

CHAPTER SIX

The work at the gate—Discussion of the papers of Juan Pablo Jimenez and Horst Kächele

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Juan Pablo Jimenez's paper is a beautiful illustration of dealing with and thinking about dreams in psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic research by Horst Kächele shows how the use of a strict methodology and statistical analysis of the data of a long-term analysis can offer new and thought provoking findings, which are not visible from within the sessions.

The common points between both papers are striking. Both papers focus on the manifest dream. In the research of Kächele and colleagues, this is the story of the dream; to Jimenez it is the narration of the dream and the associations that go with it.

Both authors further focus on the divergence between dream content and what happens in life at a conscious level. From this divergence, we might gain the impression that they are two separate worlds. This is challenging because most psychoanalytic models on dreams are based on a link between dreams and actual experiences: the Freudian approach linking dreams to inner conflicts and wish-fulfilment, the Kleinian interpretation linking dreams to the transference-countertransference in the here and now of the session, and the Bionian interpretation where dreams are seen as a processing of thoughts and feelings by the dream

work alpha, which comes close to what Mauro Mancina hypothesises from a neuroscientific approach.

Also in clinical practice dream life seems to influence what happens in conscious real life or vice versa, but at times dream life and waking life seem two worlds apart.

Let me give three short clinical vignettes:

- The first is of a patient who was for a long time in analysis and came back because of suffering a severe vital depression with weight loss of more than 10 kg, lack of interest and libido, motor retardation, anxiety, sleep disturbance with early waking, dark thoughts, hopelessness, but no crying. Psychiatric treatments like combinations of antidepressant drugs did not help. At his request I started again with sessions in a psychoanalytic frame, on the couch. The result was peculiar: amid the misery which invaded his body and mind and while remaining as depressive as in the beginning, the patient started to dream about a nice atmosphere, about a place like my office that expanded over different streets; he dreamt of feeling good and even of falling in love. For a long time there was no apparent effect on the severe depressive mood disorder. Two completely different worlds in the same person.
- Another patient, who had not been dating for years, started to have erotic dreams linked to the transference. In her dream life she had new experiences and this was followed by meeting as if by coincidence several men who were attracted to her. It was her dream life that offered her new experiences and preceded what happened in real life.
- Another example of the intriguing relationship between a manifest dream and reality is about a patient who was referred because of a complete anhedonia. He was examined in the somatic department because nothing inspired him: food, love, sex, going out, friends, work. My colleagues from the internal medicine and neurology departments thought that there was something somatic, but could not find anything. Depression was ruled out by a psychiatrist colleague. After offering the patient the psychoanalytic device, he said that for the first time since long before he had a dream. He dreamt that his belly became a field of tulips. The dream was a point of entrance to a psychic emotional world that was out of reach for him till then.

What is this intriguing difference between real life and dream life? I am excited by the paper of Horst Kächele, especially the first study, of a long-term analysis. This study shows no relation in content, nor in CCRT themes—the dream seems to be for a great part an independent creation.

In our approach to this phenomenon we should also focus on the dream function, besides its content. It reminds me of a story about dreams and the unconscious in Matte Blanco's (1988) *Thinking, Feeling and Being*. A man enters a club and walks over the wall, over the ceiling with his head down, again over the wall to the bar and asks the bartender for a glass of milk. The question that is on the analyst's mind is: why a glass of milk?, instead of wondering how it is possible to walk over the ceiling to the bar. This wondrous dream function is probably a pictorial form of thinking, different from conscious thinking. Freud discovered the language of this *Alice in Wonderland* kind of world which is not bound to time and logical links.

In contrast to Freud who saw the dream as protector of sleep, we now agree that we sleep to dream. It is strange that evolution spared so many hours a day to sleep and be in a vulnerable position, what seems at first sight dangerous and inefficient. Something must happen in our brain that is vital and that forms a neuroscientific point of view goes with a de-activation of the prefrontal cortex and an activation of the amygdala. Are the dreams a random side product of this necessary brain activity? Or are they a kind of creative defragmentation and making new links?

Our analytic experience puts us in favour of the last hypothesis, that it is a creative functioning (quoting Borges and Grotstein, (1979): a dreamer who dreams the dream) and that bringing patients into contact with this automatic process within them is often one of the most therapeutic happenings in psychoanalytic work.

It is probably wrong to see this as a primitive function, for the same reason as Damasio showing that there are no primitive emotions in the limbic system and sophisticated thoughts in the neocortex. The contrary is true: the one cannot function without the other.

Here we may come back to Horst Kächele's text. If we hypothesise that dreaming is indeed a creative function that is necessary and probably healing, then we may hope that this creative function does not change during the psychoanalytic process into something integrated, balanced, as was the original hypothesis of the study by

Leuzinger-Bohleber (1987/1989). In this sense it is not unexpected that his research shows that during psychoanalysis the amount of love and conflict (Figure 1) does not change and that the aggressive atmosphere keeps shifting from low to very high. If the dream function is creative it should keep all its forces and negative powers in the way Green (1999) discussed. In this respect I do not understand the linear increase of a problem solving attitude in the dreams in the study. From my experience dreams can offer new approaches to a problem—but this is what is done with a dream when awake. Does Kächele mean that the attitude of the dreamer in the dream becomes more problem solving?

This leads us to the question of which attitude we should take as analysts towards a dream. Both Jimenez and Kächele take an open and creative attitude. Such a creative understanding of dreams is something specific and well described by Bion in his “PS-D, container-contained, selected fact” formula, in other words the tolerating of a not understanding, till a form finds the experience and gives sense to it. Jimenez’s handling of Carmen’s material is a fine example of it. This creative and intersubjective process adds something new to the manifest dream and is in this sense more than what Freud defined as the latent dream. The question remains, however, whether our task is to understand the content of the dream or to facilitate the dream function? A conquering Oedipus-like attitude versus a Sphinx attitude? And how far can the two be integrated?

Confronted with this question in my clinical practice, I rely on some thoughts of Wilfred Bion (Vermote, in press). Bion asked a patient: “Where were you last night?” Listening to dreams as coming from another country, from a different life that now and then surfaces as the mythical Alpheus. The analyst is at this gate, at this caesura as a kind of watcher (or midwife)—to make contact possible with the life-giving dream function. In other words, the dream may evoke new experiences that can have an influence on life, and vice versa that the dream life is in contact with life and all its unknown aspects. Bion states in a poetic way (I paraphrase) that if we have on the conscious side of the caesura the interpretation of dreams, then on the other and unconscious side we should have an interpretation of reality and its theories in dreams (Bion, 1991, p. 470). In this way of looking at them, dreams are more than just psychic transformations of experiences, thoughts, and feelings that have already happened (what Bion calls “transformation in knowledge”), they are also offering radically new and changing experiences (“ransformations in O”) (Bion, 1970).

The text of Juan Pablo Jimenez shows such a radical influence of new experiences in the dream on the life of the patient and how the analyst helped to facilitate this. Jimenez states clearly that it was his impression that what the patient experiences in her analysis is a kind of first experience and this is how I understand the meaning of Bion's T(O).

But the opposite is also true: unexpected experiences reach and stimulate the dream function. They may produce a shift. The complex and creative interplay between analyst and patient treating the dream seems important. Jimenez is careful, but I can imagine that the sixty-nine interpretation was unexpected to the patient and must have resulted in a strong effect. We may also wonder what would have happened had Jimenez taken up the danger, illness, and death that are present in the dream (men in black, ravine, infected penis, fistulae).

In conclusion: what is the best attitude at the gate? Probably the most open attitude. Bion as well, for TK (or change through creative understanding and psychic processing) as much as for T(O) (or new and changing psychic experiences), comes to the same conclusion at the end of his last theoretical book, *Attention and Interpretation*:

It may, therefore, seem surprising if, at this stage and in relatively few sentences, I describe what is perhaps the most important mechanism employed by the practising psycho-analyst. ... Any attempt to cling to what he knows must be resisted for the sake of achieving a state of mind analogous to the paranoid-schizoid position. For this state I have coined the term "patience" ...

Patience should be retained without "irritable reaching after fact and reason" until a pattern "evolves". This state is the analogue to what Melanie Klein has called the depressive position. For this state I use the term "security" ... I consider the experience of oscillation between "patience" and "security" to be an indication that valuable work is being achieved.

(1970, pp. 123–124)

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