

## **The group as place and substance of dream**

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### **Abstract**

The dream reported in a therapeutic group is one of the events which incisively characterizes its development; its frequency is comparable with that of other forms of psychotherapy and in any case its merit depends on the way the therapy is carried out. The dream considered in this contribution refers to that kind of group that achieves, even if in a discontinuous way, that state of emotional fusion among the members (Neri et al., 1990), so that it can be considered as “psyche-group”, set as such against the “socio-group” of the serial assemblage (Moreno, 1964).

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In this case, the group dealt with here is the analytical one, having a freudian approach. Especially in this context the dream allows to investigate the deep hidden emotions, being such not much and not only with reference to the personal life of each single member of the group, they express the way of being and feeling of the inter-acting collectivity, in particular that of the primordality of each single individual and of everyone.

During the important moments of this group the participants actually go into a modified state of consciousness which is similar to the one of hypnosis, this being meant not as situation of obsessive monoideism but of pervasive monotonism. As a consequence, the analytical group proves to be extremely full of emotions and expresses itself as “matrix”, which is equivalent to the “transfert” of the psychoanalytical process.

As a consequence of the same process during its emotional moments the analytical group is “in a dream” rather than “in sleep”, a state which is subject to all the laws that the psychoanalysis has described on the matter, and every inter-action which occurs inside, beyond the dreams, in the strict sense of the word, has an oneiric nature.

The other constructive and interpretative moments are instead similar to the wakefulness.

From this point of view the group setting works first of all as a pre-sleeping event which becomes incorporated in the dream, just as elements of the experimental situation where the subject falls asleep, are found in the psycho-physiological study of the dream. Moreover, the group dream is significantly influenced by the emotional state that the subject has towards the group leader and the group-as-a-whole, as well as towards the expectations he places in them; and what induces the group to “choose” him to dream on behalf of everyone is the particular salience that these

aspects take on in just anyone of the members. The group actually exerts its unconscious delegations especially in terms of dream: <<*Subjects who dream are those who experience most clearly and intensively the emotional situation which the group is undergoing*>> (Zimmermann, 1967).

The specific group process also includes the fact that the free associations of those who have listened to the dream also render them active participants of the oneiric process, causing past events, that have remained latent even for a long time, to resound in each member of the group, thus bringing them to recuperate pieces of existence which have already been kept dissociated and never been known.

This theoretical approach gives rise to the specific method of the group-analysis, by which an oneiric or inter-active data reported during the sitting is processed: other members, who are not the dreamer, are also asked for the associations on this data and a collective interpretation is constructed around them, an interpretation which proves to be better than the individual one, even if it was that of the leader. The dream actually activates latent memories and feelings in the members of the group and, moreover, it is a principle of the group-analysis that the dream is essentially provoked by their being together.

It is about a real process of “resonance”, the principle according to which a sound is tuned in with the vibratile capacity of an environment and acquires a thickness and a meaning that are much bigger than what the sound has in itself.

As from the 90s a method of analysing dreams shared in group, which was called “Social Dreaming” (Lawrence, 1998), has been developed right on this basis.

Besides the “resonance”, the “mirroring” as well characterizes the analytical group, i.e. that mirroring process, according to which the subject involved is inclined to see himself or part of himself in another individual or in a group inter-action, or to imitate or to contradict their behaviour and all this always in the absolute unconsciousness of such (Pines, 1977). Everyone, becoming aware of this possibility and accepting it (“benign” mirroring), learns by means of the mirroring to see his own repressed aspects, which are reflected in the inter-action of other members of the group among themselves and of himself with them: he sees the others reacting in the way which is proper or contrary to him and when he sees what happens in the group, he also learns what is happening in his mind; he recognizes respectively that his own conflicts and problems take place in a context that reflects them.

These processes bring the analytical group to a deep homogenization that implies the fusion of the subjects among themselves.

In order to now introduce the clinical material, it should be mentioned that the event is quite frequent, where the same dream, as a whole or in its details, is told in a sitting by two or more members of the group, or that a subject recognizes the dynamic photogram of his inner world in another member, resounding with him, and that an entire scenery of events, far-off in time and space, emerges to someone’s consciousness being recognized as his own also by others.

The fact that the group dream expresses not much the desires of the member who told the dream, but rather the desire of another member or of the group as a whole, according to a process of delegation, which dissolves the individual restraints, brings as a consequence that the oneiric group content can be less structured or more archaic than that of the individual dreams and that it refers to older ages than those of the personal psychoanalysis.

These are “archetype” dreams (Zanasi and Ciani, 1995) which can be identified as such due to the presence of mythological, religious, alchemic, theriomorphic motives, which are far from everyday events and distinguish themselves for the intensity of the affections that are associated to them. They correspond to the level of that “primordial matrix” proposed by Foulkes that can already be found in the small analytical group of 8-10 people and is pervasively present in the Large group of 50 people or more (Ancona, 1998).

The work of recuperation, actualization, publicizing of these wild thoughts proposed by Bion (1983) takes place on this scenery, thoughts that are somewhere in the air, heritage of the ancestors, of the civilization and of the surrounding world: the “bizarre thoughts”, in search of a thinker, in this case of the unconscious mind of the group, so that they can express themselves.

A world that declines in the multi-dimensionality is indeed actualized with the group, a world which is permeated with emotions tending the more towards the infinity, the more they are connate of unconscious.

According to the theory of Matte Blanco (1975), the same emotions are de facto numerous, contemporaneous and antinomic “molar bi-logical structures” at this level. They can produce the chaos experience which is well perceived in the Large groups, producing a “symmetrical frenzy” (Matte Blanco, 1988), where the therapeutic action of the group is carried out by encouraging the change of direction towards that “ideational frenzy” (Durst, 1996), which is syntonic with the physico-social reality.

The processuality of this itinerary well summarizes what mentioned so far: we start from the conscious perception that each member of the group has others, either individuals or concrete and well-defined relationships. However, *<<the human beings, besides being individuals, different one from the other, (also) perceive to be a single inseparable unity with everyone and the world, each of them being a single element of intersection of an infinite number of propositional functions, those functions or classes where each of them defines something. In this view, the human beings are inclined to unite one another, to undo themselves as individual beings and the sociality, which is typical of the individuals, exceeds the limits into a unifying matrix that makes you feel to be “everything” and gets you into communication with everyone>>* (Bria, 1985): a communication which is essentially emotional.

This reality clearly occurs in the analytical group and so we can say that its work introduces strong emotions and that “symmetrizations” (Matte Blanco, cit.) are produced in increasingly comprehensive classes depending on their intensification.

Hence, a growing number of individuals that satisfy the same propositional function is “seen” behind each individual (or relationship), i.e. the function of the original perception: in other words, we are facing a class which has been experienced as a unity of multi-dimensional nature, where several individuals have become a single super-individual that is capable to capture a myriad of scattered elements and thoughts.

The “condensation”, which is typical of the dream, takes place in the group, meaning that the group has thus turned into dream.

This target, which is the half of the programme to be carried out, is followed by what Matte Blanco called “epistemological swing”, in consequence of which the asymmetrization alternates the occurred state of symmetrization.

By this is meant the reductive work which is introduced as interpretation and heterogeneous, tridimensional thought; it is the function of translation, of unfolding, according to which a n-dimension space is represented by a (n-1)-dimension space.

Matte Blanco has indicated what happens then: a multiplication of elements.

We actually learn from him that a multidimensionalized space-time-structure, where several things look like one and the same thing, which is reduced to the tri-dimensional level, gives rise to a bi-logical structure, where more objects are given in the discrete space. And we learn from Bria (2001) that the “epistemologic swing” is correlated with the possibility of a swinging course between descent of multi-dimensionality to tri-dimensionality and ascent from the latter to the former.

If we now start from the assumption, which has been made possible thanks to Matte Blanco’s avantgarde theorization, that the psycho-pathology in its various forms produces a multi-dimensionality based on “lethal” bi-logical structures, where the restraining and defensive aspect (“obsessive” short circuit, according to Bria,) predominates, or where it totally disorientates the asymmetrical operation of the logical defense and replaces it (“delusional” short circuit, as in Schreber), as a consequence it follows what is the task of psychotherapy, here in particular of the group-analytical one: it is the replacement of pathological, non-vital bi-logical structures by “vital” bi-logical structures, which are isomorphic to the non-vital ones, since they belong to the same equivalence class, but they are characterized by the logical/affective balance...

This is accomplished right through the ascending movement which dissolves the pathological structures in the multi-dimensionality and by means of the subsequent redescent to the tri-dimensionality. The latter movement causes new bi-logical structures to appear, which are vital, because this is how they have been transformed by the homogenizing consent supplied by the group.

It is in this way that the analytical group in its dream function appears like an extraordinary tool of unfolding and confirmation of the theory and of the clinic of Ignacio Matte Blanco.

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