

Dream Appreciation

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**We live in a
dream-deprived
society . . .**

DO WE NEED A SOCIOLOGY OF DREAMS?

BY MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

“For sociology, interested only in man awake, the sleeper might as well be dead.” This is a quote from the late distinguished French cultural anthropologist Roger Bastide.

Based on his studies of dreams in transitional cultures in Brazil, he raised the question: “. . . whether the sociologist is right to ignore the other half of our life, to envisage man standing and sitting, but never asleep and adream” (“The Sociology of the Dream” in G.E. Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (eds.), *The Dream and Human Societies*, 1966).

In primitive societies in the early stages of transition, there is a unity be-

tween the world of myth and the sacred as reflected in the dream and in waking reality with easy passage in both directions. Western society lacks the institutions that foster this exchange. The door to the dream world is closed to society at large. It remains open on a small scale as the container of one’s personal problems to be worked through in private with a therapist. We live in a dream-deprived society.

The failure to recognize the necessity of institutionalizing dreams in a way that makes the function more visible, has led Bastide to conclude that sociologists look upon any such institution as dealing with a “waste product” and would not be “within the competence of a sociology worthy of its name — a kind of social sewer service.”

Dreamers make use of images available to them at a given moment in history. Remolded into metaphorical visual imagery, they convey informa-

tion of some significance to the dreamer. It seems to me obvious that just as they contain personal referents, they might from time to time contain social referents. That is to suggest that unresolved social tensions also play a role in shaping subjectivity and surfacing in a dream just as more personal tensions do. As Erich Fromm, Trigant Burrow, and others have pointed out, there is a social unconscious at play that takes its toll so long as it remains unconscious. In the following quote, the sociologist Robert S. Lynd describes one over-arching source of social blindness.

“Liberal democracy has never dared face the fact that industrial capitalism is an intensely coercive form of organization of society that cumulatively constrains men and all of their institutions to work the will of the minority who hold and wield the economic power; and that this relentless warping of men’s
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THREE MISTAKEN IDEAS ABOUT DREAMS — WHY THEY ARE

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN

Mistaken Idea #1

Dream consciousness is an inferior, more primitive form of consciousness than waking consciousness.

Freud thought so.

Dreaming consciousness is every bit as subtle and creative in dealing with its own domain, our inner life, our subjectivity, as waking consciousness is in

dealing with its primary domain, our way of interacting with the world we encounter in the waking state.

As they used to say about Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers, when it appeared that everyone regarded Astaire as the maestro and that Rogers just followed him, someone once remarked, "She did

everything Fred did, but in high heels." So waking consciousness has been regarded as the superior form of consciousness while dreaming consciousness has been its second-rate partner.

Freud dignified dreams with meaning, but never quite freed its instinctually tinged primitive

representational form. The imagistic form that characterizes dreaming is every bit as powerful in identifying and reflecting in creatively imaginistic ways the emotional cross-currents of our lives as our waking consciousness is in mapping the nature and structure of matter, living and inanimate. What we have not yet succeeded in doing is to solve the mystery of the relationship of matter to consciousness.

Honesty has been the highest scientific value in the exploration of matter. There is a good reason for that. In contrast to dreaming consciousness, which always hits the nail on the head, waking consciousness in its effort to help us find our own place in the world is pulled in many directions in terms of the values that prevail. They range from honest virtues to expedient self-interest. Awake we are often taken in by the spurious at the expense of the authentic.

Asleep and dreaming we know of no other value than to tell it like it is when it comes to what is going on on the inside. It is true we use a different language with which to accomplish this task (for the most part the use of metaphorical imagery), but it is just as elegantly suited to its task as

DO WE NEED A SOCIOLOGY OF DREAMS?

*Continued from page 1 lives and forms of association becomes less and less the result of voluntary decisions by "bad" or "good" men and more and more an impersonal web of coercions dictated by the need to "keep the system running." (R.S. Lynd, "Business as a System of Organized Power" in A. M. Lee (ed.), *Readings in Sociology*, 1951)*

Here are three examples of this warping that are encountered in dreams.

#1 When a young woman in therapy, suffering from frigidity, makes a reference in her dreams to her own sexual organs as a head of lettuce encased in the empty shell of a cantaloupe situated on the shelf of a supermarket, she is saying something about

her own personal sexual problems and at the same time making a statement about an aspect of social life.

The personal referents are of interest to the clinician. Her sexual organs are seen as objects separate from her functioning self that can be bought and sold in an impersonal way. Might the social referents be of interest to a sociologist? We do live in a society where attributes of individuals such as brains, beauty, talent, and sex are treated as objects that can be bought and sold in the marketplace.

#2 Racism raises its ugly head when a young white woman dreams of a black man as a threatening predator.

#3 In Sweden the struggle for equal rights

for women began much earlier than in the United States. There were signs of successful women in all spheres of life. In the eighties I came across a Swedish magazine article commenting on the dreams of three very successful women in politics and the business world. Sexism seemed to be a thing of the past. Yet in each of the dreams the self-image of the woman was that of a cow who, along with other cows, was there for the benefit of the farmer.

Freud repersonalized the dream. Might psychohistorians not benefit from a resocialization of the dream?

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WRONG AND WHAT THE REAL TRUTHS ARE . . .

ordinary discursive speech is to our waking situation.

Mistaken Idea #2

Dreams seek to protect us from certain truths about ourselves in the interest of not upsetting a given emotional status quo during sleep.

This has been the building block of psychoanalytic theory from Freud on, although minor adjustments have had to be made by revisionist theorists. The latter have moved away from Freud's heavily instinctual orientation to more integrative and adaptive orientations. Even then the protective mechanisms of censorship and disguise are still there, diluted but still recognizable. Frustrated childhood wishes are on the way out, as is the exclusive emphasis on wish fulfillment generally.

Even the most sophisticated of these efforts still do not extend full citizenship to dreaming consciousness. Among psychoanalysts Jung was the first to question this prejudicial approach to dreaming consciousness. His basic challenge to the Freudian view was his emphasis on the manifest content of the dream, that is the dream itself was to reveal rather than conceal any turbulence bubbling up out of the unconscious domain.

Mistaken Idea #3

Dreaming consciousness has not been generally noted as a natural healing mechanism.

We don't make value judgments about the liver and the heart. Both are essential to the maintenance of health. The same applies to waking and dreaming consciousness. We have an inside and an outside and both have to be kept in order to maintain a state of health. We maintain a reliable waking consciousness through our ability to learn from previous experience. In the interest of maintaining an authentic relationship to our insides, it is just as incumbent upon us to learn how to benefit from our dreams. However, the dream-deprived society we referred to earlier has not yet done this. Full citizenship for dreaming consciousness implies the full recognition of the dream's natural ability to keep us posted on what we really feel.

It is this failure to accord our dream life full citizenship that is the most serious blunder we have made. We talk about racism and sexism and have recognized the loss to society of such prejudicial attitudes and practices. We have yet to be awakened to the insidious and pervading presence of dreamism — an irrational blindness to the

contribution our dreams can, through their intrinsic honesty, contribute to the moral fiber of society. There is a kind of hidden class structure at play here. Our dream life has become ghettoized. We have been lulled into thinking that only by escaping the ghetto and bringing a dream to an elite core of dream interpreters can we be sure of their proper management. All dreamers should have a place in the sun, not only those who can afford therapy. Dreaming is a universal experience and the benefits of that experience

should be available to all.

For the past several decades, as a result of the consciousness raising push of the sixties following on the experiential work of the fifties, the dream scene has been slowly changing. Dream groups have been proliferating in recent years. Books keep appearing, many written by professionals who are turning their attention to educating the public and describing one or another approach to dream work. There is some hope on the horizon but as we all know, prejudices dies a slow death. □

The Association for the Study of Dreams July 6-10, 1999 at U of C, Santa Cruz

Immerse yourself in dreamwork at the 16th annual international conference of The Association for the Study of Dreams at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Choose from over 150 workshops, seminars and exhibits on dreaming for both professionals and lay dream workers. Continuing education credits are available for some sessions.

Wendy Pannier will conduct a dream group using Monte Ullman's group process on Thursday July 8 from 7-9 p.m. Additional impromptu sessions can be scheduled if participants wish.

For information on the conference program or a brochure, please contact The Association for the Study of Dreams, Box 1600, Vienna, VA. You can call the toll-free conference hotline number — 1-877-DREAMSS — or you can send an e-mail to ASDreams@aol.com

Information about the conference — and about ASD and what it has to offer dreamers — is available on the organization's web site:

www.asdreams.org



DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

LETTERS OF TWO WOMEN: REFLECTIONS ON THEIR

In November, 1998 I held one of my three-day leadership training sessions for those interested in an intensive exposure to the experiential dream group process first developed by Nan Zimmerman and myself almost three decades ago. Soon after it ended, I wrote the following letter to two of the participants who shared their dreams. It's the first letter of its kind I ever wrote.

This was the first time either woman had ever been in a dream group of mine. I had known Barbara in the late sixties and early seventies. She was very active in organizing community participation in the outreach

program of the Maimonides Community Mental Health Center I headed at the time.

I am grateful to both women. Their openness comes through in their letters, as it did when they worked with their dreams in the group. Here is the letter I wrote and their responses.

Dear Carolann and Barbara,

I am writing to each of you to ask if you would, in a paragraph or two (or as long as you would like it to be), describe the impact the work on your dream had on you — the feelings you experienced at the time, as well as any reflections that followed.

I have been doing these weekends for many years, but I don't think I was ever more impressed with the power of the process to bring a dreamer to the heart of the issue they were struggling with. I would like to include whatever you send me in something I am writing, but of course only with your approval and permission.

*Please do not feel obligated in any way to do this. I simply would like your experience to reach a wider audience.**

Carolann's response:

The dream work which I did at Monte Ullman's training session has been the most exciting opening/embracing/relating to a dream of mine that I have ever experienced in all my 30 years of dream work. As the process began, I quickly moved from the fear of disclosing myself and wondering if I would be seen as clever and wise in a new group to relaxation, excitement and total involvement in the images my dream of the previous night had presented.

* Please do not construe the two women's responses to my letter as testimonials. They come from a much deeper place.

My excitement built as the group played with their projections on my dream and my dream began to open for me on many levels (my outer life now, my past traumas, my inner life and my spiritual path of transformation). Listening to connections group members made to my dream, I experienced the dream as a living, multifaceted being conveying layer upon layer of messages and understanding related to a core issue in my life.

Never before have I seen so clearly that a dream cannot and should not be pinned down to only one meaning. Additionally exciting for me has been the way Monte's process has encouraged my inner and outer life to continue to work and expand on the meaning of the dream through follow-up dreams and related incidents in my life during the last two weeks.

I am only now realizing the extent to which the process encouraged me to embody my dream during the work and after returning home. Even as I write, I feel my heart beat faster in excitement, my energy and concentration increase, and a deep joy settles over me.

Appreciating Dreams

A Group Approach

Monte Ullman's latest book *Appreciating Dreams*, develops a comprehensive technique for exploring dreams in small group settings. The book explains the basic principles of how to help the dreamer using this particular technique, which is now known and respected worldwide. In addition to describing the structure of a dream group session, this volume offers practical guidelines for dream group leaders and those who want to study dreams, on their own or with others.

"This book is indispensable reading for all students of psychology, group psychotherapy and dreams."

— Frank M. Kline in *Readings*

Appreciating Dreams is available in hardback and paperback from Sage Books. You can order by phone (805-499-9774), fax (805-499-0871) or e-mail (order@sagepub.com).

GROUP DREAM WORK EXPERIENCES

The core of my dream awakened me to my misconceptions about masculine and feminine energy and my need to live from my feminine core of energy, thus freeing my creative power. In the following two weeks, I have noticed ways in which I have changed the way I relate to my energy and in the way I have handled some specific relationship issues.

I asked myself today, "What is it about this process that encouraged my dream to speak to me so profoundly?" First, there is the total safety and acceptance I felt throughout the entire process. This tone was set by the group leader and mirrored by group members. I felt listened to, valued, and respected which freed me to relate to my dream images intimately and fully. Secondly, I always felt in control of what was happening. The process sets guidelines that kept me centered on the fact that the dream was mine, and that I was the authority free to accept, reject or amplify on others' projections and insights into my dream, or to stop the process if it became too much for me.

There was only once when I felt diminished and

felt myself withdraw in fear and doubt. That was when one group member took on authority about my dream, thus not following the guidelines of the process and demonstrating to me the importance of a sensitive leader reminding group members to follow

the process. The process really works and helped me to delve deeper and farther than I ever "dreamed" possible!

Barbara's response:

On the first day I was amazed at the openness of the dreamer and I was

certainly thinking that I could never be so open. I am usually embarrassed or suspicious of such early personal disclosure in a new group.

During the process, however, I was totally unprepared for the impact

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Leadership Training Program For Experiential Dream Groups

A Leadership Training Workshop in group dream work will take place at Monte's home May 14-16. This is an intensive three-day workshop which will cover the underlying premises and key principles on which Monte's group dream work is based. It will explore in depth the kinds of problems that occur at each stage of the process as well as the technique of leading a group.

Even if you have attended one of Monte's Leadership Workshops before, this can be a helpful way to "fine tune" the process.

DATE: May 14, 15, and 16

PLACE: 55 Orlando Ave.

Ardsley, New York 10502

These workshops fill up quickly, so for more information call Monte Ullman at:
(914)693-0156

The intensive three-day workshop will cover:

- A presentation of the structure and rationale of the Experiential Dream Group. This will consider in detail the roles of the dreamer, the group and the leader at each stage of the process.
- The principles, guidelines and necessary precautions for effective and serious dream work will be emphasized.
- The kinds of problems that arise at each stage of the process will be discussed.
- If they choose, participants will have the opportunity to lead the group and benefit from a critique by the dreamer, the group and Monte.
- A final session will be devoted to some of the practical problems involved in carrying out Experiential Dream Group Work. These include the size of the group, the make-up of the group, the length and number of sessions, issues that arise with participants who are in therapy, etc.

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TWO WOMEN REFLECT ON GROUP DREAMWORK EXPERIENCES

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her dream had on me, when I made it my own. I cried for my husband, who has been dead for 18 years, as if the wound was fresh.

That same day I reported that I rarely remember my dreams and Monte said, “You will tonight” — and I did. I, of course, was not willing to share as the first dreamer and even stated to several people on entering the workshop that I did dream but I would not tell my dream to the group.

When I selected a mug for my morning cup of tea, I unconsciously picked a mug designed with hearts — and my dream

was about hearts. Somehow that gave me the impetus to relate my dream to the group.

As the process developed, I found myself revealing more and more, yet feeling extremely safe. For me, that is most important — trusting and feeling safe. The willingness of others to share their feelings first, their total listening and Monte’s insistence on the dreamer’s safety provided that.

I had a follow-up dream the second night of the workshop which I remembered clearly. What is interesting and fascinating to me is that it is November 23 as I am writing

this, and I have not remembered another dream since the night of November 7 when we were all together. Perhaps, without the group, I am afraid to remember because my dreams are painful. I leave that analysis to you, Monte.

I do want to continue this work. It makes sense to cut through unnecessary

layers and get to the core or if you will the “heart” of the issue. Why waste time deluding myself when there is something honest inside struggling to be heard?

The dream process you developed inspires me. I look forward to seeing you soon and joining one of your dream groups. □

Dream Appreciation is published quarterly for people interested in working with dreams and the group process developed by Dr. Montague Ullman.

Comments, suggestions, questions and letters are welcome. Contact the Editor, Wendy Pannier, by phone at (610) 925-0758, by fax at (610) 925-0759, or by writing 105 Taylor Lane, Kennett Square, PA 19348. Our e-mail address is <dreams@kennett.net>.

We encourage you to share this information with others, as long as proper credit is given.
