

Psychoanalytic transformations¹

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The author describes how Bion took Freud's conception of dreams as a form of thought and used it as the basis of his theory of transformations. Bion developed an expanded theory of 'dream thought', understood as a process of selection and transformation of sensory and emotional experiences. In this theory, the work of analysis is in turn conceived as a process not only of deciphering symbols, of revealing already existing unconscious meanings, but also of symbol production—of a process for generating thoughts and conferring meaning on experiences that have never been conscious and never been repressed because they have never been 'thought'. Analysis, in its specific operational sense, becomes a system of transformation whereby unconscious somatopsychic processes acquire the conditions for representability and become capable of translation into thoughts, words and interpretations. The rules of transformation applied by the patient in his representations and those applied by the analyst in his interpretations have the same importance for the analytic process as those described by Freud for the process of dreaming. The author discusses the broad categories of transformation adduced by Bion (rigid motion, projective, and in hallucinosis) and introduces some further distinctions within them.

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I should like to refute the widespread prejudice that the psychoanalytic concept of transformation is a construct due to Bion. The concept of *transformation* is amply present in Freud's thought. He uses it in three contexts: the theory of the defence mechanisms (*Affektverwandlungen*, transformations of the affects); the theory of the analytic process (*Umwandlungsprozess*, a process of transformation); and dream theory. Here I discuss briefly the last of the three.

The 'dreamwork' (*Traumarbeit*) is seen as a *form of thought* with the function of transforming psychical contents: 'It does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to *giving things a new form (umzuformen)*' (Freud, 1900, p. 507).

Bion took Freud's conception of dream thought and used it as the basis of the theory of transformations. He developed an expanded theory of 'dreamwork' (the α -function theory), which he put forward as an extension of Freud's theory to dream thought in the waking state, understood as a process of selection and representation of sensory and emotional experiences.

In this theory, attention shifts from the contents of thought to the development of the apparatus for thinking thoughts. Dreams take on the status of a specific

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device not only for the observation of psychic reality but also for its *generation and transformation*.

Hence, the work of analysis is in turn conceived not only as a process of *deciphering symbols*, of revealing already existing unconscious meanings, but also of *symbol production*—of a process for generating thoughts and conferring meaning on experiences that have never been conscious and never been repressed because they have never been ‘thought’.

Analysis, in its specific operational sense, becomes a *system of transformation* whereby unconscious somatopsychic processes—whether or not repressed—acquire the conditions for representability and become capable of translation into thoughts and meanings. That is in fact what analytic transformation consists in: *what was originally a drive-related or affective quantity, a sensation, emotion or action, is turned into a dream image, the representation of a wish or anxiety, a word, an interpretation or a meaning*.

Concept of transformation

Psychoanalytic transformation can be considered in terms of Bion’s definition:

For me, a factual situation (conjectured), an emotional state (say hate, also conjectured), a representation, are constantly conjoined and I record or bind it by the term ‘transformation’.
... The object of binding ... is in the hope of discovering the meaning of the constant conjunction. (1965, pp. 68–9)

In other words, the process of signification calls for the linking of a factual reality whose meaning is unknown (*O*), an emotional reality correlated with it, and a symbolic reality (a name) that represents both, for the purpose of discovering their meaning.²

In this way, a mutual interdependence is established between the elements involved in the transformation: the representation receives its meaning from the emotion, without which it is empty (meaningless), while the emotion in turn receives its name from the representation, without which it is mute (nameless). The link between the experience, the emotion and the representation is the origin of the meaning.

The correlation between the elements is reciprocal—hence, the introduction of the idea of ‘constant conjunction’, which Bion borrows from Hume, to indicate that the relationship between the three terms cannot be reduced to binary cause-and-effect relations (\rightarrow), but involves trirelative, complementary interactions (\leftrightarrow).

As a model of transformation, we may consider the reflection from the surface of a disturbed body of water:

I shall use this as a model for the analytic observation of transformations. It will be convenient to suppose that the *L, H, K* links influence the transformation in a manner analogous to the

²The symbol ‘*O*’ thus does not stand for a supposed metaphysical reality, but at most for a ‘physical’, factual one. ‘*O*’ is defined as ‘that which, while at the origin of a mental phenomenon, is not a mental phenomenon’, and as such is unknowable in itself. In order for it to be known, it must first be transformed into a mental phenomenon.

atmospheric changes in the model ... A representation, though distorted by emotion as a reflection in a lake might be distorted by a breeze, can be seen to have a relationship with the object. Equally, emotions that are active can be seen to have a relationship with the object even if disturbed by the representation. Again, the representation can be seen to be related to the emotions, and vice versa, even if disturbed by the object. (Bion, 1965, p. 68)

The following epistemic paradox can be stated on the basis of this theory: the fundamental rule of analysis is the capacity to lead the patient towards the representation. However, this cannot be done on the level of the representation alone, for analytic transformation is possible only through negotiation of the emotional turbulence, which is responsible for the *conferring* of meaning. Conversely, the emotional experience alone does not suffice to bring about transformation, because, in turn, it is the conversion of that experience into a verbal representation—into an interpretation—that is responsible for the *appropriation* of the meaning. Failing this, the relational field of the analysis becomes the locus of immediate affective interactions, or ‘inverse transformations’—namely, ones involving desymbolization, hallucination and action.

To sum up, the process of transformation stems from the interactions between *all* the dimensions and objects present in the analytic field. Whenever one of these usurps the place of the others by virtue of its density—whether sensory, emotional or rational—a level of the field that must be observed is thereby obscured and excluded: *the subject obscures the object, the conscious the unconscious, the action the thought, the intersubjective the intrapsychic, the external the internal*. Or the other way round.

The result is the collapse of the analytic field and its degeneration—into a cognitive field or an affective field; a linguistic field or a field of action; a field of unconscious transactions or of real transactions.

What, then, is the nature of analytic transformation? The term transformation, and indeed also Bion’s other term or concept, ‘element’, is initially drawn from the language of alchemy. In his reading of *Faust*, Walter Benjamin warns us against the suggestive power of ontological transformations—the transmutation of substances and souls, of lead into gold, of an old man into a new man. The alchemical symbol is a gateway to being: it has the power to dissolve and to create.

Jung, as we know, was fascinated by the idea of alchemical transformation, whereas Freud stayed aloof from it. Of the two phases of chemical transformation, *solve et coagula*, Freud says, our competence is confined to the former: our task is solely to take apart, to ‘lift’. *Analysis does not seek to produce anything*.

This does not mean that it produces nothing, but only that it is not intended to *control* the transformation in accordance with a higher purpose, such as an ambition, an ideal, an affect, a memory or a wish. It neither seeks nor is able to do so—because, ‘once begun, it goes its own way and does not allow either the direction it takes or the order in which it picks up its points to be prescribed for it’ (Freud, 1913, p. 130).

Let us consider the well-known example of the field of poppies. A painter and a gardener both transform the field, but, whereas the latter destroys the initial reality by modifying it, the former has neither the intention nor the capacity to modify the reality that lies at the origin of its transformation in a picture—nor does he

tell us anything about its actual nature. Instead, he tells us something about his own relationship with that nature. Similarly, analytic transformations do not entail transformation of the original reality. For the painter, as for the analyst, *O* is the starting point of the transformation *K*.

However, if we give up the idea of bringing about ontological changes—which has always underlain the recurring educational and corrective conceptions of the treatment—this does not necessarily mean that analysis is reduced to a mere cognitive process or the mere attribution of sense: *K* is not the opposite of *O*, but a link with *O*, and involves the relationship with *O*. The knowledge referred to here is not therefore intellectual knowledge, but the appropriation of the experience of oneself, of the meaning of oneself (for this reason, in my view, its semantic status is very similar to that of insight).

In order for there to be analytic transformation, the following are necessary:

- 1) ‘the catastrophic impact with *O*’ must give rise to the lysis of a crystallized conjunction of representations, emotions and meanings (a ‘break-up’) and to the revelation of a conjunction not previously observed (a ‘break-through’) (Bion, 1977);
- 2) the new conjunction must receive its meaning from the encounter with *L*, *H* and *K*; and
- 3) the meaning must contain ‘invariants’ in relation to *O*.

In other words, patient and analyst must partake of the nature of *O*, and be able to discern something of *O* by way of the transformation it undergoes. That is to say, *O* is the referent of the process as a whole and constitutes the *origin* and the *limit* of the possible transformations (in the sense that not all are equally possible). *K*, *L* and *H* are the links with *O* and constitute the signification system.

Once the meaning is achieved, it will not have to do with *O*, or with *K*, *L* or *H* considered separately, but with the relationship between (*O*) and (*K-L-H*)—between the referential system and the signification system.

Rules of transformation

It must be stated at the outset that the theory of transformations is not a metapsychological conception. Bion presents it from the beginning as a clinical theory:

The theory of transformations and its development does not relate to the main body of psycho-analytic theory, but to the practice of psycho-analytic *observation*. Psycho-analytic theories, patients’ or analysts’ statements are representations of an emotional experience. If we can understand the process of representation it helps us to understand the representation and what is being represented. [Therefore] the emphasis of this inquiry is on the nature of the transformation in a psycho-analytic session. (Bion, 1965, p. 34)

Again, Bion suggests, the theory may prove useful for psychoanalytic diagnosis, in so far as the relevant clinical entities could be better defined and classified on the basis of the type of transformation and of the invariants (rules) applied.

In my view, the rules of transformation applied by the patient in his representations and those applied by the analyst in his interpretations have the same importance for the analytic process as those described by Freud for the process of dreaming.

I discuss the three broad categories of transformation adduced by Bion (*rigid motion*, *projective* and *in hallucinosis*) and additionally introduce some further distinctions within them.

Rigid motion transformations

In geometry, this term denotes the transformations generated by the displacement of the points of a plane figure from one part of the plane that contains it to another, in such a way as to produce an identical and symmetrical figure. In the geometrical model, these transformations (rotation, permutation, inversion and translation) are characterized by the following properties:

- a) the points of the source figure and those of the resultant figure bear a relationship of biunivocal correspondence to each other (congruence); and
- b) the original figure can be reconstituted by means of a displacement of the points that maintains fixed distances between them (i.e. a displacement involving 'rigid motion') (reversibility).

Bion defines *linear or rigid motion transformation* as a movement of feelings and thoughts from one sphere of application to another without alteration of meaning, and for this reason sees it as an expression of the non-psychotic part of the personality. Rigid motion transformations are characterized by the absence of distortion and by the possibility of tracing a path back from the end product to the original meaning.

Two different types of rigid motion transformation can be distinguished:

- *Continuous rigid (CrT)*: characterized by reversibility and contiguity, as in the psychic mechanisms of transformation into the opposite (logical or temporal inversion), permutation and displacement (substitution of a representational or affective content without alteration).
- *Discontinuous rigid (DrT)*: characterized by reversibility but without contiguity, because in this case what is involved is a displacement of the object, as in the transference process (where a system of affects or representations relating to one object is attributed to another) or in linear projection (where a system of affects or representations belonging to the subject is attributed to the object). The scale of these processes is determined by the quantity of affect involved in the transformation.

The difference between them can be illustrated by the following brief clinical example. For many years, a woman has had a relationship with a married man and persists in the futile hope that he will separate from his wife. The woman lives with her daughter, who has now decided to get married. At this point the woman develops a phobia of the dark, of noises and of thieves: 'I have always been an independent, secure person', she says, 'but now I'm afraid of being left alone in the house.'

The 'fear of being left alone in the house' is an example of displacement of representational content without alteration of affect (*CrT*). The fear of being left alone, because abandoned by her daughter, is transferred and attributed to the dark and to thieves through the construction of false connections.

Now, however, the daughter spends every evening with her fiancé and the woman stays at home by herself waiting for her. The new state of loneliness and resentment at the prospect of being abandoned gives rise to an intensification of the emotions of frustration and rage bound up with the absence of her own companion. So, she resorts to projection: when her daughter comes home at night, the mother welcomes her back lovingly, but is increasingly concerned *about her*: ‘You’re late—did something happen? I was so worried about you’.

These phrases show that the increase in intensity of the emotion has its counterpart in the need to place it at a distance by projection: ‘I was not worried about myself / I was worried about you’ (*DrT*). However, the foreshadowing of a looming *real* threat (‘did something happen?’) indicates the presence of a charge of resentment, which is already in danger of bursting the bounds of the plane of the relationship.

Projective transformations

As stated, a linear T occurs in the relevant plane and involves a displacement without distortion. A projective T, by contrast, takes place in space and calls for the consideration of at least two planes. The projective space results from an extension of the ordinary plane (that of linear Ts) by the addition, in the space external to the plane, of new points and planes. The transformation is characterized by the following properties:

- a) the projective space does not contain the ordinary plane and its points; and
- b) the points of the projective space do not bear a relationship of biunivocal correspondence to those of the ordinary plane.

Hence, the objects of the ordinary plane, when represented in the projective space, become distorted and incongruous (a straight line becomes a curve, a circle becomes an ellipse or a cone, and so on).

Unlike the situation with linear Ts, then, here it is no longer a matter of simple displacements, inversions or translations of points from one part of the plane to another. In this case, there is in fact no displacement, but instead *the formation of a different plane and a different object*. What is transformed is not the source object but *the space* external to the plane that contains it. This makes it easier to understand the distinction between linear projection (the displacement of points on to the plane) and projective transformation (the creation of new points in space). In the language we have been using so far, the former involves a projection of the emotion on to an object which nevertheless belongs to the plane of the relationship with the subject (‘worried about myself’ → ‘worried about you’), whereas the latter entails the creation of another plane, which, while containing the projection of parts of the subject, does not contain the subject and the object together, so that their relationship and its meaning are lost. These transformations are therefore an expression of the psychotic part of the personality. Examples of projective transformation are the processes of splitting, projective identification and disavowal (*Verleugnung*). Recourse to such processes is dictated by the increase in the force of the emotion and the impossibility of its being received by the mind that ought to contain it. The increase in the intensity of the emotion is paralleled by corresponding ever

higher levels of distortion of the meaning, which ultimately collapses into a form of *action*.

To return to our example, once it becomes clear that the situation is not going to change, the woman's state deteriorates and she attacks her daughter and the analysis. This is initially manifested in the destructive, angry criticism of the daughter's fiancé: '*He doesn't love you ... he will ruin your life ... he will abandon you*'; and later, as the symptoms intensify, in the *fear of going mad, increasing concern on the part of all family members, consultation of neurologists and threats of hospitalization*.

Here again, two different types of transformation, with an increasing degree of distortion, can be distinguished:

- *Continuous projective (CpT)*: the transformation—'He doesn't love you ... he will ruin your life ... he will abandon you'—has the characteristics of a *projective identification*: the intensification of the emotions of hate and envy necessitates the splitting off and projection of the 'unloved' part of the self into a space that wholly dispenses with the self; the construction of this other scene, *of which she no longer forms a part* (the daughter's disastrous fate with her husband-to-be) is the creation of the projective T. This is therefore an expression of the personality's attempt to deny (in the sense of Freud's disavowal [*Verleugnung*])³ its own intolerable emotions, while at the same time maintaining the recognition of their reality as a separate entity. The final outcome of this process is the construction of the projective scene, which, while containing the meaning, does not contain its subject.
- *Discontinuous projective (DpT)*: the second type of transformation can only be called a leap into another dimension, expressing as it does the progressive divergence of the projective plane from the symbolic field. The extension of the attack on thought (the fear of going mad) and the overflowing of the manifestations into the outside world (involvement of family members, consultation of neurologists, and hospitalization) correspond to the evacuation of the emotion into a *domain of action*, which is not homologous with the symbolic qualities of the psychic domain and of that of the analysis. Bion calls these realizations 'hyperbole'.

This is described as follows:

The container may not be able to tolerate the emotion and the contained emotion may not be able to tolerate neglect. The result is hyperbole. That is to say, the emotion that cannot tolerate neglect grows in intensity, is exaggerated to ensure attention and the container reacts by more, and still more, violent evacuation. (Bion, 1965, p. 141)

(Intensification →← hospitalization.) 'By using the term "hyperbole"', Bion writes, 'I mean to bind the constant conjunction of increasing force of emotion with increasing force of evacuation' (p. 142).

³For Freud, this meant that instead of conflict and its repression there was a rejection of reality and splitting of the ego whereby the two opposing currents, the negation of reality and its recognition, persist side by side without cancelling each other out.

The term 'hyperbole' has a number of different meanings. The literal sense, from the Greek *hyper-ballein*, is to cast beyond, while its rhetorical connotation is a quantitative alteration in meaning, involving either positive or negative exaggeration. In Italian, the same word, *iperbole*, is also used for the geometric figure known in English as a hyperbola, an open curve made up of two opposing branches that diverge from the focus. The most interesting characteristic of this curve is that, unlike other members of the conic family to which it belongs (circles, ellipses and parabolas), *it does not contain its focus*.

Bion describes hyperbole as the beginning of a transformation in hallucinosis; the operation to which he is referring is the *expulsion of meaning*, because this is a precondition for the process of hallucinosis.

Hence, hyperbolic transformations belong in the area of transition between projective transformations and transformations in hallucinosis, and call for further investigation, because, 'as a group of phenomena that can be observed psychoanalytically, they may occupy no less space than that of the transference-countertransference and of projective transformations' (Camassa, 1990).

Transformations in hallucinosis

The description of *transformations in hallucinosis* requires a reference to a model of topological space in which relationships that violate the laws of Euclidean space are possible, involving *pars pro toto*, internal-external and container-contained inversions and the formation of bizarre objects, in which an element belonging to the personality is evacuated and included in a material reality, which is consequently deemed capable of 'action'.

The corresponding theory is that of inversion of the α -function—namely, the expulsion of emotions and thoughts in the form of sensory phenomena (β -elements), or, in other words, a substitution of the evacuative for the representational function of the mind. As a result, the apparatus for thinking thoughts, too, is partly overturned and expelled, and the mind operates like a mouth-anus canal or muscle without a digestive apparatus.

The inversion of the 'alpha screen' has the following consequences:

- a) There are no longer any obstacles to the passage of elements from conscious to unconscious and from inside to outside. Hence, there is no longer any possibility of distinguishing them, or of dreaming or symbolizing: β -elements are, after all, characterized by their inability to form reciprocal links.
- b) By virtue of the 'beta screen', the patient is able to *induce emotions in the analyst*. This means that the dreams and associations the patient brings to the session do not have the function of conveying information, but are a form of action.

Hallucinosis originates from a personality dominated by 'omnipotence, hate, envy, greed, rivalry, health and virility', which is therefore unable to tolerate the frustration resulting from contact with reality. Reality must therefore be rejected.

The model of this process is the hallucinatory relationship with the breast. Unlike the situation in a normal relationship—in which the possibility of thoughts and *K* links taking the place of the absent breast corresponds to its absence—here

the absence of the breast is negated and experienced as presence: 0 breast = 1 breast.

In other words, if the frustration induced by the absence of satisfaction cannot be tolerated, the difference between the existence and non-existence of the breast is negated, in order to keep ‘no-thing’ away from ‘noughtness’. The next step is to multiply 0 by itself (an increase in 0 by parthenogenesis) and the development of $-K$.⁴ In other words, the personality is supposed to have the capacity ‘to grow and flourish exceedingly by supplying itself with unrestricted supplies of *nothing*’ (Bion, 1965, p. 134). Hallucinosity is an omnipotent method of achieving independence by the creation of a reality whose objects are held to be self-sufficient and superior to thoughts. This reality being the product of the patient’s evacuations, the patient feels totally independent of anything that he himself has not created. Concomitantly, any experience, whether internal or external, that tends to negate the faith in the superiority of his method is attributed to the intervention of envious and hostile external forces (including the analysis) and calls again for recourse to evacuation. The patient sees the interpretations he obtains in his sessions as instances of acting out on the part of the analyst—as expressions of the analyst’s attempt to demonstrate the superiority of *his* method and to inflict pain on him.

Manifestations that belong to the field of hallucinosity include somatopsychotic transformations, repudiation (*Verwerfung*) and hallucination. Unlike *Verleugnung*, *Verwerfung* entails a precautionary process of ‘expulsion from the ego’ (*Austossung aus dem Ich*) of *both* affect *and* representation, and hence their exclusion from the symbolic universe. Precisely for this reason, Freud writes, they may reappear *as hallucinations*.

I shall now describe a hallucination in the patient mentioned earlier. The daughter yields to her mother’s attacks and decides not to marry after all. The two women continue to live together in a relationship increasingly burdened with persecution and guilt (as the ‘spent quantities’ of *L* and *H* increase). During this phase of the analysis, the patient says in one of her sessions, ‘I had a dream: *there were dead bodies everywhere, in the inside walls, under the floor, in the outside walls, in the doors and on the ceiling*’. The analyst’s interpretation was: *walled up alive together*.

At the beginning of the next session, the patient comes in, fixes her eyes on the walls of the consulting room and exclaims, ‘*There’s blood, blood and more blood coming out*’.

Two different degrees of transformation can be observed here:

- The transformation level of the dream, which expresses the contamination of emotions and of parts, of subject-fragments and object-fragments (emotions/bodies/walls) in terms of topological space. The capacity for representation still exists here, although forced to the limits of the sensory explosion (physical invasion of the container, and violation of the law of impenetrability of bodies).

⁴ $-K$ is not a false knowledge, but the negative of K . Bion describes the $-K$ relationship as an attack on the K ‘link’ between container and contained, in consequence of which the contained is emptied of its meaning, and, ‘in the place where this was’, there remain the ghosts of spent thoughts (*no-thoughts*).

- The transformation level of the hallucinatory crisis, in which the meaning previously assigned by the analyst with his interpretation is evacuated into a sensory experience (-K) and experienced by the patient as *an action of the analysis*.

The following differences result from a comparison of hallucinosis with delusion:

- a) Delusion is a *pre-conception* that turns to mis-conception because it mates with a *realization* that does not approximate to the preconception closely enough to saturate it, but closely enough to give rise to a false conception.
- b) Hallucinosis is a *predetermination* that turns to action because it is directed towards the evacuation of internal reality and the utilization of the subject's own evacuations to construct a new external and internal reality corresponding to the need for independence from not-self objects.

For this reason, as Freud has already pointed out, the process involves a complete 'remodelling of reality':

In a psychosis, the transforming of reality is carried out upon the psychical precipitates of former relations to it—that is, upon the memory-traces, ideas and judgements which have been previously derived from reality and by which reality was represented in the mind. (1924, p. 185)

Therefore, the transformation in hallucinosis invests not only the perception of reality. What now presents itself as reality is no longer the result of the encounter between preconceptions and realizations, but of that between pre-determinations and evacuations. It is the very status of reality that is therefore modified.

I have mentioned certain psychic processes (*continuous* and *discontinuous* transformations) with a view to distinguishing the forms of negation and non-linear transformations that belong to the area of the psychoses from the forms of repression and linear transformations that fall within the sphere of the neuroses. As Green (1999) has shown, the field of action of these processes goes far beyond their original definition in terms of defence mechanisms; indeed, it extends to the whole of mental functioning and to the ways in which the opposing tendencies of the drives are expressed psychically as the capacity to create 'links' (processes of objectalization and symbolization) or as the capacity to destroy them (processes of disobjectalization and desymbolization).

In my view, the different types of transformation represent the forms assumed by the relations between the non-psychotic and psychotic parts of the personality—that is, between, on the one hand, the part which, being capable of tolerating conflict and frustration, is able to learn from experience and to perform symbolic transformations whereby it can obtain such satisfaction as is possible from objects, and, on the other, the part—characterized by omnipotence, hate, envy, greed, rivalry, health and virility—that is unable to tolerate the absence of satisfaction and the existence of objects independent of the self, so that it has to construct an internal and external reality directed towards the evacuation of frustration, the experience of self and the knowledge of self.

The fate of meaning lies between these two processes: together with affect and representation, to which it is indissolubly bound, meaning may be recognized, repressed, projected, denied or expelled. The investigation of its dramatic transformations is the work of analysis.

Two clinical examples

I

The first patient of the morning was a woman not long in analysis who was suffering from the obsessional idea that she was contaminated with faeces.

Before lying down on the couch, she emptied out her bag on to the table to check that its contents had not become soiled on her way from home. I noticed that this time she did not take off her shoes, but, once in position, bent her leg and pressed her heel hard into the couch.

I connected this act with the previous session, in which the patient had spoken with a complete lack of emotion about her father, who had abandoned her and her mother and little brothers when she was small.

After a few minutes' silence, the patient began to cry, because, she told me, of a news item about a group of children burned to death in Jamaica. Then she told me about her old Peruvian servant, an affectionate mother living in extreme poverty, to whom she would have liked to give some money had it not been for the burden of her analysis. She added that this was 'not' a complaint to me—but she had worked out that the analysis was costing her as much as the luxury cars her father was constantly trading in while he was alive, while keeping the family short of essentials.

She now began to cry again, but this time not for the Jamaican children; she was crying with rage on account of the humiliations and sacrifices she had undergone together with her mother and brothers 'while that fat old father of mine was living it up with his girlfriends. In the end he died of cancer, and it serves him right', she concluded, finally extracting her heel from the couch and stretching out her leg.

The above sequence describes a process of transformation which has, at one extreme, the evacuation of emotion in the form of action and its projection into a distant location and, at the other, its recognition and expression in words. In between, the transference reflects the transition from disavowal (*Verleugnung*) to consciousness via negation (*Verneinung*).

In order for this to be describable as a psychoanalytic transformation, the analyst must be able to establish certain correlations between the various levels and contents to which his attention is directed; in other words, it must be possible for the entities that at first present themselves as 'facts'—symptoms, shoes, tears and murdered children—to be seen as manifestations of *the very internal objects* that ultimately take the form of transferences, memories and representations in words.

In the next session, the patient brought a dream: '*It was a Sunday and I came to see you with Gianni [her first love, who had died in tragic circumstances]. You lived in a lovely old house in the little port town of Arenella, with a big veranda looking out over the sea, and you were dressed in white linen; all the furniture in the house was white too. You gave us a warm welcome and took us out on to the terrace, from*

which there was a magnificent panoramic view over the entire bay. The sea was clean and full of colour and light.'

She remarked that perhaps the reason she had dreamed of the finest period of her life was that she had suffered in the previous day's session: 'I told myself I needed to feel something positive for my father. I realize that this may be a denial, but it helps me a little to understand, and also a little to live. After yesterday's session I devoted the whole afternoon to my terrace; I am very proud of my terrace, and at the moment it's full of flowers, colour and light'. I commented it was like the one in the dream.

Next day (in the third of these consecutive sessions), she brought a very different dream: *of a young man on his deathbed. Everything was untidy and filthy: the sheets were creased and soiled with blood and faeces. You could see he was about to die; in fact, he already looked like a corpse, as the body was completely black, dry and devoid of skin, as well as having no hands. The man embraced her with his stumps, and she wept in utter distress. Then she started cleaning up the room, which was full of rubbish, bits of paper and plastic bags, 'like flotsam on the seashore'. The house was peculiar: a kind of ancient wash-house, with a canopy and a plinth in front of it.*

She associated with Gianni's fatal accident, the Jamaican children with their hands burned off, the memory of her father's hospital bed, which was soiled with faeces as he lay dying, and the contrast with the previous day's dream, in which everything had been white and clean. And then there was that funny little house.

'Where is your father buried?' I now asked, thinking it was not too much of a shot in the dark.

'In the cemetery at Arenella!' she answered in surprise. 'The cemetery near the sea ... This dream is the complete opposite of yesterday's.'

'And yesterday's dream was the opposite of hate and pain', I said, 'so today's is the opposite of their negation.'

The interpretation was then completed by the patient herself: it concerned both dreams and the transformation that had taken place during the interval between them: 'So your house in yesterday's dream was my father's grave! I turned it into a grave with a terrace looking out over the sea.'

This interpretation, then, was the end product of the transformation: the undoing of a condensation that linked present and past, internal reality and the analysis, emotion and its meaning.

In each of these brief extracts from sessions and in the overall sequence, we can discern the actual course of an analytic transformation. The first point to be made is that its progress is not linear, from action to interpretation, or from denial to recognition, but boustrophedonic—that is, alternately forwards and backwards—between negation and insight, between *Ps* and *D*.

The object of the transformation is the field of the analysis, to which the patient's representations and the analyst's theories belong—as well as the emotions and actions, which sometimes 'speak louder than words'. Conscious and unconscious; cognitive and affective; real and symbolic; intrapsychic and intersubjective: the transformation is such that none of these dimensions can be dispensed with.

II

The patient begins her session with an invective against the light pollution around her house, which prevents her from seeing the sky. She goes on to talk about atmospheric pollution and acid rain: ‘Twenty years ago when I got married, people were still talking about it, but now it’s never mentioned.’ She suddenly returns to the previous subject, but on a more personal level: ‘Last night you could see the stadium lit up as if by daylight; the light of the floodlights was absolutely swamping my house. Absolutely unheard-of violence! I asked my husband: “Since when have they been calling that football [*calcio*]?” He said, “For about 20 years, I suppose.” I answered, “And do they still show blood?”’

I comment, ‘It sounds as if the light and the blood are both excessive and as if they have to do with your marriage (the acid rain from 20 years ago).’ I confine myself to this, because I feel that the patient’s mental state would be unable to tolerate a longer intervention. A more complete interpretation would have had to show her that the meaning of the constant conjunction was that the emotions of frustration and rage expressed as an excess of blood and light swamping her house from outside were the same emotions that she had been experiencing for 20 years in her conjugal life and that, owing to the intensification resulting from their negation (‘now it’s never mentioned’), they were now threatening to burst on to the scene in an explosion coming from inside herself and to swamp her house.

Without showing any reaction, the patient starts talking again, this time more calmly and rationally, about the war, the Iraqi suicide bombers, and her concern about possible escalation into a worldwide conflict.

After listening for a while, I remark, ‘Now you’re talking about blood in a more appropriate context, but one that doesn’t concern you.’

In an artificial, oddly light and silvery voice, she now tells me that she has had a row with her son and that he broke her spectacles; then she changes her tone and says in a low, hoarse voice: ‘Doctor, in my house you are quite likely to get killed.’

In the first part of this sequence, a series of psychotic transformations can be discerned: ‘Since when have they been calling that football [*calcio*]?’ ... And do they also show blood?’ [where a symbolic equation is made between the game of football and a ‘kick’ (the same word, *calcio*, means both in Italian)—hence the blood]; the hyperbole of the light pollution: ‘The light swamped my house ... absolutely unheard-of violence!’ (a condensation of a psychic content and a sensory reality). The last sentence (‘Doctor, in my house you are quite likely to get killed’), on the other hand, expresses the same emotion in a form appropriate to its nature as psychic reality, and can be seen as the result of the process of transformation occurring in the session, which now enables her to reconnect the emotion with its terrible meaning.

This example illustrates an impairment of the symbolic function. However, it is important to realize that it does not constitute desymbolization proper, so that we must not abuse the linguistic facilitation to which that term lends itself. For the symbolic register is not actually abolished, but in fact only abused—that is, used improperly to ‘force’ reality, saturating it with the patient’s own private meanings. For this purpose, a current of thought strips the symbolic system of its real meanings and replaces them with the omnipotent meanings assigned by the unconscious

subject (that is, it treats conventional symbols as if they belonged to the group of non-conventional symbols), while another current continues to operate normally with the conventional symbols. This might explain why a psychotic, as Bion says, is someone who seems at one and the same time to be wrong and to be right, to understand and to misunderstand, to be dreaming and to be awake.

Translations of summary

Psychoanalytische Transformationen. Der Autor erläutert, wie Bion, ausgehend von Freuds Verständnis der Träume als Form des Denkens, seine Theorie der Transformationen entwickelte. Bion entwickelte eine erweiterte Theorie des „Traumgedankens“, den er als einen Prozess der Selektion und Transformation von Sinneswahrnehmungen und emotionalen Erfahrungen verstand. In dieser Theorie wird die Analysearbeit wiederum als Prozess verstanden, der nicht lediglich Symbole entziffert und bereits vorhandene unbewusste Bedeutungen aufdeckt, sondern darüber hinaus Symbole produziert – d.h. als Prozess zur Generierung von Gedanken und Zuschreibung von Bedeutung an Erfahrungen, die nie bewusst waren und nie verdrängt wurden, weil sie nie „gedacht“ worden sind. In ihrem speziellen operationalen Sinn verstanden, ist die Analyse eine Transformationssystem, das unbewusste somato-psychische Prozesse repräsentierbar und in Gedanken, Worte und Deutungen übersetzbar macht. Die Transformationsregeln, denen die Repräsentationen des Patienten und die Deutungen des Analytikers gehorchen, haben dieselbe Bedeutung für den analytischen Prozess wie jene, die Freud für den Prozess des Träumens beschrieb. Der Autor diskutiert die allgemeinen Transformationskategorien, die Bion erläuterte (Transformation durch starre Bewegung, projektive Transformation und Transformation in Halluzinose), und differenziert sie weiter aus.

Transformaciones psicoanalíticas. El autor describe cómo Bion tomó la concepción de Freud sobre los sueños como forma de pensamiento y la usó como base de su teoría de las transformaciones. Bion desarrolló una teoría ampliada del “pensamiento onírico”, entendido como un proceso de selección y transformación de experiencias sensoriales y emocionales. En esta teoría el trabajo analítico es a su vez concebido como un proceso no solo de desciframiento de símbolos, de revelación de significados inconscientes ya existentes, sino también de producción simbólica; un proceso para generar pensamientos y conferir significados a experiencias que nunca fueron conscientes ni reprimidas porque nunca fueron “pensadas”. El análisis, en su sentido operativo específico, se vuelve un sistema de transformación mediante el cual procesos somatopsíquicos inconscientes adquieren las condiciones para la representabilidad y devienen capaces de ser traducidos en pensamientos, palabras e interpretaciones. Las reglas de transformación aplicadas por el paciente en sus representaciones y aquellas aplicadas por el analista en sus interpretaciones tienen la misma importancia para el proceso analítico que aquellas descritas por Freud para el proceso onírico. El autor discute las amplias categorías de transformación aducidas por Bion (movimiento rígido, proyectiva, y en alucinosis) e introduce algunas distinciones más entre ellas.

Transformations en psychanalyse. L’auteur décrit comment Bion a considéré la conception freudienne des rêves comme une forme de pensée, et l’a utilisée comme la base de sa théorie des transformations. Bion a développé une vaste théorie de la « pensée onirique » comprise comme un processus de sélection et de transformation des expériences sensorielles et émotionnelles. Dans cette théorie, le travail de l’analyse est à son tour conçu comme un processus qui non seulement déchiffre les symboles ou révèle des significations inconscientes déjà existantes, mais aussi comme une production de symboles, comme un processus générant des pensées et attribuant un sens à des vécus qui n’ont jamais été conscients et qui n’ont jamais été refoulés parce qu’ils n’ont jamais été « pensés ». L’analyse, dans son sens spécifique opérationnel, devient un système de transformation par où des processus somatopsychiques inconscients acquièrent les conditions de représentativité et deviennent aptes à être traduits en pensées, mots et interprétations. Les règles de la transformation appliquées par le patient à ses représentations, et celles appliquées par l’analyste à ses interprétations, ont la même importance pour le processus analytique que celles décrites par Freud pour les processus de rêve. L’auteur discute les grandes catégories de transformation apportées par Bion (transformation rigide, transformation projective et hallucinose) et introduit quelques distinctions supplémentaires parmi elles.

Transformazioni psiconalítiche. Bion assunse la concezione freudiana del sogno come una “forma di pensiero” e la pose alla base della teoria delle trasformazioni. Egli sviluppò una teoria allargata del pensiero

onirico dello stato di veglia, considerato come un processo di selezione e trasformazione delle esperienze sensoriali e emozionali. Questa teoria comporta che il lavoro dell'analisi è a sua volta concepito, non solo come un processo di decifrazione simbolica, di disvelamento di significati inconsci già dati; ma anche di produzione simbolica, di processo per generare pensieri e conferire significato a quelle esperienze, che non sono mai state coscienti e non sono mai state rimosse, perché non sono mai state "pensate". Il dispositivo analitico diviene, nel suo senso operativo specifico, un sistema di trasformazione attraverso il quale i processi somatopsichici inconsci acquisiscono le condizioni della rappresentabilità e divengono suscettibili di tradursi in pensieri, parole e interpretazioni. Le regole di trasformazione adoperate dal paziente nelle sue rappresentazioni e quelle adottate dall'analista nelle sue interpretazioni, hanno, per il processo analitico, la stessa importanza delle regole indicate da Freud per il processo onirico. L'autore si sofferma pertanto sulle tre grandi categorie di trasformazione indicate da Bion (lineari, proiettive, in allucinosi) allo scopo di introdurre alcune ulteriori distinzioni.

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