Summary

Dreamwork is an amazing therapeutic tool. Not only does it provide a unique window into the unconscious it can also facilitate communication on a deep level between the psychotherapist and the client, strengthening the alliance between them, and thereby contributing positively to the client's healing process.

But dreamwork is not without its challenges and in the following I will take a closer look at some of them. In particular, I will focus on three dilemmas:

- Firstly, when working with dreams in therapy, we want to find answers, make conclusions and move forward. But to benefit fully from dreamwork we must realize that dreams are always open to a multitude of interpretations. And if we reach for the conclusion too soon, there is a risk we will close the creative exploration of the dream and miss out on important insights. Using Ole Vedfelt's model for dreamwork I will look at how we can keep the dream open while we move forward with the therapeutic process.

- Secondly, as therapists we train for years to become experts in dream interpretation and our clients seek us out because of that expertise. But there is a risk that expertise and authority can get in the way of an open creative exploration of dreams. Based on thoughts from Michael White, founder of Narrative Therapy, I will describe how some approaches to dream interpretation can inadvertently result in an asymmetrical power dynamic and discuss how we can mitigate this.

- Finally, when we interpret dreams, we put them into words, and this in itself can contribute to closing the dreamwork process. With help from Bateson, Stern and Hillman I will be looking at problems that can result from prematurely attempting to translate dream symbolism into conventional language.

Along the way I hope to offer a peak into the amazing world of wisdom and creativity offered by dreams, and perhaps inspire readers to start working with dreams themselves.

Dream Interpretation in Cybernetic Psychotherapy

According to Ole Vedfelt's Cybernetic Psychology, when we are awake our consciousness is constantly busy processing the enormous amounts of information we are subjected to through our experience of the world. But when we sleep at night, consciousness is relieved of the burden of processing this information. Vedfelt explains dreams as a result of the surplus of capacity with regards to information processing thus arising, and as a result of activity in higher level psychological operating systems, which are able to process more information with higher complexity than the awake consciousness. When we dream, consciousness starts processing information which has come in during the day. New material is compared with existing and new associations and possibilities of meaning are formed. Simultaneously, dreams produce model simulations, creatively synthesizing different aspects of experience and experimenting with problem solving in a risk-free environment. (Vedfelt 2007, s. 503f.).

Cybernetic psychology sees the psyche as a network where associations between clusters of information are constantly created and adjusted while the system dynamically responds to outside influences and the state of consciousness. When we are awake and deal with tasks that require special attention, the psyche will utilize particular sub-networks in consciousness. But in dreams the constraints are loosened and we get freer access to unconscious parts of the psyche. Thus, the whole psychic network and all modes of consciousness are potentially activated simultaneously in a so called supramodal space - a type of conscious experience combining all modes of experience, i.e. thoughts, sights, sounds, scents, bodily sensations, kinetic experiences and atmospheric moods. (Vedfelt 2007, s. 504).

Hermeneutics of Dream Interpretation

The cybernetic psychology approach to dreamwork has many facets and utilizes techniques and interpretation methods originating in a range of psychological theories. A dreamwork session usually start with the dreamer recounting the dream. The therapist listens and mirrors the story back to the dreamer, while sometimes pausing to ask questions or offer reflections. The process then goes on to explore the associations in the dream and a great deal of attention is given to the thoughts, bodily feelings, and emotions arising in both the client and therapist as a result of working with the dream. Sometimes meditation-like contemplations are used (so

called guided introspection) to go deeper into feelings and associations resulting from the dream. To further open up the process to the bodily, visual and kinetic aspects of the dream body therapy may be used, or the client may be asked to draw scenes from the dream, which can then be explored in conversation.

As a matter of principle, the cybernetic therapist will not offer definite interpretations of dreams and it is seen as important not to commit to any particular interpretation. On the contrary, it is recommended to test out different perspectives of interpretation to see how they resonate with the dreamer, while looking out for new interpretive insights emerging from the process. Vedfelt recommends that the interpretation process toggles between two positions, a) the dreamer's own subjective interpretation and b) the co-interpretation and offering of perspectives by the expert. By shifting between these positions, the dreamer's own interpretation and the expert's co-interpretation can creatively inspire each other. That way new layers of understanding of the dream and its significance for the dreamer's life can continuously be uncovered. (Vedfelt 2007, s. 511).

Vedfelt bases this approach on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer sees it as unavoidable that we have prejudices or pre-conceptions, when we start reading a text. As soon as we grasp an initial meaning in the text, we will project a meaning on to the whole text. This is because we already read the text with certain expectations of meaning. The aim is to become as aware as possible of one's own prejudices and always be prepared to revise the meaning. If we understand dream interpretation from this perspective, it has a number of implications (Vedfelt 2007, s. 185f.):

- It is impossible to avoid interpreting. One will always articulate a tentative meaning or understanding, even if one chooses not to express it.
- Interpretations can never be neutral or objective, because the interpretation will always be based on one's prejudices
- It is not possible to reach an exhaustive interpretation, because new possibilities of interpretation emerge as the meaning is revised.

Alternating between openings and closures

Seen from the hermeneutic perspective dream interpretations must in a sense always be tentative, and the psychotherapist must remain open to the possibility that

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new interpretations, which could be helpful to the client, may later emerge. Of course, this should not be understood to mean that we can never conclude anything. On the contrary, some form of interpretation and conclusion is important for the client as well as the therapist to feel that the process moves forward. But knowing that all interpretation is tentative, means that dreamwork requires a special attitude, where we always stay prepared to alternate between small closures of meaning and openness towards new interpretations. It is not desirable for a dream interpretation to be perceived as a final or unambiguous explanation, because this is likely to close down the creative exploration of the dream.

Dreamwork as a Therapeutic Tool

Because dreams expend most of their energy organizing experiences and coming up with possible solutions to problems, they will naturally concern themselves with that which is important to the dreamer and will therefore directly or indirectly point to topics and issues of great relevance to the therapeutic process. By paying attention to their dreams, we can learn a lot about our clients and their particular attitudes towards the world. Such insights into the network of meaning in the psyche can be very profound. Not least because the problem-solving model simulations in dreams can point out issues and suggest solutions, which the dreamer would never have noticed in the waking state.

In the following we shall look at how the work with a concrete dream provided a new perspective for a client on his life and developmental outlook.

Anton's dream – about the inner life of the dreamer

At the start of his therapy, one of my clients Anton dreams that he is a woman who is owed money by a man. After various complications the woman manages to get the man to pay her the money.

We look at the dream from different angles. There are many possible interpretations. A psychodynamic interpretation for example may choose to focus on the dreamer's childhood and try to tease out similarities between the relationship of the woman and man in the dream and that between his mother and father. A more pragmatic interpretation may instead focus on events the day before – so called

day residues. Yet others may choose to see on the dream as a comment on the dreamer's gender identity.

After looking at several possibilities we choose to focus on the dream as a depiction of Anton's inner life, so that characters in the dream are seen as representing aspects of himself. The dream in a sense offers Anton a chance of seeing himself from a completely different perspective as if through a different consciousness. Working with the dream from this perspective he sees his own compassionate and empathic qualities – which he feels he has not paid enough attention to or managed to sufficiently integrate in the past. The "feminine" qualities of compassion and empathy stand in contrast to his usual understanding of himself as sensible, direct and pragmatic – qualities he all sees as "masculine". He now understands his dream to say that the masculine side of his personality should yield or surrender something to his feminine side – and so to speak, "finance" it in a psychological sense. The revaluation of feminine aspects of his personality becomes a central theme in his therapy. Gradually, more nuances appear in subsequent dreams and this perspective turns out to be very helpful to him in his self-development.

When dreams are used in psychotherapy, they often seem to suggest new perspectives and potentials for development. And when clients progress in their personal development, the dreams appear to comment on this and suggest adjustments to the course. Thus, dreams can become a kind of creative collaborators in the therapeutic process (Vedfelt 2007, s. 512).

Keeping the dreamwork process open

In order to use dreams in psychotherapy we must understand that they are complex and always open to a multitude of interpretations. But this may conflict with a client's desire to find meaningful and instructional advice in dreams. By virtue of their metaphorical fusion of everyday experiences and deeper memories, dreams can process much more information and a much higher degree of complexity than the awake consciousness. Therefore, the potential meaning of dreams is equally extensive, nuanced and complex, and it is rarely possible to reduce it to simple advice or instructions. If we try to force out a simple and easy to understand conclusion from a complex and nuanced dream, it can lead to a vulgarization of the dream's message and a diminishment of its insights. For dreamwork to really lead somewhere, we must try to adopt the perspectives of the dream and open ourselves

to its many possible meanings. And we must give the process time. We should allow the dreamer to learn from the process and gradually become more familiar with the language and themes contained in their dreams.

But the endless possibilities of interpretation and the fantastical imagery of dreams challenges most of us and leaves us yearning for some kind of closure. The vast potential of meaning makes us ask ourselves: How can I understand this and make sense of it in the context of my life? If we consider at the same time the fact, that people who seek psychotherapy typically long to find solutions to deeply personal, complex and painful problems, it becomes obvious that the desire for closure – to be able to conclude something significant - will be of central concern to them. But if we progress too quickly, without paying attention to how our interpretations can affect the therapeutic alliance and not least our clients' understanding of themselves, the dreamwork may be less fruitful. An experienced therapist will often be able to recognize important psychological patterns and problems based on a few dreams long before the client becomes aware of those problems. And because the therapist has practical and theoretical training and experience, he or she would easily be able to come up with complex and far-reaching conclusions about what the dream means. But it is often a better choice for the therapist to hold back and not share his insights with the client too early in the process. Even if the interpretation is offered with the best intentions it can be problematic., if the client is not able to keep up and take in the interpretation.

In Anton's example above, it is by no means certain, that he would have been able benefit from a far-reaching theoretical interpretation explaining the so called male and female aspects of the psyche. If we present such interpretations to our clients too soon, before they have started to develop their own insights, there is a risk that the essence of the interpretation, even if it is wise and insightful, will escape them. The interpretation may be understood cognitively and logically but will not be felt in the body - not experienced emotionally. Therefore, it will not resonate with the client to the same extent as would have been the case if they had had time to acquire their therapeutic insights from inside the process themselves. And without that quality of insight the client will not gain much from the process, and it will at least partially have failed. When dreamwork works best, it offers a very rare opportunity to establish a therapeutic alliance on a deep level, enabling the therapist and client to understand the client's inner world through a unique and personal metaphorical language. To begin with the dream images may only appear as vague

inklings of meaning, but gradually those meanings become clearer and clearer. When a dreamwork process goes on over a longer period of time, the therapist and the client can develop their own special language, where the secret codes of dreams become an important shorthand for understanding the client's unique way of experiencing the world. This can lead to profound emotional attunement between client and therapist as they learn to understand subtle nuances in the client's emotional and cognitive experience of the world, which may otherwise have gone unnoticed. Such a connection can give the client a feeling of being understood on a very deep level and a feeling of not being alone with his or her problems – and this will help the healing process move forward.

Asymmetrical Relations

In the following, I will examine how perceptions of expertise and authority can result in an asymmetrical power dynamic, which can get in the way of an open and creative dreamwork process. Based on thoughts from Vedfelt and Michael White, I will describe the problem and suggest ways to mitigate it.

Vedfelt explains that the different types of interpretations put forward by the various schools of dream interpretation, often turn out to be constrained by the theoretical contexts in which they were conceived (Vedfelt 2007, s. 211). It should come as no surprise, that Jungian dreamworkers produce Jungian interpretations and that Freudian dreamworkers produce Freudian ones. But this is not without its problems, because a specific theoretical perspective can turn out to exclude other perspectives. However, as Vedfelt points out, a theory-less approach to dreamwork is not the solution either, because antitheoretical attitudes often result in the interpreter unconsciously projecting their personal value systems onto the dreams of their clients (Vedfelt 2007, s. 184).

Theory-based interpretations can be problematic in so far that the interpretation can only be done by someone who has familiarized themselves with the theory. The typical client in psychotherapy will rarely be as well versed in the theory as the therapist and may therefore have trouble understanding the exact premises behind an interpretation. This in turn makes it more difficult for the client to keep a critical mind. Vedfelt warns against so called "theoretical abuse", in which a therapist pushes ready-made interpretation down the dreamer's throat. (Vedfelt 2007, p.

512, p. 518). But theory-based interpretations can put unnecessary constraints on the dreamwork process, and make a creative hermeneutic exploration difficult, even when the therapist does not insist on being right. As an example, archetypal interpretations in the Jungian tradition can be very hard to understand without prior knowledge of the theory. C. G. Jung himself discusses this in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,* explaining that he considers it "impossible for anyone without knowledge of mythology and folklore and without some understanding of the psychology of primitives and of comparative religion to grasp the essence of the individuation process" (Jung, p. 290). If archetypal interpretation requires this level of knowledge, it seems reasonable to assume that the average client could have trouble following the premises of the interpretation. Even if an interpretation is actually in accordance with its theory and is both precise and relevant to the client's situation, it may still be problematic, if the client does not (yet) have the skills and knowledge required to understand it.

A trained therapist with good communication skills, knowledge of the client and an empathic attitude, will be able to make the interpretation relevant and helpful for the client. But if the therapist does not have the necessary pedagogical skills, and the client is not able to take in the interpretation and assimilate its meaning, it may be lost on the client. Like the cryptic answer from an oracle, with which the receiver is not able to argue or have a dialogue.

This can result in an unequal dynamic, where we risk the client being alienated towards the therapeutic process. The therapist can end up appearing as a knowledgeable authority and the client as a mere recipient of information – a situation which is likely to put an end to the free and open exploration of the dream's meaning.

Discursive power in therapy

Today, very few people in therapy would be happy with a therapist behaving like an old-fashioned professor facing a young student. Most people expect more equal, respectful relationships with a higher degree of symmetry. But less overt asymmetries can easily slip into the therapist's office.

Using the concept of *discourses* as coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault, it can be explained how ideas about authority and power may inadvertently come into play in the relationship between therapist and client on a very fundamental level. Discourses can be understood as a type of unspoken rules and practices,

which help constitute areas of knowledge such as medicine, psychiatry, economics, sociology or biology and make them appear coherent. A discourse works by defining which types of language and knowledge is viewed as meaningful within a certain area and what is acceptable to do and say at a certain time and in a certain context. (Nilsson, p 52f). Different groupings in society thereby acquire the speaking rights in certain contexts, by virtue of their ability to master the relevant discourses.

Michael White, the Australian therapist, social worker, and founder of narrative therapy, has brought Foucault's thinking into the field of psychotherapy. He points out that it is a problem that discourses »encourage persons in the belief that the members of these (professional red.) disciplines have access to an objective and unbiased account of reality, and of human nature« (White, p. 29)

Considering this statement, we may wonder, how it affects the therapeutic relationship when we meet clients who have such discourse-based expectations towards the division of roles, competency and authority, whether conscious about it or not. This could for instance manifest as a belief that it is only the therapist that has the knowledge required to analyse the client, interpret dreams, give the right answers, evaluate the process, diagnose the client and so on. This would also entail that the client does not have the same authority to interpret, evaluate the process, give answers etc.

At the beginning of his therapy, one of my clients always used to pause after telling me his latest dream. He would sit back, smile at me and then ask: "So then, what can you make of this?" Something in the way he said it made it clear that I was supposed to act as the expert interpreter who would come up with the answers, while he would sit back and listen. In such a situation it is easy to be caught off guard and difficult to resist the temptation to to take on the role of the expert. Who does not like to be seen as wise and insightful? But if I had chosen to play along it may have reinforced a problematic power dynamic. If the client believes that the therapist has access to unique knowledge that gives him special abilities and authority to interpret dreams, the client may see the therapist's dream interpretations as more authoritative and definite than would be ideal. As a result, the client could become less likely to contribute his own interpretations to the process, and instead either choose to hold back his own ideas or try to mimic the therapist's interpretations.

But there are strategies, which can be used to mitigate this problem. Michael White describes a number of techniques to counteract preconceptions about the therapist as someone who has privileged access to knowledge. He recommends addressing one's own pre-conceptions up front making them known both to oneself and to the client. White very much strives to re-define his own role from that of an authority figure to a kind of co-author in the therapeutic process while also encouraging the client to take a more active role in the therapeutic search for knowledge. (White p. 31 f.). As therapists working with dreams, we can try to do the same. We can explicitly tell our clients, that we see the client and therapist as equal interpreters, and we can make an effort to actively encourage our clients to engage in the process as co-interpreters and evaluators, thereby giving the right to interpret (back) to them. This seems important, not least because many people still imagine a dream interpreter to be a person in possession of special esoteric knowledge, which is not accessible to normal people, like a fortune teller able to extract mystical messages from the reading of tea leaves or hand lines.

  Jung described how he always aspired to be tactful when interpreting a dream to avoid violating the dreamers self-respect unnecessarily: »I have made it a rule, when someone tells me a dream and asks for my opinion, to say first of all to myself: "I have no idea what this dream means"« (Jung, p. 283). By reminding himself of this, Jung was trying to keep his mind open towards the contents of the dream. It sounds like he mostly kept this reminder to himself and did not say it out loud. Perhaps he wanted to guard his reputation with his clients as an expert dream interpreter. But as modern psychotherapists we may choose to share this insight with our client's up front, making it a pre-requisite that we really don't know what a dream could mean, but that we can explore its meaning together. By reminding the client that the therapist does not have a natural authority as a dream interpreter, we can frame the dreamwork process in an understanding that both the client and the therapist are entitled to and capable of finding meaning in dreams.

Authority in cybernetic psychotherapy

Cybernetic psychotherapy addresses the problem of the dream interpreter's authority in several ways. As mentioned above, Vedfelt sees dream interpretation as a process alternating between the dreamer's own interpretation of the material and the expert's co-interpretation and theoretical contextualization. This approach

makes the interpretation process a joint effort between dreamer and expert. This process requires that the therapist makes an effort to become aware of his or her own preconceptions. For this reason, Vedfelt criticises Medard Boss, founder of the existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, for not making his theoretical frame of reference clear. Vedfelt finds built in phenomenological preconceptions on which Boss' interpretations are based, but which are not made visible. He directs a similar criticism towards Fritz Perls, founder of gestalt therapy, for ignoring his existentialist preconceptions (Vedfelt 2007, p. 174, 181, 193).

According to Vedfelt, becoming aware of our preconceptions consists of two steps. First, we must become aware of the theoretical foundation on which we base our interpretations, and second, we must be aware of *when* we start interpreting. He recognizes that it is democratic and tactful when some dreamworkers insist that the dreamer must acknowledge the interpretation. But the experienced dreamworker will often be able to see tendencies and motifs in dreams, which the dreamer is not yet aware of or willing to recognize, but which may provide valuable insights to the interpreter (Vedfelt 2007, p 510 f.).

He also discusses how we can best respond to the situation, when the therapist presents an interpretation, which the client is not ready to accept. In classic psychoanalysis this would be seen as resistance, which put simply means that the client resists the healing process. Cybernetic psychotherapy does not subscribe to this view. Instead, the dismissal of an interpretation by the client is seen as the result of self-regulating processes trying to establish communication on a different level. When a client is reluctant to accept an interpretation, the psychotherapist should therefore not persist or try to reinforce it but should instead shift attention to how the proposed interpretation makes the client feel, and what could be helpful for them in that moment. This can spark a creative process, which enriches the interpretation and helps strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Vedfelt 2007, p. 513).

When Vedfelt uses the client's reluctance to accept the interpretation as a springboard to new levels in the process, it shows that interpretations, which the client does not accept can sometimes nonetheless become helpful. But he also stresses that it is important to always stay aware of the power dynamic between therapist and client and avoid pushing the client into situations where he or she does not want to be (Vedfelt 2007, p. 516).

Vedfelt and White, makes it clear how important our preconceptions are to our work as therapists. In order to keep the dreamwork process open we must strive towards an equal, respectful, and democratic relationship between client and therapist, where co-interpretation, co-authoring and dialogue are key concepts. And we must avoid the risks connected to the therapist becoming a theoretical authority resulting in an asymmetrical power dynamic.

Reductionist Language

As I described above, theoretical interpretations and preconceptions of authority can affect the dreamwork process negatively, by creating an unbalanced relationship between therapist and client. It is perhaps less obvious, that language in itself – the process of putting the dream into words – can also contribute to closing the process of exploration.

The problem is inherent to the process of verbalization, which can have a tendency to reduce highly ambiguous dream symbols to more literal and unambiguous concepts. We will examine this dilemma from three angles. First, we review Gregory Bateson's understanding of dream language as metaphorical, kinetic and paralinguistic. Second, we examine Daniel Sterns concept of emotional attunement as an example of how paralanguage is essential to progress in therapy. And finally, we look at James Hillman's suggestion for what could be called a 'kinetic vocabulary' in therapy.

Metaphors, relations and feelings

In his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* , Gregory Bateson, anthropologist and cyberneticist among many other titles, discusses the challenges involved when trying to translate the largely non-verbal language of the unconscious into conventional verbal language. Bateson explains that not only is the contents of the unconscious difficult to access, but the information we are able to extract can be very difficult to translate into words. This is because the unconscious material, as found in dreams, is almost entirely metaphorical in nature. (Bateson, p. 139)

The metaphorical language of dreams and other unconscious activities has certain limitations compared to conventional language. Everyday language has particular words denoting particular things, persons, events etc.. It has adjectives characterizing the things. It has predicates describing what someone or something

does, and adverbs describing how this is done. And in addition, conventional language has negatives to describe those things that are not there, or do not happen.

The metaphorical language of the unconscious does not have any of that – it must instead make do with metaphorical images. Metaphors describe relationships between things, Bateson explains. "A metaphor retains unchanged the relationship which it illustrates while substituting other things for the persona or relata", and the particular relationships that dreams deal with, are the relationships between self and others. Another way of saying this is that the metaphors of dreams are primarily concerned with feelings. (Bateson p. 139-140)

Let us look at an example of how metaphors describe relationships and feelings. For example, I may choose to describe a participant in a meeting as 'a bull in a china shop'. Here it is not the actual things mentioned in the saying, the bull and the china shop, that are important, but the relationship between the person's presence or behaviour (bull like, aggressive, insensitive) and the meeting situation (fragile or delicate like pieces of china).

Dreams are abundant with such imagery describing relations and feelings in the life of the dreamer. And by virtue of their metaphors, they are sophisticated and able to hold more nuances of meaning than conventional language. The image of the bull in the china shop, could be understood to mean "this person was clumsy and insensitive towards the delicate situation in the meeting". But it could also quite adequately describe the feelings of a nervous bull trying to navigate the aisles of a china shop or simply the feeling of not fitting in. Likewise, the sound of plates and vases shattering on the floor may be good analogies to the feelings that an insensitive or awkward remark could cause, and the china may well describe the sensitive nature of the meeting. Metaphors by nature are open to many interpretations.

Bateson points out that metaphor is uniquely suited to communicate the contents of the unconscious, which makes it a defining characteristic of both art, myth and dream. He quotes the American dancer Isadora Duncan for having said "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point of dancing it". Bateson notes the ambiguity of the statement and goes on to discuss the nature of a message which must be danced to be communicated: "It is (…) the kind of message which would be falsified if communicated in words, because the use of words (other than poetry) would imply that this is a fully conscious and voluntary message" (Bateson p. 137-138).

Kinesics and paralinguistic communication

Elsewhere, Bateson explains that a certain type of metaphorical communication is fundamental to animals. He describes a pack of wolves, where the leading male punishes a lower ranking male for an insubordination, by pressing its head down to the ground as if it was a puppy. By behaving the way adult animals normally do towards puppys, the pack leader communicates his own position clearly to the other, but through the visual metaphor achieved by his actions, he also manages to depict the lower ranging wolf as a puppy (Bateson p. 366-367).

Human language is predominantly verbal, based on conventional signs and meanings. But in parallel with this exists a non-verbal analogue language not entirely dissimilar to the communication of other mammals. This language is based on kinesics (facial expressions, postures, hand movements etc.) and paralanguage (intonation, rhythm, volume as well as sounds such as gasps or sighs).

He suggests that this kind of iconic communication "serves functions totally different from those of (conventional) language and, indeed, performs functions which verbal language is unsuited to perform". Like metaphor, this type of language is very well suited for communicating relations and feelings. When a boy tells a girl that he loves her, she will be wise to pay more attention to his non-verbal communication in the form of intonation, facial expressions and body language than to the mere digital message of the words. (Bateson, p. 374, p. 418). If the non-verbal part of the communication does not feel authentic, the words will not either. In a way kinesics and paralanguage can be seen as an essential communication channels for authenticity. Words by themselves can always be dismissed as 'just something you say', whereas the kinesics and paralanguage communicates those unconscious aspects of the communication, which cannot be put into words.

Bateson suggests that dreams can be seen as a kind of cross between the non-verbal metaphorical communication of animals and conventional verbal language. They are a window into an archaic pre-linguistic way of experiencing the world, that still operates in parallel with our modern language, understanding the world through feelings, relations and pattern recognition - and although ancient, in no way obsolete. (Bateson, p. 427-428).

The way I read Bateson, he tells us that dreams, by virtue of their metaphorical, kinetic and paralinguistic properties, are able to authentically communicate feelings, relations and unconscious patterns in a very information dense form, and

with a higher degree of complexity than conventional language. If this is true, it points to special challenges with regards to dream interpretation, namely the difficulty of translating dreams to verbal language without important meaning being lost. Paraphrasing Isadora Duncan, we could ask: 'If I could tell you what it meant, what would be the point of dreaming it?'

Paralanguage in Psychotherapy

The developmental psychologist Daniel Stern explains how paralanguage plays a key role in connection to affective attunement. Affective attunement is defined as a way in which we show that we understand someone and that we are able put ourselves in their place. This is done by imitating "the temporal dynamics of the intensity, form, or rhythm of the other's behavior but in a different modality or at a different scale" (Stern 2004, p. 241) In other words this is about catching the intonation, the rhythm or the mood of what is said or done, and showing that we have understood this, by using the same intonation, rhythm and mood although not necessarily the same words.

According to Stern affective attunement is essential for the relationship between therapist and client, especially with regards to how authentic the relationship is going to feel. He describes the authentic connection between therapist and client as more important for the effectiveness of therapy than any interpretation in itself. Without affective attunement, there is a risk that the therapist's interpretations will simply be seen as a "technical maneuver from a neutral professional", which may alter "the patient's explicit understanding of herself, but not the intersubjective field between her and the therapist" (Stern 2004, p. 189). He even goes as far as saying that it can be problematic to verbally address the attunement. The drawback can be that this kind of interpretation "makes the implicit explicit, which necessarily pulls the process away from the ongoing here and now to a different here and now in which the stance is more abstracted and removed" (Stern 2004, p. 170).

Stern is talking about psychotherapy in general, but assuming that what he describes is also true for dreamwork, it would mean that it is more important for therapist and client to be able tune into the emotional dynamics of the dream than it is to make any kind of interpretation.

A Vocabulary of Kinesics

The psychologist James Hillman is famous for his work in the tradition of C.G.Jung and for his radical approach to dreamwork in which he argued that we should "Stick to the image" of the dream and ideally avoid interpretations altogether (Hillman 1989, p. 74 -76). He was a proponent of experiencing the dream images directly and feeling what they do to us, as well as "spreading the dream out" and disclosing the many associations to what the dream is like (Hillman 1989 (244-245). Hillman wanted to avoid conclusions in terms of conceptual and especially clinical language.

In a lecture given in 1977 (Hillman 2010), he argued for the use of metaphorical rather than theoretic language in psychotherapy. He advocated seeking inspiration in the language of alchemy, which C. G. Jung had introduced to modern psychology. Jung showed how the alchemists of the middle ages, had been engaged in extensive processes of refining themselves spiritually in parallel with their attempts to refine chemical substances into gold and other precious metals, and he found that the processes described by the alchemists very much resembled those he could observe in his modern-day therapeutic clients.

The language of alchemy describes psychological states and processes as if they were a cross between chemical process and mythological tales. As an example, alchemist language borrows many of its terms from metallurgy, fabric dyeing, embalming, perfume-production and pharmacy. In their descriptions of inner processes, alchemists use terms such as digging, melting, forging, soaking, colouring and drying. They dissect, clean, preserve, grind, mix, distil, dissolve, powder and so on. The personality is described as consisting of chemical compounds such as salt, sulphur, mercury and lead. Development requires corrosive acids, heat and cold, and man is seen as an alchemical flask, an alembic, which must be kept closed and at constant temperature for the process to progress. The chemical processes are accompanied by symbolic signs and visions, for example rising birds or suns, sweating kings or living trees.

The advantage of alchemical language over that of modern psychology according to Hillman, is that it is entirely metaphorical. We know, that in a concrete sense there is no fire burning in our stomachs, birds do not hatch in our chest, and we do not consist of sulphur or mercury. Therefore, the alchemical language cannot be taken literally, and we are forced to understand the psyche metaphorically – in a sense more on its own terms. Another obvious advantage of alchemical language

is that its metaphors such as melting, forging, soaking, drying etc. are clearly kinetic by nature. They refer to processes in motion and development and are therefore well suited to describe emotional and psychological processes. (Hillman 2010, p. 9- 19)

The delicate language of dreams

The examples above illustrate that verbal language has certain limitations compared to the 'language' of the unconscious, including that of dreams.

   Bateson helps us understand dreams as metaphor, kinesics and paralanguage uniquely suited to communicating about relations, feelings, authenticity and unconscious experience. The language of dreams shows us things which are difficult, sometimes impossible to put into words. Therefore, we must be careful, when we talk about our dreams that we do not reduce them to simplified concepts.

   But Stern and Hillman offers hints to how we can work with dreams without reducing their meaning. We can try to tune in on the emotional dynamic of the dream, we can focus on experiencing the dream directly as image, and we can pay attention to the kinetic and paralanguage aspects of dreams.

   This points to the need for a dreamwork method which can focus on the dream as an image, while paying attention to the paralinguistics and kinetic aspects of the experience. I believe Cybernetic Dreamwork offers such a method.

Cybernetic dreamwork

According to Vedfelt, dreams are supramodal holistic experiences in which emotions, thoughts, imagery, bodily sensations and impulses of movement are not experience separately, but as aspects of a unified whole. (Vedfelt 2007, p. 297). Supramodality is characterized by high capacity for information and is well suited for reflection and creative transformations (Vedfelt 2002, p. 103). Moreover, it is capable of synthesizing important themes governing the person's experience and actions in extensive ways. (Vedfelt 2002, p. 105).

   In cybernetic dreamwork the therapist therefore helps the client explore supramodal associations arising from the dream. Together they examine what is happening in the various modes of experience, for example which sensations arise in the body, which thoughts and emotions appear, and which patterns of movement, postures or body language emerge during the conversation. Sometimes the

therapist will ask the client to draw a symbol from the dream, which then may evoke certain bodily feelings, which when focused on can be amplified and cause emotions, which may then again cause lead to inner imagery, memories or other associations. Vedfelt sees these chains of association as Ariadne's threads, leading to higher and more essential levels of organization in the psyche (Vedfelt 2007, p. 298). Supramodal associations also involves the therapist who will continually attempt to discreetly mirror the client's body language, expressions, intonation etc. using so called vicarious introspection; observing what happens in his own realm of experience, trying to pick up on feelings and associations, of which the client may not be aware, but which may none the less be sensed supramodally (Vedfelt 2007, p. 49).

Through the supramodal method, Vedfelt promotes a high degree of awareness of kinetic and paralinguistic communication. The supramodal ability is explained as a natural intuitive expertise, which has its origin in the emotional attunement between mother and infant (Vedfelt 2002, p. 120).

The supramodal method makes it easier to stay in touch with the paralinguistic and kinetic experiences in the dream while exploring its symbolic metaphors. Vedfelt notes that supramodal chains of association should not be interrupted, because this tends to draw attention away from the authentic contact with the self (Vedfelt 2007, p 299f). When done successfully, the emotional attunement achieved through vicarious introspective will let the client and therapist experience a deep level of mutual understanding without the need for any interpretation.

Michael's dream – a supramodal exploration

In a dream, one of my clients, Michael, finds himself in a primitive cave with a beautiful woman. The floor is covered by mix of slate and shredded bicycle tubes. This is where she sleeps, and he wonders why her home is so primitive.

In therapy I suggest we explore the scene supramodally and ask him how he experiences each dream symbol in terms of bodily sensations and emotions, while paying attention to any associations that arise. While picturing the cave floor in his mind and paying attention to the feelings and associations arising, he discovers that the floor, which at first had seemed hard and rugged, actually feels surprisingly soft, as if he was laying himself down on a tongue. This reminds him of a childhood fantasy, which involved being swallowed by a whale. A fantasy, which had been both scary, pleasant and mysterious at the same time. As we proceed, the cave

appears more inviting to him, and the more he gets into the mood of the setting, the more he feels that he and the woman becomes one. At the end of our exploration, he explains that it feels like disappearing into a dark, soft and peaceful space.

The supramodal exploration takes around 15 minutes and has a considerable effect on Michael, making him gradually more relaxed and grounded. I avoid offering interpretations but focus instead on exploring the various elements of the dream through supramodal associations. The dream symbols, the dark cave, the association to being swallowed by a whale, and the melting together with a person of the opposite sex, are of course all open to interpretation. We could interpret this as a classic dream about 'the dark night of the soul'. The whale theme is known from the biblical tale of Jonas and the fairy tale about Pinocchio, in both cases an indication of a personal and spiritual crisis. The woman in the dream may suggest that aspects of the opposite sex may be emerging in the personality and may indicate the potential of transformation through integration of male and female aspects of the psyche. But as the description of the therapy session suggests, it is not necessary to verbalize an interpretation for the client to experience a result. Feeling the supramodal associations emerging from the dream symbols has a profound effect in itself.

However, later in the session we circle back to the dream and start discussing how it could be interpreted. But this makes Michael lose some of the newly achieved grounding and instead makes him focus mentally on the fascinating ideas emerging from the interpretation.

Understanding patterns, connection, and possible interpretations of course has its place in therapy, but as the example shows, there is a risk that sudden shifts away from supramodal exploration to verbal interpretation, can make us lose touch with important emotional and bodily aspects of the experience. Often it will be a better choice to remain in authentic contact with the self and benefit from the emotional attunement made possible by the supramodal approach.

Dreamwork is high level communication

In this article have tried to illustrate some of the dilemmas I see in psychotherapeutic dreamwork.

Taking a starting point in Ole Vedfelts Cybernetic Psychology I have examined the basic dilemma of wanting to keep the dreamwork process open to further interpretation while simultaneously responding to the urge to find closure and conclusions. I have tried to show how dreamwork has the ability to provide profoundly new perspectives, and I have emphasized the value of sometimes slowing down the process and holding back interpretations so that the client can keep up.

With help from Michael White, I have gone on to examine the dilemma of expertise vs. co-interpretation and the risk of creating unhealthy power dynamics. I have explained how a theoretical authoritative attitude on the part of the therapist can negatively affect the relationship but also how the clients' pre-conceptions and expectations regarding competence and authority can play into this. And I have suggested strategies to counter these problems.

I have also examined the inherent dilemma of verbal interpretations potential to reduce the complexity of dream symbols. With the help of Bateson I have showed why dreams are sensitive to verbal interpretation and with Stern and Hillman I have suggested ways in which we can work with dreams without providing conventional verbal or psychological interpretations.

Finally, I have suggested Cybernetic Dreamwork as a unique approach capable of addressing all three of the dilemmas. With its hermeneutic approach to dreamwork it aims at keeping the client and therapist on the same level and the dream interpretation process open. The method also emphasizes an egalitarian perspective, where the therapist is not seen as having more direct access to the truth than the client, and both are equally entitled to interpret the dream. Lastly, the supramodal exploration method enables a multi-faceted exploration of the dream in which the dream is experienced through body and thought associations, emotions, drawing exercises etc., while close attention is payed to the kinesics and paralinguistic aspects of the experience.

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