



character and history. Working through his nightmare's unconscious fantasy system included retrieval of painful memories and reconstruction of a tormented childhood.

Multiple dream functions and meanings have been proposed since Freud's formulations (Fiss, 2000). Neuroscience holds promise, but the psychology of the dream is in a different domain of discourse. Intriguing propositions such as implicit memories in dreams facilitating matching of recent and past memories, new learning, or solving problems and providing creative solutions, or dreaming sleep correlating with developmental plasticity, etc. are all subjects of ongoing dream research. The functions of dreams and dreaming await further clarification and confirmation.

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The Unconscious

What is your theory of unconscious processes? What are other theories that you would contrast with your conceptualization?

Response by **Giuseppe Civitaresè**

The two pillars of my conception of the unconscious are Bion's notion of waking dream thought and his radically social vision of the birth of the subject. We dream not only at night but also during the day. A set of mental operations that are unknown to us, which Bion called the α -function, constantly alphabetize the crude sensory and emotional stimuli (or β -elements) received from the environment in which we are immersed, and transform them mainly into visual images (α -elements). These absolutely idiosyncratic pictograms are in a form that can be readily memorized and are used for dreaming and thinking. In order for the subject to be awake and conscious, as well as to learn from experience, a whole series of stimuli must previously have been conscious and, after processing by the α -function, have been "unconscious" (Bion, 1992, p. 353). If the α -function is deficient, undigested accumulations of β -elements may give rise to pathologies of various kinds.

A child is born with a rudimentary *consciousness* (α -function). It feels stimuli but is unaware of itself. It perceives without understanding. This "rudimentary consciousness" (Bion, 1967, p. 117), Bion notes, "is not associated with an unconscious. All impressions of the self are of equal value; all are conscious. The mother's capacity for reverie is the receptor organ for the infant's harvest of self-sensation gained by its conscious" (*ibid.*, p. 116). This

is an astonishing image: at the dawn of life the mother is her baby's unconscious, and therefore a complement to its primitive conscious! By her reverie, her ability to receive and transform the child's projective identifications, the mother expresses her love for the child, contains its anxieties and provides it with the means of forming an α -function of its own based on the experience of being cared for by her.

In my conception, the theoretical foundations laid by Bion are built on by the subsequent contributions of Grotstein and Ogden (analysis seen as dreaming the patient's interrupted and undreamt dreams, the dialectic of the 'positions' in the generation of experience, and the concept of the intersubjective third); by Ferro's development, based on the Barangers and Bion, of a theory of the analytic field (the uncompromising adoption of an anti-realistic vertex in the session, summed up in the concepts of the oneiric spectrum and of transformation in dreaming, of the casting of characters in the analytic dialogue, and so on); and by hints from the theory of meaning taken from Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction.

In this model, conscious and unconscious are situated along a continuum, just as the two surfaces of a Möbius strip constantly merge into each other. They are admittedly separated by a membrane made up of a large number of α -elements, namely the contact barrier, but this barrier is semi-permeable and dynamic, and subject to continuous processes of synthesis and lysis. No mental event lacks an unconscious aspect. *Conscious and unconscious ultimately become two vertices for observing one and the same mental phenomenon.* The same process of abstraction and categorization is at work in the formation of both ideograms/ α -elements and concepts. Dreaming/thinking is the mind's way of forgetting differences and retaining models of the relations between things, thus assigning them a personal meaning. Basically, *such a definition of dreams permits a re-evaluation of the constructive/po(i)etic/aesthetic virtualities of the unconscious.*

Dreaming is not only the guardian of sleep. A dream is not merely the most reliable Baedeker's guide to the unconscious; it is not born of the differential between conscious and unconscious, but actually creates that differential. Whereas for Freud the unconscious creates dreams, for Bion dreams create the unconscious. Dreaming is the main component of the 'psychoanalytic function of the personality', which operates in a twofold register, namely the *un/conscious* register – that is, one that is both conscious and unconscious. An individual who achieves this capacity for binocular vision can apprehend reality from a multiplicity of emotionally significant viewpoints, and perhaps it is this that we call mental maturity and health. The need to know the emotional truth of one's existence assumes the role played by the drives for Freud. Proto-emotions, transformed and made thinkable by the α -function, are food for the mind because they impart their cognitive and motivational contribution to the subject. They augment the subject's capacity to perform un/conscious psychological work and hence to dream current emotional experience.

A fluid, osmotic interchange, or constant reciprocal 'visual accommodation', takes place between conscious and unconscious experience, which are

linked by an *antagonistic solidarity*, the secret of a cooperative understanding, the intuition of a common destiny when confronted with the stimuli of internal and external reality. Seen in these terms, the unconscious is located not 'behind' or 'underneath' the conscious, but *inside* it. It is not only close to it (and/or hidden), but *forms part of it* (Ogden, 2009). As with other dichotomies that organize meaning in classical psychoanalytic theory (Civitaresse, 2008a, 2008b), Bion thus dialecticizes the binary opposition between the primary and secondary processes and between the pleasure and reality principles (Grotstein, 2007). The findings of neuroscientific research seem to prove him right. As for example Westen (1999, p. 1071) maintains, 'the distinction between primary and secondary process thinking has to be recast'.

The unconscious, then, is a set of processes of meaning creation extending along a gradient from the sensory/semiotic (which is the exclusive 'mode' of the inaccessible, unrepressed or implicit unconscious) to the symbolic in the most complete sense of the word, and it is not given at birth but develops in the primary relationship with the object. In daily life this thought/dream is constantly at work in extracting quanta of meaning, patterns and images to be composed into narrations out of the chaotic flow of stimuli from reality. In analysis, any reverie likewise permits contact with the sequences of α -elements synthesized by the α -function, and anything that is recounted is (in virtual terms) always at the same time a narrative derivative of waking dream thought. Furthermore, there is no event in the analytic field that cannot be seen as co-generated by the analytic couple.

This model of unconscious processes arose in Bion with the aim not of adding one more theory to the existing corpus, but of composing a meta-theory – that is, of describing the functioning of concepts common to these theories. The equivalences between the concepts of dream work and α -function, unconscious fantasy and waking dream thought, projective identification and an intersubjective theory of the birth of the psyche are obvious; the latter deriving from the former in each case. Freud's concept of censorship could be reformulated as the consequence of a deficient contained/container relationship as a particular case of a larger mechanism of psychic functioning. Sexuality can be seen from the new vertex of the to a greater or lesser extent creative mating of the minds in the session – as a live chronicle of the greater or lesser degree of emotional unison (Ferro, 1992). The life of the drives is embodied in notions such as the *H*, *L* and *K* links, the proto-mental system, the truth drive or β -elements.

It could, however, just as validly be maintained that this approach constitutes a change of paradigm as described by Kuhn (1962). Whereas Bion does not deny Freud's concepts, he does not in fact mention them, or hardly at all. He ambiguously takes them for granted, but in a way that ultimately removes them tacitly from the stage, and we instead find ourselves speaking a completely different language. While in theory retained, they are actually shattered into a kaleidoscope of new concepts that call for the continuous adoption of new points of view. Moreover, by virtue of the subtle interplay of cross-references, identifications and differentiations in which they are sus-

pending, and of their deliberately unsaturated character, they demand from the analyst the constant exercise of doubt and a critical attitude towards any form of school-related dogmatism.

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Response by **Jorge Luis Maldonado**⁶

The dynamic unconscious in the analytic relationship

Research on the unconscious initially centred on considerations of memory and its vicissitudes. Interest subsequently extended to the transformations of the unconscious phantasies which arise in the analysand–analyst relationship and are manifested in the analytic process. This process comprises cycles of dynamic, economic, and structural changes that occur in the analysand and assume meaning in the transference relationship. I shall refer to unconscious processes here only in so far as they are observable in the analytic relationship.

Isolated manifestations of the unconscious can be observed in the pathology of everyday life and may also be considered by other disciplines. However, what is specific to psychoanalysis is the study of, and the drawing of conclusions about, unconscious phantasies and the subject's distortions of his or her infantile experiences, which are evaluated in the relationship between a subject and his or her object in the analytic situation. The purpose of the analytic situation is to create – for both the analysand and the analyst – a context of containment and of meaning to permit the construction of hypotheses about unconscious phenomena. The rule of abstinence and the establishment of the setting are intended to limit the arbitrariness of the analyst, and constitute the context of containment.

Changes, transformations, and working through

The introduction of the concept of 'working through' (Freud, 1914) was a milestone in the recognition of analysis as a succession of transformations. The dynamic conception thus relates not only to the situation of opposing forces, but also to the transformations of unconscious phantasies arising in

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