

## **Apprehending the dreamfunction**

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*Joseph Sandler Conference in Frankfurt March 2011*

It is a dream to discuss the two presented papers. Juan Pablo Jimenez' paper is a beautiful illustration by an experienced psychoanalyst of dealing with and thinking about dreams in psychoanalysis. The paper of Horst Kächele is an example of psychoanalytic research by a psychoanalyst. It shows how the use of a strict methodology and statistical analysis of the data of a long term analysis can offer new and thought provoking findings, which are not visible from within the sessions.

The common points between both papers are striking. Both papers focus on the manifest dream and its meaning. In the research of Kächele and colleagues- the manifest dream is the story of the dream .To Jimenez it is the narration of the dream, eventually with the associations that go with it.

Both authors further focus on the divergence between dream content and what happens in life at a conscious level. From this divergence, we might gain the impression that it are two separate worlds. This is challenging because when this is the case it means that the current models about dreams fit less than we should expect. Most hypotheses are based on a link between dreams and actual experiences : the Freudian approach linking dreams to inner conflicts and wish-fulfilment, the Kleinian interpretation linking dreams to the transference-countertransference in the here and now of the session and the Bionian interpretation where dreams are seen as a processing of thoughts and feelings by the dream work alpha, which comes close to what Mauro Mancia hypothesizes from a neuroscientific approach .

Also in clinical practice we encounter the difficulty of finding a good model about dreams. At times dream life seems to influence what happens in conscious real life, at times it is what happens during waking life that influences the dream and at times dream life and waking life seem two worlds apart.

Let me give three short clinical vignettes:

-the first is of a patient who was for a long time in analysis and came back because of suffering of a severe vital depression with a loose of weight of more than 10 kg, lack of interest and libido, slowing down of movements, anxiety, sleep disturbance with early waking up, dark thoughts, hopelessness, but no crying. Psychiatric treatments like several combinations of antidepressant drugs did not help. On his request I saw the patient a few times back on consultation and finally we started again with sessions in a psychoanalytic frame, on the couch. The result was peculiar : amidst of the misery which invaded his body and mind, while remaining as depressive as in the beginning , the patient started to dream about a nice atmosphere, about a place like my office that expanded under different streets, he dreamt of feeling good and even of falling in love. For a long time there was no apparent effect on the severe depressive mood disorder. Two completely different worlds in the same person.

-Another patient in psychoanalysis, who had not been dating since years, started to have erotic dreams linked to the transference. In her dream life she had new experiences and this was followed by meeting as by coincidence several men who were attracted to her. It was her dream life that offered her new experiences and preceded what happened in real life.

-Another example of the intriguing relationship between a manifest dream and reality is about a patient who was sent because of a complete anhedonia. He was examined in the somatic department because nothing inspired him: food, love, sex, going out, friends,work. He became totally detached and regressed. My colleagues from internal and neurological medicine thought that there was something somatic, but couldn't find anything. Depression was ruled out by a colleague psychiatrist. After offering the patient the psychoanalytic device, he said that for the first time since long he had a dream. He dreamt of protrusions in his belly like multiple tumors, they pushed and pushed against his skin, finally they opened and his belly became a field of tulips. The dream was a point of entrance to a psychic emotional world that was closed and seemed absent till then.

What is this intriguing difference between what is manifest in real life and dream life ? I am excited by the paper of Horst Kächele, especially the n=1 study of a long term analysis with a clear

methodology and statistical analysis. This study shows no relation in content, nor in CCRT themes- the dream seems to be for a great part an independent creation.

In trying to understand this we should focus also on the dream function besides of the content. It reminds me of a story about dreams and the unconscious in Matte-Blanco's (1988) *Thinking, Feeling and Being*. A man enters a club and walks over the wall, over the ceiling with his head down, again over the wall to the bar and asks the bartender for a glass of milk. The question that is on the analyst's mind is : why a glass of milk? Instead of wondering how it is possible to walk over the ceiling to the bar.

Concerning this wonder of dream function there seems to be a general agreement that the dream is probably another- more pictorial form of thinking which is different from conscious thinking. Freud discovered the language of this *Alice in Wonderland* kind of world where there is no space, no time, and a different logic.

In contrast to Freud who saw the dream as the protector of the sleep, we now agree that we sleep to dream. And indeed, it is strange that evolution spared so many hours a day to sleep, what seems at first sight dangerous and inefficient. Something must happen in our brain that is vital. Are the dreams an at random side product of this necessary brain activity? Is the basic psychic functioning that goes with dreaming necessary: a desactivation of the prefrontal cortex and an activation of the amygdalae? ( ) If so we could paraphrase Peter Fonagy's famous dictum that concerning sexuality we are all borderlines ( Fonagy, 2008 ) in saying that dreaming is a returning to an extreme borderline psychic functioning. Is dreaming a desinhibition of the so-called default network of the brain? There are many more hypotheses.

Anyway, the hypotheses that I last mentioned, point at a creative function of the so-called dream-work and in my experience bringing patients into contact with this automatic, creative functioning in themselves (quoting Borges and Grotstein: with the dreamer who dream the dream) is often one of the most therapeutic happenings in psychoanalytic work.

I do not like to use the word primitive function here, for the same reason as Damasio shows that there are no primitive emotions in the cellar of body and limbic system and sophisticated thoughts in the neocortical attic of our mind. The contrary is true: the one cannot function without the other. Moreover as Matte-Blanco demonstrated, in manifest dreams at least, dreams are always a mixture of the two forms of thinking, of differentiated and undifferentiated thought.

Here we may come back to Horst Kächeles' text. If we hypothesize that dreaming is indeed a creative function that is necessary and probably healing, then we may be happy that this creative function does not change during the psychoanalytic process in something healthy, integrated as was the original hypothesis of the study by Leuzinger-Bohleber (1987/1989). In this sense it is not unexpected that his research shows during psychoanalysis the amount of love, clinch, conflict (figure 1) does not change during the analysis and the aggressive atmosphere keeps shifting from low to very high. If the dream function is creative it should keep all its forces and negative powers as Green would say. What I do not understand in this respect is the linear increase of a more problem solving attitude in dreams in the study. From my experience dreams can be very problem solving, opening new approaches to a problem, offering solutions – but this is in what we do with a dream when awake – I do not understand how it can be reflected in the attitude of the dreamer in the dream. Maybe it is my misunderstanding.

This leads us to the question which attitude we should take as analysts towards a dream. Both Jimenez and Kächele take an open and creative attitude but that is. The creative understanding of dreams is something specific and well described by Bion in his 'PS-D, Container-contained, selected fact' formula. Jimenez' handling of Carmen's material is a fine example of it. This creative and intersubjective process is at the heart of psychoanalysis and as Jimenez puts it, also adds something new to the manifest dream and is in this sense more than what Freud defined as the latent dream.

But even if we focus on this sophisticated, creative side of understanding, and interpreting a dream; the fundamental question remains whether our task is to understand the content of the dream or to facilitate the dream function? A conquering Oedipus like attitude versus a Sphinx attitude? And how far can the two be integrated?

Confronted with this question in my clinical practice, I use a model that I adapted from thoughts of the so-called late Bion (Vermote, 2011). Bion asked a patient: where were you last night ?

Listening to dreams as coming from another country, a different life that in using Bion's metaphor, now and then surfaces as the mythical Alpheus. In this sense, I approach conscious waking life and the dream life as two streams with now and then a caesura which brings them in contact. The analyst is at this gate, at this caesura as a kind of watcher (or midwife)— to make contacts possible. (In this other world there are probably psychic a-sensorial constellations that determine our personality and that we have a glance at from the narrow holes or caesurae, but this is another story.) What is probably the most important in this metaphor of the two countries or streams, is that we can make it possible that the life giving dream function may effect its influence through this caesura. In other words that the dream may evoke new experiences that can have an influence on life and vice versa that the dreamlife is in contact with life and all its unknown aspects. Bion states in a poetic way (I paraphrase) that if we have on the conscious side of the caesura the interpretation of dreams, then on the other side we side we should have an interpretation of reality and its theories are dreams ( Bion, 1991, p 470)

In this way of looking at dreams, dreams are more than being just a psychic transformation of experiences, thoughts and feelings that already happened (what Bion calls Transformation in Knowledge), they are also offering radically new and changing experiences (Transformations in O).

The text of Juan Pablo Jimenez shows the radical influence of the new experiences in the dream on the life of the patient and how the analyst helped to facilitate this.

Jimenez states clearly that it was his impression that what the patient experiences in her analysis is a kind of first experience and this is how I understand the meaning of Bions' T(O).

In my experience surprising, unexpected experiences reach and are stimulating the dreamfunction. And here the complex and creative interplay between analyst and patient treating the dream seems important. Jimenez is careful, giving tangential interventions but I can imagine that the 69 interpretation was unexpected to the patient and must have resorted a strong effect. In the same vein we see that Jimenez takes up the sexual line of the dream which is manifest and also in line with what the patient feels, but we may wonder what would happen when he also would have taken up the danger, illness and death that are also present in the dream ( men in black, ravin, infected penis, fistulae).

In conclusion: what is the best attitude at the gate ? Probably the most open attitude. Bion as well for TK (or change through creative understanding and psychic processing) as for T(O) (or new and changing psychic experiences) comes to the same conclusion : quote from Bion

'It may, therefore, seem surprising if, at this stage ( the end of his last theoretical book – Attention and Interpretation; my remark) and in relatively few sentences, I describe what is perhaps the most important mechanism employed by the practising psycho-analyst. ....Any attempt to cling to what he knows must be resisted for the sake of achieving a state of mind analogous to the paranoid-schizoid position. For this state I have coined the term 'patience' .....

'Patience should be retained without "irritable reaching after fact and reason" until a pattern "evolves". This state is the analogue to what Melanie Klein has called the depressive position. For this state I use the term "security"..... I consider the experience of oscillation between "patience" and "security" to be an indication that valuable work is being achieved.'

(Bion 1970:123-124)

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