

Myth making, social transition and transformation: exploring the age of dreaming

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Abstract

The paper will be presented in three sections. In section 1 a working hypothesis about transition will be formulated. In section 2 illustrative material will be presented for analysis and in section 3 the social function of dreaming in transformation will be discussed.

Key words: dreaming, myth, soail dreaming, tansformation

Section 1: The working hypothesis

During times of social migration, expecially if it is experienced as a migratory imperative, a occupation with identity develops. A general sense of mistrust and incohesion (Hopper, 1996) is experienced. Transformation is typified with a social feelings of being distanced, isolated and of spectatorship (as if the social is an object). This brings to the fore a ‘constellational’ dynamic during which members are becoming aware of their relatedness and affiliation within oragnizational and institutional structures. There is also an overbearing concern by management to control process and structure manifesting into ‘strategy-as-dream’. It is proposed that the constellational dynamic has a discernible manifestation in both the organization and institution and that is helpful to differentiate the two.

This is a personalised and dreamlike exposition. I have taken my position seriously in the sense that I carry something of the ‘outsider position’. I only have to remind you of the reference to the ‘Third World’ and what that might represent. I have assumed that we are all very attentive to the psychological significance of being spectator and being observed. It is this visual quality of both the dream and our thinking that has made this paper possible.

In the humanities we attempt to offer data that will be accessible; to work towards a frame that allows participation and analysis. I will present a distinct era which has a ‘mapable’ path of change associated with the specific social transition and the process of organization re-positioning. I hope to give some radical notions as I attempt to hold onto a sense of the whole whilst being painfully aware of social and personal isolation.

As you are all well aware, South Africa experienced a phenomenal transition. I am presenting a multi-layered paper in which I take transition as point of departure and try to formulate a view on the significance and dynamics of organizational managerial ‘dreams’ and social dreams as reintegrative mechanism. During social transition the unconscious processes contribute to the difficulty of formulating a frame of understanding. The central positive and negative aesthetic experiences (borderline) (Bollas, 1987, p. 17) and transformational function and role of dreamwork and myths-creation will then be highlighted proposing that collaborative

dreaming is essential during transition and transformation. Social transition is always a threshold and liminal experience and outstretches our understanding and grasp of the whole. Myth-making and dramatic productions assist in the precarious act of holding the whole as entity. It does not only challenge our thinking (view) but the act of thinking itself.

This paper attempts to analyse the unconscious life of the organization (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Thinking refracted", 2000b, p. 10), and find a pathway to address the sense of incoherence, basic assumptions 'productions', dense acts of the thinking process, forms of thinking, and thought products (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Thinking refracted", 2000b). The migratory status of society leaves the unconscious process unattended but vulnerable to the fears evoked by the different basic assumption behaviors (Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996; Hopper, 1997; Turquet, 1975). These recent publications on basic assumptions has broadened and intensified our awareness of contradictory and chaotic experiences in organizations and institutions constellations. I only have to remind you of the intensity of feelings evoked by Apartheid and the Apartheid regime with its institutionalized functions of segregation, splitting, projective identification that lead to the colossal scale of social isolation and the impending sense of disaster that prompted a social awareness far beyond the boundaries of one country.

The post apartheid era, implying a mentality, mood or climate of opinion (Little, 1993, p. 316) has been signified by the colossal shifts. The elasticity of society is tested to its limits and has added to many feelings of uncertainty and the fear of collapse.

Colossal change is preemted by challenge (attack) on the existing social order evoking feelings of despair and collapse, being socially distant from a whole, and at times even experienced as a non-whole (entity). This leads to the fear of becoming a 'social-isolate'.

Elaboration:

I would compare colossal social change with the fear associated with faultlike geological strata (San Andreas Fault). The awareness of the collision and colossal forces in the earth's crust and the sense of impending catastrophe (the collapse of structure) is overwhelming and leads to denial. To persist in contemplation about transition demands radical thinking. Without analysis such awareness fosters expectations (myths and exciting phantasies), presents frontier ideas and can lead to paralysis in intend (stagnation). These states can evolve in a cyclical manner and endure over extended periods.

I distinguish between organizational and institutional levels of organization and communication matrices. The first refers to the broad structure represented and determined policy and positioning within the 'socio-scape'. The second refers to the functional entity of for example a training unit. The dynamics of the institution (eg training department) will reflect the whole but will also reveal the unique response and reaction to the whole. Although there is a mirroring of the larger whole the immediacy in the flow of 'emotives' and 'information', activates family dynamics. Another distinction is difference in communicational patterns and discourses. I

suggest that it is useful to formulating separate 'units of analysis' distinguishing between the constellation and dynamics of the large organizational group (with reference to the political imperatives) and the parental family group structures of the institution.

Let us look at the traumatic disaster and aftermath of September the 11th of 2001. Leading from the above it will then be understandable to argue that it was not only the dramatic scale of the terror and horror that kept the world fascinated but also the awareness that this was an attack on the whole of the society (organization) as well as the institution as intimate unit. The scale was so colossal that the fear of collapse and social isolation generated the immense emotional response and counter attack. It was almost impossible to hold the visual imagery of collapse and think how the entity of the whole has been damaged. It then becomes so critical to 'uphold' the view of the whole that the experience of the other order cannot be tolerated.

Thesis: There is a critical psychological development in the transition from the pair to the triad. Not only does it refer to the psychological significance of the Oedipal situation but also leads to the formation of the 'pair-apart'; the unit beyond the self. This also marks the important epoch of myth and fantasy activity and potentially the capacity to think together and dream apart (thoughts in phantasy).

Elaboration:

The dynamic of the 'entity' - referring to the growing awareness of the unit apart from the self. It is proposed that individual development not only needs to grapple with the oedipal structure, the experience of the stranger and outsider but also needs to keep the pair separate as entity to form the core of the social experience of the 'whole' (Nitsun, 1994). 'Entity' following the above reasoning could then also be substituted by 'institution'. Institution becomes the projective screen and is being established as enduring pattern of relations with certain mood, boundary and evolving structure.

Following this reasoning I suggest that the sense of the whole is there before it is being experienced. This follows the work on thinking by Bion and elaborated by Lawrence (Lawrence, W. G., "Beyond the frames", 1985) (Lawrence, W. G., "Won from the void and formless infinite: Experiences of social dreaming", 1991) (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Thinking refracted", 2000b).. I suggest that some recent work on basic assumptions (Hopper, 1997), psychotic process in organizations (Lawrence, G. W., "A concept for today: The management of oneself in role", 1979), the anti-group (Nitsun, 1996) boundary collapse (Parker, 1996) might be the consequence of loss of the sense of the whole.

We acknowledge the contribution made by the Tavistock approach (Lawrence, G. W., "Some psychic and political dimensions of work experience", 1982; Lawrence, G. W., "A concept for today: The management of oneself in role", 1979; Symington, 1986; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) and the working conferences to understand and describe the unconscious at work in the organization, I am now going to turn my attention to the institution. How critical is the cultural dimension? One way of finding out is to test the theses in this forum and inviting you to be 'participant translators' in whatever way it resonates.

Section 2: The institution in the culture of change

Visiting the institution in transition, the group analytic observer would be aware of the communication matrix and levels of communication (Foulkes, 1964a; Pines & Hutchinson, 1993). There would be an awareness of the autistic (Foulkes, 1964b) qualities in the process of communication. Added to this the general sense of breaking up of the order and flux of thinking in groups (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Thinking refracted", 2000b, p. 2), would indicate that the institution cannot maintain the sense of coherence and lacks the inner holding capacity. This has led to the development of certain narrative (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Thinking refracted", 2000b, p. 7), an inhibited and limited manner of thinking represented in the expectation of the 'correctional utopian thought' (Pines, 1998). There would be a wide array of repositioning strategies available but uncritical implementation will lead to the maintenance of a missionary legacy in a colonial context. Significantly there will be a shying away from boundary issues too hurtful to address (moral and political content). There might be an awareness of a lingering fear of having survived and the harrowing fear of not reliving. Members might share an uneasiness of not being able to form attachments, or a reluctance to enter into co-constituting relations. There will be a heightened negative sense of the group and low tolerance for diversity. The social isolation and distance will become a counter-constituent. The fear of being damaged in the institution-as-entity will also be echoed in the fear of damaging the entity (catastrophic fears) with the consequent sense of despair and incoherence. These feelings might manifest in the idealization of other institutions (with the evoking of basic assumptions activity and the institution of the 'strategy-as-dream') and the inevitable denigration of the value of the membership.

I imagine that much of the dynamics and ideas of the anti-group lies within this sketch of the ruined institution. I need to emphasize that the sense of collapse of the unit leads to a social valence in thought (to contain the psychotic fears of losing the unit) and that one could tap into these thoughts in a visitation of the institution but must also be aware of the fact that these clusters of thought will also penetrate the outsider with similar fears and the consequent countertransference feelings. This leads mostly to further affirmation of action instead of analysis.

The fear/terror of the collapsed whole leads to a breakdown in thinking which leads to obsessive thought, non-responsive interaction (incapable of holding opposites (depressive) and leading to splits schizoid, paranoid position) cementing the view of the 'establishment' creating thinking-substitute content and action. When Bion refers to the thinking pair he might also have given an indication of how 'thinking together' implies a unit and that thought would lead to awareness that lies beyond the individual's capacity to be occupied with the wider social expanse and having to make contact with social experiences that compels us to share and make it accessible. I hope this description will leave you with a sense of the atmosphere of being a member in such an institution and the existence of living with the fear of collapse and having to endure the isolation or limited protection offered by subgroupings as defense. It reminds me of the 'dreamless' plain of no collaborative thinking,

harrowing thoughts haunting members to be voiced but countered by ideological thinking ('un-thoughts') and reiterations. Some of the works of Munch come to mind. In such an institution there is the regulation and ritualizing of relations and cultural exchange.

Section 3: The dream come true?

The significance of social dreaming is demonstrated by this conference. I now want to argue that dreams are the vessel that is central to our migrational and transitional heritage. Dreams and myths contains the fear of collapse and isolation and the dread of having to find a new understanding of the whole and how the self relates within that whole (referred to as identity). They bring about translation and leads to transformation (Lawrence, W. G., "Won from the void and formless infinite: Experiences of social dreaming", 1991, p. 274). Transformation to be understood of having found the capacity to form a sense of the whole to such an extent that the fractional view of the entity of the institution can be molded into some form of continued entity.

As indicated earlier this would present as the 'corporate dream'. In contemporary life it is almost unthinkable to have an organization without a 'shared dream'. These dreams originates in a type of 'Copernican' fear represented in the collapse of the constellation. This manifests in different guises (missions, visions, strategies) but essentially it gives an indication of how the relation between the organization and the institution is regulated, an indication of the migratory issues and some indication of the intensity and scale of the underlying fears. I would also suggest that many of the organizations that are successful within transition has developed structures that allow for fractional thinking (Lawrence, W., Gordon, "Beyond the frames", 2000a) referring to thinking refracted)

Many examples of social transition are available especially within the realm of myths and stories. One can think of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the building of the Tower of Babel, the Ark, the journey to the Promised Land to cite a few. Leading from the above reasoning it is apparent that these are always associated with the fear of impeding collapse of the unit or whole as it has been apparent and represented at that time and the new form not yet established. The expulsion from Eden indicates the lifelong theme of transition and the need for transformation

The next critical point is the vehicle/vessel ('dream container' Lawrence, W. G., "Won from the void and formless infinite: Experiences of social dreaming", 1991, p. 281,) that allows for the transition and can also assist in the transformation. Again there would be many historical examples to cite here. The ceremonial burial vessels used to carry the Pharos is such an example. The ark of the covenant another. These vessels contained the elements of transformation. They represented certain order but also the notion of containment that will make the transformation possible. One can imagine how for the ordinary citizen the pyramid or the temple were the embodiment of the transformation and transition that would ally their own fears.

The contribution of dreamwork - group mentation

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One could now ask what the function of dreamwork would be. Borrowing from the pioneering work by Lawrence, I would argue that the ‘fractional thinking’ allows the social and the individual dynamics to be shared on the same plain; from relating to awareness and reverie about constellational figurations in an orbital understanding of the wider whole (multi-verse). Dreamwork provides both the method and structure within which ‘units of analysis’ can be extended and become a shared group activity which incidentally also counters to the original fear of the collapse. Dreamwork allows thoughts to be searching and being searchable (playfulness) We should also be reminded of the destructive qualities that lies within this activity; the fear of the anti-dream; the no-dream; the dreaded dream; the imposing dream and how these would form part of how the dream can be accessible to the institutional member as citizen. This might be one of the most daunting tasks of being a citizen.

Gordon Lawrence has shown in his use of the prism as structure how the seemingly ‘one-dimensional reality’ of the line of light carries the immense potential of the light refracted (Lawrence, W., Gordon, “Thinking refracted”, 2000b). Romanyshyn, argues that the various transitions of mankind’s relation to the self has lead to the contemporary occupation of the self as spectator (Romanyshyn, 1989) and the expectation that technology will substitute constellational isolation . I argue that the contemporary individual is grappling both with the sense that social reality is represented in dreams and that dreams as thoughts have to be represented in a form. The citizen has become a spectator to the extent that he cannot dream his thought because it is already given.

Dreamwork addresses the social distancing and the collective response to that. It allows the very central fear of losing the grasp of the whole and lack of inner presentation to be explored and through the collaborative process of fractional thinking allows participants to create understanding that contributes to their sense of the whole. It leads to a cleared view of the significance of the ‘strategy-as-dream’ carrying intense disturbed though and emotive constellational responses. It helps to uncover the failed dreams, the partial representation and misdirected solution assisting in retracing the path of construed eradication of uncertainty in taming the anti-reality and anti-role of shared thinking. It can contribute in arranging the components to make them more accessible and prepare for new thought. It helps to establish cohesiveness and irradiate the emotive representation of the ‘incohesive’ which leads to the arena of the dramatic participation and transforms spectatorship to citizenship.

Dreamwork and thought bring together the social and the personal and opens the arena to the radical. It allows us to wonder about the new, the transitional and the transformational and challenges the capacity for reverie. This is the age where dreams have become real but the function of the dream has been discredited. Technologically speaking dreams have become the trademark of our time and has created devouring expectations. Whilst this is true on one level it is also the age of decomposing social fabric and more concern about sustainability on rejuvenation of social structures. The dream has been elevated to formal significance but the act of dreaming together is becoming more difficult. Maybe that is why thoughts are waiting to be dreamed.

I have tried to explore the relation between the individual and the social reality by analyzing the organizational and institutional life during a period of intense and dramatic social transition. By proposing the notion of the institution as psychological entity and arguing the significance on both individual and group level I had shown how transition leads to the fear of loss of this sense of the whole. Social transition needs the dream as vessel for transformation. This dreamwork should not become institutionalized but part of the collaborative thought creation.

One cannot think of a group without a dream. South Africa, at least in the initial period, was seen as making a dream come true. Dreams has become central in forging views. It might now become imperative to share our dreams and work through the fears that organizational strategies are disallowing in thought.

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