

# The grid of psychoanalytic elements and myth as a model of analytic experience

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## Abstract

In order to allow the base of scientific psychoanalytic theory and the thoughts of the analyst to correspond, Bion proposes the Grid of psychoanalytical elements as a useful tool to represent the positions that the mind of the analyst may adopt during the analysis session, to predispose himself to listening and shared knowledge. The Grid provides an opportunity of factual recognition and tolerance to the transformation of thoughts, in order to resonate with the O elements that have emerged during the session.

Myth, occupying a specific position in the C row of the Grid's genetic axis, constitutes an example of it and configures itself as a model that can be used to enlighten unconscious aspects that would otherwise remain incomprehensible.

**Key-words:** Grid, analytic experience mythologem, re-signification, alpha element

Through myth, Bion provided a description of the human and group drama in search of a knowledge about themselves, moreover, he used it as an emblem of emotional situations and as an opportunity to describe the K links, through which the individual becomes aware of the emotional experience that concern him extracting elements that enable him to learn from such experience. The manner in which myths are configured are somewhat similar to models; that is abstractions of an emotive experience or as a materialization of an abstraction.<sup>1</sup>

Underlining the vivid criticisms directed at psychoanalytic knowledge of lacking a scientific base; it being too theoretic but also excessively concrete, was the necessity to find a correct balance between abstraction and achievement, thus, in 1963 Bion proposes a grid as an instrument that may make the practice more rigorous and precise and a valid support to elaborate the emerging aspects throughout the analytic practice, concurring at the same time to improve the communicative opportunities amongst the analyst and analysand and improving the confrontation between analysts. The grid constitutes an exploration model for analytic practice, throughout the recording of interpretations, verbal formulations, gestures on which the analyst can later meditate through a “*psychoanalytic game*”<sup>2</sup>, as a work of reflection on the elements of psychoanalysis with the aim of sharpening the psychoanalytic thought and the self ability to enter in emotive resonance with the patients.

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<sup>1</sup> Bion, W. R., (1962), Chapter Twentyfive, in *Learning from Experience*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1972, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Twenty, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 124.

The grid is presented as a mathematical matrix built with vertical columns and horizontal rows, the rows intercept and generate a cell characterized by a letter, this indicates the row, and a number indicates the column. Bion, specifically, refers to two axes, called *genetic axis* and *axis of usage*: the first classifies thoughts through their level of abstraction and development, whilst the second recalls the practical usage of thought by the apparatus entailed in thinking thoughts, Bion refers to the specific use of thoughts, both epistemologically existent and genetically precedent to the ability of thinking.

The grid is composed of a series of *psychoanalytical elements*, of personality functions<sup>3</sup> that may be observed in analysis through three dimensions: sense, myth and passion. If a psychoanalytical object doesn't possess such dimensions it is not thorough.

The first dimension describes the object as a promoter of a sensitive experience as defined by *common thought*, this means by the possibility that the real or unconscious-emotional aspects are recognised by one person through more than one sense, or by different persons through only one sense. "*I'll consider – Bion writes – that an object may be perceivable by the psychoanalytical investigation, if, and only if, it satisfies similar conditions to those that are satisfied when the presence of a physical object is confirmed by the evidence of two or more senses.*"<sup>4</sup> In this manner, not only do we recognise in the psyche an element of sociality and sharing, but we consider such quality as a prerogative of communicating, since both analyst and analysand are aware that the interpretation refers to something that may be represented through sight, hearing and touch.

The second aspect, through which thought manifests itself, in the psychoanalytic field, is through myth, in the grid this occupies the C row of the genetic axis, together with the oneiric thoughts and dreams. Myth becomes explicit through the capacity of sensorial images organized in a narrative way and represented as a collective elaboration of proto-mental emotions that have unconscious roots and that were not able to find a transformation in the individual psyche: thus, in this manner, myth presents itself as "*common non-sense*"<sup>5</sup> that finds a form of elaboration through the mythopoetic action. Bion ascribes the mythopoiesis, transformative action of myth, to the alpha function, as the organ that intervenes on the sensory impressions and on the emotional experiences thus converting them in alpha elements, furthermore implied in ulterior transformational processes. Mythopoiesis offers meaning and symbolization to personal and social unconscious material, restructuring the psyche

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<sup>3</sup> When Bion talks of personality functions he refers to aspects of the psyche that are characterized by the fact, as in mathematics, that the function is connected and composed by a series of factors that operate in concordance and that are deductible by observing the function itself. [Bion, W. R., (1962, Chapter One, in *Learning from Experience*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Three, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ivi.

through experience, comprehension and attribution of meaning. The use of mythological material is non specific to personal history, but at the same time it is universal, it gives a sense of continuity to a psyche that is animated by partial creations.

In this concept we can find an important step forward in regards to the Freudian idea of myth: if the oedipal events offer an exemplary comprehension of the psychic dynamics that preside over the formation of a neurotic personality structure, on the contrary Bion believes that the mythological narrations are connected to the mental functioning of psychotic nature, potentially present in all individuals.

Bion suggests that myths help us in the understanding of the psyche's unconscious spheres: therefore they represent a valid tool that the analyst can use in practice. In the same manner in which a scientist makes use of several mathematical methods to carry out his job, the analyst should have at his disposal a certain number of myths on which to make associations: familiarizing with them he will be able to individuate the myth that is most appropriate to the patient and the most appropriate interpretation to the present analytic situation.<sup>6</sup> *"It doesn't regard the usage of conscious material to interpret the unconscious (as in free associations); it regards using the unconscious to interpret a conscious mental state associated to facts of which the analyst is aware."*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, myth not only stimulates the emerging of the profound material from our psyche, but it allows us to gain consciousness of our personal history that by relating with the other, in the here and now of the session, will inevitably modify. The relation consists of an interactive exchange through which we recognise our own self due to the identification and the affective mimesis with the other: this topic gains ulterior value in regards to the small analytic group, in which the emerging emotions that belong to others allow the subject to recognise such an emotion, that previously couldn't be represented as his own. More precisely aspects of group thought merge in the common space of the group field, where knowledge starts and develops to stimulate the process that from K transformation aspires to the evolution in O.

The knowledge of myths is therefore essential to the analyst, in building his own models, through which he may *"find the correspondence between specific problems presented by the patients and the body of psychoanalytic theory"*<sup>8</sup> avoiding to create new theories when he is confronted with situations that are difficult to manage. Statements made on facts that are observed in analysis are expressions of a personal myth, pertinent to the *"as if"*<sup>9</sup> dimension.

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<sup>6</sup> [6]Stagnitta, S., in <http://www.consulenzepsicologiche.it/contributi/Bionilmitocomenonsensocomune.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>Ivi.

<sup>8</sup> Grinberg, L., et all., (1991), Pensiero, in *Introduzione al pensiero di Bion*, trad. It. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1993, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Three, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 21.

For these reasons, when thinking over the importance of models in psychoanalysis, Francesco Corrao identifies the main characteristics, of myth and of dream as: the *functionality*, entwined to the *as if* component; the *dramatization*, which is the ability to generate feelings, the *analogizing*, connected to the production of metaphors; the structural *organization*; *creating metaphors*; the non adhesion to Aristotelian logic, the narrative quality.<sup>10</sup>

The third dimension of the psychoanalytical object is passion, concept connected to the emotions of L-love, H-hate, K-knowledge that intervene in the contact amongst minds: the analytic process of knowing an object that is to be known happens through the pain and frustration that derive from research, which implies the surfacing of feelings of hate, but also of joy and love for discovery.

Going back to the grid, Bion underlines how it can be applied to all the affirmations that the analyst and patient make, which through the grid find a genetic and systematic structure.

The usage axis is composed by a series of cells numbered from 1 to n. The first, that of the *definition hypothesis* which is characterized by the tendency of designing an object from experience as if it was a matter of fact that excludes what is not comprehended in the designation: in this manner the mythological images assume the role of static and univocal determinations. In C2, instead, connecting to the *pseudo  $\Psi$*  they become deceiving representations whose aim is to avoid contact with aspects acknowledged as emotionally dangerous. In column 3, the *notation* column (Freudian concept), are registered representations of past and present realizations: here the mythological narration, emblem of a public and private situation, favours the imaginative memorization of the emotional field that was created during the session.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid that affirmations become factual enunciations that exclude other possible meanings, as in the column of the *definition hypothesis*, or fallacious and diverting in respect to the reality that we want to evade, as in the column of the *pseudo  $\Psi$* , it's necessary to pay great attention to them, thus favouring transformative processes of unsaturated psychic nucleus that fluctuate in the mind waiting to be thought and finding a uniform configuration. This column, defined as *attention*, is comparable to Freud's concept of *free and fluctuating attention* and constitutes the transit manner to achieve a state of true concentration, typical of the subsequent column of *investigation*. In this field the emerged mythological element is meticulously observed in order to highlight the characteristics, connections, implications and the possible configuration that it assumes in relation to others. The analytic interpretations and new elaborations that the patient makes on mythological narrations uncover what otherwise would remain obscure, thus, satisfying the human innate drive to search, of which the Oedipus myth is an illuminating example.

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<sup>10</sup> Corrao, F., (1992), Epistemologia, in *Modelli psicoanalitici. Mito Passione Memori*, Bari: Laterza, p. 18.

In relation to myth, research can proceed through four phases which emphasize the underlying meanings of the mythologem, through resonance between separated and reconnected elements:

- deconstruction of the narrative plot and individuation of the constitutive elements of myth, the *mythologem*;
- decoding of elements;
- re-signification;
- re-combination of divided elements in order to individuate new connections.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of myth in the analytic situation can be inserted into the transformative processes connected to knowledge of oneself: meeting action (sixth column), or *acting-out*, it assumes the effective characteristics favouring the real process of evolution of personality, even if the interpretation that is provided is neither exact or thorough. Tension towards this unreachable aim generates in both the analyst and the analysand a sense of fatigue due to the greatness of the task, pain due to the discovery of a devastated and isolated psychic dimension, deriving from a sense of abandonment of integral parts of oneself.

The grid can be used in other manners with thought, one can use other categories other than those suggested by Bion; furthermore, it can be applied with images of myth as with any other emerging element.

What has just been stated can be classified in each of the categories of use with particular attention to context, on the contrary the configuration in relation to the genetic axis is suggested by the abstraction and development level reached by thought in a temporal consequential view, by which every row derives from the precedent one. Therefore, row A represents (*beta*) *elements* that are not observable in clinical field, as they are saturated and lack distinction between the inanimate and psychic, but from which the *alpha elements* flow, metabolized parts of the corresponding function that have ingested and returned in an elaborated form the previous beta elements. Combining in a narrative form, the alpha elements generate the first phenomenological appearance of thought, recorded in row C in the form of oneiric thought, dreams and public and private myths. In row D they are transformed in *precognition*, which is a waiting state which aims to receive a limited array of phenomena and evolve in *conception* (row E) in case a pairing possibility is found. The *concept*, occupying row F, derives from the concept freed of the sense-perceptive elements and suitable to provide scientific formulations. Row G is, instead, constituted by the *scientific deductive system* in which concepts and hypothesis tend to combine following a logic and coherent relation. Finally, Row H, describes the *algebraical calculus* as an ulterior abstraction of the preceding category, suitable to

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<sup>11</sup> Corrao, F., (1992), Mito, in *Modelli psicoanalitici. Mito Passione Memoria*, Bari: Laterza, pp. 24-25.

represent thoughts through the use of graphical signs and mathematical formulas connected by precise rules of logic.

From this point of view, not only myth, but every other analytic element finds a precise collocation in the grid and offers a clear, but not rigid, representation of its practical use and of its possible evolutions.

## Notes

[1]Bion, W. R., (1962), Chapter Twentyfive, in *Learning from Experience*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1972, p. 139.

[2]Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Twenty, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 124.

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[4]Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Three, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. [5]ivi. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 18

[6]Stagnitta, S., in [www.consulenzepsicologiche.it/contributi/Bionilmitocomenonsensocomune.pdf](http://www.consulenzepsicologiche.it/contributi/Bionilmitocomenonsensocomune.pdf) ivi[7]

[8]Grinberg, L., et all., (1991), Pensiero, in *Introduzione al pensiero di Bion*, trad. It. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1993, p. 40.

[9]Bion, W. R., (1963), Chapter Three, in *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, trad. It. Roma: Armando editore, 1973, p. 21.

[10]Corrao, F., (1992), Epistemologia, in *Modelli psicoanalitici. Mito Passione Memori*, Bari: Laterza, p. 18.

[11]Corrao, F., (1992), Mito, in *Modelli psicoanalitici. Mito Passione Memoria*, Bari: Laterza, pp. 24-25.

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