

Dream, group and toucht

Thoughts about a dream of Didier Anzieu

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Abstract

The relationship between thought, the subject, the group and the dream. From a reading of a dream of D. Anzieu given in the context of an interview and published, the author has placed emphasis on the components groupal thought that this dream appears to stage. The group is the operator required a cleavage fruitful. To think is to project the group that the subject can't bind. The thought is marked by reports that the subject has with internal and external groups.

Key-words: dream, thought, group, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, group illusion

During a seminar on "The birth of thought and the process of thinking", Didier Anzieu, after presenting and discussing his work, A psycho-analytical approach to the thinking process , and as an answer to a question about grief thoughts, told his audience about a dream of his.

"I had a dream, the other night, before the round table talks : out of my belly flew a group of doves. Hardly were they out when some monstrous creatures pounced on them and devoured them. I need not give you my own interpretation". (op. cit. p. 176) That dream " that account of a dream" in its brevity, density and clearness (like any typical dream) points to a feeling of concern, even anxiety, about the capacity of the seminar members to welcome and deal with the objectified thoughts that are going to be proposed and shared. If we can think of the seminar as a place for the group, the dreamer's belly (an intimate round table, not a group one but a bodily one this time) becomes a self container which enables us to develop and give shape to the components of anxiety among others.

Waiting to be confronted with the group, not only that of the round table (an organized group) but also the one made up of the whole audience (a more puzzling one) is going to initiate a symbolic process which seems to me to bear on the group components of thought. Anyway, this is, if not an interpretation, at least the gist that this dream account, as expounded in such a group context, inspires me with. To expound it, I will rely on the four components it is structured by : the cover, the inside, the outside and something else that comes and goes from one to the other.

The cover : The dreamer's belly is the limit (the cover symbolizing the skin-ego) between the thought of the subject who is inside and the way the outside group will receive it. It is the container that allows at once to show up the components, what is at stake, the different stages of thought. The stress from which thought originates comes

up on either side of the cover, between the subject and the group, the subjective and the inter-subjective.

Passing through from one to the other, from the inside to the outside, from the subject to the group is the very condition of thought as a double to-and-fro movement:

-from oneself to oneself when Didier Anzieu is dreaming;

-from oneself to the others when the dream is being told. But the others are inside — represented then by the group of thoughts and the monsters — as well as outside when D. Anzieu tells the audience about his dream, then writes it down for his readers, putting the finishing touches to it to give it that restrained, essential, polished form.

Inside, and getting out (therefore moving) we are presented with a "group of doves", i.e. thoughts, and even thoughts of peace. This refers us - on the one hand, to a grouping work which appeals to that group-dimension thought, but also to that grouping set to motion at heterogeneous levels (moving from the inside to the outside). Here we come up against three specific components of every thought ;

- on the other hand, to the doves — birds as frail as peace — which symbolize the precarious peacefulness one feels when one is able to shape mental contents into thoughts, to group them together as it were and experience the necessary illusion that one is getting at a frail consistency : it is an inner state of peace. But that state of peace is counterbalanced by fears of persecution and feelings of envy typical of all group situations toward the thoughts of the subject, the subject himself being one of the group components.

The inner group illusion

Let us make here a first proposal : the pleasure and peacefulness then felt on one's own are based on the same kind of illusion as that of the group. Such illusion is mostly characteristic of the dreamer's or thinker's inner group (represented by the uniform doves grouped together) and means that the thought process -gathering or shaping them into form- cannot be achieved outside such primary illusion. This would amount to the inner equivalent of the group illusion. But if such a link with one's own inner group is essential, it is only a state, a component of thought. Deprived of its possibility of moving towards what is external to the subject, such thought would be reduced to nothing.

The dream does show that this precarious state is also founded on its setting to motion towards an intersubjective space, the group's space external to the thinker.

That seesaw motion of the subjective space towards an intersubjective one is also a characteristic feature of thought : such movement, is the passage from a state to another by experimenting the gap between the inside and the outside at the risk of heterogeneity. I do believe that thinking is the psychic treatment of heterogeneity and

presupposes a conflicting area between the subject's inner groups and the external groups he belongs to.

The exterior : The dream, also shows us the risk taken at the moment when thoughts are being voiced : the monsters waiting outside eat up the doves.

Let us note here the appearance of a threatening destructive group which undoes what was initially grouped by its assault upon the doves. All the group work done by the subject on his own -his day work and his night dream- and which is representative of his ~y of thinking the group is going to be destroyed by the external group as soon as they get hold of it. This is the subject's -the dreamer's- thought and fear.

The external group as a necessary deposit of the non-thought

We will then make a second proposal complementing the first one : the inner group illusion needed to build up a thought is compensated for by the projection in the external group of what could not be united and must necessarily be rejected to allow a first stage of thought.

Thus, the external group would be originally linked with the negative part of thought, i.e. anti-thoughts bearing the mark of hatred and aggressivity against the links. The external group represented by monsters runs contrary to the doves for the subject. He is entrusted with the aspects of the unlinked urge which is held aloof by the developing thought. Thinking also means unconsciously rejecting what is unthinkable. Entering the group is then felt as a fear of being confronted with the undoing parts of the mental components which were at first projected and severed.

In such a prospect, the function of the external group is essential. It takes the part of the container where the thinker -the subject- is going to project his anti-thoughts that will enable him to do grouping work and keep enough time for illusion, until the "doves" appear. We can see how the inner and the outer group are complementaries in the construction of thought.

Meeting the external group is a fundamental step for thought. The dream that symbolizes what is at stake in such a meeting is quite in keeping with its future achievement. That confrontation leads to a point of steadiness of the thought in progress, a point which is a compromise between the subject his inner group and his outer one. This point of steadiness I consider as thought itself. It is achieved by re-introducing some of the components into the external group. At that point, thought itself is what is uttered, shared and confronted with others.

I want now to point out a third proposal which is also the initial component of all that psychic work and fundamentally links dream, thought, subject and group. As I already mentioned, thought is the result of psychic work linked with the experience of heterogeneity. To think is indeed to gather what is different. Such work cannot be done but on the basis of an experience, sought for or caused by circumstances, of a detachment (this term I take up from Anzieu about creative work) of the subject from the external group. To think would necessarily lead to betraying the group, keeping

aloof from it, taking one's leave, disengaging oneself. This is the point where I set the group foundations of thought and the confliction that characterizes it.

Thought at work is at the disposal of the subject getting free from the group's confusional effects. That fear of the group that the dream, gives shape to when the time comes to tell one's inner thought is fear of losing the thought at work, what one had to suppress in the first place in order to stand as subject.

I think we are now ready to extend our conception of thought far beyond the subject who advocates it in its most elaborate, satisfactory forms. As an answer to Descartes "I think, therefore I am", counterbalanced by Freud with his repression hypothesis into "I am, also in what I cannot think", psycho-analytical research on the group leads us not only to understand better the precedence of "our existence" open thought, the subject's multi-foundations to the mere ability of thinking, but also to understand that "it is because I am part of a group from which I cut off myself or from which I am repelled that I can think". Fundamentally, thought bears the mark of the connection between subject and group in that to-and-fro movement from closeness to detachment.

By means of his thought the thinker constantly introduces heterogeneity into the group. The agony of thinking is linked to that fundamental state of conflict. Thinking is labouring in and through the distance between the subject and the group and can sometimes change that gap into a link object, which is the characteristic feature of all thought. In that prospect, dream has a specific role.

If we actually came back to the dream of a group expounded to a group — more precisely to the dream as it is reported to the group — we can sense its vocation to relationship. It enhances the work of a subject building up his thought and, so to speak, gives the group back its identity and its real necessity for the subject's work.

The dream is an answer to the archaic fears induced by the group, and it also creates a symbolic figure that can be shared. It seems to me — my hypothesis — that it appears only if the split between the illusion of the inner group and the projection into the external group has been rich enough to outline the beginning of a topical connection. From, such a point of view, the dream is a bi-facial production between the dreamer and the group he talks to, what we call a relationship object. That way of talking openly to others is already the hallmark of thought. More precisely, the part of that thought which belongs to the group.

Starting from a reading of D. Anzieu's dream given during a seminar, and then published, I have emphasized the group components of thought that seem to be "Staged" by this dream. Proposals are formulated about the links between thought, subject, group and dream.

One of them is about the existence of the thinker's inner group illusion - necessary for the fermentation of thoughts. The other one about the part played by the external group during the time required for that thought fermentation. The group is then

viewed as the depository of what the thinker cannot link when his thought is at work and yet is a part of the thinking process. The group is the necessary operator of a productive divide. To think from such a point of view is first to propel into the group what the thinker cannot link. Thought is essentially marked by the relationship between the subject and the inner and outer groups. Finally, the account of the dream, is placed in its relationship vocation between the dreamer and the group. It is the pointer of thought at work, a part of which belongs to the group and in which he can recognize himself.

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