Dreaming Psychoanalysis Forward:

Social Dreaming Applications in Academic and Community Settings

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“Thirdness is that quality of human existence that transcends individuality, permits and constricts that which can be known, and wraps all our sensibilities in ways that we experience as simultaneously alien as well as part of ourselves. Thirdness is the medium in which we live and that changes history, moments into time, and fragments into a whole.”


“And I hold that it is true that dreams are faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is an art required to sorting and understanding them.”

Montaigne, “Of Experience”

Introduction: Psychoanalysis and Dreams: Is there a Role for “Social Dreaming?”

Emphasizing what he perceives as the one hundred plus year “love/hate” relationship between dreams and psychoanalysis, Lippmann (2000) decries the devalued status of dreams (theoretically and clinically) in contemporary psychoanalysis, generated by a fickle relationship that reflects the nearly universal ambivalence towards the unconscious, that unruly dimension of human experience that will not submit to our Western desires for mastery and domination. While we agree with Lippmann’s overall assessment of our ambivalent attitudes toward dreams and the unconscious, we do not share his pessimism concerning the potential for re-integration with psychoanalysis. In contrast, it is our contention that contemporary psychoanalysis (a pluralistic conceptual landscape that parallels the complexity and ambiguity of the unconscious) offers renewed possibilities for the re-integration of dreams: for us, dreams remain the quintessential representation of the unconscious, the unformulated, the dissociated, and the repressed. In fact, there is some empirical evidence that supports our optimism: Lempen & Midgley (2006) surveyed and compared articles published in a psychoanalytic journal during two time periods (the early 1950s and the 1990s) in order to assess how the theoretical and clinical use of children’s dreams had developed over time. Despite their conclusion that “there has been a decreased focus on dreams in a clinical context,” the data suggest a more complex picture: the proportion of papers referring to dreams increased; the number of papers referring to dreams in the title remained stable; the theoretical use of dreams increased; and although the clinical use of dreams with children declined, their clinical use with adults expanded! Another study (Hill & Knox, 2010), surveying the clinical use of dreams in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, found that therapists addressed dreams with fifty percent of their patients and took up about one half of the
time in therapy discussing dreams. Rumors concerning the death of dreams and the divorce between psychoanalysis and dreams seem premature!

Paul Tolpin (1989) quotes Montaigne to support his assumptions concerning dreams and dream mentation—assumptions which we share—that they reveal the breadth and depth of human mentation and motivation, and hence require a complex, nuanced, and paradoxical approach to understanding and applying clinically:

“…dreams have no inherent motivating force, but are, rather, simply windows to the usually unconscious, continual operations of the mental processes that constitute the experiencing self to which REM sleep gives us brief access.

The content of dreams is a vast variety of unconscious feelings and thoughts and the innumerable ways of dealing with those feelings and thoughts that our minds are capable of. Dreams, then, may consist of messages about somatic states, or they may be attempts to reduce internal psychological tensions. They can express conflicts, erotic and aggressive urges, wishes and fears of all kinds. They can express states of the self, moods, defensive tendencies, states of disorganization, states of satisfaction or desire, attempts to solve intellectual problems, visions of creative possibilities, and so on. They combine archaic memories and current experiences….The list is incomplete” (p. 42).

Tolpin’s formulation comes very close to Bion’s (1970) ideas concerning dream function: dreaming is what the unconscious mind attempts to do all the time; however, it is not always successful (Ogden, 2004). In addition, Bion proposed a synthetic or integrative function which undergirds the creation of meaning and psychological growth—this seems to bear similarity to the self-psychological proposition (Fosshage, 1989) that the dream serves maintenance, restorative, and developmental functions.

For our purposes, we want to propose that Tolpin’s notions (despite his apparent commitment to an individualistic worldview—note the focus on the self) provide support for “social dreaming” (Lawrence & Daniel, 1982; Lawrence, 2003a, 2003b) as one of the functions that dreams serve, a function that has been eclipsed by the focus on the isolated, private mind. Indeed we have clearly arrived in psychoanalysis (parallel to the contemporary shift to plurality) to see the value of a “multi-functional” model of dreaming (Fiss, 1989). As Fiss has noted, Freud (1905) proposed such an organizing principle in his analysis of Dora, suggesting that dream meaning may be “of as many different sorts as the process of waking thought; in one case it could be a fulfilled wish, in another a realized fear, or again a reflection persisting on into sleep, or an intention, or a piece of creative thought.” (p. 68). However, in practice, he advocated for the primacy of the “wish” as the organizer of dream mentation and motivation.

In a roundtable discussion focused on the challenges of integrating a socio-political perspective into psychoanalysis, Jessica Benjamin (Altman et al, 2006) tells an anecdote concerning a group consultation in Germany which involved analysis of a dream containing an “obvious reference”
to the Nazi regime and wartime activities. To her shock the audience engages in a “blanketing denial” of the reference (despite Benjamin’s interpretation) to Nazi murderous actions during World War II. Benjamin goes on to say that her experience in this context suggested a “kind of collective unconscious setup…that we carry an awful lot of things that are not individual, that are what you might call ‘transpersonal’ in our political unconscious” (p. 182). Furthermore, she argues that psychoanalysis has colluded in an institutional blindness (similar to that group of German therapists)—a taboo—a “denial of historical forces…” (p.182).

It seems to me that Benjamin is groping for the ideas (first proposed by Gordon Lawrence) we will present in this paper regarding the value of a “social dreaming” paradigm. In this regard, it is noteworthy that it’s a dream that is the focus of her consultation and anecdote—a dream that contains reference to a social reality that is being disavowed, denied, dissociated. Benjamin is describing her emerging awareness that she and other contemporary relational analysts have been in collusion with a psychoanalytic establishment whose “denial of historical forces is very much embedded in our early history, and the way that we failed to reorganize ourselves around that has had a very powerful influence, even for those of us who departed from Freudian tradition” (p. 182). Benjamin and other contemporary analysts have been adrift in the unconscious sea of the “cultural third” (Gerson, 2004, 2009 ), which is the cultural unconscious we are all implicitly organized by.

Lynne Layton (2006), another relational analyst, on the other hand seems more clearly aware of the power of the “cultural third,” and describes her conflict and struggle to feel “authorized” to analyze the socio-political unconscious as a psychoanalyst. Remarkably, like Benjamin, Layton, during the course of an analysis, confronts the “cultural third” through the medium of an analysand’s dream! The patient’s dream generates a dilemma for her—whether to address what seems an explicit reference in the manifest content to a political stance her patient is grappling with, or to adhere to the narrower confines of the traditional focus on the dreamer’s more intimate interpersonal circumference. In the process, Layton discovers her own unconscious conflict: is she straying from being an “authentic “ analyst if she permits or encourages exploration that leads away from intrapsychic, private dimensions to a “political psyche” (Samuels, 1993, 2004)? Or is she colluding unconsciously with her “own resistance to linking the psychic and the social” (p. 110)? Layton arrives at the view that she has been in collusion with a culture that decontextualizes and de-historicizes—attacks social linking--- a powerful unconscious demand to dissociate individuals from their social context:

“Cultural norms erect barriers to what can be thought, felt, and articulated, in speech. Because…they share the same dominant middle-class culture, therapists and their clients often adhere, consciously and unconsciously, to some of the same cultural norms. These norms…created dynamic unconscious conflicts as well…can generate particular kinds of clinical enactments…. Normative unconscious processes result from narcissistic wounding inflicted by
sexist, racist, and other power hierarchies whose norms mark one group as inferior to other
groups” (p. 107).

These cultural norms, serving as cultural organizing principles that require de-linking the psyche
from social context, inform the traditional perspective on the clinical use of dreams, focusing on
the private, personal experiences of the dreamer, and retaining the lingering assumptions of the
pre-relational and pre-intersubjective paradigm of the “isolated mind.” (Stolorow, 1992).
“Social dreaming” (Lawrence & Daniel, 1982; Lawrence, 2003) practice and interpretation
represent the emergence of a truly relational and intersubjectivist perspective: social dreaming
for a social mind. Furthermore, this renewed valuation of dreams in itself represents an
engagement with what Lippmann (2000) refers to as psychoanalysis’ “unacknowledged
ambivalence” towards dreams, deriving from cultural and systemic factors: he proposes that
analysts display analytic arrogance in our struggle with “unknowingness,” uncertainty, and the
puzzling nature of dreams and the unconscious by imposing meaning using a preferred theory.
The “Social Dreaming” perspective and method may be an antidote to these institutional
projections, with a democratic group dialogue that generates multiple interpretive narratives and
encourages tolerance for ambiguity.

A Brief History and Description of Social Dreaming

Lawrence (2003a, 2003b), the originator of social dreaming, provides a description of the
“social dreaming matrix” (SDM): a process involving a group of participants who share dreams
and associations to those dreams, relying on the working hypothesis that the dreams shared
reflect a collective cultural product, a social unconscious comprised of dissociated social,
political, and cultural experience. A major hypothesis is that the initial dream shared is a fractal
of all subsequently narrated dreams, that is, the initial dream provides a pattern which is
replicated in subsequent dreams. Our experiments with social dreaming appear to confirm this
hypothesis, as we will describe in a later section.

There are several other foundational assumptions: the dreams generated in SDM are metaphors
for unconscious, disavowed, dissociated cultural and community experience; the dreams in
SDM are the shared property of the dreaming community; focus must be on the dream, not the
dreamer, which facilitates development of a safe “mental space,” an intersubjective/relational
third (Winnicott, 1971; Ogden, 1994; Benjamin, 2004; Gerson, 2004); ascertaining dream
meaning should be approached with the attitude of a working hypothesis; the content and
meaning is unpacked through three psychoanalytic methods: associations (Freud), amplification
(Jung), and animation (Bromberg, 2000, 2003; Bosnak, 2004). Jung’s method of image
amplification, encouraging cultural and archetypal associations, attempts to go beyond Freud’s
linear and private associations; because relying solely on verbal associations may distance us
from the non-verbal, unformulated dimension of the dream and the unconscious (Blechner,
Bosnak’s strategy of animation (enactment/embodying of the dream’s imagery and non-verbal narrative) tries to circumvent being trapped in the “verbal associational network,” (Lippmann, 2000), by enabling access to a procedurally organized implicit knowing.

In developing the radical paradigm of “social dreaming” and the “social dreaming matrix” (SDM), Gordon Lawrence (2003a, 2003b), was influenced by several perspectives:

- Wilfred Bion’s (1970) theory of dreaming (Bion conceptualized dreaming as a fundamental and continuous mental process by which we make wholeness, synthesis, and meaning from our fragmented emotional experience.);
- Charlotte Beradt’s (1968) *Third Reich of Dreams* (a book reporting the dreams of ordinary German citizens during the period of 1933-1939—dreams reflecting their intuitive, dissociated, unconscious knowledge and foreknowledge of the Nazi regime’s intentions);
- and an anthropological narrative (Stewart, 1951) concerning the Senoi, a Malaysian tribe who interpreted their dreams as part of their daily communal lives.

**Social Dreaming and Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Challenges and Linkages**

Contemporary psychoanalysis has opened up new vistas for understanding the psyche, the unconscious, and dreams: the emerging paradigm is pluralistic, transcending the polarity of intrapsychic vs. interpersonal, and developing an epistemology that encourages self-reflexivity (Rubin, 1998). However, as Gonzalez (2009) eloquently states there “is a pressing need for contemporary psychoanalysis “to articulate an “… intersection of the personal and the social…. a place of linkage between the axes of intrapsychic fantasy and social categories...” (p. 57). He argues that psychoanalysis must enlarge its project, moving beyond the dyadic, widening its scope to the social context:

“The psychoanalytic project has been conventionally understood as a conversation behind closed doors, the private contract between suffering patient and soul doctor, but increasingly we are called as analysts to make sense of the broader context in which that conversation takes place.... We can no longer practice in a hermetically sealed chamber and hope to remain relevant” (p. 57).

We agree with this challenge, and propose that the contemporary psychoanalytic concepts regarding “thirdness,” first introduced by Winnicott (1971), with his formulation of an “intermediate area of experience,” and expanded by Ogden (1994), Britton (2004), Benjamin (2004), and Gerson (2004), have enormous relevance for and applicability to the conceptualization and practice of a socially-oriented psychoanalysis. Furthermore, “thirdness” provides a theoretical foundation and scaffolding for the emergent theory and practice of “community psychoanalysis” (Twemlow, 2006), a theory and practice that seeks to expand psychoanalytic thinking and interventions to venues beyond the confines of the traditional dyadic
setup: to larger systems, neighborhoods, communities. We view “social dreaming” as an exploratory method and intervention to be added to the repertoire of “community psychoanalysis.”

While Britton (2004) delineates thirdness as a developmental achievement (involving the evolution of Oedipal consciousness of the exclusionary pair), Ogden (1994), Benjamin (2004), and Gerson (2004) emphasize thirdness as emergent intersubjective/relational processes and mental space. However, it is Gerson, carefully distinguishing among three dimensions of thirdness (developmental, relational, and cultural), who with his notion of cultural thirdness (Gerson, 2004, 2009) provides a contemporary psychoanalytic foundation for social dreaming and community psychoanalysis. He defines the cultural third as a form of thirdness that “envelops, intrudes upon, and shapes interactions …as well as the subjectivities…” (p. 70). Gerson provides as examples: the “incest taboo, language, and professional standards “ (p. 70). We would (and we believe Benjamin and Layton would also) expand the latter to include the “political unconscious” (Samuel, 1993, 2004), the socio-political dimension of human experience (Layton et al, 2006), and the Jungian “cultural complex.” (Singer & Kimbles, 2004). The “social dreaming matrix” and the dissociated social dimension of all dreams provide us access to the unconsciously organized cultural third.

We believe there are several other conceptual developments in contemporary psychoanalysis that have further relevance for “social dreaming”: Self Psychology (Kohut, 1977, 1984), Intersubjective Systems Theory (IST) (Stolorow, 1995; Stolorow & Atwood, 1996; Livingston, 2009), and Relational Psychoanalysis (Ullman, 2006; Stern, 2009). Psychoanalytic Self Psychology has contributed to the psychoanalytic theory of dreams by proposing “self-state dreams” (although foreshadowed in the work of Fairbairn from an internal Object Relations theoretical perspective) which provide a snapshot/x-ray of the current status of the individual self: we propose that the social dreaming matrix (SDM) generates “social state dreams,” which provide metaphors expressing the authentic, but dissociated, state of the community. Intersubjective Systems Theory (IST) has three principles which can be fruitfully applied to social dreaming: the idea of an intersubjective field emerging from the interaction of multiple subjectivities (analogous to Gerson’s cultural third and Ogden’s and Benjamin’s intersubjective third); the concept of the developmental dimension of transference (“leading edge” or “forward edge”); and the conflict between accessing dissociated affective experience and maintaining vital object ties. All three show promise in enhancing our understanding of SDM phenomena, particularly the “forward edge” process (also outlined in the work of Fosshage (1989), who maintains dreams have the primary function of maintaining and restoring the organization of the self), which focuses our attention on the intuitive, developmental imagination of the group expressed through social dreams. Livingston (2009) refers to this dimension as the emergence of “embryonic new organizing principles.” The need to maintain vital object ties deepens our understanding of the enthrallment of groups to authority and powerful institutions: recall in this regard, Benjamin’s allusions to the psychoanalytic community’s taboos regarding socio-political
and historical forces. Examples of these (the forward edge process in social dreaming and the collectively shared disavowal because of group-wide attachments to authority) will be provided from our SDM experiments/applications.

Finally, we would like to provide an argument for the inclusion of “witnessing” (another emerging concept in contemporary psychoanalysis) as an essential form of intervention in psychoanalysis, along with traditional interpretation (Freud), holding (Winnicott), and containment (Bion), as proposed by a number of psychoanalytic writers (Poland, 2000; Ullman, 2006; Stern, 2009). Furthermore, as we believe that “social dreaming” is an emancipatory practice, representing a socially engaged community psychoanalysis, its practice is a form of “moral witnessing” (Margalit, 2002; Ullman, 2006; Boulanger, 2012), urging all dreamers and SDM participants to provide testimony to collectively and collusively dissociated human suffering and inviting psychoanalysts to an “active commitment to social justice and human rights” (Boulanger, 2012). Following Gerson (2009), we will provide in a later section a description of some of the defenses (denial, disavowal, intellectualization, projection, etc.) mobilized against “moral witnessing” during SDMs.

**Jung’s Relevance for Social Dreaming and Contemporary Psychoanalysis**

Samuels (1996) details Jung’s banishment and emerging re-integration into mainstream and contemporary psychoanalysis, arguing persuasively that “Many of the central issues and features of contemporary psychoanalysis are reminiscent of positions taken by Jung in earlier years” (p. 471). Among other ideas, Jung had emphasized the transparent meaning of dreams via the manifest content, foreshadowing the contemporary perspective often credited to Erik Erikson; insisted on a creative, non-destructive dimension to the unconscious psyche, analogous to self-psychology’s emphasis on “self-righting” and Kohut’s “leading edge;” argued for the clinical usefulness of the counter-transference, bearing similarities to contemporary intersubjectivity theory’s notion of mutual influence; anticipated contemporary thinking concerning multiplicity (Bromberg, 1996) with his conception of complexes, “splinter psyches,” and sub-personalities. As is well known, Jungian concepts, display an appreciation of varying levels of unconscious life in a spectrum including the personal, cultural, collective and archetypal/spiritual dimension of psychic experience (Jacobi, 1973). Out of this formulation of psychic life dream material may readily be understood as emerging from a socio-cultural unconscious, which provides another theoretical basis for social dreaming that is both inclusive of archetypal phenomena and a study in *cultural complexes* (Singer and Kimbles, 2004). We make the case that a number of social identities (“non-represented voices”) are marginalized, and their social experience and the impact of this marginalization is collusively dissociated, i.e. in the form of cultural complexes.
Jung held on to the ideal of “educating the personality”, arguing passionately against educational processes that foster automatism, a continued shadow in graduate psychology education, which is moving lock-step with market driven trends toward increased materialism (e.g. in one-sided “evidence based” emphases) while minimizing the value of subjectivity and intangible inner work. As a response Antioch University, Los Angeles (AULA) created a Jungian informed program within its graduate psychology track called the Spiritual and Depth Psychology (SDP) Specialization (a “wild life refuge for psyche” in graduate education). Within SDP we encountered a dilemma around the teaching of introductory psychoanalytic theory which is saturated with Eurocentric, White, hetero-normative bias. We determined that using social dreaming may be an ideal way to see past our own cultural complex that leaves us perpetuating our “straight white (psychoanalytic) family values” even within a multicultural context. Experimentally we used SDM to consult the academic community’s social unconscious. We posed the dilemma to the community and asked “what is on our minds regarding this issue.” A day long event of dream sharing and discussion followed. Out of this event we began to develop pedagogical strategies to integrate the emergent community themes (e.g., we hosted a conference on non-represented voices in the psychoanalytic canon, a faculty roundtable, an African American Women’s Circle, and forged an ongoing process of SDM and community dialogue to enhance curricular responsiveness to the local, regional, national levels of community as well as the global psyche).

Other experiments and planned applications of social dreaming ensued:

- Exploration of American Xenophobia (SDM held in July, 2011): we will provide some highlights in a later section of this article;

- We successfully introduced the SDM as an experiential exercise in teaching introduction to psychoanalytic theory;

- We planned to experimentally apply at Occupy Movement (Los Angeles), relying on the “forward edge” function to facilitate more conscious formulation, articulation, and actualization of a future strategic agenda. We visited both the New York City and Los Angeles Occupy Movement sites. However, after several collaborative conversations, just as we were going to implement, the Los Angeles site was closed down by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

- We hope to organize social dreaming matrices at an International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE) Conference and at the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis –Los Angeles (ICPLA), with focus on articulation of potentially generative future lines of organizational development, in addition to assessing the present “social state” of the organizations and their social worlds (or “phenomenological ecology”).

A Social Dreaming Matrix: American Xenophobia:
Our first formal experiment with the SDM was a daylong workshop held at Antioch University in July 2011. The theme was on American xenophobia, with the goal of interrogating the American communal unconscious with regard to xenophobia. Participants (about 30) included mental health professionals; students in Antioch’s Masters in Clinical Psychology program; journalists; artists; two high school seniors, a substantial sub-group self-identifying as gay or lesbian; a Catholic priest and a nun; and a couple of early childhood educators. The schedule included 3 SDM segments and a final dialogue. My personal experience as facilitator was complex: I (GB) was both challenged (puzzled by some participants “resistance”) and awed by the process and the outpouring of unconscious symbolization. For days and weeks afterward I felt emotionally haunted by the evocative dream images and the affect they contained. After several weeks I was able to begin to impose some meaning onto the experience, having received feedback from some participants. Here is my first attempt at a coherent statement of my impressions (an e-mail exchange with a participant, who was recommending a longer SDM experience, more structure, etc.).

Hi Tina,

Thank you for your thoughtful feedback!

I agree re the fleeting impressions: I too have struggled over the last several weeks to bring some personal coherence to my experience. However, it is beginning to gather/cohere as a result of self-reflection, feedback from participants, and extended conversations with colleagues. I and others have had the intuition that it needed to be longer (perhaps two days, with an overnight dreaming opportunity).

I like your idea of the pause (it is a technique that was used by a Jungian analyst who presented at Antioch on children’s dreams). Several other folks had similar reactions to the process: needed more structure and guidance.

I realized almost immediately afterward that I should have repeated even more often than I did what the preferred way of contributing was, which was stated at the beginning and several times during the SDM—and written down on handouts (share your dreams in reaction to other dreams; assume that all dreams are your dreams as well; provide your personal associations—not analysis or interpretation; try to perceive the links and connections—similarities? —between the dreams and associations shared). Although I was initially puzzled by the participants’ difficulty in following the guidelines provided, I realized that I have to respect the power of the unconscious—that what happened is the only thing that could have happened given the ubiquity of unconsciously-motivated perception, values, habits of mind, personal agendas, etc.
There are some obvious themes that emerged:

- The group’s search for a sense of effective goodness and fear of identifying/reacting with evil when confronted with social evil (images of angel with ineffective wings, associations to the holocaust, invasions from the sky, envy of the Tea Party’s ability to organize, channel, and mobilize anger/rage, with associations to NAZI era);

- The culture war that was evident in the group’s dynamics and associations: atheism/scientific worldview vs. religion/new age spirituality vs. secular critical theory (academic artists/theorists) vs. psychoanalytic sensibility/perspective;

- The social/personal disorientation of being confronted with a different paradigm that seems to have its own truth and integrity (exemplified by the dream of the religious icon constructed in reverse from the traditionally accepted method): ENGAGEMENT WITH ANOTHER CULTURE—THINK ISLAM AND WEST!;

- The condensation of the personal and the social in dreams images (Shaman-like George Bush in the desert; Barbara Walters invading someone’s bedroom);

- The youngest participants’ associations to social media and technology—completely absent from the dreams and associations of the middle-aged cohort in the workshop.

I’m sure there are many other themes and ways of organizing the dreams and associations, but these seem to have an obvious resonance for me and the overarching theme of xenophobia (fear of otherness or the stranger or foreign).

All best,

George

The puzzlement I expressed in that e-mail regarding “the participants’ difficulty in following the guidelines provided” was resolved by the realization that this “difficulty” represented what Gerson (2009) has referred to as defenses against moral witnessing and Layton (2006) defines as attacks on social linking—a refusal to connect with the other and his or her suffering and an active defense of de-contextualizing. Examples of these “defenses” abounded: some chose to interpret dream images as representing individual, private concerns of the dreamer; others
intellectualized by applying the jargon of academic deconstructionism, emptying images of either personal or social meaning, or affective resonance.

After much reflection, I’ve come to the view that the core issue the Xenophobia SDM grappled with was witnessing and acknowledging collusion with destructiveness or evil (represented by hope-filled encounters with a shaman-like former President George W. Bush in the desert, who offers the wandering dreamer “tea—actually peyote … human contact … warm feeling” that promises to relieve the loneliness and disconnection evoked by the desert imagery) and struggling to find efficacy and goodness (often represented by images of angels, particularly a striking image of an angel with enormous wings which were useless—“stalled”). In fact, the first dream offered in the SDM was the latter iconic image:

“I’m in Boston, traveling on a train, I had recently bought a T-shirt with angel wings on the back. I fell asleep and dreamt I was an angel with huge wings, but cannot fly. Someone (a she) came down… looked like an angel. She painted an ‘A.’ When I woke up I saw angels marching in a parade.” Just as Lawrence (2003a, 2003b) hypothesized that the dreams shared in the SDM would have a fractal-like pattern, a pattern of “visitation” with ambiguous (sometimes disappointing) outcomes is repeated throughout the SDM. The second dream shared was by a participant whose father was a Holocaust survivor (connected to the first dreamer’s train imagery?) also contained visitation by an angel:

“Your dream reminded me of my father dying; he suffered; he could not let go. He was a genocide survivor. I wanted to help but could not. I had a dream with his father—he was full-bodied, put his arm around me and said, ‘I wish my son could see how much I’ve changed.’ My father would not let go. I then felt visited by an entity—an angel. The wings seem to ground me, but trains displace us. There is a panic with the displacement.”

The first dreamer responds:

“The wings give capability to move, but I’m stalled. The angel who comes to me give me a name, ‘A?’ I must find out the meaning. It gives me hope to transcend. I see angel as energy to help me move on. In the midst of travel, the angel comes with security—potential is there.”

This pattern of visitation continues in dream images reported later:

• A dreamer describes an alien invasion in the desert with plans to colonize our planet—it’s a recurrent dream where “there is no safety. I’m caught between a sense of beauty and destruction. Reminds me of ‘Star Wars Missile Defense’ proposed by Reagan.” This is followed by associations and attempts at interpretation: “…reminds me of current state of America…the desert represents our depression. The wings are grounded, stalled. America has what it takes to move through this transition…we can transcend. Lots of movement: trains, ships, wings—sometimes not moving.”
Two dreams are narrated involving encounters with former President George W. Bush, who seems to initially offer hope to dreamers wandering in the desert, and then turns out to be a shaman-like “trickster.”

First Bush dream: “I’m wandering in the desert feeling alone. I finally arrive at a hut. George Bush is inside dressed as Carlos Casteneda’s Don Juan. He never speaks, hands me tea—actually peyote. I’m walking to east coast to meet my mother. I asked lots of questions of Bush but he never responds.”

Second dream: “I have George Bush dreams too…always silent, giving me Kool-Aid to drink.” This is followed by the following association: “Shamans used to dress as your worst nightmare…what in him scares me?...how am I like him?...how sociopathic?…”

Lawrence’s prediction of a fractal-like progression in the dreams of an SDM seems borne out in this sequence: encounters with entities connected to other realities with promise of hope, safety, human contact, but resulting in disappointment. Even the alien invasion is associated with beauty and imagined military defense (“star wars missile defense” system).

A remarkable development occurred during the Dialogue segment of the SDM workshop: as the participants focused on reflection and meaning creation, there was the emergence of an inchoate longing to counter the Tea Party political movement with a progressive counter-movement (recall the foreshadowing of this in the “tea—peyote” image in the first George Bush dream). It seems to me in retrospect that the SDM Dialogue’s inchoate longing foreshadowed the development of the Occupy Wall Street Movement—which emerged two months later! This emergent longing appears to be an example of a “social dreaming forward edge process” that we hypothesized: The SDM process gives birth to innovative future directions for the dreaming community. This assumption, a developmental process active in social dreaming, has guided us in applying SDM to curricular development at Antioch University. Encouraged by our experiments with the SDM method, theory, and perspective; we propose several potential avenues for explorative application:

Community-level processing of collective trauma (either man-made or caused by natural disaster). In this regard see the psychoanalytic focus-group-like dialogues concerning environmental sustainability facilitated by Lertzman (2008, 2012).

SDM workshops at Psychoanalytic Institutes in order to avoid the trap of institutionally blinkered perspectives, integrate the collectively disavowed, and create self-reflective space for emergent, previously unformulated insights regarding the institute’s organizational unconscious (Levinson, 1994). In this regard see also the work of Rubin (1998) who details the authoritarianism and blindness present in the psychoanalytic community throughout its history.
Experiential training in the understanding and clinical application of dreams for psychoanalytic candidates. Blechner (2011), using Ullman’s (1996) approach to group dream interpretation as well as occasional application of Lawrence’s (2003a, 2003b) social dreaming matrix, suggests that in addition to the training benefits, “group dream interpretation” may facilitate resolution of dyadic impasses and enhance the analysis of dreams in individual dream work.

- Continue to apply in academic settings to provide a “social state” reading of the academic community and discover innovative paths for future curricular development, responsive to the emergent needs of all stakeholders (students, faculty, the society it serves, etc.).

Conclusion:

In this article, we have provided a brief introduction to “social dreaming” and its implications for relational psychoanalysis (especially for the illumination of what some have referred to as the “political unconscious”--- a taboo area for traditional psychoanalysis). We have highlighted the usefulness for social dreaming theory and practice of such concepts as “cultural thirdness,” “social state dreams,” “forward edge social dreaming,” and “moral witnessing.” Moreover, we have argued for the renewed relevance of Jung for contemporary psychoanalysis and “social dreaming,” particularly the concept of the “cultural complex.” And finally, we have summarized some of our experimental applications of the “social dreaming matrix” in two contexts, and adumbrated additional potential applications (community level processing of collective trauma; psychoanalytic institutes can benefit from application to organizational development, renewal of training of candidates in dream work, and as a method of group consultation for resolving analytic impasses). Although we agree with Lippmann’s (2000) formulation regarding the love-hate relationship between psychoanalysis and dreams, we, in contrast, are optimistic about a renewed marriage and potential for enhancing psychoanalytic training and psychoanalytic technique (Blechner, 2001, 2011).

References

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