

REPEATING, SYMBOLIZING AND REMEMBERING. ¹

"What is our past but a series of dreams? What difference can there be between remembering dreams and remembering the past?"

(Jorge Luiz Borges: Borges, Oral, 1979).

"If our view of memory is correct, in higher organisms every act of perception is, to some degree, an act of creation, and every act of memory is, to some degree, an act of imagination".

(Gerald M. Edelman; Giulio Tononi: A Universe of consciousness, 2000).

Raul Hartke ²

Remembering psychic representations rendered unconscious by repression (*lato sensu*) has always been a central focus of the psychoanalytic theory and technique developed by Freud. This, even after he acknowledged that the id also hosts drives without representation (Freud, 1923; Green, 1995a) and that, very often, the analyst's constructions cannot promote the remembrance of experiences or internal psychic processes, but despite this produce an identical therapeutic effect (Freud, 1937b).

In his last formulations, Freud says that the genuinely analytic task (1937a) consists of the *a posteriori* (*Nachträglich*) review of primitive repressive processes, used by the infantile ego as the only possible resource to fight against threatening drives. This review enables substituting these primal repressions by reactions appropriate to a more mature psychic condition. This task requires remembering and reproducing, in the psychic sphere, the experiences, drives and forgotten childhood conflicts responsible for the aforementioned repressions. Considering the relative intensity of the forces in conflict (ego and drives), according to Freud (1937^a), assigns greater value to the economic point of view, at the same time as the topographic and dynamic ones.

In consonance with these therapeutic objectives, it appears to me that Freud has always sustained a concept of the psychic apparatus basically centered on

¹ Report presented to the panel "El psicoanálisis cura aun mediante la rememoración?" (Does psychoanalysis also cure through remembering) at the 45th Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association, on 25/07/2007, Berlin, Germany.

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memory. This is rendered explicit in the known models proposed in Letter 52 (Masson, 1985) and in chapter seven of the Interpretation of Dreams (Freud, 1900). I do not find any evidence that this point of view was abandoned after the introduction of the so-called *topographical point of view* (Freud, 1923).

My contribution to the present panel will not discuss the role of memory in mental functioning (something I consider unarguable), but the place and function of remembering in the psychoanalytic therapeutic process (which is currently being questioned).

In order to develop it, I will begin with Bion's conception (1962, 1963) of the psychic apparatus as an apparatus to generate thoughts and to think them, i.e., to create and use symbolic formations. And further: an apparatus that is created and develops based on the relationship with another, already able to function in an appropriate psychic manner. In my opinion Winnicott's theory (1971) about the potential space, which constitutes the psychic *stricto sensu*, also conceives the mind basically as a generator of symbols, although it is based on different premises from those of Bion. Thus, I will consider the mental apparatus to be essentially a *symbolization apparatus*.

As I see it, this formulation provides new space for theoretical, clinical and technical reflections and implications, including modifications as to the place and function of remembrance in the therapeutic process.

It is known that, thanks to the alpha function and the thinking apparatus postulated by Bion (1962), this symbolization apparatus is responsible not only for transforming perceptions and raw emotions into psychic - symbolic - elements, but also for the development of the latter in terms of different levels of abstraction and complexity, as well as for its distinct possible uses. There is also the possibility of the reversion of the alpha function, with the generation of the so-called "bizarre objects" (Bion, 1962), i.e., perceptions and emotions with aggregated fragments of psychic functions.

Based on Bion, Meltzer (1986) emphasizes that the capacity to form idiosyncratic autonomous symbols to represent the meaning of emotional experiences constitutes the essence of the mind. It enables keeping these experiences as remembrances (memory as a psychic function), using them to think and transform them into different symbolic forms of communication, which is different from only recording and retaining facts (memory as a property of the brain),

manipulating them logically and transmitting them as bits of information. In this context, for the purposes of this report, I would like to highlight his observation that a large proportion of human functioning, as for instance bodily functions, automatic reactions and habitual adaptive acts and conventional social behaviors, are not symbolic, non-mentalized, or at least proto-mental. They are based on innate patterns, conditionings, training or imitation of the external qualities of others.

All these different levels and uses of psychic formations, including facts that have not been psychically digested, as well as “bizarre” phenomena, can be found in the analytic space, in the analysand, in the analyst or in the dyad. In order to guide myself and work analytically with them, I use a “navigation tool”, consisting of an adaptation of Bion’s well-known grid (1963, 1977). Following his suggestions, I dispose it in a system of Cartesian coordinates, but I change the distribution and polarization of the levels and uses of psychic functions, also contemplating the negative phenomena, in consonance with his proposal of a negative grid (Bion, 1963). (Figura 1). I will use it in this report to present and provide a foundation to my points of view regarding current objectives and technical procedures of psychoanalysis, naturally including the meanings and functions of remembering, as well as repetition and other correlated phenomena.

On the vertical axis are disposed the different levels of psychical working out, of abstraction as Bion says (1963,1977), but in an inverse position to its grid. On the positive upper extreme are maximally symbolic formations resulting from the work of the alpha function and the thinking apparatus (Bion, 1963, 1977). On the lower one would be the “bizarre” phenomena (Bion, 1962) resulting from the inversion of the alpha function.

On the horizontal axis are the different possible uses of the psychic formations. On the positive right pole, the purpose of this use is to learn from emotional experience. On the other, negative one, it aims at to evade this experience.

At point zero, i.e., where two axes cross, are the psychically undigested facts described by Bion (1962) as beta-elements.

The right upper quadrant receives what I would call creative imagination, comparable to playing as described by Winnicott (1971). The upper left contains the classically described neurotic defenses, corresponding to column 2 of Bion’s grid, and includes neurotic daydreaming mentioned by Winnicott (1971). The lower left

corresponds to the psychotic defenses and would leave the right one open to investigate the possibility of psychotic formation being used in order to learn from experience.

Actually, besides these two axes mentioned – horizontal and vertical, x and y, I also included a third, the “Z” axis, regarding the type of object relation (Figure 2). In the anterior pole I would place the essentially narcissistic relations and in the posterior one what Bion (1992) calls “*social-ism*” as opposed to narcissism. This presentation, however, would render my talk of today more complex and longer. Therefore, I limit myself to mentioning that the symbolic constructions used to learn from the experience of intimate affective relations (Meltzer, 1986) would be included in the posterior upper right quadrant. In other words, it would represent the “shared playing” described by Winnicott (1971), the essence of creative living and mental health.

The phenomena situated in each of these quadrants have, in the analytic space, different phenomenological characteristics, distinct transference manifestations and countertransferences; they also require varied forms of analytic work. For instance, I would say that the more typical of the upper left quadrant, the more they present the properties described classically by Freud and the more they lend themselves to the psychoanalytic technique he proposed. The closer to the horizontal axis, the more they require using the analyst’s mind, with its own alpha function, capacity for *reverie*, etc. in order to, as Meltzer says (1986), dream for patient the emotional experience that he himself does not manage to dream. Furthermore, in such states, what I call “trellis interpretations” prove useful (Hartke 2005), thinking about the structures used in gardens to favor the growth of certain leafy plants. They are probably the equivalent of the non-saturated interventions described by Ferro (1995). The objective would be to further the symbolization process. The analytic space, in these cases functions as a sort of “symbol incubator” (Hartke, 2005). The more they can be classified in the lower left quadrant, the more likely the setting is to become a *holding* environment in the sense given to the term by Winnicott (1965).

I mention these situations simply as examples of the possibilities of using the diagram. The basic aspect of all this is, in my view, constituted by the need and importance of identifying and conceptualizing the different types of clinical phenomena that can be found in the analytic space, even during the course of a

single session, which require appropriate changes in the modality of analytic work. Thus, the repetition in action described by Freud in 1914, could actually have different meanings. It would correspond to a phenomenon that can be located close to the horizontal axis, but that can be used both to evade learning from experience (repeat resistentially in order not to remember) and to communicate to the analyst the experiences that cannot be verbalized, for instance. In the latter case it would be located at some point further to the right. It should however be emphasized that, as in any other human phenomenon, its point of location would vary in each case within the range mentioned above (i.e., more or less close to the horizontal axis, but at different possible points between the right and left poles.)

The purpose is always to situate the phenomena that are occurring in the analytic relationship, whether it be in the analysand, the analyst or the dyad. Thus, a dream – an eminently symbolic product – can, however be told by the analysand *during the session* as a fact, almost as something belonging to another person. In other words, at that time, as a non-symbolic, non-mentalized form. It can also be told in order to evade contact with an emotional experience that is taking place here and now, thus constituting a “column two” clinical phenomenon, i.e., belonging to the left upper quadrant.

All of this, as I already mentioned, is also valid for the analyst’s functioning during the session. Thus, in my opinion, the concept of *reverie* should be restricted to the phenomena in the mind of the analyst that can be situated in the posterior right upper quadrant, i.e., imaginative formations originating in the intimate emotional contact with the patient, and used to know what is happening at that time in the analytic space. It is unlikely that something arising in the analyst’s mind during a session would have nothing to do with what is taking place in the relationship at that time. In other words, it would certainly be located at some point along the posterior positive Z axis. But I also think it prudent not to completely exclude the possibility of belonging to the anterior, narcissistic segment. In this case I would not consider it *reverie*. Furthermore, it can always be used by the analyst to evade the present emotional experience, and also under these circumstances I would not categorize it as *reverie*. Thus I think about the possibility that the “*figurability*” so usefully described by the Botella couple (2002), is a phenomenon that can also be categorized in the posterior right upper quadrant, but much closer to the horizontal axis. In other words, a phenomenon without much psychic elaboration, an almost

hallucination, according to the Botellas (2002), but arising *in* and *through* the relationship, and used to get to learn what is happening with the patient.

As a consequence of the concept of the psychic apparatus essentially as an apparatus for symbolization and the implications resulting from this, some of them described in my discussion of the adaptation of the grid, many contemporary analysts – and I am one of them – consider that the ultimate objective and specific curative factor of psychoanalysis consists basically of broadening the analysand's potentials for psychic processing, thus increasing his capacity for containing the emotions. In the words of Ferro (1995), always so well attuned to Bionian thinking, it consists of enabling "... an expansion of the mind and of the possibility of thinking" (p. 27). In the terms of the diagram, it consists in taking mental functioning as far as possible towards the posterior right upper quadrant. In this way there will be less need to use the classically described defensive mechanisms. In the terms used by Freud, in his last concepts about the therapeutic task, cited at the beginning of this report, it consists in maturing the ego so that it can then renounce (to) the archaic defenses. There is thus a crucial change of objectives, from the defenses and resistances towards the broadening of the capacities of ego symbolization – from the contents to the container (Ferro, 1995) -, considering their relative or primary incapacity to perform this work. The formulation is, therefore, broader than the Freudian propositions in the sense of rendering the unconscious conscious, or placing the ego where the id was, insofar as it involves basically transforming into psychic – both conscious and unconscious – what until that time was proto-mental. In Bionian terms, this occurs thanks to a broadening of the alpha function (of which *reverie* is one of the factors) and of the thinking apparatus (Bion, 1962), favored by the relationship with an object that has the capacity of containing, *reverie*, *negative capability*, etc. (Bion, 1962,1970).

As I see it, all the latter considerations do not exclude analytic work along the general lines classically proposed by Freud for certain patients, or rather, during certain periods of analysis or moments in the sessions, as I suggested on describing the possible uses of the adaptation of Bion's grid. However, the removal of defenses and the recovery of unconscious memories would not constitute the therapeutic factor in itself, as Freud proposed, but only a means, an instrument, a way to help the analysand to broaden his general capacity of processing and symbolizing the emotional experiences, as I already mentioned. In this same direction, Sugarman

(2006) considers that the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis does not derive from an awareness, in itself, of specific rejected psychic contents, but of a general broadening of *insightfulness* which this provides. In other words, from access to a “metallization” that had so far been repudiated or inhibited, going from a mode of functioning based above all on action to a verbal symbolic level of mental organization.

In order to present my position specifically as regards the forms of memory that can be found in analytic space, as well as the place and function of remembering in the therapeutic process, once again I use the adaptation of Bion’s grid. I distinguish the following possibilities:

1) Memory as record and preservation of psychically undigested fact, that can be classified around point zero of the diagram. It is possible that the so-called “procedural memories” (Schacter, 2001) can be categorized in the same way. They constitute *ways-of-experiencing the other* (Fonagy, 1999) that, although derived from early relational experiences, are not conscious, nor even unconscious. They are non-symbolic records, without memorable psychic contents. However, they can later be represented psychically and modified by their finding, interpretation and working through in the analytic relationship.

Another type of memory that can be classified in this first category would consist of the record of certain traumatic experiences that are reported by patients as facts that are almost alien to them, and not lived through as a personal psychic experience. Or else, situations in which people, as Bion says (1970), feel the pain (or the pleasure), but do not manage to suffer it, nor, therefore, discover it..

Except for this, I believe that we should not classify as psychic *stricto sensu*, the reproduction, learned by heart in a completely unknown language, without any understanding of its meaning, for instance. And this, although in the present case we are using memory, words, etc. I mention this situation as an extreme cases among so many other much more subtle and daily ones, of the reproduction of supposedly psychic contents, which have actually not been mentally processed.

2) Memory as an already psychic phenomenon, i.e., processed by the alpha function, but used to evade real contact with the emotional experience prevailing at one time, whether it be in the relationship or of the relationship itself. In other words, as a phenomenon that can be classified in some place of the left upper quadrant,

corresponding to different levels of abstraction in column two of Bion's grid (1963,1977).

3) Memory as a psychic function used to learn from emotional experience in intimate relations and to create symbolic representations of these experiences, i.e., a memory that can be situated in the posterior right upper quadrant. This form of memory, or, more probably, a very special form of it, is constituted by what Bion (1970) calls "*dream-like memory*" (p.70). He considers it the essence of analytic work, and it is favored by suppression of memory, desire and comprehension. It is spontaneous, non-sought, arising unexpectedly, clearly with the appearance of a coherent whole, and disappearing without leaving any trace. According to Bion (1970) it is memory of the psychic reality, which cannot be apprehended by the sense organs. It is essential for contact with this psychic experience as well as for its "*evolution*" and transformation into psychic growth, both of the analysand and of the analyst, a growth which is always atemporal and catastrophic. In brief, it is crucial for the indispensable transformation of knowledge and of understanding into *being*. .

It is thus different from the memory commonly considered, which consists of conscious attempts at remembering, and has dominant background of sensoriality. The latter memory serves as a defense against the fear that something unknown and unknowable (in the sense that it can only be experienced) will appear, and in this time is of essence.

Where could we situate the *dream-like memories* in the diagram? At the most distal point possible from the posterior right upper quadrant? Anyhow, wherever we place it, it will be at the edge of the obscure, formless infinite of the unknowable thing-in-itself, from which the geometrician rescued us by inventing Cartesian coordinates.

Precisely because of the fear of an emotional cataclysm when faced with the "catastrophic change" derived from this "*becoming reconciled to, or at one with*", oneself (Bion, 1970, p. 34), the tendency of the analysand, the analyst or the analytic pair is to retreat from the *dream-like memories*, towards other quadrants of the diagram.

I would sum up the general situation of remembrance in the analytic therapeutic process when conceived on the lines advocated in this report, as follows: we need to manage to "dream" (in the sense of *dream-work-alpha*; Bion, 1992) our own *memories* (i.e., storage of undigested facts) so that we can, in this way,

transform them into *remembering* (constituted with alpha elements) and then use them to learn from the experience in our intimate relations.

Besides, we should not confuse the sensorial cover needed to render the emotions apprehensible to the “sensory organ for the perception of psychic qualities”, that is, for the conscience (Freud, 1900; Bion, 1962), with emotions themselves, which do not have form, odor, color, etc. Based on Bion, I call this coating process of the emotions “*originary hallucinating*” (alucinância originária). It provides the foundation for the mind and can be observed in our nighttime dreams. In my view, the “hallucinosi” described by Bion (1970) consists in confusion between this sensory coating and emotion itself. However, after we use the memory to get to know and understand the emotional reality prevailing in the session, we also need to avoid the risk of this hallucinosi which is always present.

Increasingly I think (Hartke, 2006) that the process of generation, development and use of symbolic formations has as its best locus of observation and analytic work the phenomena that occur between the patient and the psychoanalyst. In other words, in the potential space described by Winnicott (1971), this playful intermediate area in which everything is at the same time, objectively perceived and subjectively conceived. A space of transformations (Bion, 1965; Ferro 2005), of metaphorization (Modell, 2006), of transcendence, as well of multiplication of the vertices (Bion, 1965; Meltzer, 1986) of perceptions and raw emotions, of history and internal objects. In consonance, my technical objective is to achieve “shared playing” with the analysand, knowing meanwhile that he, I, or both of us as a pair, will be most of the time incapable or resistant to this. Whether it be through the collapse of space due to an experience of fusion with the other, or by taking refuge in omnipotent, magical playing, or even for playing alone in the presence of someone reliable. Besides, there is the possibility of an excessive deviation towards what is objectively perceived, leading to loss of contact with creative imagination, or towards what is subjectively conceived, transforming external reality into an essentially subjective phenomenon. Thus, attentive not only to the conditions of functioning of the patient’s free association and my evenly suspended attention, but also, and possibly mainly, the possibility or not of “shared playing” between the two of us.. The referential model of my technical procedure is the (*squiggle game*) proposed by Winnicott (1968), obviously verbal in this case. I find it comparable to the shared dream “exploration” technique described by Meltzer (1983) and considered by him to be the most

important base for the development of the patient's self-analysis capacity. The other forms of intervention constitute resources in search of this objective.

The experience of shared playing in the analytic space can then be internalized by the dyad participants, each of them in their way. The internalization will constitute or broaden the internal playful space of symbolization, i.e., the mind proper. In a way, I think of an *alpha space*, generating the alpha function in the individual minds. In this sense I refer, playfully, to an "*between subjective*" concept, rather than an intersubjective one. From that angle, although it depends on individuals and exists through them, what is psychic is born and develops in the relational space with the other. In this same direction, and also inspired by Winnicott, Ogden (1997) proposes that the analytic process results in the construction of an "*intersubjective dream space*" (p. 108) which will enable "... the expansion of the capacity of analyst and analysand to create 'a place to live', in the area of experiencing that lies between reality and fantasy " (p.121). Similarly, because it also values something that has to do with the playful potential space described by Winnicott (1975), Green (1995b) connects psychic normality and the objective of analysis to the broadening of what he calls "*tertiary processes*". These are processes that place the primary and secondary processes in a relationship that is simultaneously conjunction and disjunction, in such a way that each of them fertilizes the other with its properties that favor optimized mental functioning between creativity and stability, and at the same time, limits those that render this objective difficult. In my opinion, the capacity for playfulness, together with the capacity to be moved, in human relations, constitute essential criteria for mental health and, thus, basic therapeutic objectives.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that all of this process expanding the mentalization capacity is only possible based on a foundation constituted by the relationship with an object that has the capacity to receive emotions, containing, "*negative capability*", *reverie*, tolerance of doubt and of a feeling of infinitude, etc., described by Bion (1962,1970). All of this involves a capacity of "good enough adaptation " (Winnicott, 1955) of the analyst's mental functioning in a session, or, as Ferro says , of "modulation" in the analytic field. In my opinion, this emotional "environment" not only constitutes a necessary condition for the analyst's interventions to favor the expansion of mentalization, but also represents a therapeutic factor in itself, in the sense that it enables a mutative relational

experience. Thus, for instance, the permanent attempt by Ferro (2005) to be *at-one-ment* (Bion, 1970) with his patients, using the unconscious returns that they give him about the current conditions of the relationship, in my opinion constitutes something therapeutic in itself. There are several aspects that should be debated about this factor, as well as about the technique to establish and try to maintain it, but this is already beyond my present aims, i.e., the discussion of the function of remembering in the therapeutic process. I would only emphasize that emotional attunement and the analyst's interventions enable and complement each other mutually and recursively. .

The dialogue on the invention of writing, between Socrates and Phaedrus, told in *Phaedrus*, by Plato, could serve as a point of departure and fertile metaphor for the formulations against remembrance in the analytic process advocated in this report. The God Theuth, mythical inventor of numbers, calculation, geometry, astronomy, the game of checkers, dice and, above all of writing, visits Thamos, king of all Egypt, seeking to convince him that these inventions should be distributed to all the inhabitants. As to writing, he says the following: *"This is a branch of knowledge, o King, that will make the Egyptians wiser, and improve their memory. The medicine of memory and wisdom has thus been discovered"*.

But Thamos retorts: *"O Most Ingenious Theuth, a man is capable of creating the fundamentals of an art, but another must judge what part of damage and of usefulness it has for all who are going to use it. Now, you, at this time, as the father of writing, you are, because you like him, point out to him effects contrary to those it expresses This is because the discovery will provoke in souls the forgetfulness of all one learns, due to the lack of exercise of memory already because, trusting in writing, it is from outside, by means of strange signs, and not from inside, thanks to ones own effort, that they will obtain the memories. Therefore, you have not discovered a remedy for memory, but for remembrance. To the scholars it offers the appearance of wisdom and not truth since, thanks to you receiving a large amount of knowledge, without the need for instruction, they will consider themselves all-knowing, when they are mostly ignorant, and furthermore, difficult to deal with, because they have the appearance of sages but are not really so "* (1997, p. 120-121).

Further on, contrasting this form of recording with the live and lively discourse of the sage, Socrates speaks of the "*logos spermatikós*", the seed word, the only one that can fertilize the souls that are able to receive it.

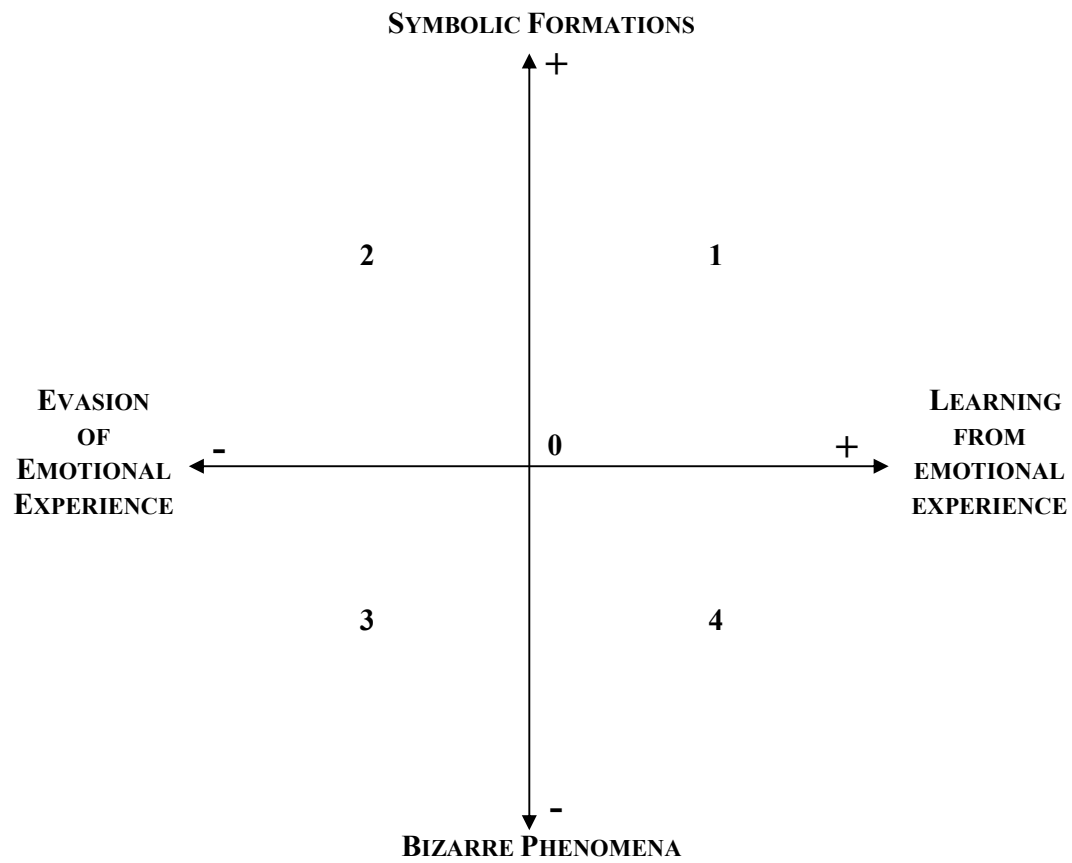
In my opinion, therapeutic moments are those in the analytic relationship in which both minds become available and capable of receiving and transforming words into *logos spermatikós*, seeds of dreams, imagination and playing. In other words of creative psychic life.

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FIGURE - 1



0 = Facts that have not been psychically digested (beta-elements).

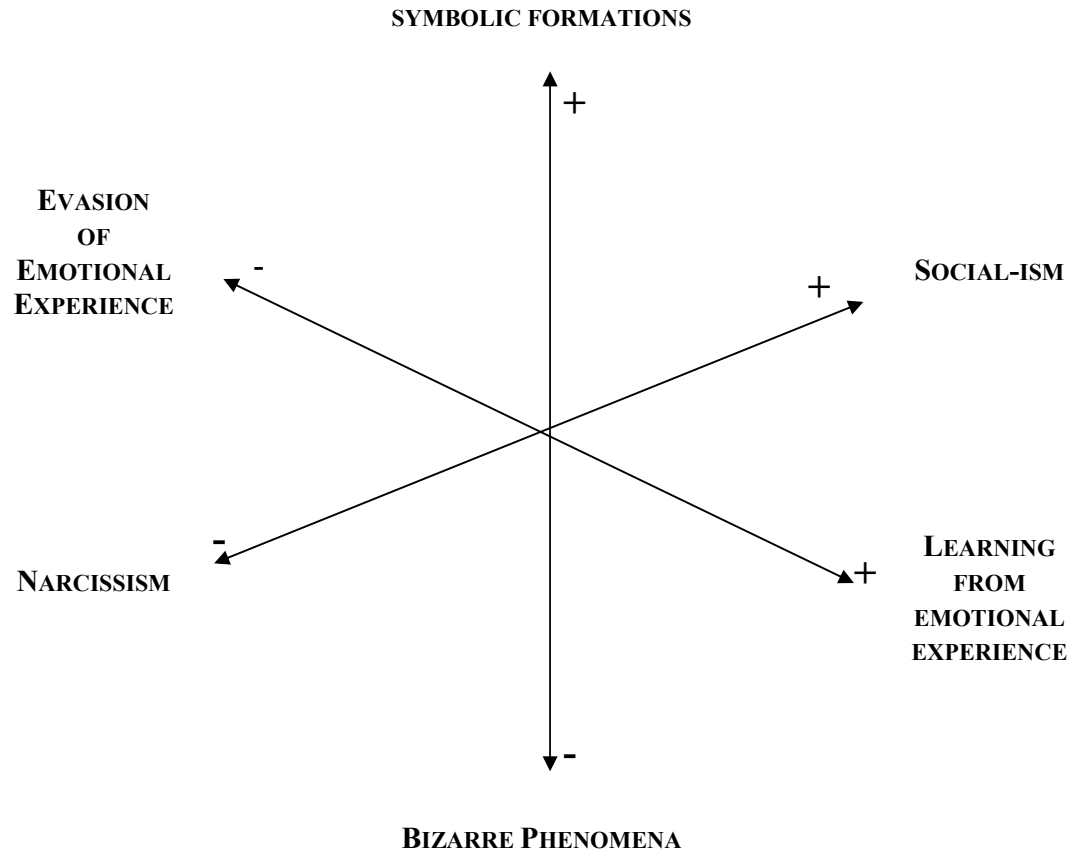
1 = Creative imagination.

2 = Neurotic defenses.

3 = Psychotic defenses.

4 = ?

FIGURA - 2



Posterior upper right quadrant = Symbolic formations used to learn from emotional experience in intimate relations (shared playing).