

The Social Dreaming Phenomenon

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The structure of the lecture has three parts:

- I. The Phenomenon of the Social Dreaming Matrix
- II. An Enlarged Theory of Dreams, Called the Epistemic Theory
- III. Social Dreaming @ Work

This I will do through presenting working hypotheses. A working hypothesis is a sketch of the emergent reality, which illumines it. If it is found wanting another working hypothesis can be substituted, one that better fits the reality that is always in the process of becoming.

I. The Phenomenon of the Social Dreaming Matrix

1. The dream, like thinking, is always enlarging the space of the possible. Through the dream we are brought into the tension between the finite (that which we know) and the infinite (that which is beyond our ken). This for well over a century, we have termed the conscious and the unconscious. But since we can never be conscious of our unconscious thinking and thoughts, we should replace the terms with finite<->infinite. I believe that we are conscious of the infinite as a mental space that contains all that has ever been thought and ever will be thought in the cosmos. In a real sense, all thinking begins from "no-thought", from an absence. We make the thought present from first recognising it is not there.

Wilfred Bion was on to this when he said that what is made conscious of unconsciousness is always 'Won from the void and formless infinite' (Milton). Harry Stack Sullivan, whose memory this lecture celebrates, wrote about the 'inattended' when referring to the unconscious. This seems right to me because the unconscious does not become a thing -- it is not reified. It is a process.

The first working hypothesis is that dreams, dreaming and dream work are always inducting us to the tension between the finite and the infinite.

2. The methodology of Social Dreaming hinges on it taking place in a matrix, a place where people come together to share their dreams. Someone will give an account of a dream at the beginning of a matrix. Others follow. There is a flow to the dream in that one dreamer intuitively fits his/her dream into the previous one. After a time, the 'taker' will offer a comment on the possible links and connections between the dreams. The term 'taker' is used to describe the persons who are convening the matrix. Their .

role is to further the work of the matrix, which, as stated in the primary task, is *to associate to one's own and other participants' dreams as made available to the matrix to make links and find connections*. So a Social Dreaming matrix encourages or celebrates the capacity to think.

3. The seating of the matrix is designed to facilitate the work of Social Dreaming. The chairs are arranged in clusters of five to seven, depending on numbers. The clusters of chairs represent a star-like shape, a bit like a snowflake when seen through a microscope. In a matrix of thirty or so participants there will be approximately seven to nine clusters of chairs. All the chairs are linked; ordered in a pattern. They all face the centre of the room. The takers sit anywhere in the matrix.
4. I have used the term 'matrix' to describe the configuration of participants. To the best of my knowledge, such a configuration had never been consciously convened before Patricia Daniel and myself did so at The Tavistock Institute. It was thought that if it was to be called a 'Social Dreaming group', it would be in the area where what had been learned about groups would obtrude into the work of the matrix. The matrix is to transact dreams and to be working at the multiple dreams-in-association. In short, the thought was that dreams would speak with dreams. Although we each dream individually, participants seem to intuit that their dream is not a personal possession and belongs to the larger whole matrix, which is always in a process of discovery or of meaning becoming a version of the accepted truth.

The term 'matrix' had been intuitively chosen. It proved to be correct. A matrix is different from a group. A matrix is a place from which something is bred, grows and develops. Matrix describes the space from which everything that exists in our Universe, indeed the cosmos, has their origins. Matrix existed before mankind developed groups. The Social Dreaming matrix, purposely convened in the here and now, is a reflection of the primordial matrix of humanity.

5. Dreaming is respected as being a representation of the truth of the images and proto-thinking that is the infinite existing in the minds of the participants. A dream will often be a fragment but, nevertheless, is seen as a potential synthesis. Social Dreaming is a method of arriving at the meaning of the dreams through dream-work.
6. The key tool of Social Dreaming is 'tree association' which was first proposed by Sigmund Freud in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, but really 1899). The takers' work is to associate to the dreams in order to find connections among them. In this, they are working at the finite of the dream and the emotional experience of the infinite from where they arise. In this way, the takers model how to work with dreams in a matrix.
7. The Social Dreaming matrix has been a rediscovery, not an invention. We know from anthropological writings that what convention calls primitive peoples collectively shared their dreams. The Indians on the British Columbia frontier would go hunting. They would be lolling around their camp. Suddenly, they would all strike camp and

hunt. Why? Because one of them would have a dream in which he found prey, stalked it, and made a dream-kill. The actual kill had been foretold in the dream. There was none of the chance of today where they would follow spoor in the hope of making a kill. These Indians were dreaming in the context of the tribe, a matrix in my terms.

8. *What can be said about the matrix in the context of Social Dreaming can be offered as a second working hypothesis. A matrix is a different 'container' for receiving dreams and so the 'contained' of the dream changes. The 'content' of the dream and its meaning becomes different from those delivered in other contexts.*
9. In a Social Dreaming matrix, transference and counter transference issues are not addressed directly in the here and now as they would in a group. If we have faith in the dream and dreaming, such issues are voiced in the dream. We have found that if they are addressed directly that they rob the dream of these emotional experiences of transference and counter-transference. Once they are indicated in a dream, the 'takers' will make a comment. For instance, from our work in companies we know that such issues will be present. Once feelings on authority figures are verbalised in the dream, they can be associated to and developed; but it is more the authority for the thinking in the mind of the transference figure than the authority figure itself that is important.
10. The participants in a group are concerned, at some level, about being part of the universe of meaning. A group is tussling most of its life about the meaning and nonmeaning of being in the group. In a Social Dreaming matrix, its work of free association that allows for a multi-verse of meaning to emerge. A matrix can tolerate this, and those in the matrix do not experience themselves as going mad (or psychotic) because such a multi-verse makes sense to the participant. This is consistent with dream life .

The third working hypothesis, then, is that dreams arise from the matrix of emotional experience that is prior to the formation of group. Much like what Grotstein speaks to when he wrote about the dreamer who dreams the dream and the dreamer who understands the dream. There as many people who understand the dream as there are participants.

11. In the first Social Dreaming matrix in 1982 (conducted in the Tavistock Institute) the hypothesis that it would be possible to dream socially was quickly established. Additionally, dreaming evoked new dimensions that had been rarely possible in the classic, dyadic situation. Social Dreaming ushered us into a new experience of dreaming. Why was this so?
12. Dreams relate to each other in the matrix, which would be impossible in any other context. At first, they start as personal dreams. And, over the course of a matrix, begin to relate to each other. In the final phases of a matrix, the dreams can be seen as

forming a hologram with each dream reflected and contained in the other. One has associations to fractals in this context. Truly, dream speaks with dream in a matrix.

13. One difference of a matrix is that it becomes a learning system that is always teetering on the edge of instability. It is a fragile construct. But, through the process of selforganisation on the part of the participants, it produces unpredictable, emergent futures in terms of the discovery of meaning. Synchronicity in a matrix becomes normal.

14. I believe that dreaming in a Social Dreaming matrix inducts us to the world of the socio-centric. Bion makes a very useful distinction between the world of the egocentric and the socio-centric. This distinction is between narcissism and social-ism. In the foreword to *Experiences in Groups*, he says that as a psycho-analyst one can look at groups via two vertices. One is that of the pair and all the minutiae of transference detail between the consultant and the participant. This is the Oedipal situation. And second, he writes that one can also look at the group in terms of what he calls sphinx. This is related to knowledge and scientific method, i.e. how one arrives at knowledge. Very firmly, a Social Dreaming matrix takes us into thinking about the 'Other' and frees us from being gagged and bound in the world of the 'I'.

15. So I have a fourth working hypothesis, that the experience of a Social Dreaming matrix places participants in the domain of sphinx, i.e. in the realm of knowledge, scientific method and truth searching .

16. In this hypothesis I am reflecting something of the social character of dreams. Paul Lippmann in a brilliant article, 'The Nature of Dreams', makes the hypothesis that the nuances and styles of social influence can be found in dreams. He writes:

'The varied' experiences in dreams may be thought of as continuously exploring, portraying, rehearsing, commenting upon, criticising, adding to, varying and improvising on aspects of the socially shared characteristics of a people ... in the deepest privacy of dreaming, the culture's ways are being developed, tested, explored, and reinforced' (Lippmann, 1998:203-204).

17. What I want to emphasise is that Social Dreaming is about expanding thinking, meaning and knowledge through the matrix, which is a different kind of container.

II. Towards Ways of Understanding Dreams

1. Can we allow ourselves to try and understand a Social Dreaming matrix with negative capability (Keats), i.e. being in mysteries and doubts without irritably reaching after fact or reason? Can we experience Social Dreaming as it is, recognising that a matrix exists to explore what only a matrix can explore?

2. Erich Fromm wrote in *The Forgotten Language* (1951, later published in 1957), that there were three approaches to the understanding of dreams. First, the Freudian view postulated that all dreams were expressions of the irrational and asocial nature of human beings. Second, Jung's view that all dreams were a revelation of unconscious wisdom. This wisdom transcended the individual. Third, the view that dreams express any kind of mental activity and are expressions both of our irrational strivings as well as our reason and morality. Dreams express both the best and the worst in us as human beings, for they cannot be controlled or managed.
3. I have sympathy with Fromm's third way of interpreting, which says that dreams are an expression of mental activity. It is possible to cut through the various 'schools' of interpretation if we ask ourselves from what or where do dreams arise.
4. Dreaming is a subjective experience that we bring into consciousness. Dreaming is a form of thinking or, as Bion put it, 'dreamers are thinkers. '
5. I follow an Epistemic theory of dreams first propounded by Wilfred Bion. This takes us much further than Freud, Klein or Jung. It is based on Bion's view that psychoanalysis is about the evolving processes that make for mind. He saw that 'the mind is seen to develop on the basis of the acquisition of knowledge, knowledge about itself and knowledge about its objects, internal and external' (Meltzer, 1984: 68).
6. Bion proposed that alpha-type elements are suitable for dream storage and subsequent thinking. If they are not capable of transformation they remain as beta-type elements. They remain as undigested facts and not available for thought. They become things in themselves. He describes beta-type elements as being 'the matrix from which thoughts can be supposed to arise'. To be sure, Bion makes clear that this is a mystical apparatus that he invites others to fill out from their experience to make them meaningful and useful (Meltzer, 1984:72).
7. Since the time of Freud, Jung, Fromm and Bion, we have quantum mechanics to help us understand the processes of thinking and dreaming. Though they each foreshadowed quantum theory, particularly Jung with his concept of synchronicity and Bion with his elements, there was no theory of dreaming firmly grounded in the new sciences.
8. Every atom of our body and mind contains, at the sub-atomic level, both waves and particles simultaneously. Every elemental event in neuro-physiology is related to the other elemental events as entities in the cosmos at large through waves and particles. Only a wave or a particle exists for us, as observers, at one time. Waves periodically collapse as particles. When it is in this form it becomes a piece of information, a fragment of knowledge, a shard of the infinite. Waves and particles are immortal, invisible and hidden from our eyes.

Bion foreshadowed this. Simplifying his exposition, we can say that beta-elements are waves. When they take the form of particles they become alpha-elements. As beta - elements, they become part of a universe of strong emotions, though we are unable to

use them for thinking. They constitute the infinite that each of us contains, which becomes a formidable obstacle for making experiences finite.

9. The quality of the information contained as a particle in our dreaming and thinking will depend on the mental disposition we bring to bear on the act of participation. A dream is a subjective experience, which no one else has in exactly the same form. 'Participation' I use in two senses: one to partake of and two to subjectively engage with the dream. The dream is not an object to be regarded through the equivalent of a one-way mirror. It has to be made in the inner world of the observer. There is a deep connection between the observer and the observed. Natural scientists found this out well over fifty years ago.
10. I can illustrate what is in mind here by referring to Harold Bloom's anti-reductionist point about poetry. He says that the meaning of a poem can only be another poem.

'The sad truth is that poems don't have presence, unity or meaning ...
What then does a poem, possess or create? Alas, a poem has nothing and creates nothing. Its presence is a promise, part of the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Its unity is in the goodwill of the reader ... its meaning is just that there is or rather was, another poem'
(Rorty, 1989: 41).

I submit that this could equally apply to dreams and dreaming. A dream is a particle. To arrive at 'the meaning of a dream requires free association. Then a fresh meaning for the dream is minted. The poem is replaced with another poem of the reader. The dream with another dream.

11. We participate in the dream work of a matrix through free association, which is to give our subjective feelings and experiences the highest value and acclaim. Free association is the most subversive of activities in the twentieth century. Christopher Bollas, in *The Mystery of Things* (1999), writes that in our linear and goal-directed world, where consciousness is highly focused and directed at redemption through scientific and technological endeavour, free association, where one says whatever crosses one's mind, is 'to undermine the structure of Western epistemology' (Bollas, 1999: 63).

To engage in free association in the matrix is to be taking the dream as particle and thinking about it in a free way in order to find/make meaning, approximating, to a greater or lesser degree, what is contained in infinity. Infinity, though, will never be known.

12. The evidence for the infinite being made present in dreaming comes from Bollas who has written on the 'unthought known'. The unthought known has proved to be a useful concept in organisational analysis. The unthought known is not a collection of abstract representations but is the outcome of countless meetings, often in tranquility, between the infant as a subject and his object world (Bollas, 1987: 52). I think that embedded in these encounters is an inkling of the infinite as we make our relationships in the finite

world. The infinite is not only something out there as objective fact but is also in here in our inner worlds. To engage with the infinity that is publicly construed we have first to construe it in ourselves. The ecology of forgotten dreams is the infinite.

13. What comes to be known when it is thought depends on the opportunities and the impediments presented by the eco-niche that each of us inhabits. By 'eco' I am referring to the whole natural world we are located in. Loosely, I am using it in the sense of ecological. By 'niche' I mean the slice of the environment that we occupy. I have the idea that even a single cell organism dreams or participates in proto-dreaming. Thus, evolution comes about in the context of the eco-niche the organism inhabits.

From the residues of dreams, forgotten or otherwise, we make a life. In other words, we make a life from dream's shadows.

14. Montague Ullman writes that dreams come from the 'black hole of the psyche' (Ullman, 1975:9). This is a wonderful image. The dream has an 'explicate' meaning. Through the process of 'revealing the unknown implicit in the known' (Sharpe, 1937: 18) one can experience the emergence of the implicate meaning. The poet and the dreamer have the same task, which is to convey experience through language that is 'simple, sensuous and passionate' (Milton). The dreamer struggles in the immanent world of the day-to-day to give a sense of having been in the transcendent world of the night. Within the explicate meaning is another set of meanings embedded in the 'implicate'. So working out the meaning of dreams is a continual movement between the two; the explicate and the implicate; the finite and the infinite.

15. *The fifth working hypothesis can be stated as -- Social Dreaming ushers us into the infinite, the implicate, the distinction between alpha-type and beta-type elements, which signals the world of quantum reality that leads us away from the intra-psychic, narcissistic mode of understanding dreaming, and moves us towards the socio-centric, or Sphinx.*

III. Social Dreaming @ Work

1. We work in organisations as social systems. Organisations are thought products. There are two social systems of thinking in operation at one and the same time. There is the explicate one of consciousness -- this is where people share a primary task and cooperate about what work is to be done. Alongside this, there is the implicate system the system of parallel processes. This is the one of free association, stream of consciousness and musings in the mind, which every human being possesses. All the people in a company share this stream of consciousness composed of waves and occasional particles. There is a communication at a primordial, telepathic, intuitive level, which we would want to deny. Freud recognised the telepathic but could not integrate this intuition with his theory of the mind.

The dream is a particle version of the dreaming that goes on all the time as the organisational wave. How the particle becomes apparent to us is an achievement of consciousness. How, then, to have the inattended part of the discourse of a social system, like a company? The answer, predictably, is to convene a Social Dreaming matrix as has been done by a number of colleagues, like Marc Maltz, Martin Walker, Hanni Biran, Alastair Bain, and others.

2. Hanni Biran did a consultation in Israeli schools with psychologists. The primary task was to explore phenomena of violence in schools. She used as one of her techniques a Social Dreaming matrix. They all discovered that dreams are a substantial reservoir for understanding processes in schools. One incident in the school was as follows:

During a break an eight-year-old boy pushed a girl of the same age to the floor and threw himself over her. Others crowded round and cheered the 'couple' on. The school principal, following the agitation, sexual excitement and violence, responded with alarm at the fear of losing control. The 'couple' was beginning to undergo stigmatisation for the event was being continually discussed in both staff room and play ground.

Hanni Biran and her workshop developed the working hypothesis that the dramatisation of the event was a kind of pleasure for the staff and it was being used to contain their own wishes and fantasies. They were ignoring the generation gap for the discussion was more suited to adults than for children.

Supporting this working hypothesis, it was found out that rumours were being circulated in the school and all sorts of secrets were being voiced. Through the adult's denial of age, the event was turned into a drama, perhaps to camouflage the real issues. At the same time as the psychologist presented this material, she gave a dream.

I am with a group of children and there is a guide who tells us where to go. I realise that the guide is my husband (who is in fact a tour guide). He assumes responsibility for the trip. He explains different things to us. He cares. He has knowledge and is willing to share it with everyone. We walk for a very long time. We find ourselves on the outskirts of a Wild West town. We walk through a large warehouse full of furniture. Everything is painted sunshine yellow. I then notice the whole town has been painted in the same colour and so were our clothes. Everything was painted in the same uniform colour.

Through dialogue and free association the matrix tried to make connections and find links to make meaning. In the dream, the psychologist asks an external masculine authority to show the way because the group itself had lost the ability to see and know. One conclusion was that the child, dubbed the 'Rapist', had coerced the whole social system of the school to look at itself.

The system was threatening to become a Wild West. A discussion with the faculty and the administration should help to discover the dream's 'furniture warehouse'. The resultant working hypothesis would be to free the children from all that was projected into them and to avoid splitting them into 'bad' objects. Another suggestion was that the faculty be given different individual roles in preventing violence and be trained in the use of varied reactions to violence when it erupts in the school.

The sunshine-yellow preoccupied the group and reminded Biran of Bion saying of Milton that 'He could not investigate "things invisible to man" while he was blind with the brilliant light of facts' (Bion, 1973: 104). Bion writes in the following page 'Would it not be better to blind ourselves artificially so that the dark should be so pervasive that any very faint object will show up - like the expression about looking for a black cat in a dark cellar without any light' (p. 105).

Here, Biran shows the intimate connections between the dream and reality and uses the dream to illuminate the nature of reality. Parenthetically I think that the true meaning of dream is a bit like searching for the black cat.

3. Looking for the black cat in a darkened room became clear to me when I was doing a consultation to a small organisation using Social Dreaming. The first dreamer gave a dream:

She is in a garden of a house she used to occupy. The garden is profusely overgrown. She feels that underneath all this profuse boscaje there is a finer garden. Sometimes she sees the lineaments of it, i. e. she perceives what might be the garden when she goes to the top floor of her house.

This simple dream turned out to be the consultation. They were a set of people whose founders had left them. They were doing good-enough work, which was therapy for the under-privileged. The nature of their work was to deal with unspeakable tragedy. This came out in the consultation, although it was difficult to acknowledge, as well as the dynamics occurring between the members of the group. What we came to as a working hypothesis was that the nature of their work was such that it was difficult to keep hope alive -- how do you make hope?

4. Marc Maltz and Martin Walker conducted a consultation and used dreams on-line, i.e. dreams were communicated by the participants on the computer via e-mail. Their findings can be found in *Social Dreaming @ Work* (Lawrence, 1999). They confirmed that Social Dreaming is a powerful tool for reaching the unconscious, or infinite, in organisations. There is always a tension between those who would want to interpret and those who are content to free associate. Free association is open ended, whereas interpretation closes off exploration.

The sixth working hypothesis, then, is that the Social Dreaming matrix, when conducted in an organisation, comes to contain the disowned aspects of the social system, like 'feminine authority'. This is symbolic of all the other disowned aspects of the system. If the disowned comes into the matrix, could it not become part of the discourse of an organisation?

5. It is the emotional link between the dreamer and the dream, the disentangling of the link in terms of transference and counter-transference in the dream, that brings us insight into our selves and the social systems in which we play a part. So dreams about 'bosses' are really about what is in their minds and whether their thinking will have authority over our lives?
6. *The seventh working hypothesis is that the experience of the Social Dreaming matrix allows participants to tolerate and thus explore the unknown, to live in doubt, mystery and uncertainty, and to let-go of rationality.*

I think that this capacity to be in a state of unknowing is anathema in the company organisation. Notice how when an innovative idea is produced, immediately a working party is set up to look at its feasibility.

7. We live out our lives in a materialistic and nature controlling era, worshipping technology as the greatest of our gods. The dream, however, gnaws away at this by offering us each night a chance to question this, to pose existential questions of ourselves that are about the nature of the lives that we lead.
8. *I leave you with a final, and eighth, working hypothesis, that a Social Dreaming matrix is a transformational object, phenomenon or experience and as such is the theatre of the infinite or the unconscious. The play in it is deadly serious for herein are the roots of our civilisation and creativity.*

In the Social Dreaming dream, we are in the equivalent of the 'third space' or 'cultural space' that Winnicott indicated (Winnicott, 1971). This is the cultural space in which we create by making transitions from what we know to what is beyond our ken.

9. I end with a dream on Social Dreaming, which occurred during the night of 13th September, 1999. I had spent the weekend leafing through books on dreaming, imagining you as an audience. If you will, you had become a matrix in the mind.

In the dream, two of us are rebuilding an ancient, fortified tower on the top of a low, craggy mountain, which commands a view of a valley. My colleague, who is a co-founder of Symbiont Technologies, is the builder. He is studying a report that has come from a government expert on historical monuments. In the report it says that we have to build an extra floor between the first two stories and the final one which is a battlement. The extra floor looks like a pudding,

or a souffle. It is like the bulbous towers that one finds in a Russian Orthodox church, but not so regular. Then the topmost fortifications will be superimposed

As happens in many dreams, this building work is done instantaneously. My colleague is querying this opinion of the expert, but I am insisting that we follow his advice. During this we have found the visor of William Wallace. We are not sure if it is empty or not. It is not, we find, and we scoop the head out.

Later in the dream I descend to the valley. There are two perfect Georgian houses. Each a mirror of the other from a distance. When I get closer, I find that one is made of stressed concrete, mimicking, in every detail, the features of the original house. I find that the concrete house has been built by trade unionists as a conference centre only a few years ago. In the dream I go down the long drive that leads from these two houses. I hear voices. Recognising that apparently one woman talks in the same way as both my mother and my wife, I go towards them (her) across some wild moor, which is reached through a gate. The woman is talking to the others in her group of the opinion of the historical monuments' expert. She says, in effect, that both opinions are right -- to have an extra floor and not to have one. I meet with them and the dream ends abruptly, leaving me without the answer I crave.

Whatever associations I have will be left because I find myself in a unique situation where you the audience can provide me with meaning to the dream. I look forward to that in the subsequent discussion. Temporarily, you the audience can become a Social Dreaming matrix.

To conclude: As the response to a poem is another poem, the response to a dream is another dream. I hope that in listening to this lecture you have responded with another lecture in your minds. It will be much better than the one just given. If that is so, I will have achieved my aim, which is to understand dreaming in a matrix.

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