

Sublimation/Dilation of Desire, Held Separately Together  
in a Moment of Being O

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*“Dreaming in the service of the reality principle obscures things in order to protect their integrity. Dreaming in the service of the pleasure principle purposely writhes about reality, which it can’t stand. It depends who has the control over negation.” (J.S. Grotstein, July 13, 2013, personal communication).*

We spend much of our lives navigating who has the control within us—the reality principle or the pleasure principle, or something else? For Freud, the pleasure principle had to be tamed by the reality principle in a one-way process of containment, of ego over id. Yet for Bion and for Grotstein, navigating the constant conjunction between any two seemingly opposed psychic forces that co-occur as pairs, such as the reality principle and the pleasure principle, is an altogether different task. Both for Bion and for Grotstein, the psychic task is not ego dominance. Rather, the task is realizing a psychic koan, moment to moment, of becoming O—Bion’s symbol for ultimate reality. For Bion ‘becoming O’ is approached through binocular vision (Grotstein, 2007). For Grotstein (2000) ‘becoming O’ is approached through engaging psychic reality in counterpoint. As Grotstein (2007) clarified:

Freud held that repression defends consciousness—later the ego—against the unconscious—later the id—but not the other way around. Bion, applying “binocular vision” and a “reversible perspective”, allowed for the repression of both and for selective interaction between them. (p. 78)

In other words, the id and the ego are in a dialectical, rather than a hierarchical, relationship—a relationship that needs to be continuously navigated and is not ever static.

The ubiquitous challenge of unrequited love and the related psychological work of sublimating one's desire for another, either because you are unavailable for a romantic relationship or because the other person is unavailable for a romantic relationship or you are both unavailable for a romantic relationship, occurs for nearly all of us at some point. This paper is about taking this reality, this difficulty, this heartache, as a cause for transformation (T) in O, Bion's designation for emotional truth, ultimate reality. My thesis is that falling in love with someone you cannot be with can be taken as a cause not only for sublimation of desire but also as a cause for dilation of desire when we have faith (F) in O. By *dilation* of desire I mean the ability to fully feel and think about the experience of desire, rather than impulsively acting on it on the one hand or merely repressing it on the other hand, to meet desire in its fullness within oneself. My thesis is that sublimation and dilation, when taken *together, through psychic counterpoint, through binocular vision*, allows for transformation (T) in O through faith (F) in O.

In order to appreciate this perspective, two truths are vital. One truth is Michael Eigen's (2010) teaching that you have to sit with feelings in order to develop psychic taste buds for your emotional life. Another truth is Bion's teaching of holding a constant conjunction in binocular vision (Grotstein's teaching of holding a constant conjunction as psychic reality in counterpoint) in order to allow for *selective* permeability across the contact barriers among the unconscious mind, the conscious mind, and O (Grotstein,

2007). We will return to these truths of sitting with feelings as they are, and allowing for selective permeability of experience across the contact barriers of mind shortly. But first, an unmediated experience speaks for itself.

It all happens in an instant.

There is that rare moment when everything falls away and the mind not only quiets but also stops altogether. You are more yourself than you've ever been for the simultaneous release/dissolution and dilation/expansion of being. You are becoming O. You are transforming (T), with faith (F), in O. In this place, you rest as O. You are falling in love (L). And in this very moment, the falling gives way to an expanse of space where all movement occurs within you, and in this way, the motion of falling transforms into the pure stillness of fully dilated, fully saturated space. In this moment you are container/contained, inseparable. You are, in this moment, infinite—beyond any need for fathoming.

Such a moment can be described as the transcendent position, following Grotstein (2014). It is a moment that occurs through constant conjunctions between the mystical vertex and the vertices of romantic love and erotic desire.

Yet, lest you idealize this moment, you must hold it in light of binocular focus.

Remember, this is not a love that you are free to pursue. Keeping the potential for annihilating, masochistic, catastrophic experience in view, in the very same line of sight,

you regard the dilation of the self in tandem with concern for self-contraction and self-destructive capabilities.

[Bion] had a way of calling attention to destructive forces working in one while at the same time affirming existence. Bion put a tracer on destructive/self-destructive tendencies while at the same time supporting one's search to be oneself. (Eigen, 2015, May 30).

You respect the contact barrier that allows for messages to be bi-directionally conveyed, through a selectively permeable membrane, between the unconscious and conscious fields of mind. (And tri-directionally communicated, with O as the third point of the triangle with conscious and unconscious mind as the other two points.) This contact barrier softens the division between the ego and the id, even while it keeps them separate yet in dialogue.

You make a decision, in an instant, to erect the contact barrier and negate the pleasure principle. The conscious decision moves, like a double arrow, in both directions at once; in this moment of reinforcing the contact barrier, something slips inside you—a consequence of a simultaneous selective permeability. This is the contact that the barrier, paradoxically, allows.

Semi-permeable doesn't exist. What exists is selective permeability. In other words, alpha function—which is in the contact-barrier that separates consciousness from unconsciousness—constitutes the caesura. You can also think of it as Freud's preconscious. Bion doesn't use that term. But there is a noumenon. *God in that place.* (Grotstein & Pearson, 2015).

You have made a conscious choice to be penetrated by desire, by O, even as you (because you are able to) hide that desire from the other, and so you become O. You are concealed as O and revealed as your ordinary self, who is none other than O, obscured. There is a noumenon. God appears *in that place*.

You fight it. You fight not to let go but to remain conscious and in control. You fight for the ego to maintain the upper hand, in order not to abandon the separate self of conscious awareness. And the expansive moment slips away...yet through binocular vision it slips away not into the obliteration of repression but rather, just under your skirt, and just behind your ears. Tucked away for safekeeping, never forgotten, still you dilate. The pleasure principle is guarded as well, on the other side of experience. Still, there is only O. (Until the memory becomes hazy, and you contract again, but that is later on.) For now, you have kept yourself intact and abided by the world of consensual appearances. You reach for expectable speech when yet all of you is resting as the Silent Self.

You have not betrayed your Fullness.

You need not abandon desire as it arises in romantic fantasy, according to the pleasure principle. Yet, there is a path beyond mere indulgence of the pleasure principle. Mediating between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, in the service of O, you need to sit with the feelings of desire and allow yourself to sense the fullness of desire as it emerges, in order to simultaneously and quite paradoxically *develop desire through sublimation in reality*, thus achieving a transformation of desire, through bearing

witness to faith, and ever becoming O. This transformation can only be achieved by feeling fully and being present to the desire you experience.

Michael Eigen teaches on the importance of developing our capacity to tolerate our emotions by sitting with them, on the capacity to develop “psychic taste buds”.

It’s best not to try to do too much. But it’s good to develop what I call psychic taste buds, to taste the psyche and psychic processes, smell it, taste it, feel it.

Don’t try to make it go away. Try to taste a little bit more of it, live your way into it and see what happens. (Eigen, 2010, p. 4.)

From this perspective of becoming O, the pleasure principle is neither to be over-indulged nor abandoned, but rather, desire is to be tasted and felt, in order to be metabolized within oneself, within one’s psychic register.

This paradoxical injunction of not trying to do too much was recently echoed by Eigen during his current seminar, where he reiterated:

Staying with it [strong feelings] and staying with it some more can be beneficial.

One thing that’s at stake is building capacity to tolerate affective states, affective attitudes, tolerating more of oneself. (Eigen, 2015, May 15).

Eigen is encouraging us to develop the psychic capacity to tolerate strong affect in order that we not be undone by it, in order that we metabolize more of ourselves in service of becoming O.

What is the faith that achieves the transformative living of this paradox of holding sublimation and dilation of desire together? What is faith in O? It is a faith that desire, when held with respect and not met with mere indulgence, can grow our capacity for psychical experience. It is a faith that desire, when felt fully from within, will not destroy

us. It is a faith that desire, when sublimated through alpha function and digested through a felt sense, is capable of transformation. It is a faith that desire, beyond Bion's clinical dictum to abandon desire, need not be abandoned in the context of romantic love, but rather it must be fully contained. It is a faith that *through* desire we can become O.

The vicissitudes of faith involve the struggle not only to know but in some way to be one's true self, to take up the journey with all that one is and may become, and to encounter oneself through the ground of one's being. This is undertaken with the knowledge that we are mediate beings, that certainty is beyond certain reach, but that anything short of this attempt portends disaster and is self-crippling. The undertaking itself involves one in continuous re-creation. (Eigen, 2004, p.127)

And what of O, what of ultimate reality? How does O hold space for these infinite nuances of feeling and thought, this continuous re-creation? O does not divide itself, even as it does take sides through the contact barrier. O contains the caesura between the reality principle and the pleasure principle as well as the reality principle and the pleasure principle themselves. O absorbs the selective permeability itself and holds the seeming opposites in tension. Sublimation/dilation of desire is a constant conjunction where each psychic movement in the pair can be held separately together, in a moment of being and ever becoming O.

For Bion, we become "O" through a transsubjective mystical realization, a resonance or "communion in 'O'." The object slides under the mystic signifier in order to prepare us for a transient glimpse of fleeting, ineffable Truth. This process constitutes *contemplation without an object to contemplate*. It is a totally intra-subjective, meditative transformation. (Grotstein, 2014)



It is this intra-subjective, meditative transformation that sublimation/dilation of desire gives way to, wherein the object of desire “slides under the mystic signifier in order to prepare us for a transient glimpse of fleeting, ineffable Truth.” This “process constitutes *contemplation without an object to contemplate*” because the mystic signifier creates the caesura between sublimation and dilation of desire in that “transient glimpse of fleeting, ineffable Truth”. The barrier creates the contact, and the contact creates the barrier between the psychic twins of sublimation and dilation of desire, in a continuous process of re-creation, if we can remain open to the continuous evolution of becoming O.

Sublimation: S/he is not available for a romantic relationship. You have to turn your gaze elsewhere for fulfillment.

Dilation: Yet there is a well stirred within, a life force, a quickening to eros through my strong feelings, which I will not abandon. There is an inner eye where, beyond an outward pull, my gaze can rest.

Sublimation: But be careful not to get lost in fantasy. That well, that inner eye, that inward gaze, can swiftly become a tempest if you do not gentle the strength, if you do not calm the force.

Dilation: Yet there is treasure in that well, safe within the waters of experience. I can allow those ripples to shape me. I can let those tides extend my shoreline.

Sublimation: Careful lest you get washed out to sea!

Dilation: I will stay in contact with the lighthouse that guides to shore, even as I venture into the ocean of experience.

O: Meet me in the darkness of the unknown ocean of experience, yet lit from faith within.

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