

## Discovering Dreamlike Experiencing in the Framework of Bonding Analysis

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**Abstract:** Bonding Analysis, the support of pregnant individuals in relation with their child, allows us to access the reality of a primary layer of experience between the pregnant parent and child during the prenatal period and makes it available for reflection. The influence of this primary layer on our experiencing and our actions, both on an individual level and on the level of society and culture, becomes obvious. From these observations we can conclude that prenatal and perinatal dreamlike projections significantly influence sociocultural processes

**Keywords:** bonding analysis, prenatal relationship, dreamlike experiencing.

### Prologue

Today, bonding analysis holds its own as a comprehensive and sophisticated method to support the relations between the pregnant parent and child during pregnancy. However, to truly grasp the fundamental significance of this method, we need examine its origins. The story began with Hungarian psychologist Jenő Raffai's entry into professional life. In 1986, he took up employment in a Budapest psychiatric clinic for adolescents diagnosed with schizophrenia. I can picture Jenő Raffai, unprepared by his theoretical university education, becoming transfixed by the psychic reality and distress of these adolescents. I know from my experience that to witness these kinds of struggles can be harrowing for the observer. In a seemingly safe environment, they remain haunted by a "dreamlike experiencing" that seems real to them, while reality loses meaning. We are looking at experiences that are not stored on a symbolic level as are those explored by conventional psychotherapy. These experiences occurred to us on a

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psychosomatic level: sensations, feelings, moods, and visual experiences that I call dreamlike experiencing, as it is similar to the way we experience when we dream. In practice, this means inspiring people during their pregnancy to engage with this pre-lingual experiencing and allow it to come alive within them. The specific purpose of this support was to encourage them to allow those difficult memories from their own past to emerge—memories that might be washed up by this inner experiencing.

Raffai tracked these clients and their experiences with great patience and empathy. Whereas the common psychiatric practice of diagnosing schizophrenia can create a distance that forestalls empathy and understanding, Raffai discovered evidence of how their personal histories may have contributed to their development of schizophrenia. Categorizing Raffai's clients' experiencing as schizophrenia allows us to understand it on a medical level. However, it does not transmit the level of personal inner experience.

One of Raffai's patients provided a crucial clue in illuminating the background of this inner experiencing of schizophrenia. His patient intensely desired to be incorporated into Raffai's body, to be allowed to complete his development there, and then be born again as a healthy person. Psychiatrists with medical training could have diagnosed this wish as a typical symptom of schizophrenia. Its intensity convinced Raffai to take this patient's request seriously. He saw that the patient wanted to regress into his "womb." His patient wanted to "re-digest" the threatening experiences that had occurred in his mother's womb inside the body of a therapist, whom he experienced as empathic, benevolent, and well-balanced to, eventually, be born psychically intact. The patient felt that their mother did not want them and that there was not an inner relationship established with her during pregnancy. The patient had taken on this fear and carried it as an elementary burden. As a child, dependent on the protection of his parents, he was able to suppress his fear. The process of maturing during puberty requires us to anchor ourselves within our own origins. The patient's origins had been burdened with rejection and non-relatedness, terror and fear (Huttunen & Nyskanen, 1978; Janus, 2011a; Verny, 2021), and they overpowered him. This was the origin of his fantasy and dream—to digest his original fear and loneliness through a renewed pregnancy in the womb of an empathic therapist. Raffai repeatedly saw his patients go through a process of delayed maturation. His deep apprehension of their distress and his disposition to make himself available for their retrospective digestion of unresolved fears allowed them to leave their fear and terror behind and embrace a hopeful arrival in this world.

When Raffai saw these connections, his understanding of helping patients process unresolved trauma was relatively unheard of at the time. The authenticity of his patients' experience was his affirmation, and he

published his discoveries in scientific articles (Raffai, 1991) within the circles of the then-emerging field of prenatal psychology. Right around this time, the International Society for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (ISPPM) emerged as a scientific forum to promote the significance of the prenatal and perinatal experience. In the 1990s, I organized annual conferences in Heidelberg on various aspects of prenatal psychology. Raffai heard about them and registered to present a paper (Raffai, 1991). Everyone attending it was deeply impressed by his exposition; it was the expression of something that everyone in this circle had suspected but not yet been able to put into words with such clarity.

In the framework of his psychoanalytic training and his work at the psychiatric clinic for schizophrenic adolescents, Raffai began a training analysis with the renowned Hungarian psychoanalyst György Hidas, which took place in the classical modus of four sessions per week. At length, his experiencing deepened in a strange existential and dreamlike way that initially remained opaque. Raffai experienced a feeling of painful inner abandonment and fear that was of gigantic magnitude, and it completely transfixed him. Thanks to his inner strength and deep humanity, Hidas did not dismiss his analysis as too dysfunctional. Instead, he provided a supportive space for his experiencing. In tolerating this existential experience of fear, the two of them gradually discovered that it was a re-experiencing of overwhelming prenatal abandonment and horror. Allowing this back into inner awareness made it possible to reflect and integrate it. Both were aware that this was a fundamental amplification of the human capacity for experiencing that provided completely new insights into the prenatal mother-child relationship. This insight is as new today as it was then.

Raffai's experience with adolescents diagnosed with schizophrenia—and their fantasies of returning to the womb for post-development—matched the insights from his own psychoanalytic quest. Raffai's studies were not designed to show a causal effect between prenatal experiences and schizophrenia. He was inspired by these experiences to help improve the lives of prenates and their parents by developing an initial plan to support expectant parents and their children to help prevent the tragic developments he had seen in his patients.

### **A First Unsuccessful Plan**

Raffai's plan was to support expectant parents in relating with their child-to-be. At first, he thought material support would be needed because, for parents-to-be, financial distress can impede establishing a relationship with their child at this early time. He thus planned a "Trust for the Support of Expecting Mothers." In Germany, there is a group of psychoanalytic psychotherapists who take a stand for the

psychotherapeutic support of those diagnosed with schizophrenia. I endeavored to convey to my colleagues some of the insights of prenatal psychology regarding the relevance of the quality of prenatal relations on further development—all to no avail. As of today, this remains the blatant reality. It is not surprising, considering the situation, that Raffai's initial plan was doomed to fail. Its failure, however, facilitated a deep reconsideration. The situation did not call so much for external support. Instead, it called for internal help: help in the form of what Raffai had experienced in his analysis with Hidas. Once they both realized this, they shifted from analysand and analyst to equal partners who ventured to construct such a framework to foster prenatal relations between mother and child. Thus, a second plan emerged, which is available as a teachable method in the form of today's bonding analysis.

### A Second, Successful Plan

Their experience with schizophrenic adolescents, as well as their own analysis, gave them certainty and strength to embark on the creative adventure of offering psychic support for mothers-to-be. The analytic couch situation provided the outer framework. However, their objective was not to analyze the clients' childhood experiences but to explore prenatal relations between mother and child analytically.

Based on their psychoanalytic background, Hidas and Raffai called this method bonding analysis. I call it Support of the Prenatal Mother-Child Relationship. Referring to the study of chemical processes, Freud had chosen the word analysis to represent apprehension by means of dissection. The name analysis was selected to endow his method with the gravitas of a scientific procedure. In its abstractness, however, the term analysis obscures that its concern is with understanding and reconnection. Analysis brought the idea of dissection to the foreground, and Freud believed that the necessary synthesis would happen on its own. Today, we know that his reasoning was overly influenced by the intellect; synthesis does not happen by itself. It can only happen in a supportive space and requires a trusting relationship. The term bonding analysis reflects this discrepancy of analytical terminology; it is about mother and child establishing a psychic connection in the framework of an empathic and supportive relationship with a so-called bonding analyst.

Hidas and Raffai (2006) struck gold with their method of inspiring women to engage with their feelings and be in contact with their child. Mothers and children were able to experience quite wonderful, fulfilling relations on a pre-lingual, wholistic level. Their book *Nabelschnur der Seele [Umbilical Cord of the Soul]* (Hidas & Raffai, 2006) documents these findings with many examples and, as a framework, brought to life the creative potential of relatedness between mother and child—a potential

that due to the rational and patriarchal attitudes developed throughout history, had been unapproachable.

At the same time, the process brought forth difficult experiences from the mothers' prenatal period, from their own birth, and the early relationship to their own mothers after birth. It was amazing to see how these women could differentiate between their experience in the womb and the experience with their own child—all well documented in the many case studies of bonding analysis. In their cooperation, Hidas and Raffai developed this method in theory and practice. Their next step was to find ways for its practical application and convey it in a larger framework, which happened mainly in Heidelberg in the framework of ongoing courses and during conferences in Cologne.

### **The Implementation of the Second Plan**

Once more, Hidas and Raffai contacted me to implement and promulgate their method, seeing that with the conferences on prenatal psychology I had organized in Heidelberg at the time, I had established a forum for scientific exchange. Using this environment to implement and impart their method for supporting prenatal mother-child relations seemed natural. Thus, the requirements were met; their task was to interest their German colleagues in their promising method. At first, they wanted to approach the psychoanalysts. This group, however, did and continues to adhere to the guidelines of Freud's and, later, Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis where prenatal and perinatal are considered marginal—they remain unaware of their real significance. There were only a few: among them, Edeltrud Meistermann-Seeger in Cologne, and her student and collaborator Helga Blazy. Thanks to their roots in Michael Balint's psychoanalysis, they were open and receptive to this expanded understanding. In Heidelberg, the psychoanalyst Gerhard Schroth developed a new method imparting the contents of bonding analysis; he later also taught in the United States (Schroth, 2021).

Some years later, in 2004, when the first training group came into being in Heidelberg, only a small number of psychoanalysts, such as Ursula Volz-Boers, were interested in the opportunity. Most participants were psychodynamic orientated psychotherapists, midwives, obstetricians, and pregnancy counselors. However, their varied professional competencies complemented each other in creative ways. The training consisted of nineteen weekends, from noon on Saturday until Sunday afternoon. As the former director of the Psychoanalytic Institute, my role was that of an organizer and moderator—to provide Raffai with the peace and space to convey his method in his very lucid way. Later, additional vocational training was offered in Cologne and Vienna.

It was a fortunate coincidence that Helga Blazy organized bi-annual conferences on different aspects of bonding analysis in Cologne. She documented them by publishing the conference proceedings (Blazy, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016). My connection with the ISPPPM was another helpful contact. I had been serving as president for many years, and bonding analysis was firmly established in this framework as well. Last but not least, Jenő Raffai and György Hidas organized a large conference for the ISPPPM in Budapest in 2002. All these initiatives had a positive effect on bringing bonding analysis to Hungary, where the “Hungarian Society for Prenatal Psychology” had been established. Bonding analysis met with a positive response there, first on the practice level and later in professional training.

In 2015, Jenő Raffai’s tragic death (György Hidas had already died in 2012) necessitated significant changes. A committee consisting of Helga Blazy, Ursula Volz-Boers, Gerhard Schroth, and I took on the responsibility to continue imparting the concepts of bonding analysis and realized a professional training for bonding analysis trainers. Blazy made an outstanding contribution by publishing the papers Raffai presented at the conferences in Cologne; published by Mattes Verlag Heidelberg in (Blazy, 2015), they built the foundation, the very essentials of bonding analysis.

As a result of these initiatives, a considerable group of about 100 bonding analysts arose in Germany and Austria. In 2020, the Gesellschaft für Bindungsanalyse nach Hidas und Raffai [Society for Bonding Analysis according to Hidas and Raffai] was founded in Cologne. Finally, thanks to connections between Cologne and Warsaw, the conference “Bonding starts before Birth” (March 23, 2021) brought bonding methods to Warsaw.

After this prologue, I will now return to the topic I announced in the title of this article—“Discovering the Dreamlike Consciousness in the Framework of Bonding Analysis,” and I will extrapolate it on a more theoretical level.

## Preface

The method for supporting the prenatal mother-child relationship, called bonding analysis by its creators, Hidas and Raffai (2006), utilizes the natural potential for dreamlike communication and consciousness between the expectant mother and her child during their prenatal time together. To our rational mind, this potential does not appear immediately accessible. It has become clear that this first phase of life is very significant for the later development of the child’s personality and relationships. Later in life, these experiences are still present on a background level (Janus, 2017). It has also become apparent that the

support of parents in their relationship with their children is essential for the children's further development. I will present two examples of the dreamlike character of these relationships.

**Examples of Mothers' Experiences with their Child in Bonding Analysis — from the Book *Nabelschnur der Seele* by Hidas and Raffai (2006)**

**Example 1**

“I was soon able to be in contact with my baby. It worked the third time. It was always very strange. It feels as if you are dreaming - that is how the images appear. By the way, during the session, while the images appear, I can choose whether I want to talk about what I see and feel right then and there, or whether I prefer to share it all at the end of the session, in one go. For me it was easier to share it right away. The communication during our contact seemed like a cartoon. I know, it's not the same for everyone, because other pregnant women shared their experience with me. But in my “movie” my womb was a little apartment. It had windows and there were chandeliers—my baby could hold on to them and swing around. One time I could feel that it was hungry, even though it had not told me so. I asked it whether I was right—and it did affirm that it was hungry. Then a tiny man in checkered pants appeared and brought trays with food. I saw these really concrete animated scenes” (Hidas & Raffai, 2006, p. 117 ).

**Example 2**

“When we were finally able to connect, it was...I started crying...even when I think of it now, I'm still very moved! I think I cried because it was so incredible, that we really had been able to connect. The feelings I had were different from what I had read in the articles. A lot of feelings... Warmth flowed through me, a very nice feeling, it was just incredible. By the way, he often played hide and seek, even when we connected for the first time, and it happened quite often that he wasn't ready to communicate. It also happened that we could connect, but...well, even though there was contact, we weren't always communicating” (Hidas & Raffai, 2006, p. 138).

**Example 3**

“During the session, I often felt as if I was the fetus. When I relaxed and released tension, the images appeared - I was in a huge room or hall and huddled in a corner like a tiny being in a giant world. I didn't feel well, I felt abandoned. Often I got a

headache and ran away from the situation. It's possible that I was processing my own fetal experiences." (Hidas & Raffai, 2006, p. 188).

These examples illustrate the dreamlike character of the prenatal experiencing between mother and child: it has the character of the fantastic mixed with elements from later experience. At the same time, however, it reflects the concrete reality of the relationship. From here, I will move on to further correlations; first, the memory character of myths that reflect the dreamlike character of pre-lingual experiencing (Janus, 2021a).

### **Myths are Rooted in Early Dreamlike Experiencing**

From the point of view of prenatal psychology, myths reflect dreamlike memories of pre-lingual experiencing in combination with elements of later realistic experiencing and social reality. From a present-day perspective, mythical man largely lived in projection, with his emotions appearing to him as visual imaginations (Jaynes, 1993). According to our current understanding, this was close to an infantile understanding of life and the world: the inner and outer world cannot be well differentiated due to immaturity at birth (Janus, 2018a; Portmann, 1969). Inner feelings can be imagined as coming from the outside world, while the actual reality can be perceived in the mirror of inner feelings and emotions (Janus, 2020a, 2020b). Myths express shared dreamlike primal experiencing from pre-lingual periods.

### **The Presence of Prenatal and Perinatal Experiencing in Social and Political Events**

Regarding social processes, prenatal psychology is still in the speculative stage. Nonetheless, we can say that sociocultural processes are influenced by pre- and perinatal dreamlike projections (DeMause, 2000). The formation of large groups within the early agricultural cultures eliminated the social cohesion created by instinctive social regulation—our heritage from the fairly small groups of primates wherein everyone knew everyone else. In the matrifocal societies of the Neolithic age, this loss of social cohesion was compensated by a shared and socially contracted relation to early pre- and postnatal maternal feelings that were represented by the image of the Great Goddess (DeMause, 2000).

The same still applies to male gods that reflect the dreamlike experiencing of paternal feelings. By relating to these pre-lingual, dreamlike parental feelings, humans were able to build large cultural units. These bonds exceeded by far the instinctive social regulation among a horde or small group where people knew each other well.



One could read later cultural history as determined by attempts to secure social cohesion with the suggestion of prenatal comfort and, within this framework, to create structures of action that were more and more rational and flexible. A precondition for this process is the increasing internalization of those feelings originally projected outward—an internal regulation of feelings and emotions, rather than a regulation through outer authorities and powers. This process alone can facilitate responsibility and maturity in the modern sense (Janus, 2008, 2013, 2018b). Bonding analysis is of great significance to further the development of such maturity. When parents establish a relationship with their child even before birth, they enable it to master the transformation of the birthing process with inner coherence and in relation with the birthing parent. Later in life, this can be an example for essential transformation and can facilitate real individuation.

### **Summarizing Remarks**

With my deliberations on how dreamlike experiencing from the earliest pre-lingual periods is present in our mythical experiencing and social actions, I would like to point out the fundamental significance of bonding analysis. This method allows us to access the reality of a primary layer of experience between parent and child during the prenatal period and makes it available for reflection; the influence of this primary layer on our experiencing and our actions, individually, societally, and culturally, becomes obvious. On a psychological level, the framework is provided by prenatal psychology, at first as a background tradition in psychoanalysis and later, more distinctively, in humanistic psychology (Evertz et al., 2020; Janus, 2000).

As a result of the very rational, and patriarchal mentality of our current period, reflections on this context still take place only at the margins of social awareness. Given their practical and profoundly human evidence, the experiences of bonding analysis can give the public an understanding of the relevance of our earliest pre-lingual experiences. Our understanding of political, social, and cultural events could gain a completely new dimension. Political events that today seem irrational could be seen in a new light, thus creating new perspectives for our decision making processes. (DeMause, 2000; Janus, 2011b, 2018a, 2020c, 2021a).

In this light, it is evident that the quality of parenthood is highly significant for a society's capacity for peace and conflict resolution. We need to prepare the next generation for this challenge in a new and different way—we need future parents to be able to care for their children in a truly related and empathic way to provide space for their emotional and cognitive development. Only then can they develop the maturity

required to meet the challenges of the future (Axness, 2012; Grille, 2005; Janus, 2010, 2018b; Sansone, 2020).

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