

## **"IN THE THERAPEUTIC THEATRE REALITY AND ILLUSION ARE ONE"**

### ***The outer, the inner and the archetypal worlds -***

#### **Peter Hawkins talks to Olivia Lousada**

*(This interview was given immediately after I had done a one-day workshop on dreams and fantasies, and in re-reading it I am very aware that it reflects my state of being after working with a large group. It is a state similar to what Bandler and Grinder describe as "Up-time", when the senses are working intensely and the mind begins to speed in making multiple connections. The subject matter of the day also has a pervasive influence.*

*Therefore this should not be read as if it was a rational measured paper, but rather as thoughts and impulses shared in a "post-workshop high". There are often references to groups ending in a state of "high" but in reading this I have become aware of perhaps the need to explore further the state I find myself in immediately after a group and of finding out what happens to other group leaders at this time. P.H.)*

#### **Psychodrama and The Three Internal Worlds**

What I would like to share is some of my excitement about the way in which psychodrama, perhaps more than any other of the new therapies, can move delicately from the world of reality to the world of fantasy, then to the world of archetypes and symbols and back again. Psychodrama has the ability, if used sensitively, to bridge the gap between these three.

Often in psychodrama people will work on their relationships with members of their family. Sometimes the psychodrama will neatly follow through. They have some unfinished business and that's it. They deal with it, they resolve it, and they integrate it back in their outside life. But what so often becomes difficult in the psychodramas I direct is that whatever is going on in that person who is working as the protagonist isn't that simple. My way of understanding this is that in any piece of therapeutic work there are three levels operating. These are the external reality level, the world of internal objects, and the world of archetypes and symbols. A girl may work on her

relationship with her father who may well be dead. It will then become clear that she is also working on her internal concept of fathering. Is she able to find an internal father from within which can praise her and validate her? In this exploration the shadows of the archetypal world may soon start to intrude and colour what is happening.

This might be clearer if I gave you an example. There was a lady who was married and had children. Her husband was away on travels, a business man working abroad. We were doing a simple empty chair exercise in which you imagine someone in the chair to whom you would like to say something. The lady started to talk to her husband about his coming home and how she felt about his being away. Somewhere in it her face became puzzled. The quality of her voice began to change to a very quiet, private, quite high voice. This told me that she was not just working with her husband but something different was happening at one of the other levels. I could either have done the traditional analytic approach, interpreting what she did with her husband as another pattern, making a connection between past and present reality; or I could find some way of guiding the protagonist into making internal connections. In this case I asked her if the situation reminded her of any other to see if she could make an external reality connection, but she could not. So I took the gestalt step of using what was happening internally, instead of getting access by changing the auxiliary from husband to father. She allowed herself to see where her feelings were taking her and the images emerged from this. Her body began to curl, and her voice became higher and more private. I asked her where she was. She wasn't in a room of her past, but in an abstract symbolic space waiting for someone to come; she did not know who. At an interpretive level you can say this was the little girl waiting for daddy to come home from work. At the archetypal level (it's important not to tie this down) it was also the image of the lost girl within her waiting for the man across the seas which was and was not her husband. In some ways it was important for her to work at the archetypal level because otherwise it would get in the way of her sharing with her husband when he came home. The external drama would get crosswired with the internal and archetypal worlds.

When you move into the internal world it is like moving into dreams. Her room was not represented by furniture, as in external psychodrama because it was not that concrete. It was symbolic. Things are more fluid. The man who came was similarly difficult to represent. When asked if there was someone who could represent this person she said that he was not here. The man who was going to come - Odysseus. It would have been too confining to have used the tools of reality psychodrama, they were not the right language. In a reality psychodrama the scene becomes real for the audience with the aid of representational objects and auxiliaries. Here for the lady was a storyteller - as in a mime - and the figure who never came, like Godot, became a very present force - simply by the power of her suggestion. Depending on the protagonist I use other ways of giving this image some degree of entity by using different colours, for example a red drape, but that may tie it down

too much. Another way might be sounds - what sounds does she hear when she thinks of this man or what lighting? Giving substance to the dream may help the group, otherwise they may not be with the protagonist but filling in the blank space with their own similar projections. Work at a dream level needs to be very delicate.

*Once I had a client in a similar scene, but the man was represented by a girl who had an untouchable, breathless quality about her. She had warmth and at the same time was utterly remote, which fitted the figure from afar. So I wondered how much it depended on who happened to be present? With this girl you never knew which corner of her you were going to catch - she was always moving within herself.*

It's like the figure of Ariel in the Tempest. It's a very difficult role to play.

At the Holwell centre recently there was a psychodrama in which someone worked on her dream in which there was a beautiful sequence about some playing cards. The king did not smile and the queen who did smile were representations and sat very still under the glare of a blue and a red spot light. The easy psychodramatic technique is to say "Who is this king for you?" But it was not tied down and the protagonist was able to move from the real world in which these figures did spark off images about her own relationship with her father, but they never became her father or not her father. It moved to the internal, then to the archetypal and back again. The trilingual quality captures that magical quality when "in the therapeutic theatre reality and illusion are one". This does not happen by jumping layers, but by an ability to glide from one level to another.

Moreno always started dream work with getting the person ready for bed, getting into their normal sleeping position, their going-to-bed ritual, and then going to sleep before entering into the dream. In this way he blended reality and illusion without tying anything down so the movement could be fluid and delicate from the real to the fantasy world and back again.

There are two things I try to do with my dream world and I think this is true for most of us. I try to keep my dreams within the boundary of night time and forget about them when I wake up; let them take care of their world and I'll take care of mine - apartheid. The other thing I do is plunder and colonise my dreams. I raid them for rational understandings for use in the external world, rather than speaking and moving in the language within my dreams and letting there be some fluid communication between the language of my real world and the language of my dreams. Psychodrama has this great potential, in group therapy, for providing a fluidity from one level to another.

### **Psychodrama, The Group and The Individual - The Two Worlds Outside**

Psychodrama has also a way of moving from the world of the individual to

the life of the group and back again. It's easy to see things rigidly as an individual's pathology instead of seeing it as a group issue.

*So you see the two as a reflection of each other?*

There is always a group reason as to why that individual is working at that moment. There is a group life which encompasses all the individuals within it, but has a life of its own. The ability to work bilingually is important. I was running the last of a series of psychodrama sessions in which someone was deciding what to do with an object left to them by their late grandmother. Suddenly I became aware that this, for the group, was also about what to do with the psychodrama course and where to put it in their lives. I asked all the group members to take up the theme of symbolic objects and to find some images to represent the group experience of the last few weeks, which they could take home with them. Not only was the choice of what they wanted to take away from the group important, but also what they wished to do with these objects, where in their outside lives were they going to place them. Then we could move on.

If the woman had buried the object away from the grandmother, the group's hope of having some symbol they could take away from the course would also be buried. I had to watch my need, as director, to have the session end in a certain way because of the group need. I had to leave a space to let the individual complete her work and then work with the group rather than doing it through the individual. I have to watch for this clarity in the sharing part of the psychodrama. The protagonist can become an auxiliary within a group psychodrama. For example a person who has worked and got stuck in a lot of impotence and frustration can, within the sharing become the person who carries all the impotence and frustration for the group. Similarly I have grown very suspicious in a new group, of the first volunteer to become protagonist, if the group is obviously still very dependent on me as leader and has developed very little life of its own. Often the first person who the group will throw up to work with is a person who the group is trying to create as the patient for the group, to carry all the group's sick parts. The protagonist has a personal valency for being a patient because then we can all work through that person. I have to be very careful of the first protagonist as it can often be a sacrificial victim to me as director.

*Or a defence against you!*

*Do you ever use group dynamics rather than a psychodramatic exercise to warm up the group?*

I do a lot of work with staff teams in which I am called in as a consultant and I use many techniques of which psychodrama is one. The starting point is the life of the team. The material necessary for psychodrama can be made available through sociodrama techniques such as sculpting. The staff team sculpts itself or is sculpted by one of its members; I prefer the former on the whole. I also

use this technique in therapeutic communities. A tremendous amount of material comes to the surface.

With the group, as with the individual, there are the three levels; of the reality experience; the internal world and the archetypal world. One community had a lot of staff changes. In the sculpt the strong clients all positioned themselves on the edge of the group as they did not want to deal with all the emotional nappy changing of the community. They were giving up the peer-leadership of the community. What was exciting was the way the illusion and reality were one in this instance. We found a way to work with both the internal and the archetypal life of the group. Group mythologies develop and the myth under this reality is something like he/she who is left holding the baby will be killed off. The imagery of large groups is often very primitive.

*How did this work out?*

individually

I gave people the chance to try out other positions they would like to be in individually and to discover what they needed to get there in that group. Within the group sociodrama I was allowing bits of individual psychodrama. We could then explore what people felt about their positions and we looked at the symbolic feelings about being afraid of being depended on by the community. There was also the fear that there was no one to be dependent on in that community. Once we had dramatised this we were into a new situation . . . "What are we going to do, and how are we going to manage?" How can we express our fear and hurt that no one is left in the centre? Not ourselves, that's too dangerous." In this case they put certain supportive relationships and meetings into the centre. So they moved the culture from a family one to a tribal one. We had worked through mythology and validated it. The effect was that the group was freed up to move into a new stage. The process started was managed. We were talking about several layers of language at once both in the group and in the individual. For me it is real skill to change levels without being hamfisted or saying that one equals the other. It needs the same delicacy as sharing a picture or dream instead of raping it with interpretations. That is such a travesty of what's being shared.

*Have you used dream work at a group level? You said that in fantasy and dream workshops you often find pools of people coming up with similar images.*

There are several ways I work with group fantasies, like the story telling fantasy where the group lies with their heads together like spokes in a wheel with their eyes shut. They create a story out of the group. If the story grows out of the group feeling it becomes like a dream in that it will be a gift, something to heal the group with, or it will have something to tell the group. I like them to find some way of creating the story dramatically. The very

act of creating it actually does the work that the fantasy is there to do, it doesn't need pointing out.

*Like projected theatre.*

I've known really violent fantasies about devouring a group member and so on, and had the group play out the fantasy including electing its victim.\*

*Some of it is to do with ritualization?*

### **Rituals**

Ritual is a way of dealing with the complexity of our mythical, archetypal, internal and reality worlds. For example the ritual of the wedding is very powerful. The days when the bride wore white may be past for the people who read *Self and Society*, but the image of the bride in white with a veil which was also a shroud was a way of encompassing very primitive feelings about the death of a family, with its member leaving, and the starting of a new family. When this ritual was alive the wedding was doing what good psychodrama does. It was bringing the reality and the illusion together in recognising the grief, the passage and the new beginning at one and the same moment in time.

*There are often rituals around death in psychodrama. A great deal of work is centred on relationships in the family which may be worked on over and over again before someone feels ready to move on, for example with separation from the family.*

In the same way we re-experience the wedding ritual in attending other peoples, which is sometimes even more powerful than our own. This also happens in psychodrama, when the grief and laughter, the sadness and celebration come together intimately as it does in great drama, like "Waiting for Godot"

In my own separation from my own family I had a few rituals to help me do it. Psychodrama was a means by which I had to create my own rituals, and that takes a long time. Society takes many generations to create rituals. To create such a ritual which embraces the paradoxical complexity of the experience in psychodrama is very difficult because what often happens is that the protagonist and director succumb to the pressure of themselves or the group to find a one dimensional answer. "Just tell your mum what a pain in the arse she was, and break out of the circle; have the cathartic finish and that's it." The really powerful moments are when you are encompassing the strength and the anger to kick your way to freedom (as D.H. Lawrence puts it) but can also deal with the grief and tears intimately connected with the separation. The one dimensional is a travesty of one's internal world.

We were talking about taking part in other people's rituals and psychodramas. It often can be more powerful than our own. I remember a mother who had done some work on her separation with her mother, but she was cut off from

her feelings until later the same day when she was chosen to play as an auxiliary the son of another protagonist. In this part she danced with "the mother" an event which had the nuance of both celebration and separation, grief and joy. In being included in this ritual of another group member, she could contact levels of herself which she was unable to experience directly. Isn't there a ritual in which the mother dances with her son at his coming of age? There ought to be!

*Ritual is created where it is needed. If psychodrama was understood to be an aid to ritual, do you think it would be more palatable?*

It may be that some would find it more palatable to start from the dream world rather than the real world, or to start from the collective ritual rather than the individual psychodrama. The internal work they have to do with their internal mother, for example, could be worked at from the other end, instead of confronting them with their anger towards their own mother for which they are not ready.

*You mentioned pools of imagery coming up in a group?*

If there are several images that keep coming up or indeed just come up in the language of the group it can be very illuminating about what the group experience is at a deeper level. With images that are predominant it may mean they are a collective issue as well as individual, as people can tune into the collective as well as being in touch with the internal.

*Is there anything you want to say by way of conclusion?*

I want to reaffirm to myself my own struggle not to walk down the one dimensional road. I have to try and experience several dimensions at once which is both challenging and, when it happens, very enriching. When I am trapped in one dimensional work I come away feeling drained from trying to solve people's problems which they want me to try and solve, but don't want me to succeed. When I get out of the one dimensional I am enriched because I have celebrated the infinite paradoxical nature of human existence.

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