

Dreams: are they personal or social?

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Abstract

The history and lineage of dreams is ancient, mysterious and revelatory. Dreams have been used for prophecy, fortune-telling, for access to the spirit world and for extending our vision beyond our diurnal limits. Ancient Greece sought healing through sleep and dreams; Bion asserts the psychotic hallucinates because he cannot dream, cannot use normal dream work; Kohut and self psychologists also see dreams as revealing the unconscious state of the self and giving the therapist an opportunity to aid in self-healing.

In my experience, group members are soon able to feel themselves into the expressed dream of one of their members and to relate both to the dreams, to the group situation and to their own participation. Dreams are therefore both individual and social and dreamtime is a valuable time in which we can reconnect to ourselves and to the group matrix and through this to society of which each one of us is but a fragment.

Key words: group, dream, social dream

Freud's view of dreams has dominated during this century. "Dreams are not in themselves social utterances, not a means of giving information", the dream is an intra-psychic phenomenon which has sleep-preserving functions, sensoring unacceptable psychic contents. Dreams can be decoded by the expert in the psychology of the unconscious. Dreams are democratic because oedipal creatures all, we constantly recycle our childhood adventures and tragedies. In his "revolutionary" dreams, Freud, the rebellious poor subject in the Austrian empire together with its arrogant prime minister Count Thun, are both translated into an oedipal father-son dyad: Social context is banished, the intra-psychic empire of the family is superimposed onto the imperial hierarchy. Freud's dreamwork is democratic: "Paricide replaces regicide" (Schorske). However, society re-enters the dreamworld when Ferenczi in 1913 asks "To whom does one relate one's dreams?".

Dream telling, the search for the other to whom one can tell the dream, transcends Freud's autonomous intra-psychic dream model. Indeed the anthropologists have shown us cultures where dreams are given great importance, are told each morning in the family circle as means of communications with the spirit world.

In a striking phrase Jung writes: "The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul opening into that cosmic night which was psyche

long before there was any ego-consciousness". For Jung the dream comes from the more universal, truer, more whole self, the bearer of ego-hood. Later we shall see how this concept of the dream possessing an unifying capacity has been taken on in social dream matrix workshops, initiated by the British Organisational Consultant W. Gordon Lawrence.

As group analysts we are aware of the universal, pervasive, powerful impact of context and setting. Whatever is experienced, said, attended to, ignored, has meaning connections to the situation in both the here and now and its resonance to the there and then. Thus the dream remembered, brought to the group, if explained, or ignored, associated to, amplified, interpreted, belongs to the group context. Does the dreamer dream for herself or for the group? In respect of dreams in the group, Foulkes was still a follower of Freud, who wrote that dreams are not in themselves social utterances, not a means of giving information. Note that Freud here speaks from his one body intra-psychic model, in contradiction to his later acknowledgement that all psychology is both individual and social. Foulkes writes "The dream is particularly an individual creation, not meant for publication, for communication to others. The self, as Freud has shown us, refused to accept it even as an internal intra-individual communication". Foulkes contradicted himself by saying that we should treat the dream like any other communication according to its dynamic significance. Every dream told in the group is the property of the group, which has a fine intuition to distinguish between "group dreams" and other dreams which can be presented as resistances. The dream can shed light on the group situation, on the group as a whole, can be an unconscious reflection on group occurrences.

Foulkes considered that the manifest content of dreams relates to the ongoing transference situation and this is the way in which the positive use of dreams comes into the group situation: dream as told to the group is left to the group to analyse. The dreamer often reports events in his dream which shed light on his own situation, in particular in relation to the group, on the group as a whole, on events going on in the group, his unconscious reflections on occurrences in the group. This is a valuable aspect of dreaming in group analysis and has to be differentiated from telling of dreams as a resistance, when it represents withdrawal from human contact.

So far we have looked at and been confined within the intra-psychic and autonomous model of the dream. Yet within this model, from the object of relations perspective, there is always an internalised group so that the dynamic processes are often recognisable in the theme of the group where the presence of intra-psychic others may threaten or may offer safety to the dreamer. The internal object is used for projection or evacuation of intolerable psychic conflicts so that the dream is an effort to make use of a "not me personification", this is not my murderous aggression, but that of the other who attacks me.

The dream is also an attempt to find a container for the conflicted self, to give recognition and expression to our cultures of psychic forces. How often in a dream do we not seek a home for ourselves, just as in childhood we sought security in the arms of parents. Here I recall Freud writing about the child in the dark bedroom calling for the parents, who says that when he hears their voices he feels safe because the light goes on.

Claudio Neri has written of the common space of the group, as an imaginary stage by which the participants' fantasies are formed (Resnik "The theatre of dreams"). Neri wisely reminds us that the fact that a patient brings a dream to the group does not imply that the dream becomes a group dream. Sometimes, the group is there to receive a dream with the dreamer making a gift, a fragment of childhood or a precious photo from the family album. But in other dreams it is the group that is in the foreground with the story of the individual in the background.

The imaginative space of the group can represent a fantasy of the interior of the maternal body, a rich space of creativity and a stimulus to imaginative curiosity. In group fantasies and dreams exploration of these obscure spaces becomes part of the group process. Dreams, fantasies and imaginative speculation are ways in which self can be represented in the group.

Any member of the group, or of a social dreaming matrix, may tell a dream with the aim of revealing an inner experience to an audience. This is dream telling, a narrative. The group's response may be disinterest, evasion; a dreamer in one of my groups was told that before the group could give attention and understanding to his dream he had himself to become a more responsive and understanding member of the group, moving from his position of self-isolation and destruction; the response to his interpersonal relationships is the also response to his dream. Other dreams may be welcomed, resonated and responded to as illuminating not only the dreamer's psyche, but those of other group members, amplifying the group's recognition of their shared processes.

An habitual latecomer had overslept and been awakened by a dream in which she was attacking her father, trying to strangle him and damage his throat. That same night in another dream, she was looking at the group through a TV screen, but wishing that she could actually be at the group. Through the dream she could represent, then speak about her fear to damage her therapist by the aggressive things she needed to say to him, a theme resonated in the group, bringing into consciousness damage that can be done to fathers by their daughters in retaliation to having been physically and emotionally abused by them. Another dream which could be understood as the group containing and amplifying hidden aspects was from a woman who suffered severe migraines. Her dream occurred during an migranous attack: she was being attacked by

members of the group with others standing by and not protecting her. This dream came at a time when she was becoming more able to assert herself in the group and to put limits onto what another woman representing her mother, was doing to her. Some two years later, as she was preparing to leave the group, this same person again had some headaches and a terrifying dream of an airplane taking off vertically, though its back was broken away, leaving everyone vulnerable to falling out. This dream represented both her fear of leaving the group catastrophically and being vulnerable, but also represented the group's potential to disintegrate through a member leaving and perhaps again her fear of her underlying destructive capacities. The capacity to have a horrifying dream and to have it responded to before leaving was important for her and for the group.

Udo Rauchfleisch (1995) has shown that dreams in groups emerge at times when there is a disturbance to the group structure, as when a member leaves, as in the dream I have reported, or when a new member is expected. The dream reveals both the underlying disturbance and the defences of the individual and of the group.

Example: A group anticipates welcoming a new member and does not seem to experience conflicts over rivalry, disappointment, difficulty in sharing. However, in a dream the group is sitting together at a garden party and they are annoyed because the therapist has chosen to sit at another table, talking to people they do not know. The dream offered the opportunity to recognise their anxiety that the newcomer would take the therapist's attention. Another dream he reports is the response of a woman to another woman having left the group. In this dream she is with other people in a lift, becomes terrified when she discovers that a mirror in which she used to see herself had disappeared and she was faced with a blank wall. Through this dream the group could recognise the loss of mirroring that the former member had provided and to appreciate that they themselves now had to develop their own capacity for self-reflection and for self-discovery.

Here it is relevant to refer to the work of Didier Anzieu who described the dream as a "pellicule", a membrane which protects part of an organism and which also functions as a photographic film on which impressions register. The dream acts as a protective shield, putting both external stimuli and internal pressures onto the same plane. This presupposes the existence of the skin ego, the earliest body boundary, always vulnerable to rupture in the cumulative traumas of everyday life. This skin envelope, this pellicule, can clearly be seen in the dream of a group patient described by Luisa Brunori (unpublished) where in the dream the patient comes out of a tent which is a sort of theatre, a kind of rubber tent, which is like a membrane. Emerging from this tent and leaving it brings the patient into a zone where he experiences the anxiety of being alone. The rupture of the group membrane through the arrival of newcomers gives us evidence of its existence.

Bion and dreams

In his late writing *Cogitations*, Bion writes that dreaming proper is a continuous process in waking life akin to a mental digestive process that makes conscious material accessible for storing unconsciously, suitable for transformation from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position. If the capacity for dreamwork, as in the psychotic, is destroyed, the psychotic is unable to make use of the experience of both external and internal reality and then hallucination takes the place of dreaming. The dream also has an integrating and synthesizing capacity for achieving "common sense", linking body senses to one another. Similarly, dreams in the group can make 'common sense' between the members and unify the group matrix.

I have a former individual patient of Bion's in one of my groups. A single woman now in her sixties, highly intelligent and a good linguist, she has not risen above a secretarial position, and lives a relatively restricted social and emotional life. After several years in a twice-a-week group, she has achieved a much improved social and emotional level of functioning, in contrast to her previous destructive, explosive, unsocial behaviour. In the group she very often falls asleep for lengthy periods and has long periods of insomnia. I believe she illustrates Bion's thesis of the pathological effect of the lack of dreamwork in waking life, and that she sleeps in the group because she lacks the capacity for normal waking time dreaming, for reverie, mostly she can only hear what directly connects with her preoccupations and without it becomes unconscious. She hates people who have the ability to speak openly about themselves. This person rarely brings dreams to the group, but here is one. In the dream there was a ship and she knew there were many untrustworthy and dangerous persons aboard. The steamer's funnel was belching and billowing intense black smoke which was descending on everyone and she knew that the ship would sink under it. She spoke vividly and was listened to attentively. She had thought hard about her dream and knew that it represented her terrible inner contents, such as her jealousy, which was so painful out of control that sometimes she wants to die of it, yet she also knows that her jealousy is healthy and therefore does not want to lose it. Her anger is terrible, uncontrollable, seeps out of her: in the dream, because the smoke comes from the funnel of the ship, it therefore has some direction and does not seep out. Her dream enabled the group to work on jealousy, exclusion, spoiling, splitting of love and hate, it gave direction to the shared voyage.

Donald Winnicott

Dreamwork takes place in what Winnicott called the intermediate third area of experience, the in-between. This is a space for curiosity, exploration, discovery, the playground of experience. Winnicott's ideas have been taken up by the Kohutian self-psychologists who respect the dream as phenomenon, as a 'thing in itself' that communicates meaning, a meaning that does not need decoding, that needs empathic

attunement by the listener. Staying with the dreamer's subjective experience, understanding the particular images and experiences as presented, as expressions of the state of the self and also as attempts of self-healing, through regulation and restoration of psychic structure. "The dream is the best expression of itself and not a disguise for something else". Instead of being an authority on meanings, the primary task of the therapist, or of the other group members, is to amplify and elucidate the patterns of meanings conveyed by the dream imagery. Such a dream was that of a man with a poetic ability who dreamt joyfully of being part of his computer game, a dream which though mad, was a marvellous experience. The dream occurred at a time when he was more able to speak his mind openly to his wife who would say to him, these are mad thoughts, which he now does not mind. In this dream, as in the same session, he has a joyful sense of play, of being released from having to be the healer to his disturbed mother and to other group members.

This is a transformational dream, presenting a change in self-structure, a dream that conveys a powerful and undeniable message. Transformational dreams are recognised as such by other group members and are often compared to earlier dreams of the same person. Important dreams will be remembered, sometimes for years, particularly the first early dreams that patients bring to the group. In dreams we create and survive catastrophes, both for ourselves and for others. A patient about to leave a group after several years dreamt of standing next to a window and seeing a ship wrecked upon rocks, the survivors standing ashore. She could see that they had wires attached to them which enabled them to be rescued and thought what a good technology this was! This dream represents the invisible network of connections of the group members to the group matrix. Following the dream the theme of this session was that in group there can be release from self-judgement and the consequences of the judgements of others. Loves and hates within the group do not have consequences that have to be paid for. In the group people stay together and work through issues that would elsewhere have led to breakdown of relationships: the group is both the container of and a container for developing emotional experience.

Transformative dreams

These two dreams were spoken by an elderly austere priest, a lifelong bachelor without sexual experience who was soon going to leave the group. He said that both these dreams followed my having used the word transformation in a previous session. The first dream "was rather wonderful. I was looking at the sea and the sea was full of dirt and mess. Then as I looked at it there was transformation, the sea became clear and clean".

The second dream "I saw a whole lot of food that was old and stale and covered with cobwebs and thought that I had to get rid of it all. Then as I started to look through it, I found that there were statuettes and other valuable objects in it. I broke open a vase

and in it was a small bird hanging upside down and to my amazement the bird was still alive. Its beak was open and it was making big movements as if needing something. I knew that what it needed was water and so I ran out across a big grassy space to bring back a small beaker of water with which to feed it".

The dream was greeted with pleasure as having a powerful transformational force: one woman excitedly said "what a marvellous dream, because in this group you are always asking to be fed and you've never been able to use it, so there's always discarded food and now you discover that what it wants is not food but water". The dreamer said that he'd been very inspired by a book entitled "We drink from our own worlds", which is about transformational theology. This dry, austere man is leaving the group after several years where he has always thirsted for recognition, in conflict between his thirst for authentic recognition and his compensatory need for grandiosity. The theme of grandiosity resonated in the session; a woman is overwhelmed by her grandiose fantasies of being the only woman singer in her choir, climbing to the top of the platform and singing and either shitting and farting over everyone below her. The theme of the group seemed to be how to use the power in grandiosity and to transform it into something acceptable to others as well as to oneself.

Narcissistic defences of grandiosity lead to interpersonal distancing and failure of intimacy. This priest had often chilled the group by his glacial withdrawals which tested the group's capacity to find warming, containing responses. He saw himself as a baby who, after having been fed and cleaned by his mother would be left in his pram in the garden; there would be no response to his cries until it was the correct feeding time again. He repeated this pattern in the group, resenting the intervals between the sessions. Similarly, Rauchfleisch writes of an isolated man who makes his group members feel angry, helpless and uncaring.

This man had a dream about a puma with an injured paw, sitting in the middle and surrounded by killed animals. He came to see that he had compensatory wishes to be big and powerful to conceal his vulnerability. This dream enabled the others to express how they had felt killed off by his aloofness and how this had left him alone in a dead world. The work on this dream brought about significant change in the group configuration: he was less isolated, more open to his vulnerability and they no longer felt killed off.

Another form of transformation is what I call "widening vision". This is when the person's previous narrow view of themselves and of the world becomes widened through internalisation of the group's capacity to have multiple perspectives, multi-visions. Gordon Lawrence calls this the ability to recognise a "multi-verse" rather than a "universe". The ability to use this "multi-verse" entails a movement into

confusion and threatened disintegration from which new visions can emerge and exist together within a coherent frame.

Here in Rome two Jungian group analysts, Pier Giacomo Miglioratti and Marco Zanasi have shown how we can understand the language of dreams on the neuro-biological level, work stimulated by our beloved deceased colleague Romano Fiumara, and on the archaic archetypal transformational level. Zanasi describes dreams as going on two levels; the interpersonal transferential, and the activation of the collective unconscious. Dreams that express the collective unconscious represent the activation of what he calls "the right hemisphere" of the group, giving meaning to shared experiences of chaos, of fusion, confusion, which are intrinsic to the group process.

Miglioratti describes a succession of dreams from a phobic obsessional woman in his group and shows how the patient finds herself inside her symptom, being in the dreaded situation, but at the same time contained by the group situation. Thus through interpretations the patient was able to widen her sphere of consciousness, to recognise the dreads of birth and death that underlay her symptomatology and now to remain within the dreaded situation, receiving help and understanding, instead of taking flight.

Samuel Johnson (1709-84):

"In solitude we have our dreams to ourselves,
and in company we agree to dream in concert".

Social dreaming matrix

I will conclude this paper on dreams by discussing a significant innovation in dream work, the social dreaming matrix. This is the brain child of W. Gordon Lawrence, former member of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, a man of originality. He greatly values both Bion's and Jung's thoughts. Bion and Jung are both prophets, mystics who have made dark journeys of discovery into the realm of madness. In 1913 Jung had a series of dreams in which he saw Europe covered by a monstrous flood, though Switzerland was protected by its mountains. He saw the rubble of civilisation and the sea turned into blood. Jung believed that he was threatened by psychosis and did not see a possible political dimension to his dreams and thought that he was threatened by psychosis. In 1914 he dreamt that the earth was covered with ice as a result of arctic cold, then he understood the link between the personal and the political as the First World War broke out.

By chance that Gordon Lawrence found a book entitled "The Third Reich of Dreams" by Charlotte Peradt, a German psychotherapist who had collected 300 dreams in Germany between 1933 and 1939, dreams that directly expressed the dreamers' reactions to the threatening political atmosphere. This encouraged Lawrence to take

the bold step of instituting dream workshops in different countries in which he observed how the matrix of dreams was related to the different cultures of Israel, Germany, Australia, India, etc.

In a social dream matrix where persons gather to explore the social dimension of dreaming, the seating is in a spiral or in a snowflake configuration which enables the participants to differentiate the setting from that of a therapeutic group. Dreams are presented for responses by the dreams and associations of others. It is the dream, not the person, which is the medium for discourse.

Lawrence's language is rich and metaphorical. He differentiates "The politics of salvation", from "the politics of revelation". The meaning of these terms is that in the conventional meeting between expert and client, therapist and patient, consultant and organisation, there is an expectation from the client that the expert will find a way to solve the client's problems. By contrast, what can be transformative for persons, patients or clients, is when they are able to find their own internal sources for creative change through revelation, which can come through their dreams. In group analysis we know that this is the way people are enabled to develop.

An illustration of this transformation is that of a workshop where a dream-sharing session led to an atmosphere analogous to the improvisations of musicians. There was "an inspiring sense of rhythm and wholeness" as a collage of dreams was assembled. From my own experience in the dream workshop, I know that over one or two nights a dream matrix evolves with the aid of a consultant or consultant team who have the necessary vision to capture the unconscious links between the dreamers. Lawrence has written "that one can feel disconnected, at times, in the matrix, but a connection can always be found because of the richness of the associative culture that it engenders". This applies also to our group analytic large group experiences where from the disparate utterances a sense of connection emerges that can be registered through imagery and metaphor. At a recent large group meeting of over 100 AGPA, a veteran group therapist, silent through the previous two sessions said, "I don't know why I keep coming to these sessions, it must be because I like to feel what it is like to be disconnected". Those words express the sense of discovery, of disconnection from the familiar self in a safe setting. The large group takes us into the waking dream that Bion tells us is necessary for maintenance of mental and emotional health. I believe that large group and dreaming matrix together are the next steps to the ecology of mind at the beginning of our next millennium.

Jung does not refer to the very similar dream of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment". "He dreamt that the world was condemned to a terrible, new, strange plague that has come to Europe from the depth of Asia. All were to be destroyed except to a few chosen. Some new sorts of microbes were attacking the bodies of men, but these microbes were endowed with intelligence and will. Men attacked by them at once became mad and furious. And never had men considered

themselves so intellectual, so completely in possession of the truth as these sufferers, never had they considered their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible..... Men killed each other in a sort of senseless spite. They gathered together in armies against one another, but even on the march the armies would be attacking one another, ranks would be broken and the soldiers would fall on each other, stabbing and cutting, biting and rowing with each other."

Raskolnikov's dream is used by Trigant Burrow, the American founder of Group Analysis, to represent the divide between human beings, divided because each claims his own individuality and fails to recognise the organismic indivisible nature of man. For Burrow Raskolnikov's dream is not a prophetic dream of the outbreak of warfare; but instead illustrates the constant warfare that humankind is engaged in through the failure to recognise the depth of our commonality.

Dreaming "In concert", as Samuel Johnson describes, can restore the sense of primary unity which is our common birthright, unity with the maternal other, through her with the caring community which she represents. If dreams are always attempts to adapt to traumas, both internal and external, to repair the tears in our psychic envelopes as Anzieu describes, the therapy group offers to its participants the opportunity of weaving together a collective skin-container. Within this container dreams reveal the threats represented by newcomers, the re-emergence of repressed and split-off affects and fantasies that can now become parts of a common narrative journey. This journey can reach mythological and archetypal depths.

In my experience, group members are soon able to feel themselves into the expressed dream of one of their members and to relate both to the dreams, to the group situation and to their own participation. Dreams are therefore both individual and social and dreamtime is a valuable time in which we can reconnect to ourselves and to the group matrix and through this to society of which each one of us is but a fragment.

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