

On love, hate and knowledge

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In this short theoretical paper, I discuss Bion's three relations of love, hate, and knowledge, using Peirce's semiotic theory of relations and Bakhtin's semiotic/philosophical writings. Reading Bion through the prism of these resources allows us to better understand the meaning and ontogenesis of the basic relations and to examine their clinical explanatory value.

Keywords: Bakhtin, Bion, hate, knowledge, love, Peirce, relations, semiotics

1. The difficulty of reading

In *Learning from Experience*, Bion (1989) makes the rather thought-provoking suggestion that the three basic relations of an individual are love (*L*), hate (*H*), and knowledge (*K*). However, despite intensive efforts to elaborate these basic relations, their meaning and ontogenesis remain to a large extent elusive. This difficulty should not be considered the result of poor style or theorization. Bion's writings, especially the later ones, struggle reflectively with the tension between the introduction of insights (Gampel, 2007) and the recognition that these insights should be presented in a communicative, 'digestible' form that would necessarily and tragically undermine their novelty, turning them into ready-made, reified clichés. This irresolvable tension may be addressed stylistically by creating 'holes' in the text, which on the one hand create points of singularity and catastrophes but on the other hand allow the text to 'breathe' and the reader to engage in a different kind of reading. In fact, in biology it has been found that the more complex the organism, the more holes and variety of holes it contains (Casati, 1994). Bion's holes are signs of complexity that call for a different kind of reading, one that is never conclusive but is an ongoing struggle to comprehend something that can never be fully described in words. This approach clearly resonates with Ortega y Gasset's description of reading as a utopian task. In his seminal text *The difficulty of reading*, Ortega y Gasset (1959, p. 1) defines utopia as: "Every action whose initial intention cannot be fulfilled in the development of its activity and which has to be satisfied with approximations essentially contradictory to the purpose which has started it." The present paper is just one attempt to carry out this utopian task by reading and elaborating on Bion's three basic relations in light of C.S. Peirce's semiotic theory and Bakhtin's epistemology. This reading will hopefully give us a better understanding of these basic relations and make their ontogenesis and their clinical value clearer. Bear in mind, though, that reading is a utopian

task since every utterance is simultaneously deficient and exuberant – it says less than it wishes to say and more than it plans (Ortega y Gasset, 1959). Therefore the reading expounded in this paper should not be considered conclusive; it is guided by no more than the holes it presents to the reader.

2. Where do we come from?

Semiotics is defined as follows:

The perspective that results from the sustained attempt to live reflectively with and follow out the consequences of one simple realization: the whole of our experience, from its most primitive origin in sensation to its most refined achievements of understanding, is a network or web of sign relations.

(Deely, 2005, p. 16)

As a perspective, rather than a theory or a method, semiotics in its modern form (e.g. Neuman, 2003; Sebeok and Danesi, 2000) may offer a meta-theory for psychoanalysis. However, in the context of psychoanalysis, the focus of a semiotic analysis should be clearly articulated. As Canestri suggests: “What should seem more pertinent to our discipline today is not so much a definition of the symbol itself, or a rigid and limited characterization of symbolism ... but ... the greater relevance acquired by symbolization as a process” (Canestri, 2007, pp. 2–3). If we adopt this perspective, we can re-examine many theoretical difficulties associated with the meaning of central concepts in psychoanalysis. For example, treating the *sign* rather than the *concept* as our basic unit of analysis may give us a different understanding of the *object* in object relations theory. A discussion of the relevance of semiotics to psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of the present paper. My aim is much more modest: to discuss the relevance of certain aspects of Peircean semiotics to understanding Bion’s basic relations of love, hate, and knowledge. Despite the potential of Peircean semiotics to enrich psychoanalytic theory, it has been applied very little to psychoanalysis and usually with limited access to Peircean terminology (e.g. Olds, 2000; Steiner, 2007, in press). Notable exceptions are Silver’s (1990) pioneering psychosemiotic model, Green’s (2004) discussion of psychoanalysis in Peircean terms, and Salomonsson’s (2007a, 2007b) recent papers that present a semiotic perspective on the treatment of infants. Note that semiotics does not provide a dogmatic set of well-defined ideas, and there are significant differences in focus and interpretation even among those who apply Peircean semiotics to psychoanalysis. For example, while Silver (1990) emphasizes Peirce’s pragmatism and hypothesis generation in his psychosemiotic model, Neuman (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, in press), who adopts a Bakhtinian relational epistemology, emphasizes semiotics as a resource for meaning-making in a world of complexity.

In Peirce’s theory of relations there are three basic relational types, corresponding to his three categories of being: *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness*. Firstness concerns “qualities of feeling” (Peirce, 1931–58, *Collected Papers* [henceforth CP], vol. 8, para.329), “positive internal characters of

the subject in itself" (CP 5.469). Some examples are the "redness" of an apple or the basic feeling of frustration. Secondness "consists in one thing acting upon another" (CP 8.330), i.e. a dyadic structure in which two objects are related through direct and "mechanical" influence, such as the bonding of one molecule to another. Thirdness is "mental or quasi-mental influence of one subject on another relatively to a third" (CP 5.469). In other words, it is a *mediated* relation that cannot be reduced, or broken down, into simpler dyadic elements. These categories are a way of organizing any realm in ascending order of complexity. Although the categories depict an ontology constituted by three orthogonal dimensions, Peirce repeatedly emphasizes their interdependence, an issue that will be mentioned in this paper.

Let us consider the meaning of these categories. Firstness is the "mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else" (CP 8:328); it is the "qualities of feeling" (CP 8:329), "positive internal characters of the subject in itself" (CP 5:469). Firstness is characterized by "multiplicity" and "variety" but with no symbolization or other form of semiosis, meaning that the differentiated particles of the system are not subordinate to any semiotic logic that might be used to sort them out and organize them in a communicable form. Each particle exists, as Husserl put it, 'in and for itself'. Firstness should not be confused with Bion's *O* and Kant's 'thing-in-itself'. As Salomonsson argues: "When we ground *O* in Kant's 'thing-in-itself', it becomes impossible to settle what symptoms or paintings are transformations *of*. Kant maintained that our thoughts do not reflect what objects are 'in themselves'" (Salomonsson, 2007b, p. 1208). This point is discussed extensively by Neuman (2009a, in press):

In fact, the Kantian Ding-an-Sich corresponds to Peirce's concept of the 'dynamical object' rather than to Firstness. In contrast with Bion, Peirce realized that 'raw' sense impressions are never 'raw', "for as long as things do not act upon one another there is no sense or meaning in saying that they have any being" (Lowell Lectures, CP 1.25, 1903). In other words, the quality of our basic encounter with the 'real', the 'dynamical object' signified by Bion as '*O*', is already mediated.

At the most basic level of existence, newborn infants probably exist in a realm dominated by Firstness. This primary form of being invites the question of identity since an object is said to exist if its identity persists over time. The question is how self-identity persists in the chaotic realm of Firstness, where the law of identity ($A = A$) seems to be inapplicable in its highly abstract semiotic version. As Bakhtin argues, albeit in a different context:

Man is never coincident with himself. The equation of identity $A = A$ is inapplicable to him. In Dostoevsky's artistic thought, the genuine life of the personality is played out at the point of his departure beyond the limits of all that he is in terms of the material being which can be spied out, defined and predetermined without his will, 'at second hand'.

(Bakhtin, 1973, p. 48, my italics)

The equation of identity is inapplicable to the primitive form of being, because it assumes a level of semiosis yet to be developed, an 'I' yet to be formed that can be equated with itself. Let us recall that the equation of identity assumes the ability: (1) to transcend the multiple elements that constitute the primordial self and to group them under a unifying sign, in our case 'I'; and (2) to differentiate between what is to the left of the equal sign and what is to the right of the equal sign, even though both are the same sign, A. It assumes a 'difference of similarity' and at the same time a 'similarity of difference'. As the quantum physicist David Bohm (1998) insightfully remarks in his book on creativity, order and structure are created through the interplay of 'difference of similarity' and 'similarity of difference'. However, Firstness introduces self-identity in a very basic form.

3. Identity: The view from within

The primordial form of being is not constituted by the law of identity, which is symbolic in nature. Firstness, like Heraclitus' river or Dilthey's *Erlebnis*, is a flux in which multiplicity and variety in transformation establish systemic closure (e.g. the river or the primordial self) in a way that is almost beyond our symbolic grasp. That is, the elements maintain closure as a whole not through some *general equivalent* (Goux, 1990) such as the 'I', but from *within* the system, on the micro-scale. This implies that in the realm of Firstness, or 'beta elements', to use Bion's terminology, each element exists as it is, in and for itself, as an identity function only. It is not even an object but a dynamic being beyond our symbolic grasp. It is what Peirce describes as the "Dynamical Object" (Peirce, 1992–98, *The Essential Peirce* [henceforth EP], vol. 2, p. 498). As the Nobel laureate Wislawa Szymborska poetically illustrates it in one of her beautiful poems:

In Heraclitus's river
I, the solitary fish, a fish apart
(apart at least from the tree fish and the stone fish),
write, at isolated moments, a tiny fish or two
whose glittering scales, so fleeting,
may only be the dark's embarrassed wink.

(Szymborska, 2000, p. 61)

As symbolic creatures, we have a very hard time imagining a collection of elements that constitutes its closure without the regulation of an outside perspective or subordination to a symbolic order. In fact, we usually fail to adopt Bion's mystical approach (Grotstein, 2007) when addressing the hidden reality and easily slip into theorization and reification of the dynamical object through our highly sophisticated semiotic tools. This failure results in the essentialist fallacy of assuming a transcendental realm available for unmediated contemplation. As Salomonsson argues: "Psychoanalytic transformations cannot be of the essentialist kind" (Salomonsson, 2007a, p. 1214). A similar idea has been propagated by Neuman with regard to the primordial self:

One may even argue that what we describe as the 'I_o' [the primordial self] is no more than the sum of objects and relations in which the individual is embedded. In other words, approaching the *Ding an sich* of a person does not involve archeological excavation of that which is *beneath* the surface but the weaving of a tapestry showing what is *in between* the singularity of the first-person perspective and the second- and third-person perspectives.

(Neuman, 2009b, in press)

Returning to the realm of Firstness and the way identity is established, it is Jean Piaget who insightfully notes the possibility of regulation from within and the exact mathematical mechanism that may be responsible for maintaining this systemic closure. In *Structuralism*, Piaget (1970) considers *structure* in terms of a mathematical group. He points out that a binary operation on elements of a group is reversible in the sense that it has an *inverse*. For example, with regard to the integers (-1, 0, 1, 2, 3, etc.) and the arithmetic operation of addition, for each number n its inverse is $-n$ such as $n+(-n)$ equals 0, which is the *identity element*, the element that changes nothing when applied to any other element (e.g. $3+(-3) = 0$). Piaget argues that the existence of an inverse element in a system results in self-regulation of the system from "within" because an erroneous result is "simply not an element of the system (if $+n-n \neq 0$ then $n \neq n$)". In other words, the closure of such a structure, its "identity", is secured from within through the inverse element that may restore the system to its original state (Piaget, 1970, p. 15).

Let us dwell this primitive form of identity by adopting Bion's terminology and his use of algebraic notation for signifying psychoanalytic ideas. We then denote the primordial self 'I_o'. If the identity of I_o is constituted along the lines presented above, then Piaget's insightful observation may hint at a necessary condition for the transformation of I_o. To move from a primordial state to a more advanced state, I_o must be in a state of 'openness' that involves *a momentary suspension* of the inverse element. Under this condition, I_o loses its boundaries. As a byproduct, however, we expect to see paradoxes and obscurities, such as $n \neq n$ and $n = m$. In other words, when the inverse element (or inverse function) is suspended, the law of identity is violated at the micro level and everything may be potentially equated with everything. This symmetry and its implications for psychoanalytic theory are discussed in depth by Matte Blanco in his theory of bi-logic (Matte Blanco, 1975). Moreover, the idea that the transformation of I_o takes place when the inverse function is *momentarily suspended* has important clinical implications. For example, Bion (1989) speculates about the existence of the 'contact barrier' that functions as a boundary between the conscious and the unconscious. The momentary suspension of the inverse function allows the system to open itself up to the projection of beta elements and to the inclusion of the corresponding alpha elements that are produced through the mirroring mother. As Freud suggests: "Nothing has entered you from without that did not meet what was within" (Freud, 1907c, p. 142). The danger in this openness is that a failure of the alpha function might result in a trickling of beta elements into the conscious realm. As Bion realized, this is a clear characteristic of psychosis.

In Peirce's theory of relations, a monadic relation corresponds to Firstness. Linguistically, it is expressed as a fact about a single object. The statements 'The cat is black' and 'I'm afraid' (or, more accurately, the feeling of being afraid) are expressions of monadic relations. A monadic relation is thus a basic quality of feeling that may be expressed linguistically through an adjective or adverb. In the primary form of existence, 'I am bad' means that the closure constituting the primordial I_0 includes 'bad elements'. Because these elements are in constant flux, they should not be considered *objects* but dynamic forms of being, similar to wave functions. In other words, basic qualities associated with I_0 are dynamic processes rather than stable objects. Moreover, they cannot be considered qualities of self. As Peirce argues (CP 5:56):

It is, however, a patent fact that we never, *in the first instance*, attribute a Quality of Feeling to ourselves. We first attribute it to a *Non-Ego* and only come to attribute it to ourselves when irrefragable reasons compel us to do so.

In other words, the basic qualities are not objects contained by the 'self' but dynamical objects constituting the primordial self. These qualities turn into self-objects only through the other and as a result of the mirror stage, as will be explained below. It is important to realize, though, that Peirce's position is radical in the sense that it paradoxically locates the second- (or third-) person perspective before the first-person perspective. According to Peirce, our self is hypothesized and constructed rather than given as it is. This position sharply contrasts with the Solipsistic-Cartesian doctrine that arrogantly claims that: "There exists a first person perspective possessing privileged and irreducible characteristics, in virtue of which we stand in various kinds of isolation from any other persons ..." (Audi, 1995, p. 751). Modern psychoanalysis is in sharp contrast with the Solipsistic doctrine, and Peirce, like other scholars such as Bakhtin, presents an alternative.

The dynamical objects may be described as being subject to the two basic 'forces' recognized by Freud, Thanatos and Eros; the first represents the natural tendency towards disorder of the system and the second represents the tendency towards greater connectivity and unification. Although these instincts, their binary nature, and their diametrically opposed meanings might be regarded as anachronistic, they resonate perfectly with our modern understanding of systems. In modern terms we may describe Thanatos as the natural tendency towards an increase in entropy as epitomized by the second law of thermodynamics. This law suggests that the total entropy of any isolated thermodynamic system tends to increase over time. Its general and common sense, however, is that a system's natural tendency is towards disorder simply because 'disordered states' are much more probable. Any mother or father can understand this law by observing their children's room. Given enough time, even the most organized room, especially a teenager's, will turn into chaos. Eros, as a contrasting force, may be considered a trajectory leading to an organized system by weaving connections between isolated elements of the system. In modern terms, Eros can be described according to the dynamics of *preferential attachment*, where

initially random variations in a network of elements are automatically reinforced through feedback loops, thus greatly magnifying differences and creating highly connected nodes/elements known as *hubs* (Barabasi, 2002). Wikipedia explains this process as the way some quantity (e.g. wealth or connectivity) is distributed among a number of individuals or objects according to how much they already have, so that those who are already wealthy, for example, receive more than those who are not. In other words, some quantity is randomly distributed at first; for instance, one person is ‘randomly’ born into a wealthy family and another is ‘randomly’ assigned poor resources. The dynamic is such that, given the randomly assigned quantity, more of it will probably be assigned to those who already have it: the rich will become richer; those who are more popular on Facebook will get more friends; and so on. If we impose value judgements on dynamical objects subjected to these trajectories, we may call them ‘bad’ and ‘good’, respectively, and use them as the building blocks for love and hate relations. Those elements of the system that have the magnetic force to attract other elements of the system, whether mental or material, will be evaluated positively, whereas those that remain relatively isolated will be evaluated negatively. This interpretation will become clear in the following section.

4. The ‘I’ as a vanishing point

The ‘I’ as the emerging vertex of relations is formed from the outside as a result of the *mirror stage* (Lacan, 2001). The importance and dynamics of the mirror stage were introduced by Bakhtin in 1919, long before Lacan discussed it in the context of psychoanalysis. As Bakhtin put it:

Indeed, our position before a mirror is always somewhat spurious, for since we lack any approach to ourselves from outside, in this case, as in the other, we *project ourselves* into a peculiarly *indeterminate possible other*, with whose help we then try to find an axiological position in relation to ourselves, in this case, too, we try to vivify ourselves and give form to ourselves – out of the other.

(Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 32–3, my italics)

Bakhtin makes two main important observations. First, mirroring is not passive reflection. We “project ourselves” onto the other rather than being passively mirrored by the other. The second important observation is that this other is not a well-formed object. It is a “peculiarly *indeterminate possible other*”, just as the I_0 that projects itself onto it is an “indeterminate possible I”. In other words, the mirror stage in which the ‘I’ is transformed from a primordial form of being into a relational form of being (i.e. an object in relation) involves projection, which we may describe in mathematical terms as a mapping function established between the *I-to-be-formed* and the *other-to-become*.

In Firstness, the infant may project basic qualities to the outside world with no concrete other in mind. This process may be better described as ‘expression’ rather than ‘projection’ because ‘projection’ assumes a well-defined other. This idea resonates with Grotstein’s insightful argument:

... we then come to be able to experience apparitions or revelations of the anticipated object from within us, from our inner Platonic/Kantian, numinous reservoir, which allows us to anticipate the yet unknown and yet-to-arrive object.

(Grotstein, 2007, p. 10)

In other words, although the *other-to-become* does not yet exist, it exists as a promise yet to be fulfilled, a promise that we trust from birth and actively, though blindly, strive to fulfil.

The mother's role in the mirror stage is to accept these expressed (beta) elements and to return them to the infant by a variety of semiotic means, including facial expressions, linguistic signifiers, and gestures. In using the term *semiotic means*, I am stressing the mother's mirroring activity as semiotic activity in which the newborn is offered a *substitute* for his/her basic feelings. This semiotic interpretation is crucial for understanding the mirror stage. The infant is offered *something that stands for something else* (e.g. a facial expression of sorrow as a substitute for a painful experience), which is precisely Peirce's definition of a sign (CP 55). This interpretation contradicts the idea that projective identification is the earliest form of symbol formation (Segal, 1964).

The basic form of substitution, as evident in the mirror stage, is *equivalence* (Goux, 1990), in which an isomorphic relation is established between beta and alpha elements, for example, between pain and an empathic look. This basic form of substitution establishes the transition from Firstness to Secondness. This basic form of substitution, and in fact of semiosis, is phylogenetically evident in a variety of domains, as originally recognized by Hegel and Marx and further developed by Jean-Joseph Goux (1990) in his seminal work *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*. In economics, for example, *barter* is the most basic form of the 'symbolic equation', (Freud, 1924d; Segal, 1981), or of substitution, to use the Marxist term. In ethics an eye for an eye is an illustrative example of this basic logic of substitution, and in the development of writing, pictography is a clear instance of substitution as equivalence. In fact, *symmetry* governs the first form of substitution and semiosis, an idea that resonates with Matte Blanco's idea that symmetry governs primary processes. At this point one should acknowledge the importance of triad-icity, as triads are the simplest groups in which asymmetric network phenomena can be studied (Mesterton-Gibbons and Sherratt, 2009, in press). That is, the introduction of the triad is a break in symmetry and a shift to a higher level of complexity. As Green realizes: "It is as if, when a certain stage of complexity is reached, three elements in interaction are needed to understand the network of relationships that depict the situation" (Green, 2004, p. 100).

The idea of the mirror stage transforming a beta element from the status of a dynamical object into an object, an alpha element, will be developed further.

The above suggestions resonate with Melanie Klein's idea of 'epistemophilic instinct' (Klein, 1926) – the instinct to know, expressed most basically in the ability to project I_o elements onto the other and to establish an

isomorphism between the beta elements and their mirror images (i.e. the alpha elements). Based on the above discussion, this instinct could be better termed the *semiotic instinct*.

There is another crucial semiotic aspect to this instinct. Put an infant and a kitten in a room. Get their attention and point to the window with your finger. The kitten will gaze at your finger. The infant will direct its attention to the window. This instinct of following a pointing gesture is an essential aspect of our cognitive and linguistic development, an aspect that probably led Ortega y Gasset to make the provocative claim that: "Language must be studied in its root as pure gesture" (Ortega y Gasset, 1959, p. 10).

What is interesting, however, is that, in mirroring, the mother points to the infant and introduces to the infant *a new element*: the *I-to-be-formed as an object*. This 'I' is the thing the mother is looking at when she interacts with the infant. In contrast to other alpha elements that have clear corresponding beta elements associated with concrete somatic signifieds, the new element, the I-to-be-formed, has no clear reference. It is neither the pain associated with a growing tooth nor the satisfaction associated with a full stomach. *It turns out to be a signifier with no signified!* Following Neuman (2009b, in press) let us denote this 'I' as 'I_R'. The idea of I_R as a signifier with no signified was introduced by Bakhtin. He suggested that in the linguistic realm the sign 'I' fulfils the mysterious function of associating the lived experience of the individual with a communicable and social form of expression. As Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist beautifully explains: "Much as Peter Pan's shadow is sewn to his body, the 'I' is the needle that stitches the abstraction of language to the particularity of the lived experience" (Holquist, 1990, p. 28). A similar thesis was introduced by Peirce, who described the self as an explanatory construct that emerges as the system's hypothetical fixed point of reference (CP 5:230).

If we follow the algebraic metaphor presented above, then a probable scenario is that, in the transition from Firstness to Secondness, I_R is formed primarily through (1) openness involving momentary suspension of the inverse function, and (2) '*field extension*' where additional elements are introduced to the infant by the mother. The most important element is the 'I'. This element is introduced, however, with no concrete reference. It is the element to which the mother points in her language, gestures and gaze, but it has no corresponding beta element or somatic locus. It is the 'fixed point' of the system, the element of constancy, and the *common denominator* (Goux, 1990) in a system in constant flux: I am what my mother is looking at when I cry, feel pain, or am satisfied or frustrated.

At first, the new element is just one of many elements. However, it turns out to have a unique status. The subordination of the beta elements to the emerging 'I' is derived from the unique status of the latter as the 'fixed point' of the system. It is the common denominator. Therefore, this signified/signifier turns into a 'hub' connected to all other elements regardless of their particulars. Its introduction into the system is not 'random'. However, the dynamics that establish its status as a 'hub' are similar to the dynamics of preferential attachment, as it becomes a 'magnet' for the other elements. In the later phase of Thirdness it turns out to be like the *vanishing point* in

painting, which in semiotic terms is the introduction of the ultimate perspective, the vertex, the mathematical zero (Rotman, 1993). The 'I' as the vanishing point is the kernel of our mature ego, but at the basic level it is constituted by Secondness, as will be explained below.

5. I love you, I hate you, I know you

Peirce's second category of being, it should be recalled, is Secondness. Secondness "consists in one thing acting upon another" (CP 8:330). It is "the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third" (CP 8:328). In other words, Secondness involves a *dyadic relation*, which may be formally described as a fact about two things/objects. 'I love you' is an expression of a dyadic relation. In this context, it is important to understand how the transformation from a monadic relation to a dyadic relation takes place.

Peirce introduced the idea of *hypostatic abstraction* (CP 4:235, 4:227–323) to address this challenge. Hypostatic abstraction is a process that converts a *quality into an object*. Drawing on the terminology of systems theory, we may describe it as a process whereby the trajectory of the system ends in an *attractor*, a set of points in which the system eventually settles. The transformation is actually from a monadic relation to a dyadic relation through the *reification* and *containment* of the basic quality. For example, the expression 'honey is sweet' may be converted into 'honey possesses sweetness'. This process is applied to elements associated with the I_0 , as well as to the other that changes from an 'indeterminate possible other' into a reified object. A concrete example of hypostatic-abstraction-at-work is given by Neuman (2009b, in press). It must be noted that containment is a process of "semiotic interaction" (Salomonsson, 2007, p. 1214) More specifically: "Containment indicates the part of the process in which the mother receives her baby's signs of troublesome emotions and signifies them back to him" (Salomonsson, 2007, p. 1215). In this sense, even a 'dyadic' process of projection or projective identification is semiotically mediated. This point is expressed powerfully by Silver:

Saying that thought is simply 'projected' is to propose an object-relation involving one object hence entirely hidden in the null-dimension. Let me hasten to add that 'projections', as refereed by Freud (1991) and by many others (Green, 1980), as a general and normal imaginative phenomena, is a symbolic experience.

(Silver, 1990, pp. 300–1)

This perspective is in line with Peirce, who "seems to offer a non-linear, complex, and reflective cognitive process in which Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness – like the three Borromean rings – cannot be differentiated" in practice (Neuman, 2009a, 2009b, in press).

The I_R mediated by the mother in the mirror stage takes on its unique status as the general substitute by being connected to all other elements and by being the only element that has no concrete, differentiated locus/signified. Like Spinoza's God, it becomes the ultimate signifier that contains all. It becomes a *container* that under the first form of semiosis

establishes symmetric equivalence with its contained elements. Here *projective identification* enters the picture. In contrast to the basic one-directional projections of the Firstness category, projective identification is based on the isomorphic routes established in the mirror stage. I can project onto you because we have established an isomorphic relationship. This isomorphism means reversibility and the ability to go back to where we started. In contrast to the 'expressiveness' of Firstness and its one-directional flow from the *I-to-be-formed* and the *other-to-become*, projective identification is built on semiotic cues that let us return to our selves. In Firstness the infant is like a child lost in the woods, able only to cry but not to find his way out. In Secondness, the infant is like a child lost in the woods who can trace his route back while following the signs left by his mother.

Projective identification is a tool for dealing with the threat of destruction grounded in the semiosis of Secondness, where the 'I' is equated with its elements. This logic of semiosis, which clearly resonates with Klein's original formulation of projective identification, is as follows: I contain 'badness'. Under the logic of symmetry (Matte Blanco, 1975), 'I' is equated with its elements. I contain badness therefore I am bad. Badness as a thanatotic force threatens to destroy me. You are the mirror image of my 'I' under the first form of substitution. I get rid of my 'bad' by projecting it onto you. You contain bad. You are a bad object. I hate you.

In this phase the containment and projective identification of the basic qualities, which have turned into objects (i.e. alpha elements), allow the infant to establish the first form of relations: love, hate, and knowledge. At the most basic level, love is the dyadic relation established between the infant and the other as the object that contains 'good'. This is probably why different forms of love (for mother, spouse, and children) are governed by the same need to be as close as possible to the loved object (Green, 2005). Another aspect of the dyadic relation is that the first form of substitution is expressed by projection and introjection. For example, the infant may logically deduce from his love for a significant other that the significant other loves him. This semiotic logic explains pathological forms of love such as *erotomania*, in which a person has a delusional belief that someone of higher social status (e.g. a celebrity) is in love with him or her. The person believes that this love is reciprocated and when rejected might resort to infantile aggression against the object. This aggression is explained by the violation of the first form of substitution. If you do not establish our symmetry, then I cannot project the destructive elements that threaten to destroy me. Therefore, your refusal to love me is a threat to my self and I have to attack you in self-defence.

Hate ['I hate you'] is the dyadic relation established between the infant and the other as an object that contains 'bad'. Knowledge ['I know you'] is the dyadic relation established between the 'I' as a container and the 'You' as a container: I know you because I know what is in you. You contain what is in me. The interpretation of this basic form of knowledge resonates with the most basic form of knowledge as an organic act of incorporation through eating or sexual intercourse. For example, in Genesis the verb 'to

know' [*yada* in Hebrew] appears in the context of sexual intercourse [Adam 'knew' Eve] and in the context of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In both cases, the sexual and the gastronomical knowledge is portrayed as an outside object incorporated into the consuming and containing other. This is probably why Bion used the Greek signs ♂ and ♀, originally denoting male and female, to indicate 'contained' and 'container'. This form of knowledge also explains the deep association between knowledge and paranoia (Loewald, 2003). Knowing you entails knowing that you are consuming me and my thoughts. The logic of paranoia is the logic of reverse cannibalism: the containment of the container. You spy on my mind because you devour my mind's content through my projective identification and the substitution of my self for your self.

The semiotic process described so far also explains the asymmetry of love and hate. As adults we believe that the loved object is unique and irreplaceable (Green, 2005). It is as if the loved object were like our own 'I', unique and irreplaceable. However, the logic of hate is such that it seldom, and only in pathological cases, focuses on an irreplaceable and unique object. We have racial hatred but rarely racial love, and even the occasional cases of racial love we tend to interpret as reaction formation, such as when supposed admirers of Jews are found to be secret anti-Semites. The logic of hate is the logic that prevents the 'I' from growing and establishing its status first as the hub and then as the vanishing point. It is threatened by destructive elements and therefore remains an object under threat rather than an object of unique status. In order to become a hub, the 'I-as-object' must be linked to as many elements as possible. However, a violent attack of linking, as described by Bion, may lead to fragmentation of the self and in extreme cases to withdrawal to Firstness. The logic of hate is the ultimate logic of symmetry and attacks on linking in which every object, despite its unique characteristics, is equivalent to 'bad', to the evil that threatens to destroy me. If 'I' equals 'bad' and under the logic of symmetry 'I' equals everything (Matte Blanco, 1975) then, according to the first form of substitution, all objects are bad and should be destroyed. An attack on linking is therefore inevitable. This explains why the logic of hate, more than it is destructive to others, is destructive to the self, which turns against itself like a biological cell committing suicide: *apoptosis*. In contrast, the logic of love is such that it does not threaten the status of the ultimate substitute, thereby allowing the self to grow, like a hub in a network, up to a critical point of narcissistic bifurcation, where it is differentiated and projected onto the other. This process implies the conditioning of knowledge on love.

Knowledge, in the true sense of the word, or knowledge of truth as pursued by Bion, is conditioned on love. This idea is reflected in our culture in the story of Prometheus. Prometheus was punished by the gods not for bringing knowledge to people but for seeking knowledge through destruction, through stealing, through taking from the gods. Had he sought true knowledge through love, Prometheus' destiny might have been different. Similarly, Western culture's Promethean quest for knowledge has led it to the brink of self-destruction.

6. How do we know? How do we love?

Thirdness is “mental or quasi-mental influence of one subject on another relatively to a third” (CP 5:469). It is the “mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other” (CP 8:328). A sign positioned in a triadic structure of sign, signified, and interpretant is a form of Thirdness. Lacan’s trilogy of real, imagined, and symbolic is a form of Thirdness. Winnicott’s potential space having the form of the symbol, the symbolized, and the interpreting subject (Ogden, 1985, p. 132) is also a form of Thirdness.

A triadic relation is a *dynamic* relation among three objects, such as ‘A gave B to C’. Notice that the triadic relation corresponding to Thirdness constitutes a different category of relations since it introduces the ultimate level of complexity. As Peirce realized, a genuine triadic construct *cannot be reduced to or composed from lower-order relations* (monadic and dyadic). However, combinations of triads will suffice to build a structure with every higher-order relation: “Analysis will show that every relation which is tetradic, pentadic, or any greater number of correlates is nothing but a compound of triadic relations” (CP 1:345).

A sign is a triadic structure: it is “something, A, which denotes some fact or object, B, to some interpretant thought, C” (ibid.). This triadic sign-structure is clearly applicable to the analytical situation in which the unconscious is “playing the role of the object, verbalization as its expression in terms of signs, and interpretive thought as the process by which the terms are related to one another” (Green, 2004, p. 113).

A triadic relation is equated by Peirce with *meaning*: “every triadic relation is meaning” (ibid.). Therefore, meaning is built into every process of semiosis. When I_R changes from being an element among elements to being the vanishing point (denoted I_V), it turns into an *interpretant*, the idea corresponding to the sign. The interpreter/self then turns into a sign in itself: “Like the signs in general, the self manifests a trinary character. Every self, in collaboration with its sign addresses itself to some other” (CP 5:252). Here we may sense triadicity, which takes the object produced by hypostatic abstraction and turns it into a sign with the maximum complexity and abstraction. In this context, I love you, hate you, or know you not as an object but as a sign, as part of a meaning-making process on the highest level. You become a sign that cannot be equated with its contained elements; rather, it represents a vanishing point, *my perspective*, which is unique and irreplaceable. This is precisely Bakhtin’s idea of the individual as a unique perspective (Bakhtin, 1990), an idea that has implications for understanding phenomena like bereavement (Neuman *et al.*, 2006). The I_V as my unique perspective also explains the exclusiveness and uniqueness of mature love. As Bakhtin puts it:

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons *do not coincide*. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, *I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself.*

(Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 22–3, my italics)

Bakhtin suggests: “As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes” (ibid., p. 23). Thus, mature love is not seeing my self in the other but seeing my *non-self* in the other, seeing my own vanishing point, and complementing it with the other’s vanishing point. According to this interpretation, a sign is a loophole through which I may experience myself as a unique individual rather than as an object. To quote Bakhtin again: “I always have a loophole, as it were, through which I can save myself from being no more than a natural given” (ibid., p. 40), an object among other objects. For a summary of the discussion thus far, see Table 1.

7. Back into the loophole

I began this paper by emphasizing the importance of holes. The most important holes are, of course, the loopholes that attempt to save us from being ‘natural givens’. Only through Thirdness can we save ourselves from being ‘natural givens’ – objects of love, hate or knowledge. However, this is not the expected end-point of a linear course of development. All three basic categories/relations are evident in our lives. Our development is like a spiral, and therefore the basic constitutive transformations of the geometrical spiral (i.e. translation plus rotation) are evident in the trajectory of our development. We move on as we strive to return to our point of departure, which is no longer the same as it was. Thus the spiral model represents a process in which the same themes are evident in different stations of our lives. This idea can be seen in Bion’s *A Memoir of the Future*, as insightfully presented by Gampel (2007). For example, mature love has the narcissistic aspect of Secondness, and mature knowing always contains a grain of paranoia and cannibalism. However, the spiral model also suggests that, despite the circular transformation that strives to bring us back to the same point (i.e. rotation), there is a complementary process of translation, of moving along the line, progressing point by point along the arrow of time, thus constituting a vector, a dimension with a direction. This coupling of rotation and translation assures us that we never return exactly to the same point. In a very deep sense, rotation as a transformation headed back to the original state in a circular motion represents the thanatotic process that strives to annihilate us. Translation, on the other hand, is the transformation that

Table 1. The semiotic relations in context

| Category | Relation type | Status of object | Nature of ‘I’ | Dominant ego function |
|------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Firstness | Monadic | Dynamical object/beta element | Closure constituted by the inverse and identity functions | Field extension and projection |
| Secondness | Dyadic | Object/alpha element | Container/hub | Projective identification |
| Thirdness | Triadic | Sign | Vanishing point/perspective | Semiosis |

pushes us away from our origins – anti-entropic movement. In light of these diametrically opposed forces, the psychic life of the individual and the way one gains knowledge of self and others seem paradoxically much more comprehensible and complex at the same time. This conclusion should guide us in future inquiries into a subject that is only partially discussed in this paper. This paper is therefore inconclusive and a call for future dialogue; it is an invitation for future research and contemplation on psychoanalytic ideas from a semiotic perspective that may enrich psychoanalytic theory as Bion conceived it – a never-ending task.

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Translations of summary

Über Liebe, Hass und (Er-)Kennen. In diesem kurzen theoretischen Aufsatz diskutiere ich Bions drei Grundarten von Beziehungen Liebe, Hass und Kenntnis. Dabei stütze ich mich auf die semiotische Theorie der Relationen von Peirce und Bakhtins semiotische/philosophische Schriften. Bion durch das Prisma dieser Quellen zu lesen ermöglicht uns, die Bedeutung und die Ontogenese der grundlegenden Beziehungen besser zu verstehen und ihren erklärenden Wert für die klinische Praxis zu untersuchen.

Sobre el amor, el odio y el saber. Este breve trabajo teórico analiza las relaciones entre el amor, el odio y el saber en Bion. Para ello, utiliza la teoría semiótica de las relaciones de Peirce y los escritos semiótico-filosóficos de Bakhtin. Una lectura de Bion a través del prisma de estos recursos conceptuales nos permite no solo entender mejor el sentido y la ontogénesis de las relaciones básicas, sino también examinar su valor explicativo en la clínica.

Amour, haine et connaissance. Dans ce bref article théorique, l'auteur examine les trois liens - amour, haine et connaissance – de Bion à la lumière de la théorie sémiotique des relations de Peirce et des écrits sémiotiques/philosophiques de Bakhtin. Ce prisme enrichit la lecture de Bion et éclaire la compréhension de la signification et de l'ontogénèse de ces liens de base et l'étude de leur valeur clinique heuristique.

Amore, odio e conoscenza. Questo breve lavoro teoretico tratta delle tre relazioni in Bion di amore, odio e conoscenza alla luce della teoria semiotica delle relazioni di Pierce e degli scritti semiotico-filosofici di Bakhtin. Una lettura di Bion attraverso il prisma di questi autori ci consente una più profonda comprensione del significato e dell'ontogenesi delle tre relazioni basilari e di esaminare il loro valore esplicativo a livello clinico.

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