scene and from the development of associations to add shades of meaning to fill out understanding of what is taking place" (p. 18).

**Reverie:** Intuition is associated with another of Bion's (1962b) concept, "reverie". Reverie is originally a French word which Bion used to refer to a "state of mind which is open to the reception of any 'objects' from the loved object and is therefore capable of reception of the infant's projective identifications whether they are felt by the infant to be good or bad" (p.36). It is noteworthy that although Bion brings the mother to the fore in this definition, he thinks that reverie applies also to any object relationship. He regarded the state de reverie as one of the tools, or requirements for entering into contact with the different aspects of O pervading each session, and therefore recommended the analyst or therapist to indulge into this meditative state. For as put by Grothstein (2009b), reverie resembles an "hypnotic state" which allows the analyst to "become totally immersed in his own experience of the analysands total presence and being" (p. 30). This corresponds to the state of mind Bion (1970) called "at-one-ment" (discussed
below); it does not imply that the analyst will lose his self and thinking faculties. On the contrary, when the analyst has entered into this state of mind he is more apt to intuit the analysand’s pain and suffer it, and then transform it into a better emotional experience. This transformation of pain made in a state of reverie is not a passive mental activity; it requires of the analyst to actively and successfully dream the material and the analytic session in the here-and-now.

Concerning dreaming the session, extending Freud’s (1900, 1901) ideas on dream and its functions, Bion (1970) developed a unique theory which cannot be discussed here because it goes beyond the scope of the present work, and it has been discussed in details by others (see, for instance, Sandler, 2005; Grotstein, 2007, 2009a; Hafsi, 2008). In a few words, Bion (1992) does not reduce dreaming to the state of sleeping by night. He believes that we are always dreaming awake or asleep, by day and by night. According to Bion one of the fundamental functions of dream (besides those described by Freud) is to process or transform our emotional experiences (internal and external events). As a transformational process, dreaming includes encoding, encrypting and sorting out, and rearranging our emotional experiences. According to Bion, to acquire meaning our emotional experience must be dreamt first. When the subject can not dream his own emotional experience, he may rely on an external object to make him or her perform this task for him/her. Therefore, Bion suggested that like the mother does for her infant, the analyst must dream his patient emotional experience during the session. And that is what he meant when he recommended us to try to dream the session.

Seen from the container-contained model (Bion, 1962a, 1963, 1970’s, dreaming the patient’s emotional experience involves for the analyst being able to provide positive containment (Hafsi, 2011). Positive containment is characterized by the use one’s alpha function to transform the unnamed emotional, and therefore unbearable experience, or "beta-element", into a more tolerable, a one with a name, or alpha-element which will be used by the patient for "learning from experience" (Bion, 1962b), and future dreaming.

6. Becoming and at-one-ment

Reverie and the state of mind of unsaturation and truthfulness characterizing it are prerequisites for the analyst to "become" and "be-at-one" with O. Although the concepts of becoming and at-one-ment may seem similar, they are slightly different. Bion did not distinguish the two concepts, but from my point of view, both concepts concern the encounter with the evolving O of the session, however, seen from a chronological vertex, becoming describes the process, whereas at-one-ment represents the end-product of the encounter with and discovery of O. Bion (1970) describes the state of at-one-ment in the following:
"To put it in more popular terms, I would say the more ‘real the psycho-analyst is the more he can be at one with the reality of the patient O] (p. 28)...O...can not be known...That it exists is an essential postulate of science but it cannot be scientifically discovered. No psycho-analytic discovery is possible without recognition of its existence, at-onement with it ..." (p. 30).

Hence Bion expects the analyst to become his/her patient, and be-at-one with him/her, because it is the only means to have access to O. He (1970) reminds us that "the psycho-analyst can know what the patient says, does, appears to be, but cannot know the O of which the patient is an evolution: he can only be it" (p. 26).

It should noted that at-one-ment is different from phantasied experiences of fusion of subject and object characterizing the psychotic patient and the psychotic part of the personality (Bion, 1967a; Grotstein, 2009a). At-one-ment is an experience strictly reserved to the analytic session. At-one-ment stirs from within the analyst, when immersed in reverie, an emotional experience similar or correlated with, if not identical with, the one felt by the patient or analysand. Moreover, the experience of at-one-ment is real; it is not related to, or dependent on the actual and manifest discourse and behavior of the patient. For the already stated and known by both analyst and analysand precludes this experience. Bion (1970) writes that "the more he [analyst] depends on actual events the more he relies on thinking that depends on a background of sense impressions" (p. 28).

According to Bion (1970), the experience of at-one-ment depends on having faith in the absolute truth O: For, he writes,

"There can be no genuine outcome that is based on falsity. Therefore, the outcome [at-one-ment with O] depends on the closeness with which the interpretative appraisal approximates to truth" (p. 28).

7. Interpretation

Bion deals with interpretation from different vertices throughout all his work. He suggests that when the analyst has dreamt sufficiently the analyst's emotional experience (O), has by the means of his alpha function processed and transformed it enough to be accepted for reintrojection by the patient, and has, using his/her faith and intuition, experienced the feeling of at-one-ment with it, he/she is expected to share his experience with the patient, through providing him/her with analytic interpretations. Bion emphasized the fact that O of the session must be equally available to both, the analyst and the analysand. Both must become O in order to be able to experience catastrophic change and development. Bion (1965) repeatedly emphasized that
"In psycho-analysis, any O not common to analyst and analysand alike, and not available therefore for transformation by both, may be ignored as irrelevant to psychoanalysis. Any O not common to both is incapable of psycho-analytic investigation; any appearance to the contrary depends on a failure to understand the nature of analytic interpretation" (pp. 48-49).

Analytic interpretation is thus an essential tool (the only one available to the analysis at the moment) that facilitates the emotional sharing process starting from the analyst. Moreover, an analytic interpretation can be valid or invalid, not good or bad. According to Bion the validity of an interpretation can be tested only in the session. A valid interpretation is an interpretation that is useful, that is a one that can help the patient become and be-at-one with his/her O. A valid interpretation is also a one which is "pure and absolute" (Bion, 1974), that is free and uncontaminated by the analyst's internal noises or countertransference. Bion shares with us what he means by absolute interpretation:

"There are certain patients who can recognize that any interpretation I give is not absolute. I can describe it in terms of an actual experience in this way: The patient cannot listen to what I am saying because of the noise. Sometime the 'noise' is the way I speak, sometimes it is the distraction produced by a fly in the room, but in a sense all the noises that he can hear appear to have an equal value" (p. 77).

As suggested by the statement above, a valid interpretation is an interpretation that is based on the result of the analyst's intuition of and at-one-ment with O of the session. Bion recommended that analytic interpretation must be based on the analyst's intuition not the result of his thinking activity.

Moreover, Bion (1970) suggested also that interpretation should reflect K (knowledge)-link and not L (love)-link or H (ate)-link. That is, the analyst interpretations should not reflect love for or hate of the patient. They should draw the analysand's attention to only the analyst intuition of and emotional experience of O, that is something that he/she is not supposed to know. Conveying to the analysand what he consciously knows and do not wish to know will accentuate the patient's pain and suffering. Discussing this idea, Bion (1963) states that:

"The emotion to which attention is drawn should be obvious to the analyst, but unobserved by the patient; an emotion that is obvious to the patient is usually painfully obvious and avoidance of unnecessary pain must be one aim in the exercise of analytic intuition" (p. 74).

Bion (1970) suggested that to be effective, interpretations should be given using the "language of achievement", a language characterizing a "man of achievement". As discussed above, a man
of achievement is a person characterized by great patience, equanimity, and tolerance towards uncertainty and ignorance.

The language of achievement comprises unsaturated elements which when tolerated by the speaker and listener, will promote transformations, and will consequently lead to change, growth, and achievement in both. Language of achievement does derive from sensuous and nonsensuous experiences, but remains unsaturated. Therefore the result of being subjected to language of achievement, always partial understanding, and therefore frustration, and the urge to remedy to this situation by modifying and improving it.

According to Bion (1970), the effect language of achievement is long-lasting, and unlimited, it can go beyond the time and space where it is articulated. He (Bion, 1970) puts it in the following:

"...Psychoanalyst...must employ methods which have the counterpart of durability or extension in a domain where there is no time or space as those terms are used in the world of sense" (p. 2).

Bion distinguishes between the language of achievement from the language of substitution. The former is used as a substitute to actions; it replace actions like in the saying "actions speak louder than words". Whereas the former is always a prelude to action, and is itself a kind of action. The interaction between analyst and patient is supposed to be characterized by the language of achievement. Bion's (1970) compares below the language of achievement and the language of substitution.

"Set over against and in contrast with the language of achievement I consider the language that is substitute for, and not prelude to, action. Language of achievement includes language that is both prelude to action and itself a kind of action; the meeting of psychoanalyst and analysand is itself an example of this language" (p. 125).

Bion does not seem to exclude the possibility of providing the analysand or patient with interpretations in the first interview. Interpretations very often reflect the analyst's own personality, character, and object relations, the way he regards and do treatment, and the expectations he has towards his patients. Therefore, early interpretations are important because they provide the analysand with an opportunity to form a general image of what kind of person is the analyst.

To sum up, Bion's work suggests that valid or correct analytic interpretation are formulated in a language of achievement. Owing to the unsaturation characterizing it, language of achievement puts the patient in a state of mind characterized by a feeling of lack of understanding, uncertainty, and consequently the experience of emotional turmoil. When facing
this situation, the patient has two alternatives. If his/her tolerance of frustration is not sufficient enough, he/she will opt for the evasion of the situation, which consequently leads to deterioration of both the self and the analyst. However, if his/her tolerance capacity is sufficient, he/she will attempt to modify the situation, by transforming it into a more insight and growth-inducing one for both of the analytic couple.

III. Requirements outside the session

The following are some controversial exploratory methods Bion has recommended us throughout all his work. These methods comprise the necessity to entertain wild thoughts, make use of one’s speculative imagination and speculative reasoning, using myths and models, freeing one’s "internal artist", displaying binocular vision", when investigating the O of the session.

1. Entertaining Wild thoughts

In A Theory of Thinking. Bion (1962a) suggested the presence of "thoughts" independent of the person’s thinking capacity. In other words, he postulated that thoughts may be regarded as epistemologically precedent to the thinker. That is, the thinker does not produce thoughts, they are imposed on him/her as a necessity for survival. Thoughts are not created by the thinker, but some thinkers can meet them, if they are in the suitable state of mind described above.

The following is how Bion (1962a) first introduced this idea separating thinking, or the apparatus for thinking from its end-product, thoughts:

"It is convenient to regard thinking as dependent on the successful outcome of two main mental developments. The first is the development of thoughts. They require an apparatus to cope with them. The second development therefore, is of this apparatus that I shall provisionally call thinking. I repeat thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts...thinking is a development forced on the psyche by the pressure of thoughts and not the other way round" (pp. 110-111).

Bion (1962a) suggested that pathology may be regarded as associated with disturbance in the development of thought or disturbance in the apparatus for thinking, or even, like in some cases, with disturbance in the developments of both.

One of the earliest thought, according to Bion, is the one of an absent or a "no-breast". The infant experiencing this no-breast is obliged to process it, digest it, or think it in other to have a conception of the breast on which his/her survival will depend. For that his/her thinking apparatus is mobilized. If, due to a failure to think and bear this no-breast, the infant will resort
to its evacuation through projective identification, remaining thus without a conception of the breast, and thus prey to mental death.

Hence, to repeat, there is first a thought and then thinking. What is referred to as thinking in ordinary parlance corresponds to a kind of rethinking, or secondary thinking. This is not confined to the infant's early experience, and primitive thinking; it applies also to thinking at earlier stages of our development. Our adult thinking apparatus can, at any time, be faced with this free or wild thoughts, and has to deal with them by containing and transforming them. In the seminars given in Sao Paulo Bion (1980) addressed his audience saying:

"It is difficult to stick to one's right to be a nasty psycho-analyst who has nasty thoughts and who is willing to give a home to still more nasty thoughts. I suggest that you do that with one of these wild thoughts whether it be called dirty, nasty, psychotic, banal or ordinary. There is no shortage of abusive terms for the idea. You might even, in spite of everything, call it 'Narcissus'. It could admire itself in a mirror or pool of water. But...don't let the nice little Narcissus fall into the pool...and get drowned" (p. 85).

Again, in the Italian Seminars Bion (2005a) referred to wild thoughts and how to deal with them. He recommended to remain always vigilant and open to new emotional experiences, if one is willing to get in touch with these wild thoughts when they traverse his/her mind. An example of these wild thoughts is what Bion called the "selected fact" discussed above. As a wild thought, the selected fact suddenly bumps against the analyst's half-dormant and half-darkened mind, to create that good enough light to recognize the O of the session. Bion states this in the following:

"If you can be wide open, then I think there is a chance that you might catch some of those wild thoughts. And if you allow them to lodge in your mind, however ridiculous, however, stupid, however fantastic, then there may be a chance of having a look at them. That is a matter of daring to have such thoughts – never mind whether you are supposed to have them or not – and keeping them long enough to be able to formulate what they are" (p. 44).

Paraphrasing Bion and using again a model, we can say that these wild thoughts seem to be like seeds brought to the therapist by an unknown bird or a sudden blowing wind. If he/she is willing to serve as a container and be able to tolerate not knowing what kind of flower the seeds will grow into, then the therapist will be able to blossom with these flowers.

2. Speculative imagination, imaginative conjecture, and rational conjecture

Since the object of psychoanalysis goes beyond the senses, can not be known and is
unknowable. Bion recommended the analyst to use his/her speculative imagination or speculative reason and its byproducts, imaginative conjectures and rational conjectures. Speculative imagination may be thought of as theoretical (or logical, deductive) thought which is opposed to practical (active, willing) thought. It is also contemplative, and is therefore opposite to practical reason which is engaged, involved, active, and dependent upon the specifics of the situation. Speculative reason provides the universal, necessary principles of logic which must apply to every situation. A conjecture as used by Bion seems to corresponds to an idea based on guessing, and not on evidence.

Bion considers speculative imagination as an indispensable primary tool to investigate O of the session. The analyst must dare resort to speculative imagination and use conjectures to think, even to interpret, prior to developing theories explaining what he is experiencing in the here-and-now. Bion (1980) writes:

"While I am trying to understand what the analysand is telling me, I have to guess, I have to conjecture until the patient can give me some more convincing evidence; then I may be able to feel reasonably sure of my interpretation" (p. 102).

The use of speculative imagination is justifiable when we can not rely on our senses to provide us with data about the object under scrutiny, and when other adequate methods and evidence acts are lacking. As a matter of fact what the analyst has to deal with are, in most cases,"situations stimulated literally on the spur of the moment" (Bion, 1980; p. 67). They cannot be confirmed in the past or the future; no evidence can be brought to us by our sense. We have to rely on our insight and intuition which are tools closely associated with speculative imagination. All the theories about the infant's early developmental stages were first based on speculative imagination. What is supposed to occur in the infant's psychic world, emotions, feelings and thoughts as described by Klein for instance, are the product of the latter's speculative imagination. Bion again asks:

"How do we know the infant is thinking thoughts ? – we have to resort to imaginative conjecture. We cannot ask the child, and there is no way of thinking about what it is thinking about. But if the baby starts crawling towards the fire because the flames look so pretty, then the imaginative conjecture become a rational conjecture – you still don't know what it is trying to do, but you can think it may be going to take hold of a pretty piece of fire" (p. 88).

As suggested by this statement, speculative imagination involves various stages. According to Bion, the first stage corresponds to an imaginative conjecture. Then, if the analyst has
obtained from his interaction with the analysand enough evidence supporting his imaginative conjecture, he enters the second stage where the imaginative conjecture become a rational conjecture. The third stage corresponds to the moment where these conjectures are thus turned into pictorial images on which interpretations will be based. Bion (1980) described these stage in the following statement:

"In every job the first stage is an imaginative conjecture. The engineer building a dam has to have an imaginative conjecture about where the dam would do the most good, or where it might do the most harm if it were badly built. Later, the imaginative conjecture might become a rational conjecture; the secondary plan might be more workable than the first. In analysis one's first guess as to what the patient wants could be replaced by something which could be drafted on a piece of paper. Ask yourself what these various stages are before you would be prepared to turn these conjectures into a picture in your mind of what you think the effect would be if you said something to that particular patient...I find it useful to consider that the stages are an imaginative conjecture, a rational conjecture, a pictorial image – the sort of thing you can see in dreams and even 'paint' in a verbal version of a pictorial image" (p. 127) ..."One has to dare to through various preliminary stages before one reaches even a theory. That is what I mean when I talked about daring to exercise your speculative imagination..." (p. 67).

Bion (1980) was aware that recommending speculative imagination was unacceptable to scientifically rigid minds, and hostile critics when he says:

"I certainly would not expect any scientific worker who is familiar with the discipline and the rigors of scientific thought to agree, but as psycho-analysts I think we have to fall back on such imaginative and rational conjectures. The whole of our subject could be attacked on the ground that it is unscientific and cannot be supported by any scientific evidence. The most that can be claimed for it is that it is 'probable'" (p. 100).

As can be deduced from this statement, Bion seems not to bother himself with the problem of whether psychoanalysis is scientific or not. The only thing that matters for him is the necessity that psychoanalysis remains psychoanalysis, that is a field whose object is unknown, unknowable, ultra-sensuous and infra-sensuous, and is therefore dealt with by the analyst as such.

3. Freeing our internal artist

It is my impression that when Bion recommended the use of speculative imagination, he was
suggesting that we have to free the artist lying deeply in each of us. For this artist has been repressed for decades during what I may call the psychoanalytic positivistic regime established by Freud and strengthen further by those "more royalist than the king" followers. Freeing one’s internal artist, involves being able to transform our and others’ (analysand, patient, etc.), internal and external emotional experiences. In fact, Bion (1965), who was also a landscape painter, metaphorically compares the psycho-analyst to a painter.

"For my purpose it is convenient to regard psycho-analysis as belonging to the group of transformations. The original experience, the realization, in the painter the subject that he paints, and in the instance of the psychoanalyst the experience of analyzing his patient, are transformed by painting in the one and analysis in the other into painting and a psycho-analytic description respectively (pp. 3-4).

Expanding further this metaphor, Grotstein (2007) writes that "Our hidden painter paints day and night to get the proper angles and perspectives and the ratios and mixtures between fiction and truth off life's existential assembly line" (p. 218). Seen from this point of view, every product of our sensuous activity, or every sensation or feeling we have and can name is the equivalent of "an artistic painting" (ibid.).

4. Changing the vertex and displaying binocular vision

Since O is always evolving in the individual and interpersonal mental space, Bion recommends to avoid sticking to the same single point of view, or vertex when experiencing or observing a phenomenon. That is, the analyst should change from one "vertex" to another in other to have a chance to enter in contact with O.

The term vertex, according to Bion (1965), refers to the psychic place from which an emotional experience can be represented with the support of data from a sensory modality, which he called the "mental counterpart" (p. 90) of the sense involved. Bion introduced the term vertex, because he thought that the term "point of view" privileges especially sight, and therefore cannot be applied to all psychic experiences an analyst may want to express. Bion explain his choice of the term vertex as follows:

"I am unwilling to use a term as 'point of view' because I do not wish to be reduced to writing 'from the point of view of digestion' or 'from the point of view off a sense of smell' when the distinctions between metaphorical and literal usages are fine yet difficult to preserve. I can describe my use of the term 'vertex' as a mathematical term...and using it as a model" (p. 91).
And in *A Memoir of the Future*, Bion (1991) defends his choice of the term again:

"The advantage of falling back on borrowing a mathematical term like 'vertex' is that it can make it possible to talk to lunatics who are thrown into confusion if you say things like 'from the point of view of smell.' It is very exasperating to find a man who interrupts you by saying, 'My eyes don't smell,' or 'My smell can't see any view' (pp. 3-4).

Bion (1965) used the concept of vertex also to explain the difference in the transformation from O between the analyst and his/her analysand, the difference between the different schools of psychoanalytic thought, the difference between the different transformations a single person (analyst, patient, etc.) may make from O. Bion suggests that each transformation from O is the result of a specific vertex.

In analytic therapy the analytic couple (patient and analyst) share the same experience, but each has his/her own vertex from which he/she apprehends and transform the experience. According to Bion, the patient's vertex is linked to his or her unconscious motivations and their corresponding emotional links, the H (hatred) link or the L (love) link. But the analyst must be confined to a vertex that is linked only to the K (knowledge) link. His/her interpretations must be formulated from and based on this K vertex.

The difference in terms of vertex between the analyst and the analysand is therapeutically important. The lack of difference may be considered as an indication that one of the analytical couple is lying to him/herself and to his/her counterpart. This difference of vertices 1) helps to detect the invariant aspect of O, 2) test for the presence of "common sense" (Bion, 1963), and "correlation" (Bion, 1965). 3) facilitates confrontation, and 4) may lead to catastrophic change and, consequently growth in both the patient and analyst. However, for this growth-inducing process to be observed, the vertices of the patient and the analyst must be neither too close nor too far apart from one another, they must be correlated.

Bion advocated changing the vertex, and also being ready to have access to several vertices. According to Bion, the list of possible vertices is unlimited. Bion speaks, for example, of medical vertex, scientific vertex, psycho-analytic vertex, religious vertex, etc., with each vertex emphasizing a different aspect of O.

The multitude, or as Meltzer (1986) puts it, "multiplication of vertices" (p. 74) allows the analyst to have what Bion (1962a) called a "binocular vision" of the phenomenon being experienced or observed. Binocular vision enables the analyst to be more flexible by taking a step back from his or her original vertex, and allows him/her to approach a same object from two different vertices, and have two correlated views of it which will be integrate into a single view.

Bion (1962a) borrowed this physiological term to use it as a "model" for the analytical attitude he expects of an analyst seeking O. He reproached Freud's metapsychology as being
"monocular," and therefore incomplete, because it emphasizes separately the unconscious and the conscious, in spite of the fact that psychoanalysis depends on the co-presence of these two layers of the psyche, and the analyst's ability to pay attention to both of them. Bion argued that

"The model is formed by the exercise of 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. The use in psychoanalysis of conscious and unconscious in viewing (two different vertices) a psychoanalytic object is analogous to the use of the two eyes in ocular observation of an object sensible to sight. Freud attributed this function, the sense organ of psychical quality, to conscious alone" (p. 86).

Bion (1967a) suggested that the ability to display binocular vision is associated with thinking ability; that is why he also used the term "binocular thinking" (Bion, 1962a; p.54). Therefore, Bion (1957) concluded that the psychotic patient or the psychotic part the personality is deprived of this thinking ability. The latter are rather characterized by what he calls the psychotic thinking (Bion, 1967a, 1962a).

5. Using models and myths

Since its foundation Psychoanalysis has always relied on models from others fields and models related to inanimate object, and on myths to illustrate and even to explain what is taking place in the psyche. For instance the term "mechanism" is a model Freud borrowed from the field of mechanics (Freud, 1900). When psychoanalysts speak of growth, they are also using a model related to living organisms as studied in biology. Concerning the use of myths, there are numerous examples amongst which the Oedipus myth is the most famous.

Even if the use of models and myths is not an idea foreign to orthodox psychoanalysis, Bion was the first psychoanalyst to remind us of their importance. He therefore recommended to psychoanalyst to use models to explain, reconstruct, interpret, or illuminate the phenomenon being observed or experienced. Bion himself proposed several models, such as container-container, alpha-function including alpha-elements and beta-elements, caesura, contact-barrier.

For Bion a model corresponds to a construction which integrates different related observations about an emotional experience or phenomenon or unknown facts. Saying it in Bion's (1962b) own words, models can be considered as:

"a construction in which concrete images are combined with each other; the link between concrete images often gives the effect of a narrative implying that some elements in the narrative are the causes of others. It is constructed with elements from the individual's past..." (p. 64).
Moreover, according to Bion (1962b) a model can be regarded as either an abstraction of an emotional experience, or as a concrete representation of an abstraction. He expresses this in the following passage:

"The use of a model has a value in restoring a sense of the concrete to an investigation which may have lost contact with its background through abstraction and the theoretical deductive systems associated with it... A model has also qualities which enable it to fulfil some of the functions of an abstraction. It enables the investigator to use an emotional experience by applying it as a totality, to a subsequent experience, or to some aspects of it..." (p. 64).

Concerning myths, Bion regards and used them, like Freud, as models. Bion himself had a wide knowledge of mythology, he referred in his writings mostly to the myth of the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, and especially the Sphinx in Oedipus. Bion regarded myth as fulfilling some of the model's functions. As models, myths allow to convey one's private knowledge or emotional experience in a concrete and general fashion. Bion (1992) says that myths "have the qualities of common sense-one might call them 'common non-sense'" (p.186). Therefore, he strongly suggested that the analyst should have at his/her disposition various interpretations of myths especially of Oedipus, and use them, when better means are not available, as publication and communication tools.

However, Bion warns us not to confuse a model with a theory, or concrete entities. In fact this is what happened with a number of Freud's models. As pointed out by Sandler (2005), "Freud's models of primary and secondary processes, id, ego and super-ego seemed to have been taken concretely by many in the psycho-analytic movement" (p. 502). In comparison to theories, models, are more ephemeral. One can discard them when they no more serve the purpose for which they were selected, and replace them with others more useful. Unlike a theory, a model is also flexible and can be applied to elucidate different experiences, situations and phenomena (Bion, 1974). Bion believes that theories, once they are formulated, it become difficult to get rid of them, and can therefore haunt the analyst's mind in form of memories or beliefs, and therefore may inhibit his/her thinking capability. Therefore, Bion (1970) recommended the analyst to privilege models over theories, in order to create enough mental space for thinking what is always evolving, namely, O of the session.

**Conclusion**

In spite of the difficulty to understand his ideas, many psychoanalytic writers writing about
Bion have pointed out to the genius side of Bion as a psychoanalyst. For instance, commenting on Bion's writing style and his legacy, Symington and Symington (1996) writes that they "have not the slightest hesitation in saying that he is the deepest thinker within psychoanalysis – and this statement does not exclude Freud" (p. xii). Most of the writers agree that we have inherited from Bion a great amount of stimulating and provocative ideas. Those ideas have now gone beyond the narrow borders of psychoanalysis and are used even by psychologists and psychotherapists who do not claim to be psychoanalysts. As suggested by the recent two volumes by Grotstein (2009a, 2009b), Bion’s legacy can be divided into theoretical concepts, and clinical tools. In the present article, I have introduced the main clinical and exploratory tools Bion regarded as indispensable for investigating the object of psychoanalysis, O.

According to Bion, O corresponds to the ultimate latent and ultimate truth which underlines the patient's discourse, narrative, behavior, feelings expressed during the session. The most primordial characteristic of O is the fact of being unknown and unknowable to both, analyst and analysand, because it is continuously evolving and becoming, and therefore transcends our senses. The only method to apprehend O is by other means than the senses. The sole mean is, says Bion (1970), to be-at-one with, or become it.

Becoming O is not an easy task; it requires analytic training and strict discipline. In order to help the analyst in this process of discovery and becoming with O, Bion (i.e., 1970, 1965, 1962b) suggested a number of ideas. One of these ideas, is focussing on what is being observed and experienced by the analytical couple in the "here-and-now". What we have observed or experienced before (in the previous session for instance) is unimportant; all what count, says Bion, is the present. For the past has finished and the future has not come yet.

Focussing on the here-and-now includes another of Bion's teachings: the necessity to eschew "memory, desire and understanding" and all their avatars. The analyst is recommended to artificially blind himself by forgetting all what he has learnt from the patient in previous sessions, and the theories he was taught. Because those may function as memories, disturbing and obscuring what is happening in the session.

The encounter with O requires also a mental state characterized by what Bion (1970) called negative capability, and faith, or act of faith (F). While in this state of mind the analyst or therapist is able to bear ignorance and uncertainty, and is not willing to fill the gap left by ignorance. Because he has faith in the existence of the unknowable ultimate truth, O, and is ready to act in accordance (act of faith). Bion regarded faith and act of faith as a scientific procedure that have nothing to do with religious faith.

When the analyst has achieved this state of mind he/she is expected to wait until the "selected fact" will emerge, allowing him/her thus to integrate and make order in the disorder of the patient, the analyst, and their relationship.

Moreover, entering in contact with the evolving O depends also on the analyst's ability to
make use of his intuition, or analytically-trained intuition. Since O has no form, no smell, emits no sound, it can only be intuited. Bion regarded intuition as an indispensable epistemological tool which can be developed and ameliorated by psychoanalytical games of which the use of the grid is an example.

Intuition is related with another function of the mind that Bion has discussed in length and recommended, namely reverie. As pointed out by Grotstein (2009b), reverie is a mental state similar to an "hypnotic state" (p.30), or a meditative state where the subject (mother, analyst) is free from past memories and future-linked desires. When reached, this state of mind leads the analyst to be-at-one with the analysand’s emotional experience (O).

Reverie involves another mental function, namely dreaming O as it emerges in the session. Dreaming corresponds to a transformational process which depends on the presence of a healthy container-contained relationship. As a container, the analyst who is in the state of reverie will use his/her alpha-function to transform the analysand’s emotional experience into a meaningful less painful unsaturated interpretations which will be introjected to be used for learning from experience (Bion, 1962b).

Bion’s legacy to the psychoanalyst includes others exploratory and clinical "tools", and recommendations. He recommended the analyst to be always open to and willing to tolerate those "wild thoughts" and express them freely (through interpretation, communication), regardless of the consequences they may have. For in most cases these thoughts are transformations from and to O. A tolerant attitude towards wild thoughts is associated with being able to think about these thoughts using what Bion called "speculative imagination" and its byproducts "imaginative conjectures" and "rational conjectures".

Since O is always evolving, it is difficult to grasp it from a single and fixed point of view, or "vertex" as Bion chose to call it; this attitude is, metaphorically speaking, monocular. What Bion expects the analyst seeking O to do is to have a "binocular vision". This is made possible by the ability to be ready to see an emotional experience with two eyes, have two correlated visions and then integrated them.

Finally, following Freud, Bion advocated also using models and myths to illustrate and temporary shed light on those psychic experiences (O) which can not be expressed or approached using sensuous methods. By using models, the analyst will be able to reduce his/her dependency on old theories, and prevent him from developing new others. Bion does not recommend theories because, unlike models and myths, theories are rigid entities that may inhibit the analyst thinking ability. He emphasized that the less theories one has at his/her disposition the more likely he/she is able to intuit O.

Finally, the reader who is not familiar with Bion and displays a strong positivistic attitude will, after reading Bion’s work, surely and inevitably jump to the obvious and misleading conclusion that Bion is advocating a religious kind of psychoanalysis. This is due to the fact that
Bion's work is pervaded with words and metaphors borrowed from religion, and mysticism, such as godhead, ultimate truth, at-one-ment, eschewing memory and desire, etc. However, as suggested by Sandler (2005), and Lopez-Corvo (2003), Symington and Symington (1996), Grotstein (2007), and a number of others, this criticism is the result of a superficial reading of Bion's works, and a lack of understanding of the real meaning of his ideas. For Bion, all those borrowed concepts are mere tools and unsaturated models that serve the cause of the moment, and therefore they can be discarded when they are no more useful. The only psychoanalysis that Bion was advocating is neither religious, nor mathematical, as some readers have suggested, it is psychoanalysis, no more, no less. To those critics who find psychoanalysis — as conceived and practiced by Bion — unscientific, Bion (1970, p.88)) would surely respond to them saying that "...the term 'science', as it has been commonly used hitherto to describe an attitude to objects of sense, is not adequate to represent an approach to those realities with which psychoanalytical science has to deal".

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