

## **The happiness of dreaming**

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### **Abstract**

The function of dream is seen as an important resource of the group. It represents the history, the ideas, the thoughts, the memories, the sentiments that the group has experienced and developed over time. This tradition crosses through the whole group process, and has the ability to represent itself especially in the more difficult moments: it is rich with affection and gives a sense of identity to the group.

**Key words:** dreaming, group, memory of group, creativity, tradition and identity of group

Lou Salomè tells us about the crises that the poet Rilke went through during his life when he was afflicted by periods of non-creativity. She describes the anguished state waiting for his inspiration to return, accompanied by the terrible uncertainty that it was lost for ever, and then the search for perfect equilibrium whereby his talent could reappear. How many times have we experienced a similar state, while listening to a patient and both of us are tempted to oppose vitality in any of its forms, refusing to find a meaning to such a state and contrasting the myriad of thoughts that appear? How many times have we asked ourselves if it were possible to find a metaphor that refuses to emerge from a story? Or symbolic value in a dream that seems flat in structure? Have we ever thought a lacking on our part was the reason for a shortage of dreams in a patient or in a group? Or on the other hand, is an excessive production of images made incomprehensible by our impossibility to single out a way for individualization and elaboration by saturating the field with uncontrolled stimulation and anxious concern?

An amusing patient that I once had, belittled any form of interpretation or discussion of his dreams, calling them the analyst's "bread and butter." He vindicated the right to consider dreams purely casual, concrete and physiological. Still today, I am grateful to him for a long and satisfying course in "de-psychoanalysis" which gave us the possibility to work with his dream images combining the skill of real handicraft with the intensity of poetry. I believe that a group without dreams suffers greatly and is in serious risk of curling inwards (involution). When the participants have already learned that a dream is valuable for thought and constructing meaning (and are capable, if they wish, to conceal it), when they acknowledge that competition between its members exist for "supplying" the dream that is to be discussed, ("portasogno," Neri, 1995), and lastly, when a group has learned to minimise anxiety and its narcissistic defences - it is then that the non-creative periods and the fear of losing contact is most dreaded. In particular, when a group has begun to consolidate

and elaborate its growth, dreaming seems to safe-guard the group's newly-acquired identity, helping it to be freer and more original, helping it to make new investments within the group itself and enforcing its capacity towards change. The group quickly learns the common space in which it moves and in time, learns to order its objects, (with the patience of those that have known disorder) and is reassured by this project of order. Blindness or depersonalisation becomes less feared because perception of the real objects that dreaming contains, increases, and also confidence increases in that the group can now expect that its organisers reveal themselves and intersect each other with growing clarity during a session (or a series of sessions). I'll never forget my happiness after working on a dream brought by a member of a group of anorexic patients, that depicted an amphi-theatre, in which different events (distinctly affective) are taking place in clearly distinguished spaces. Successively, I was overwhelmed by a dream that was even more archaic, where the dreamer wandered around in a charnel-house that had no name, no origin and no distinction whatsoever. Finally, after these two dreams, the group was able to call people and things by name, and the relief was clearly tangible. Even the passions related to the skeletal thinness had been nourished with new and different affects and the group was suddenly aware that it had a wealth of images put away. It would always have been possible to draw on this deposit since those images were linked to thoughts, experiences and emotions. I believe in certain moments, that the power and cognition of dreaming (and in general, the enormous resources of iconic thought) are of vital importance to the group. I will try to illustrate what I mean. When an individual or group is undergoing change that generates suffering, the identity of the group is endangered. The loss of stability (even though negative) has been too sudden and lacerating, resulting in a perception of void and weakness. The boundaries begin to vacillate and the group is invested by a nomadic or homeless state, threatening the integrity and cohesion. It is here that the capacity of dreaming and what it entails, can restore affects and meaning, supplying identifying opportunities and a sense of possessing objects that are rich in meaning. All forms of literature (religious, anthropological, secular or modern), treat dreams as a source of knowledge which may be sacred, prophetic or familiar. The interpretation or understanding of which, can be tied to the destiny of a people, as in pagan and religious myths, or tied to the wishes of an individual and the world. This knowledge can be revealing, highly dramatic or habitual. Group psychoanalytical research takes account of the historic complexity of all the aspects, to create an intimate space for its transformation. The shadow of the object is less fearful if a dream is there to sustain it, the knowledge of that dream will be contained by the group. The non-symbolic dream of the psychotic patient, which H. Segal (1981) writes about, searches for "the analyst's mind to fill itself with meaning and experience," (Tagliacozzo 1993). She goes on to tell us of sensory and corporeal remnants looking for a possible "mentalisation" to free themselves from this fragmentation and disorganisation and to give themselves a comprehensible meaning, if not, at least a melting down of the aspects that are more chaotic and congested. This type of dream can appear in the centre or on the outskirts of the "associated notions" (Kaës,1993); for example, a

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group tries to organise the elements of the field around a narrative, in the form of sequential and coherent dreams. If other dreams that appear are incomprehensible and discordant, it could be a sign that the present field has excluded these unelaborated "bits" which, however, need to establish a relationship with the organised field. On the contrary, the psychotic dream occupies the centre of the group over a certain period; only around this incandescent nucleus will it be possible to develop new

expressions of order, producing images and sequences capable of remoulding the group's tendency of the moment. "The unconscious is made up of a vast area: there is an intelligent unconscious, a memory, an unconscious will. . . ." (Soavi 1999). I believe that a group is especially capable of exploring this vast area and the different nature of its provinces, through dreaming. Using a complex system of relationships that are of affinity, proximity, attraction, resonance, a different or new unconscious can erupt on the scene and appear false in a structured and organised context. In order to integrate it in the present context, it is necessary to elaborate its relationship or non-relationship. This brings the group field back (which in the meantime has become more complex) towards the initial phases in which mental, anonymous "bits" that the group has in common, were used to construct experiences and ties between different elements. The momentary regression leads the new emergency to a more profound stage and brings the method of integration up to the present. Confusion generates fear, but also desire to increase the ties and confidence within the group. Often, the patients who carry out this function within a group are not only the more fragmented and sensitive to unconscious stimulation, (the unconscious stimulation that the group has not taken into real consideration, even though it refers to it in the field), but above all are those who are in need of being sustained in their search for cohesion. They demand a larger number of elements and correlations from the group, compared to those who seem to be satisfied with an already defined structure. Dreaming is the only experience that can restore the value of this subjective search, as long as the field of the group is sufficiently fluid, contained and permeable, (and the group is able to carry it out). There is nothing in the emotive environment whether it be sensory, memory or language that can be compared for its unique value to the happiness of dreaming, especially if the group encourages us in this activity and above

all, knows about what we are dreaming. While non-symbolic or psychotic dreams tend to hypnotise and disturb the attention of the group, other dreams offer a field of elaboration that is particularly significant: their elements can be seized, elaborated and given new meaning at different levels, adhering to the situation in the session and offering different links and sense, both to the individual and to the group as a whole. I have often wondered whether these dreams are effective because they are at the centre of the "associated notions", or if they are useful because they are not fragmented and incomprehensible. We can assume that they are in a centre that is both satisfying and synthetic ("associated notions"), compared to others on the

outskirts, and that they express problems and fundamental needs of that particular moment. Although I believe that the dreams on the outskirts, however insignificant they may seem, are of great importance, in that they "supply" depth and perspective to the dreams in the centre, they act as a sort of secret avant-garde. To "associated notions" I would add "oneiric notions" that allow an even more complex map of verbal identity. The "effective narration" (Neri, 1995), is the result of a previous narration that is less effective, but nonetheless, nourishes and sustains it. Freud said that the dream is "the principal way to the unconscious" and he compared it to a daily newspaper that has to be deciphered out of what is true and what has been censored. Dreaming has continued to be vital to the different forms of psychoanalysis since Freud's time. I want to stress how dreaming is a part of the experience of fulfillment of people and their capacity to produce and value their existence, and how the group experience can furnish a precious contribution, but at the same time, demands a high price in effort and suffering. It is true, the dream is the analyst's "bread and butter!" The gratification of desire is also the gratification of the desire for analysis (the Rat Man, Freud), inevitably, the patients' dreaming is similar to the human condition and the way the analyst analyses, and above all, the relationship they have with him. The more intimate the bond, one would think, the easier it would be to interiorize, but the analyst must also protect the patient and himself from introversion and regression, if the effective fusion cannot unfold itself. We have already seen the dream as a construction in analysis (Chianese, 1995); as a production of the other unconscious from the alfa-function and from the alfa-screen (Bion, 1962); as the creation of a new text coming from a day-dream in the session (Bezoari-Ferro, 1997); as an activity that facilitates the development, the consolidation and the restructuring of the Self (Lichtenberg, Fosshage, Lachmann, 1996), in spite of the menacing fragmentation. Furthermore, we have other ways of describing the dream. The patient seems to have corresponded to the analyst's expectations in the way he selects and organizes his response to the stimulation of the analytic process, the gratification leads to the desire for further analysis and further analytical construction. It will be the analysis that demands other processes that transform the "facilitated ways" (Freud, "Project") of the pathological repetition, that will project a new organisation of the nerve network in line with an acceptable rhythm of change. The group as an analytical subject is more sensitive than an individual patient, it knows and "patrols" its limits and the characteristics of the analyst well. For love or hate, the group dreams of being inside the analyst's mind, or on the contrary, being different from the analyst. What surprises both the analyst and the group, is, when the two ideas meet. One day, the oneiric resources will become weaker and one will be less in need of being interrogated like a god in Delphi. I visited Delphi recently. One must start dreaming long before reaching the site of the oracle and the temple, which is situated in a rocky valley. An intense sky overshadows the vast area, so obscure and enigmatic. When the need to dream and the happiness of dreaming diminishes, the memory remains, the tracks of a long voyage are always there. The memory has an enormous potential to heal; the cure is the time it took the tracks to be marked out, and the gratitude

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forms new tracks for generations to come (Di Chiara 1997). So, the analysis of our dreams and our desire for further analysis continues all our lives, so long as dreaming has limited the area of suffering and transformed it into a creative thing. When a patient who was very enthusiastic about dreaming, was going through an unproductive phase and drifted into silence, I explained that something was brewing but just needed time.

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