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James S. Grotstein

Who Is
the Dreamer
Who Dreams
the Dream?



A Study of Psychic Presences

with a Foreword by Thomas H. Ogden

Who Is the Dreamer

Who Dreams the Dream?

Volume 19

Relational Perspectives Book Series

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A Study of Psychic Presences

James S. Grotstein

 THE ANALYTIC PRESS
2000 Hillsdale, NJ London

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The chapters in this book have appeared elsewhere and are reprinted here in modified form by permission of their publishers: **ch. 1-Contemporary Psychoanalysis** (1979, 15:110–169) and rev. in *Do I Dare Disturb the Universe? A Memorial to Wilfred R. Bion*, J. Grotstein (1981, Beverly Hills, CA: Caesura Press); **ch. 2-Integrating One-Person and Two-Person Psychologies: Autochthony Versus Alterity in Counterpoint.** *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (1997, 66:403–430); **ch. 3-Matte-Blanco Today I: Mainly Clinical,** *Special Issue Journal of Melanie Klein and Object Relations* (1997, 15:631–646); **ch. 4-International journal of Psycho-Analysis** (1978, 59:55–60); **ch. 5-Journal of Analytical Psychology** (1998, 43:4–68); **ch. 6-Journal of Analytical Psychology** (1997, 42:47–60); **ch. 7-Journal of Analytical Psychology** (1997, 42:585–611); **ch. 8-American Journal of Psychoanalysis** (1997, 57:193–218); **ch. 9-American Journal of Psychoanalysis** (1997, 57:317–335); **ch. 10-Bion's Transformations in "O," Lacan's "Real" and Kant's "Thing-in-Itself": Towards the Concept of the Transcendent Position.** *Journal of Melanie Klein and Object Relations* (1996, 14:109–142.)

Published by The Analytic Press, Inc.

101 West Street, Hillsdale, NJ 07642

www.analyticpress.com

Typeset in Adobe Palatino by CompuDesign, Charlottesville, VA

Indexed by Leonard Rosenbaum, Washington, DC

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Grotstein, James S.

Who is the dreamer who dreams the dream? : a study of psychic presences / James S. Grostein.

p. cm.—(Relational perspectives book series; v. 19)

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN 0-88163-305-4

I. Psychoanalysis I. Title II. Series

BFI73.G756 2000

150.19'5-dc21

00-036273

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

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FOREWORD

Thomas H. Ogden

In reading about this book, and now attempting to speak about it, I feel a bit like humble Dante being guided through the underworld by Virgil. The wonder, the marvel, the splendor, and the terror of the unconscious as portrayed by Grotstein is reminiscent of Dante's portrayal of the underworld in *The Inferno*. Grotstein brings to life for the reader the excitement that Freud must have experienced as the imminence of another order of experience first began to reveal itself to him through his exciting/frightening encounters with the female hysterics who had overwhelmed Breuer. The mystery and the awe became all the greater as Freud followed the trail of his thoughts and feelings in his journey into the underworld of his own mind and body and spirit, an underworld occupied with subjects and objects and invisible presences with their own utterly alien and utterly familiar subjects and objects and history and sense of time and space. Perhaps most important of all is Grotstein's ability to convey a sense of unlimited creative potential of the unconscious; the goal of realizing a greater share of this potential in the analytic experience itself is a pivotal touchstone for the reader's reconsideration of his or her analytic technique.

I will not attempt to present a précis of this book: to do so would require at least twice the number of pages written by Grotstein. With the caveat that any attempt to paraphrase Grotstein is as doomed as an effort to paraphrase a poem, I will discuss a few of the ideas developed in this book. As Frost put it, "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." I would, however, like to offer something of a "Reader's Guide to Grotstein." This is a dense book that, despite its weight, moves very quickly; the writing is enthusiastically brimming over with ideas. This book requires that the reader tolerate a good deal of a feeling of not knowing, of feeling confused and lost. But this difficulty in reading is offset by the fact that the major concepts discussed in this book are revisited in each of its chapters. The return of increasingly familiar, but never static themes has the quality of a recurring musical leitmotif that accrues richness and meaning as the composition proceeds. The book builds toward its final chapter, "Bion's Transformation in O," where I believe the reader will find that the book comes together as more than the sum of its parts.

To turn to the text itself, Grotstein, in his preface, presents his belief that Freud's structural model involving the interplay of id, ego, superego, and external reality, is a woefully inadequate model with which to attempt to conceptualize the mind. (The Latin terminology introduced by Strachey, despite Freud's admonitions, renders the terms abstract and experience distant.) Grotstein attempts to rediscover the energy and muscularity of Freud's insights by offering a model of the psyche in which there is a phenomenal subject (our conscious experience of ourselves as "I") and an "Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious." The latter term is intentionally ambiguous in that it represents a subject who is a reflection of itself and is known (and knows itself) only indirectly. This is perhaps the central paradox of the book. From the perspective developed by Grotstein, psychological health might be thought of as the degree to which an individual has been able to create a generative tension between the phenomenal subject and the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious.

Grotstein's discussion, in [chapter 1](#), of the dreamer who dreams the dream and the dreamer who understands the dream represents, to my mind, an important contribution to the psychoanalytic

understanding of the phenomenon of dreaming. Grotstein views the mystery of dreaming from the point of view that dreaming is a critical way we have of communicating with ourselves and of processing the unconscious communication in the very act of dreaming. The remembering of dreams and their verbal narration in the analytic setting are secondary and tertiary phenomena. The dreamer who dreams the dream works in concert with the dreamer who understands the dream in their effort to give visual narrative shape to psychic pain that can be viewed by an internal audience. That audience (the dreamer who understands the dream) understands and bears therapeutic witness to the truth of the experience that is brought to life in the experience of dreaming. This internal therapeutic dialogue, like the stars in the sky, is continuous, but visible only at night (that is, in sleep). The dreamer, never represented in the dream, is the "Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious." In this context, the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious might be understood as a quality of being that is forever creating metaphoric reflections of itself: Dreams are among its most creative, magnificent, terrifying, enigmatic, unlocalizable creations. It could be said that we are most fully ourselves in the dreaming of the dreams that dream us.

Grotstein's development of the idea of autochthony in the second chapter is a cogent statement of what is most central to the analytic enterprise. "Autochthony," the fantasy of self-creation, is seen as standing in dialectical tension with "alterity," the awareness of the other as a whole and separate subject with an inner life very much like one's own. Autochthony is not a state of being to overcome or outgrow; it is an essential, life-long aspect of experience through which we "personalize" the world by imagining that we created it and that it is a reflection of who we are. Grotstein enriches Winnicott's notion that transitional phenomena are necessary for the infant to accept the separateness of the object and, ultimately, to be able to take part in "object usage." He adds to Winnicott's formulation the important element of an autochthonous (self-creating) phantasy as a healthy unconscious dimension of object relatedness. Trauma, from this perspective, is the experience of the external world forcing itself on the individual *before the individual has had an opportunity to create it in his own image*; the traumatized individual defensively personalizes the trauma (after the fact) by fantasizing (feeling convinced in the most irrefutable way) that he caused and was responsible for the traumatizing event that overpowered him.

Two important principles of technique follow from this conception of autochthony:

Initially, the analyst's interpretations should address the patient's unconscious fantasies concerning his own responsibility for creating the dangerous (anxiety-generating) situation being experienced (whether within or outside of the analytic relationship. For example, an interpretation might be addressed to the patient's unconscious conviction that his inability to love caused his parents to neglect him in a way that left him feeling terrifyingly alone. The analyst need not concur with the patient's belief that he brought his frightening isolation on himself, but the analyst must recognize the life-preserving, defensive (personalizing) function of the patient's unconscious fantasy that he did so.

The analyst's premature attempts to demonstrate to the patient the "reality" that he or she is not responsible for all that has occurred in his or her own life may undermine the patient's necessary effort to personalize his world, consequently leaving the patient even more helpless in the face of traumatizing impingements (past and present).

Second, as analysis progresses and the patient becomes conversant with his unconscious autochthonous fantasies (as they have been experienced, interpreted, and rendered manageable in the transference countertransference), the analyst's interpretations increasingly address the differences between "persecutors" and "enemies." That is, the analysis becomes increasingly more focused on the differences between persecutory projected aspects of the self, on one hand, and the feelings and behaviors

of external objects on the other. Grotstein's conception of successful analytic work as a process of turning persecutors into enemies elaborates and extends Loewald's (1960) conception of analysis as a process turning ghosts into ancestors.

The analytic quest, for Grotstein, involves the voluntary "unconcealment" of private, pain-ridden aspects of self. To achieve this, the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious and the phenomenal subject join in an effort in which the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious serves as a metaphorical "playwright of the analytic text." The Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious communicates (in the form of symptoms, dream acts, acting-in, acting-out and so on) to the phenomenal subject formerly unexpressed and inexpressible pain. The phenomenal subject brings to the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious the pain of current life experience (which is saturated with its historical antecedents). The Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious "reworks" current experience, for example, in the form of dreaming, and thus makes it available in an altered form to the phenomenal subject (which is more imbued with capacities for secondary-process thinking and verbal symbolization). This process might be thought of as an internal process of projective identification in which different aspects of the subject make use of one another in creating emotional experience that can be thought, felt, remembered, symbolized, and communicated to oneself and others. That which cannot be "metabolized" in this manner is manifested in the form of symptomatology.

Grotstein, in [chapter 4](#), discusses the spatial and temporal dimensions of psychological experience. In a lucid and highly original presentation, he proposes that we might think of "inner space" in terms of four different forms or experiences of time and space. The null dimension is characterized by a sense of infinite space and might be thought of developmentally as corresponding to intrauterine experience (which is not "mentalized" since there is no space—or there is infinite space—between subject and experience). Grotstein's description of the experience in the "first dimension" is a vibrant description of the phenomenology of the paranoid-schizoid position. If zero dimensionality is the universe of the point (that is infinite), one dimensionality is the universe of the line: "there is a polarization of spatial [emotional] experience. Mother is either approaching (up the line) or departing (down the line). Moreover, the good mother's departure (down the line) is indistinguishable from the bad mother's approach (up the line)" (p. 92).

The quality of experience associated with the two-dimensional inner space is an experience of emotional thinness and flatness (geometrically represented in fantasy as a plane). Defense takes the form of flattening out of the emotional intensity. Three-dimensional inner space is associated with the quality of experience of the depressive position: There is a sense of one's own psychological depth, of layered symbolic meaning, of interplay between inside and outside and between oneself and other subjects. Psychopathology is not inherent in any of these experiences of inner space. Rather, psychopathology might be thought of as the breakdown of the generative dialectical tension among these forms of psychological dimensionality. From this vantage point, creativity might be thought of as requiring an ability to remain grounded in three dimensionality while immersing oneself in the possibilities of another form of dimensionality (for example, as Borges does in his imaginative literary excursions into the infinite). Grotstein suspects that experiences of inner space extend into the dimensions beyond three dimensionality in order to account for "the synthesis of component spaces" (p. 97).

It is not possible to discuss in this foreword each of the chapters of this book in detail. In the latter chapters, Grotstein offers rich discussions of the subject of analysis and its internal objects/presences, as well as explorations of the mythology, cosmology, and religious symbology in which the subject finds/creates itself. Instead of attempting to survey that landscape, I will look closely at the final chapter toward which each of the preceding chapters seems to build. The last chapter is a tour de force that

begins with one of the clearest and most inclusive explications of Bion's work that I have encountered. Bion believed that the most basic driving force for human beings was not the Freudian libidinal and aggressive drives or the Kleinian death instinct, but the "truth instinct" (Grotstein's phrase) that involves an ability to achieve a resonance with "O." O is the symbol Bion used to refer to "ultimate Truth," which is unknowable in any direct way. O is beyond words and beyond sensory perception. The infant has a need for Truth that is as strong as his need for food. In early development, the infant projects unbearable (unthinkable) truth into the mother who converts it into bits of knowledge (K), which can be used by the infant for purposes of thinking and feeling that which was formerly unbearable to think or feel. The mother-infant relationship serves as a model for Bion's conception of the analytic relationship. Grotstein explains that transference itself is ultimately directed, through the analyst as object, toward the analysand's own unconscious (the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious). The analyst in a state of reverie (a state of receptivity free of memory or desire) attempts to live with the truth projected into him by the analysand and, in a sense, "becomes it" before transforming it into symbols (K) that are offered to the patient in the form of interpretations. This is a process of transducing, in Grotstein's words, an infinite omnipotent unknowable entity into a finite and knowable one.

The process of becoming O represents the achievement, albeit transitory, of the "transcendent position," the individual's gradually developing capacity from infancy onward to tolerate (suffer) and therefore resonate with O, the ultimate realness of anything and everything. Grotstein makes clear that when he uses the symbol O and the concept of transcendence, he is talking about reaching toward something "beyond" but not necessarily "lofty." Transcendence can be quite quotidian: it might be sensed as an essence of a perception or as a response to a poem or to a conversation. It has to do with our coming into being, our becoming. In other words, the trajectory of transcendence is beyond the structures that defensively imprison us in our subjectivity. From this perspective, the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions might be viewed as strategies that we use to filter the blinding brilliance of O. The paranoid-schizoid "filtering technique" involves the creation of reductionistic binary oppositions (good/bad, victim-victimizer), whereas the depressive position "filtering techniques" involve an evasive use of the complexities of mythic categories played out in "realistic" whole-object relations (for example, the dilemmas of the permutations and combinations of the experience of oedipal jealousy).

The chapter and the book close with a fuller explication of the transcendent position. I will attempt something similar here with the help of a quotation from Grotstein's poetic language: "Transcendence is the mute 'Other' that lies just beyond, around, and within where we are from moment to moment. It is the core of our very Being-in-itself" (p. 301). The transcendent position involves a state of being that is not reserved for mystics who seem to float above everyday life. Transcendence is not a state of being that has left behind the concerns of everyday life experienced as paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties; rather, the transcendent position, as I understand it, is a psychological state in which one reaches deeply into everyday life (what other life is there?) and senses something more that saturates and enlivens one's being; it involves experiencing the pain of a beauty that is almost too much to bear.

The great value of the concept of the transcendent position is felt most strongly, I think, when, after having spent some time with Grotstein as he discusses this aspect of the experience of the human spirit and its hunger for coming into being truthfully, one finds the extant concepts provided by Freud's topographic (conscious, preconscious, unconscious) and structural (id, ego, superego) models and Klein's paranoid-schizoid positions a little flat, lacking something of "an imminence unfulfilled" (to borrow a phrase from Borges). In the impossible task of attempting to write about the ineffable, the unknowable, the "something more," Grotstein has made significant strides where few have dared to try (or even

thought to try).

PREFACE

Who Is the Unconscious?

The themes of the chapters in this book have occupied my thinking through many years of psychoanalytic practice. Once the chapters were gathered together for publication, some unifying and defining themes seemed to emerge. Searching for a title that would reflect the Ariadne's thread running through them, I realized that I had been trying to address the mystery and ineffability of the self in general and of the unconscious in particular. I found myself attempting to deconstruct the concept of the *subject*, most particularly that which we know as "I," as differentiated from "me" or "self." I began to realize that I wanted to bring psychic entities, the unconscious and its denizens (its internal subject and internal objects), as well as the ego and id, out of the shadows and mists that have enveloped and obscured them in the misleading and deceptive garb of deterministic science, which was Freud's oeuvre, and restore them to their true aliveness.

We psychoanalysts and psychotherapists take these entities so much for granted that we overlook their mystery and wonder. There is a vast difference, for instance, between thinking of an ego, on one hand, and of accepting "I" as the consummate, complex, nonlinear, multidimensional subject, on the other—or between using the construct of the id as opposed to Lacan's (1966) "Other," which I sometimes render as the "second self" or "alter ego" or the "ineffable subject of the unconscious." When the ineffable subject of the unconscious finds an external other who happens to be a psychoanalyst, then the two together constitute what the Greeks called the *psychopomp*, the conductor to the realm of lost souls. Thomas Ogden (1994) calls it "the intersubjective third subject of analysis." In bygone times this entity was known by many names: soul, spirit, presence, or even demiurge.¹

While searching the literature for background for an earlier contribution on the alter ego or second self, I came across the following advice given to young writers in another age. In 1759, in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, we find: "*Know thyself* ... learn the depth, extent, bias, and full fort of thy mind; contract full intimacy with the Stranger within thee" (in Cox, 1980). I am searching, in short, for the "Stranger within thee"—and within me—a more vitalistic, animistic, and phenomenological way to address the rich complexity of the mind, one that respects the mind's numinousness, mystery, and infinite possibilities. And I am seeking ways to rescue the id specifically and the unconscious generally from what I believe has been a prejudice—that it is primitive and impersonal rather than subjective and ultra sophisticated, and constitutes a "seething cauldron." There is reason to believe that the cauldron seethes because it bubbles with infinite creative possibilities and bristles with our indifference to it. One of my aims is to revive the concept of the "alter ego" (second self) in order to restore the unconscious to its former conception before Freud, that of a mystical, preternatural, numinous second self—and then to integrate that older version with the more positivistic conception that Freud gave us.

The unconscious functions with infinite sets and is mediated by "bi-logical"² mental processes according to Matte-Blanco (1975, 1981, 1988), which abound in symmetrizations (self-samenesses) as well as in asymmetrizations (differentiation).³ In other words, the id and its host, the unconscious, are, upon deeper consideration, characterized by a loftiness, sophistication, versatility, profundity, virtuosity, and brilliance that utterly dwarf the conscious aspects of the ego.

Similarly, when one refers to the ego, its very alienating latinity conceals *its* numinousness and mystery as “I,” the subject of experience, especially in its own unconscious reaches.⁴ I refer to the “I” that we know as the phenomenal subject and the id, which is really the alter ego to the ego as the ineffable subject. In fact—and this constitutes the major theme of this book—I posit that the unconscious is perhaps as close to the “God experience” as mankind can ever hope to achieve. Bion (1965, 1970, 1992) informs us that the Godhead is utterly ineffable and beyond contemplation and equates it with Absolute Truth, Ultimate Reality, the noumenon, beta elements (unmentalized elements), the thing-in-itself, O.⁵ The experience of a presence that is meta-human or preternatural⁶ exists as a potentiality in the boundless landscape of the unconscious. I believe that it is here that religious, philosophical, and mystical studies converge with the psychological and the psychoanalytic.⁷ This convergence is implied in Plato’s concept of The Ideal Forms and in his parable of the cave. Let me cite a passage from Plato’s *Republic* in regard to the cave metaphor, a passage that involves a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon:

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! Human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

Plato thus presents us with a powerful epistemological metaphor in which there is a fire situated behind a human being facing the wall of a cave. Between the fire and the individual are the Forms, those inhere

preconceptions that Bion (1962, 1963) calls “thoughts without a thinker” and that are older than the thinkers who think them.⁸ The fire and the numinous figures in front of it constitute the ineffable subject of the unconscious and its inscrutable landscape and workings, one aspect of which is alpha function (a profound form of meditative intuition; Bion, 1962).⁹ We humans realize them from the shadows they cast on the wall of the cave. The shadow cast by these “marionette” derivatives of the ineffable subject becomes the phenomenal subject, the self, its object, and the other objects to which the self relates. The shadow of the ineffable I, in other words, is the self, its object, the one that can never be the subject.

PSYCHIC IMAGERY AND PSYCHIC PRESENCES

Transcendentally speaking, the object the infant encounters is not merely a realistic object. That is, it is apperceived (anticipated) by virtue of inherent categories and a priori considerations (including needs, drives, affects, expectations, etc.), all exported by projective identification, which transforms the image of the real object into a phantom (even during moments of extreme trauma). This phantom becomes compounded, or third, form, a montage, a chimera (hybrid, containing many disparate forms), which ultimately becomes far removed in nature and composition from the original object in reality (see [chapter 6](#)). I believe that psychic imagery is the mysterious intermediary (presence) that occupies the internal world both as subject and as object. Psychic imagery also serves as an obligatory link between individuals externally; we relate through the resonating intermediary of our private yet shared images.

My term *psychic presences* is meant to convey the experience of intrapsychic preternatural entities which present as images or phantoms and which we, in turn, reify as real. These images or phantoms undergo a transfiguration or transmogrification as we progress from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position, to use Kleinian terms and concepts. They evolve into symbolic images that designate the “presence of the absence” of the object-person, that is, the presence of the *legacy of the experience with the object* in its absence. Even this status is obsolescent when we evolve to the transcendent position of O, the position in which the need for imagery vanishes altogether and we are face-to-face with Absolute Truth, Ultimate Reality, which are essence and the void (see [chapter 10](#)). The idea of presence in the mind is very close to the older notion of the “numen,” as in “numinous” (the numen is the local god of a place).

Intrapsychic life, like interpersonal encounters, is a dance of images—until we achieve oneness with O. In other words, once we “become” O (attain the transcendent position), we serenely realize that everything we “learned” in the depressive position (i.e., all our “transformations in K,” Bion’s abbreviation for all our knowledge about facts) was but the scaffoldings of necessary approximations and falsifications until we could be ready for O.¹⁰

I consider the concept of the image to be of consummate importance in our understanding of psychic presences. The term *projective identification* suffered a sea change as it crossed the Atlantic and was torn loose from its strictly Kleinian moorings in unconscious phantasy. Bion’s revision of the concept of his container-contained paradigm lent itself deceptively to the American revision. I do not believe, for instance, that the analysand projects into an object per se (if object means an external person). I believe that analysands project into their *image* of the object, and that image is *intrapsychic*. The participation of the real person who is the putative object of the projective identification is separate from, and therefore independent of, that projecting subject. When the analyst is truly influenced by the analysand’s projective identifications, this influence involves the counterintrojective and counterprojective invocation

of the analyst's own intrapsychic imagery. This occurs in a state of what Ogden (1997) calls "intersubjective thirdness," Mason (1994) names "folie à deux" (or mutual projective identification or "hypnosis"), and Girard (1972) terms "mimesis." Schore (personal communication) and I assign the phenomenon to "intersubjective resonance." My choice of the image as an important intermediary concept was guided by St. Paul's "First Letter to the Corinthians":¹¹

For we know in part, and we prophecy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things,

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

[I Corinthians, 13:9–12]

I understand this citation to be an example of the tradition of the mystics, who believe that the spiritual quest is to be able to see clearly, without disguise and through disguise. I also understand it as parallel to Bion's (1965, 1970) concept of "transformation in 'O,'" where we *become* Truth and Real, without knowing and beyond recognizing.

A corollary to St. Paul's Letter is a citation from Virgil's *Aeneid, Book V*:

The clouds that block thy mortal sight
I shall remove.

To clear the clouds that block our mortal sight is the psychoanalytic task, but that clearance is deceptive. As the metaphoric clouds clear away outside, our internal vision is all the more opened so that we can then shift from imagery (the object) inward to becoming the subject—in O.

"ROGUE" OR "SUBJECTIVE OBJECTS"

I have come to realize that what we have been calling internal objects are really "third forms," chimerical (hybrid) conglomerations of the *image* of the real object image intermixed with the resulting product from splitting and projective identifications of aspects of the subject. When the object is external, we see what our senses and sensitivities have rendered of our perception of the original object. This rendition becomes a projectively reidentified "subjective object," a psychic entity created by our subjectivity which we think we are perceiving the object as it really is. In other words, what we call perception is more often apperception. Apperception is the falsification or personalized distortion that underlies the illusion of perception. We "perceive" that which we are always already predisposed to encounter.

We forget that we must subjectively "format" the data of our observations with a priori categorizations (Kant, 1787). Just as a film emulsion catches the rays of light and transforms them into corresponding photographic images, so the images we form and internalize are modified by the subjective emulsions of our internal world, which render these data into personalized subjective experiences prior to their ultimate objectification.

The resulting chimerical (hybrid) images are at some remove from their original models, and they become secondary or acquired preconceptions that function like additional filters over our subsequent perceptions, thus rendering them into apperceptions (personalized distortions or “transferences”). We process our experiences from inherent and continuing mental formatting. We and our objects become prisoners, not of the events that transpire between us, but of these subjective transformations and their personalizing modifiers of how we process our experiences.

What have become known as internal objects are, to my thinking, “rogue” or “renegade subjects” ensconced within images of objects. In other words, the agent of intentionality or will of internal objects is always a function of split-off subjects. As Ogden (1986) reminds us, “Internal objects do not think.” These internal objects express themselves clinically as primitive, compulsive, relentless superego, uncontrollable, omnipotent, sometimes impulsive (even addictive) *subjective* objects, or as defective, wounded, or impotent object relics with which we identify.

The concept of the object began to change with Klein’s discovery of projective identification and was further modified by the contributions of Fairbairn, Piaget, and others. We have been forced to reassess the true meaning of *object*, a term that, in contrast to *subject*, has a solid ontic (scientific, deterministic) background and lends itself in no small measure because of that provenance to what I believe are serious misunderstandings. Many psychoanalysts and psychotherapists continue to think of the object as the actual other person and to think of the internalized object as the actual external person who is not resident within the mind. It is frequently considered that we “introject” our objects and their values as our own. Freud (1915), referring to Kant, wrote the following:

The psycho-analytic assumption of unconscious mental activity appears to us, on the one hand, as a further expansion of the primitive animism which caused us to see copies of our own consciousness all around us, and, on the other hand, as an extension of the corrections undertaken by Kant of our views on external perception. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be [p. 171].

I infer that Freud understood that he was borrowing heavily from Kant’s transcendental analytic and that the *unrepressed unconscious* is unknown and unknowable and consequently must be treated as if they were Kant’s a priori categories. Psychoanalysis is transcendental since it is predicated on the concept of inherent a priori categories with which the individual is constitutionally predisposed to use in anticipating the arrival of the object. Freud’s rendition of these inherent categories is the instinctual drives. The phenomenon of transference is also a testimony to this transcendental leitmotif in psychoanalysis (see [chapter 6](#)).

PRETERNATURAL PRESENCES WITHIN THE PSYCHE

I wish to reintroduce the term *preternatural* (beyond natural), to which I alluded earlier. Like many others lately, I have been struck by how our psychoanalytic language has flattened and desiccated the essence of the first person pronoun I, the subject and also the object. The ego and the object have become saturated conceptually, and their inherent mystery has all but vanished. I use the word *preternatural*

address the nonlinear complexity of our being alive and human—in the presence of the mystery inherent within others. It suggests exceptional qualities and capacities that we once attributed to gods, messiahs, and mystics.

This meaning of preternatural approximates how I have come to regard the ultimate nature of the subject and the object (the other) and applies to what I consider to be the ultimately sacred architecture of the psyche. It encompasses the human and yet more-than-human capacity we have in our innermost souls to harness infinity, complexity, and chaos and render them meaningful along the variegated dimensions of understanding within the human wave band. The unconscious, particularly the ineffable subject (the id), is like a god, but a handicapped one, because it needs partners in order for its mission to be completed. These preternatural presences include the dreamer who dreams the dream and the mythical author of the analysand's free associations, who are the same.

The concept of preternatural presences came to me as I was beginning to use a clinical technique that I had picked up from my own analyst, Wilfred Bion. His clinical emphasis, which I was late to learn, was not on what I thought I was saying but on the text of what I was saying, that is, on the patterns of the unfolding of the sequences of my associations. As I slowly recalled what he had imparted, I found myself listening not to an analysand per se (i.e., the person of the analysand who spoke) but to the seeming depersonified text itself, which, from one point of view, was other than human or personal.

Subsequently, I had difficulties in imparting this technique to supervisees because they felt it was too impersonal. Indeed, it is impersonal in a way. I find that I am listening to an eerie, difficult-to-define exceptional other, the ineffable subject of the unconscious itself—"speaking" to me through the muffled discourse of the analysand's conscious discourse. This other self is what Lacan (1966) called "the Other" "the decentered self," that is, the unconscious itself. To me it is the ego's alter ego, and I have called it the ineffable subject of the unconscious, whose nature is preternatural (beyond natural, larger than life), its presence among presences within, encased holographically within an ultimate, internal cosmic subjectivity, the supraordinate subject (see [chapter 5](#)).

The concept of preternatural psychic presences presumes a vitalistic, or animistic, demonic (in the positive as well as the negative sense) view of internal mental life. While it is true that the unconscious is a part of our human, personal self, it is nevertheless different. It is both human and more than human (although it was formerly thought to be less than human when the unconscious was considered as an object—"it").

In every absence, from infancy onward, there exists a felt presence (of the object) that either haunts or protects that absence but that certainly occupies it. The sense of presence is bimodal. One presence is the experiencing and contemplating subject itself, which includes the ineffable subject, the phenomenal subject, and perhaps others, which are all compositely located within a holographic supraordinate subjectivity. This complex subjective presence becomes focused on its other presence, the self, its object of contemplation and reflection, which in turn consists of identified-with presences, that is, internal objects (which I have termed subjective objects since they are estranged, alienated, misrecognized subjects in the disguise of the objects they inhabit).

These objects are subjects at one remove because of projective identification of alienated subjectivities into images of external objects. Our subsequent introjective identifications with the altered images transform them into "familiar within" (*dejà vu*) or misrecognitions; and, in so identifying with them, we become altered, misrecognized selves. In the psychoanalytic enterprise we psychoanalysts try to name the haunting presences that occupy the absence, and even presence, of the real object and hope that they may ultimately be transformed into benign and realistic presences or returned to the

proper owners.

Presence is my designation for the ultimate subjectivity of the supraordinate subject of being, which itself may be a supraordinate presence we ultimately aim to become in an evolution in O (Bion, 1965, 1970), Bion's term for the attainment of our ultimate state of consciousness. The term presence also refers to the ineffable subject, that transcendental (numinous) subject of the unconscious, the phenomenal subject of consciousness and preconsciousness, and the internal—and external (projected)—subjectivity objects. My choice of the term is also my way of addressing our need to be *present*—and alive—in our own experience and to repatriate our lost subjectivities from the diaspora into which we exiled them.

Years ago, I developed the concept of the background object of primary identification (see also [chapter 1](#)). Later I began to realize that this is more a “presence” than an object since it, whether it is unseen (because of its being internal) or visible externally, is sensed as a presence, often a formidable one, not just as an object of contemplation, need, or desire. We are most aware of this entity when we do *not* experience its holding-environment presence securely stationed behind us. The idea of psychical presences seemed to embrace my ideas about both the subject and the object, which are at the heart of this book.

I then began to wonder all over again about the thinking, feeling, and sensing mind to which the presences present themselves, presences that I now believe are larger, more formidable, and often more eerie than life; that is, they are preternatural presences. The mind that houses these preternatural presences is itself a presence of another order, a subjective presence, one capable of considerable objectivity (clear distinction between subject and object) but never loses its connection with its personalness, its subjectivity.

I came to feel that the mind is a subject—no, more than a subject; it too is a presence to be reckoned with. But one cannot reckon with a subject because it is a subject. I realized that from grammar. One cannot, grammatically, objectify “I” in any language. We are reduced to examining the shadow of its presence, as Plato suggested in the parable about the fire, the cave, and the Eternal Forms. In other words, the mind itself is a *holographic* subject, by which I mean that it constitutes a consummated presence totally and seemingly functions in parts as well.

THE INEFFABLE SUBJECT OF THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE PHENOMENAL SUBJECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I picture the psyche/mind, especially “I” and particularly the deeper strata of our I-ness that I call the ineffable subject of the unconscious, as having characteristics like those the ancient Greeks gave to the heroes and heroines who were half-god and half-human. Centaurs and the Minotaur also portray this dichotomy. Even today we attribute to famous personages such as movie stars, national leaders, and sports heroes a kind of quasi-divinity. I have learned from Bion (1965, 1970, 1992) and from Lacan (1966) to think of the real object as a real subject in its own right, utterly unknowable in its ineffable Otherness and preternatural in its ultimate essence. We fail to realize, I am now convinced, how little we are privileged to know about ourselves or about the ineffable subjectivity of others. We can only know *about* them, according to Bion (in transformations in K [knowledge]), which is not the same as achieving ultimate intimacy with them (“become” them [but not as an identification]) in a transformation in O, the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality of the Otherness of the other.

Recently, Peltz (1998) addressed the theme of psychic presence from the standpoint of its dialectic with absence and suggested that analysands must develop the ability to experience their own presence in the absence and presence of the analyst in order to be involved in the third area of potential space, where the real workings of analysis take place. In other words, the analysand must become “present” in the experience of the absence and presence of the analyst. It must be apparent that I—and I presume Peltz as well—use the word *presence* here in a sense more akin to Heidegger’s (1927) concept of *Dasein* (being here). Since the German language uses the same spelling for the imperative and the indicative mood of the verb, the ineffable subject may be said to be trying to rally the divided selves of its being, including itself, into a rousing unity with the imperative “Be here!” (*Dasein!*).

The qualities of aliveness and humanness require our presence as a subjective self, and we admit to those whom we encounter who seem to be present. We feel that we can count on them for authentic interaction. I will try to show that it is the unity of one’s ineffable subject and phenomenal subject that ultimately constitutes “being together with oneself,” that is, attaining ultimate subjectivity, which is also the goal of psychoanalysis.

I call the inner (unconscious) subject—that is, the numinous ineffable subject—transcendental.¹² This is the term Kant (1787) used for the a priori categories with which we are born and that enable us to anticipate, format, and prepare for new experiences by being able to precategorize them. (Kant actually used the term transcendental subject.) From this point of view, psychoanalysis constitutes a transcendental enterprise. The numinous, ineffable subject originates as a transcendental subject (the unconscious), and it is the individual’s transcendent task to “rebecome” that subject (from which it was inchoately separated)—in what Bion (1965, 1970) called “transformations in ‘O,’” and which I term the attainment of the transcendent position (Grotstein, 1996, 1997, [chapter 10](#)). To put it another way, I believe that the task of psychoanalysis is not the attainment of insight but, rather, the use of insight to attain transcendence over oneself, over one’s masks and disguises, to rebecome one’s supraordinate subject. This task involves a transcendent reunion with one’s ineffable subject in a moment of aletheia (unconcealment).

WHO DREAMS THE DREAM AND WHO UNDERSTANDS IT?

Once, when I was a second-year medical student, I experienced a dream (described in [chapter 1](#)). I say “experienced” because I had an epiphany when I awakened from that dream. I knew that, in a way, it was not my dream! Or so I felt at that moment. It occurred to me that the beautiful and awesome dream I had experienced and the dreamer who dreamed that dream were other than I. Someone who was not I was dreaming a wondrous dream while I was asleep! Years later I related this episode to a dinner companion in Jerusalem, Professor Chaim Tadmor of Hebrew University, an authority on ancient Assyrian culture. He was fascinated by my reaction to my dream and informed me that the ancient Assyrians believed that dreams were the language of the gods, that gods spoke to each other through human dreams, and that humans were forbidden from attending to them or remembering them. Dreaming to ancient Assyrians, constituted a divine sexual conversation, and paying attention to them amounted to voyeuristic hubris.

The memory of that epiphany lasted through my analytic training and several psychoanalyses. The meanings of the dream paled in comparison with the mystery of its creation. I realized that we take the awesome phenomenon too much for granted. To say “I had a dream last night” is, in a way,

presumptuous. All we can honestly say is, “I was privileged to witness and experience a part of a dream last night. I wish I could have witnessed and experienced the whole dream.” In other words, our ability to witness a dream, whether asleep or awake, belongs to a preternatural capacity, one possessed by an holographically and numinously functioning ineffable subject of the unconscious, whose *noms de plume* are the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream as well as the Dreamer Who Understands the Dream.

One further point about the ineffable subject is in order: In discussing the unconscious, Freud (1911) stated, “The nucleus of the *Ucs.* consists of instinctual representations which seek to discharge their cathexes; that is to say, it consists of wish impulses” (p. 186).

But then, “It would nevertheless be wrong to imagine that the *Ucs.* remains at rest while the whole work of the mind is performed by the *Pcs.* ... The *Ucs.* is alive and capable of development and maintains a number of other relations with the *Pcs.*, amongst them that of co-operation” (p. 190).

And, “[We] find that many *Pcs.* formations remain unconscious, though we should have expected that, from their nature, they might very well have become conscious. Probably in the latter case the stronger attraction of the *Ucs.* is asserting itself” (p. 193).

I reason from these citations of Freud that he conceived of the *Ucs.* as both wantonly discharging its relentless search for pleasure and relief from unpleasure *and* paradoxically protective of the psyche by actively withholding cathexes from becoming discharged—*out of consideration for the psyche*. As I shall try to show in the following chapters, I believe that the discharging *Ucs.* is not only obeying the ongoing needs of the individual, but also is “discharging” in order to get the attention of the psyche—*in dramatic form*—of urgent affects and affect scenarios that need to be recognized and processed. On the other hand, the *Ucs.* that retains its cathexis from discharging does so out of a “cooperative” covenant with the psyche to protect it from too much revelation achieved too quickly. Moreover, it is my belief that the *Pcs.* constitutes the “search-engine” of consciousness for the *Ucs.*

SPIRITUAL, ONTOLOGICAL, AND MYSTICAL PERSPECTIVES

In trying to describe psychic presences, I have found it useful to add spiritual, ontological, and mystical perspectives to my thinking. By spiritual I mean those aspects of the ultrasensual, yet still experiential dimension that merit psychoanalytic study, and I hope to show that the psychoanalytic conceptions of subject and object are seriously incomplete without that perspective. The spiritual dimension of presence includes the unconscious capacity for prescience or premonition (Bion, 1992), whereby one aspect of the self seems to be superior in knowledge to our more ordinary self.¹³ In addition, that aspect seems to have a quality of unusual authority with its other self. In the premoral stage of infant development, this quality of virtually absolute authority issues from archaic internal (subjective) objects situated in “a gradient of the ego.” In the later, moral stage, the inner voice of this spiritual quality approximates the deity and relates to guilt as well as to ideals.

Modell (1993), citing William James, addresses the concept of presences as follows:

James (1902) observed that in human consciousness there is a “sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call something there.” It is this sense of presence that may have led the Greeks to ascribe to the abstract order of earth, sky, and sea the presence of a god who is the organizer of what appear to be coherent entities. It is the function of a god to bring order out of chaos. From there, it is a short step to believing that an analogous process

Freud rendered his conceptions of the ego and the id in “scientific” or positivistic terms. It is only with the superego that we get a hint from him of a moral or possibly spiritual entity. On the other hand, Klein’s descriptions of the ego, internal objects, the archaic superego, and the death instinct amount to an apocalyptic portrait of the unconscious, one that more approximates the demonic (i.e., the persecutory, preguilt consequences of our primitive intentionality, phantasmal as well as real. Classical psychoanalysis is based on a clearcut division between unconscious intentionality (the drives) and morality (the superego). Kleinians find clinical evidence for primitive superegos that are demonically impulsive as well as compulsive and that, at the same time, seem to impose absolute moral authority over the ego. The Greeks understood this paradox when they portrayed their gods and goddesses as corrupt and corrupting. Spirituality, in other words, is often ignoble, corrupt, and even perverse. The devil himself is the god of a lower pantheon. Jaynes (1976) sees this unilateral hierarchic as the “bicameral mind,” a mind that is divided on a gradient dominated by the higher mind. He pictures the infant as being dominated by powerful godlike voices in a state of absolute hypnotic (nonconscious) submission.

By mystical I refer to the capacity that Bion (personal communication)¹⁴ ascribed to the mystic—“being able to see things as they really are—through the filters of disguise.” The mystic is also able to see the mysterious that is embedded in the ordinary. The mystic does not mystify but detects and clarifies. The analyst, without realizing it, is a practicing mystic. The mystical conceptions of the subject can be integrated with a concept that Bion (1962a, b) introduced—alpha function or “dream work alpha.”

Bion believed that the infant projects into its mother-as-container for relief, attunement, and understanding and that through her use of her alpha function the mother is able to comprehend the meaning of her infant’s cries and signals. He then stated that the infant introjects its mother’s alpha function and is able thereafter to begin to think for itself. I have come to believe that alpha function is an inborn given, a Kantian a priori category, that enables the infant to communicate with its mother as an inchoate “sender” to her “receiver” and “processor” function. Correspondingly, it is our analysands’ use of their own alpha function that enables them to “send” encoded messages to us as analysts, and it is our intuition (Bion, 1965, 1970, 1992), modified by our correlation of the data with other points of view and with the arrival of the “selected fact” (which gives coherence to the data), that allows us to arrive at an interpretation with our own alpha function (“receiver”).

The mystical and spiritual perspectives are older ways of describing our attempts to “divine” the ultrasensual. Following Bion, I have borrowed these perspectives, from the mystics, such as Meister Eckhart (Fox, 1980, 1981b) and from the Gnostics (Pagels, 1979; Bloom, 1983, 1996); today we call them the nonlinear domains of chaos, complexity, emergence phenomena, and paradox. In this regard, I am guided in part by the work of Lewis Carrol (1882), Gleik (1987), Hofstadter (1979), Hofstadter and Dennet (1981), Hawking (1988), Zohar (1990), Kauffman (1993, 1995), Palombo (1999), and Waldron (1992), all of whom approach the mystical and the spiritual domains from the perspectives of nonlinear science, mathematics, or both.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF O FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS

In a series of works on epistemology and ontology, Bion (1965, 1970, 1992) conceived of mental transformations, one of which was the transformation of raw, unmentalized experiences into

(knowledge), initially through the infant's use of mother's reverie and alpha function (patience and intuition), following which the infant could comprehend itself from mother's preliminary "digestion" of the infant's raw experiences. In Bion's terms, this amounts to a transformation from O (unmentalized experiences) into K (knowledge about the self which is to be accepted and integrated). I develop this idea more in [chapter 10](#), but in the meanwhile, I should like to give a preview of what Bion entails in his concept of O. This concept has far-reaching significance for psychoanalysis. Let me summarize for now:

O represents the ineffable, transcendental aspects of the mind, on one hand, and the raw protoencounters or experiences that initially confront the mind, on the other. In classical theory, they can be equated with Freud's conception of the instinctual drives. Bion equated O with Kant's noumenon (before they become processed into phenomena), the thing-in-itself, and even with "God," as well as with Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality. Lacan (1966) similarly talked of the Register of the Real, by which he also meant something beyond imagining and even beyond symbolizing. The Greeks referred to this idea as Ananke (Necessity). In other words, O, in its initial sense, represents cosmic immutability, impersonalness, and utter indifference. Bion tells us, however, that when we are able to allow ourselves to "become O," by which he meant having a capacity to face and to transform into O, then O itself *evolves*, by which I think he meant that we have been able, by countenancing the utter indifference of O, to transform it into our personal, subjective O—by *matching up* with it internally so that our own inner world resonates with the fundamental of the other, like two human tuning forks.

The significance of O for psychoanalysis is, in my opinion, as follows: drives and affects, rather than being the ultimate dreadful content of the repressed, are mere signifiers or mediators for something more profound, ineffable, and incomprehensible. Further, O is not merely localized within; it is omnipresent within us and in the ether of our externality. More about this in [chapter 10](#).

I end this preface with the question I asked at the beginning: Who is the unconscious? As Maurice Blanchot has mused and as Bion often noted, "Sometimes the answer is an embarrassment to the question." Yet the question must be asked with full premonition about its inscrutability and mystery.

A chance observation in a dictionary by my wife, Susan, provides what I believe is the best way to grasp what I have already stated: "Seminal principle: (Philosophy). A potential, latent within an imperfect object, for attaining full development."¹⁵

ROAD MAP THROUGH THE BOOK

As the reader proceeds through the chapters of this book, different designations of these preternatural presences appear. In [chapter 1](#), I introduce the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream and the Dreamer Who Understands It. In [chapter 2](#), I present the "Infant-as-God-the-Creator of its own little universe prior to discovering the universe beyond his creation." In [chapter 3](#), I introduce the "Infinite Geometer," who wields the "calipers of fearful symmetry" and rules over bi-logic and bivalent logical structures. In [chapter 4](#), I present a quasigeometrical version of the dimensions and coordinates of psychic space in which psychic presences dwell.

In [chapter 5](#), I introduce yet another way of talking about these preternatural presences, the ineffable subject of the unconscious and the phenomenal subject of consciousness. In [chapter 6](#), I discuss internal objects as "rogue" or "alien subjective objects" since our identification with them (subjectively) is the source of their haunting and intimidating authority over us within. In [chapter 7](#), I present the myth of the labyrinth and the Minotaur as a developmental staging area for the acquisition of courage, determination,

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