

ON PRESENCE

**Notes for the introduction of a Dialogue for Social Dreaming Matrix one day event
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These speculations arise from my experiences of Social Dreaming and are offered in order to explore any common understandings which might be emerging¹.

I am not at all sure where the notion of "presence" has arisen from, or why the word "presence" seems to capture an important part of the experience of the matrix for me at this time. However, the concept seemed right to explore especially since the idea arose "spontaneously" in a session of the Matrix while I was collecting my (and possibly others) thoughts on the topic.

I can identify a number of occasions in the matrix when I have had a sense that there is nothing beyond the upper room² in Rathdowne Street. I experience the surprise, awe and wonder of the images of the dreams as they are spoken: not trying to make sense of them, not trying to relive the experience of the dreamer, but rather waiting for the connections to occur. This sense of expectancy - of something about to happen - is close to what I mean by presence in the matrix. I do not mean to imply that once the connections are made - either verbally or silently - that the sense of presence is lost, but rather that I experience an on-going presence of mind which appears attuned - in tune with - those who are also present at the moment.

The sense of presence is expunged by bodily sensations. Palpitations or various aches and pains, seem to fill up the moment and act as a distraction³ Similarly, attention to the

¹ The data are mainly derived from my experiences of the on-going matrix held since 1991. However, experiences from other matrices inform these remarks.

² A reference to the "upper room" of the New Testament stories of the Last Supper and the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus. A place of transition and transformation.

³ This is a controversial point. At issue seems to be the meaning of the data for understanding self and process. The use of bodily sensation as one way to be in touch with what might be happening and in order to frame hypotheses is valuable for analytic work of both an individual and social kind. However I wish to hold to an alternative hypothesis that paying attention to these internal feelings may not be relevant to the work of the matrix. Clearly additional data are required to test these apparently competing hypotheses.

details of the dreams and thoughts about what the dream might mean to the dreamer or to the matrix, draw me away to another place and another time ie. away from the present.

Sometimes something is *there* which is neither mind nor body and perhaps not even spirit, which has the features of both the dream world and the other world and these can be held together in the present.

Not that this dichotomy between "different" worlds is necessarily helpful, since one characteristic of presence seems to be a questioning of what happened in the one state or the other. We have reflected on the commonality of dreams - who is dreaming what/whose dreams - but there is something coming forward about that state of mind which can ask whether I dreamt this now or then. I am trying not to be obscure: my question relates to the possibility of dreams occurring in the present.

Others might describe the sense of presence as an "oceanic"⁴ experience or as a "near death"⁵ experience. In these situations the descriptions are given of oneness, wholeness and with the additional element of being transported to another place. I wish to contrast these descriptions with the sense of presence which has a focussed, concentrated, condensed immediacy which is not suffused with bodily sensation. My notes say that it might be an experience of the universe before the big bang - that concentration of energy into the smallest piece of mass and from which new universes were created⁶.

In passing I would say that the experience I am describing is not equivalent to Bion's description⁷ of that state between stupor and dream which he sees as part of the analytic experience.

An important condition for the experience of presence appears to be the availability of others in the matrix. Here I wish to highlight a distinction between the availability of others in a physical context of "being there" and the sense of presence that they might or might not have. Again this might be a distinction between near death or oceanic

⁴ Experiences where the boundaries between the individual and the world are lost with an overwhelming sense of oneness especially with natural phenomena.

⁵ Typically described as an individual stepping outside the body or being transported to another place. Some dreams have been reported in the matrix to have these qualities.

⁶ And subsequently discovered.

⁷ In *Attention and Interpretation*.

experiences and the sense of presence since the first two appear to be primarily an individual matter while the sense of presence requires the others to make something available which is convenient to call their minds.

It is not clear to me at this time what phenomena or properties of the matrix facilitate the sense of presence among the individuals - in the interstices of the matrix as it were⁸.

An hypothesis I have is that the matrix activates an existential valency in its members where individuals/human beings are experienced as individuals/human beings devoid of roles. We are individuals in the matrix with a task - from which a sense of presence may arise - detached from the containers of particular occupational or personal roles. I think that we try to blind ourselves to our roles outside the matrix and to any concept of the roles which we bring to the matrix. If we do not come with roles, then the fundamental processes which occur when individuals relate may not operate. I suggest that the Basic Assumptions described by Bion do not predominate in the matrix. I also suggest that the matrix - especially when the conditions for presence appear - is beyond the concept of the sophisticated work group⁹.

I mean these comments to apply to both Alastair and Suzanne as well. [Alastair Bain and Suzanne Ross – Consultants to the Matrix].

I would like to make some remarks about absence. Here absence can mean: (1) not being in attendance (2) being in attendance but outside the matrix (3) the lack of presence and (4) the inability to hold the matrix in the mind.

Thus I have not attended the matrix on all occasions or that others have attended only intermittently or infrequently, does not seem to be very significant for the overall functioning of the matrix. A year or so ago when the numbers attending the then¹⁰ matrix

⁸ I am thinking of the matrix as a crystalline structure with presence as a kind of energy holding the parts together. As one observes the matrix closer and closer the actual boundaries between the elements become less distinct.

⁹ These ideas need more evidence for their substantiation. My thinking is influenced by the evidence that is coming from AISA work which suggests that it is very difficult for individuals to free themselves from that kind of structured and/or hierarchical thinking that informs our behaviour and experiences which states that the world operates as if my mind and all other minds were the same. I am thinking of the experience of *role* as being one of the basics of the structure in the mind.

¹⁰ I have a conceptual problem in defining which matrix I am referring to: the matrix of 1991 or 1992? This week's matrix? Maybe Bion's remark that one should not assume that the analyst or analysand are the same from one session

reduced greatly, I was anxious about the numbers of dreams which would be available and how many extra/additional dreams I would have to have and report if the matrix was to function. These anxieties have diminished significantly and on reflection the concern seemed to arise from slipping into a traditional way of thinking which predominates currently in the social world namely to accomplish such and such a task one needs so much raw material of certain quality for processing etc etc

I go back to my analogy of the events before the big bang - when density and energy in a small space lead to something. Perhaps the size of the matrix is inversely proportional to its ability to condense energy and /density and we should think of this critical mass in terms of small numbers rather than large.

About being in attendance but outside the matrix. It is a common enough experience to be thinking about events "out there", through the window, up the chimney, what I have left behind or what I am going back to. I used to struggle with these intrusions and tried to come back to the matrix much as I would try to return to an interesting conversation that I might have drifted away from momentarily. I now see that this struggle retards the development of presence.

Next about absence as a lack of presence. In the way I have been using presence, it is likely that it will be a transient phenomenon when certain conditions prevail. The possibility might exist for the permanence of presence for longer and longer periods in the matrix. As I wrote this, however, I became concerned that the matrix might be seen to be an instrument/technology for creating presence. I think this would not be helpful, and may reflect our limited capacities to consider what might be beyond the realms of a social world where we use technology (and people as an inevitable consequence) to achieve an outcome important for me or my group¹¹.

Lastly, absence as an inability to hold the matrix in the mind. I think of my own experiences and those reported by others, which suggest that there is a correlation between frequency, richness and recall of dreams, when the matrix is working compared with those times when the matrix is not in the upper room. I am not suggesting that we

to the next could be tested in terms of the past and present of "the matrix" I have used " **matrix**" to refer to that which is contained within task, boundary and structure of social dreaming and "**Matrix**" to refer to a particular time/experience of social dreaming.

¹¹ Especially if we consider Alastair's comment that "technology" in social dreaming may represent a male gender vertex in the matrix.

can hold a sense of the other members of the matrix or their images or a memory of them (for example a particular dream) for long periods of time. In fact, I have trouble in remembering who has been in which matrix over the years and what dreams have been reported. If dreams are to explore more than an individual experience, then it might be important to maintain the matrix in the mind.¹² Perhaps, one function of presence is to allow a continuity of the matrix across commonly understood boundaries of time, space and subjectivity.

I look forward to the exploration of these preliminary ideas.

¹² Again it is a convenience (especially given the poverty of language in the area) to locate the matrix in the mind. No doubt, one day someone will see these attempts as being as clumsy as we now see the attempts to locate the soul in the pineal gland.