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CONTRIBUTIONS: Features, articles, letters, notices, reports and reviews should be sent to Nicola Holt, Department of Sociology, The University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, fax: (01904) 433043, e-mail: nh519@york.ac.uk. Send accounts of Experiences to John Crabbe c/o SPR, 49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London W8 6LA, and Diary entries to Peter Johnson at the SPR at the same address. Contributors are strongly encouraged to submit material in electronic form — the preferred format is Word (Microsoft) via e-mail or on a PC disc.

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FROM BINDELOF TO THE MAIMONIDES DREAM TELEPATHY LABORATORY: AN INTERVIEW WITH MONTAGUE ULLMAN

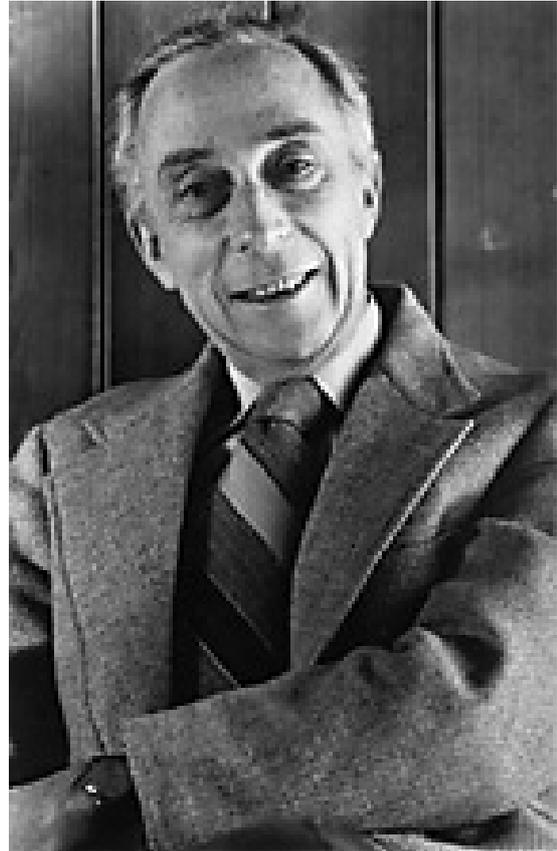
MARK A. SCHROLL

The work Montague Ullman and I have done on dream telepathy over the years could be explained by David Bohm's concept of the implicate order. Currently Monte is devoting most of his time to bringing the work of Bohm into an exposition of entangled minds, dream telepathy and the like. (Stanley Krippner, 2007)

THIS INTERVIEW took place in Montague Ullman's home in Ardsley, New York, March 26, 2008. He was recovering from a mild stroke that he had suffered ten days earlier, so in many ways this interview was a therapeutic process of remembering. We were joined by Judy Gardiner and Adam Rock, who mostly listened to our wide-ranging discussion. This article will concentrate on the events that led up to Ullman's experimental work on dream telepathy. To provide us with an introduction to Ullman's work, in Chapter 14 of Robert Van de Castle's book *Our Dreaming Mind* (1994, pp. 414-415) we learn that:

Ullman established a dream laboratory at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn [New York], where he was chairman of the psychiatry department. With the help of a graduate student [Sol Feldstein], he worked out the details of a protocol that served as the basis for all later studies. Stanley Krippner, a psychologist, joined the laboratory in 1964 when the first formal studies were beginning. Ullman and Krippner worked together for nearly ten years investigating some of the parameters involved in paranormal dreaming. They published a large number of scientific articles and summarized their findings in a popular book entitled *Dream Telepathy*, published in 1973. An updated edition was published in 1989.

I could have provided similar background information by referring to Chapter 8 of *Dream Telepathy*, that points out that (prior to his appointment at Maimonides) Ullman was Director of the Community Health Center in New York, in 1962. Clarifying that it was: "with the aid of Gardner Murphy, then Director of Research for the Menninger Foundation,



[where] Ullman was able to obtain funding to establish a dream laboratory" (Ullman, Krippner & Vaughan, 1973, p. 96). Van de Castle's contributions to this work are duly noted in Chapter 11, as he became forever known as "the Prince of the percipients", a story better left to those of us choosing to read *Dream Telepathy*. The story of how Ullman came to be interested in psi research, his first meeting with Murphy and how this led to his current work is the focus of this interview.

Ullman: It was such a miracle in a sense. You must have heard of a psychologist named Gardner Murphy?¹

¹ Gardner Murphy was Director of Research at the Menninger Foundation for 15 years and later a Professor of Psychology at George Washington University. He

Schroll: Yes.

Ullman: I fell in with him when I opened an office in New York City. He was a fabulous human being and his wife Lois was fabulous too, she was a child psychologist. When I had my office in New York City and I was in private practice, Gardner—at the time I first met him—was at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka. Then he gave that up and went to City College of New York, and he had an apartment at City College. He was really a profound and important person in my life.

Schroll: What year was it when you first met Gardner Murphy?

Ullman: It was in 1945 and I do not recall how we met. Except—wait a minute—of course I do, it's come back. One of the most treasured memories I have, but I have to preface this story. In 1932, when I was 16, several friends of mine began reading about psychic phenomena. We ended up having séances every Saturday night. This was our "Saturday Night Live". We never missed a Saturday for two years (1932-1934). We had the most fantastic psychic events happening to us in a darkened room over this period. Everything from questionable creaks, questionable movement, even levitation where we could not get the bridge table down—and we really tried; just kids experimenting, but informed by the masterpieces of psychic phenomena that are still the important ones.

Schroll: J. B. Rhine's work maybe?

Ullman: J. B. Rhine came later. The books we were reading were by authors such as F. W. H. Myers—books that were written around 1920 or 1930—the English wrote more books than authors in the USA. Their British Society for Psychical Research was more firmly grounded than the American Society for Psychical Research was at this time.

Schroll: Is that *The Survival of Consciousness Beyond Bodily Death*, by Myers?

Ullman: Yes, that's a masterpiece; unfortunately I gave that book away to a dear

was one of the first senior American psychologists to give serious attention to parapsychology. He served as President of both the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Society for Psychical Research, and was given the APA's Gold Medal Award in 1973. Among his major books are: *Personality: A Biosocial Approach to Origins and Structure* (New York: Harper, 1947); and *Human Potentialities* (New York: Basic Books, 1958).

friend.

Schroll: So, Myers's book informed your thinking for these Saturday night meetings?

Ullman: Yes, I was a sophomore in my fall term at City College in September 1932. I was walking home with my friend Len and he began telling me that he had been going to séances with other 16-year-old kids, asking if I would like to join them? I vaguely knew what a séance was, as Len proceeded to tell me the whole story. He later gave me books to read by fairly significant scientific figures. Myers's book was of course the "Bible" of books that guided our inquiry.²

Ullman: Are you [speaking to Adam Rock] into parapsychology?

Rock: Yes, I am into parapsychology.

Ullman: Have you ever been down to the Institute for Parapsychology in Durham, North Carolina?

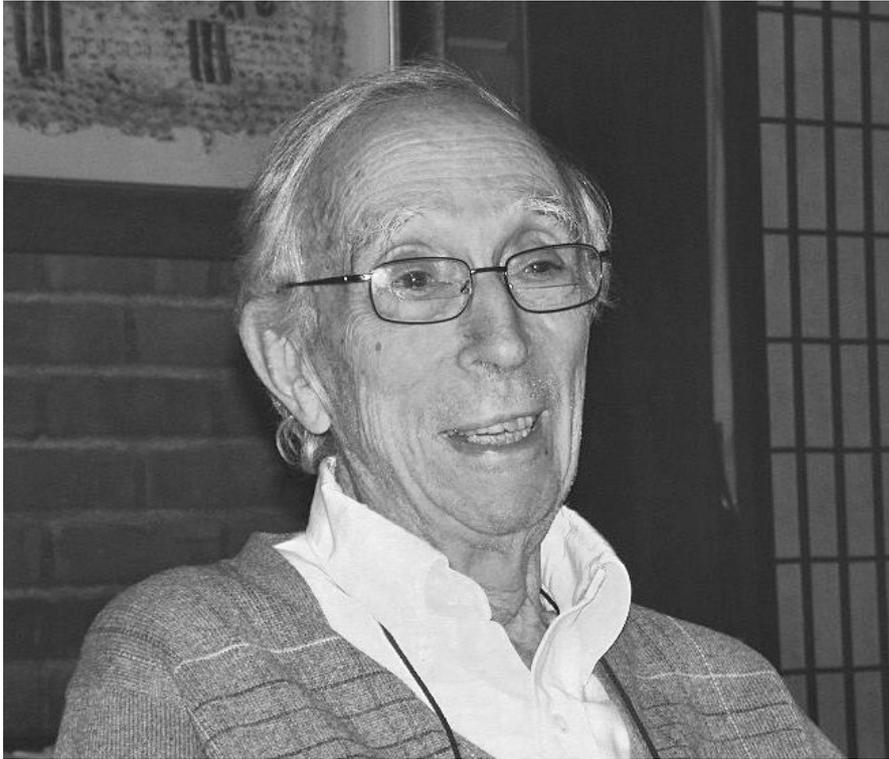
Rock: No, but I have been doing some mediumship research with Julie Beischel at the University of Arizona, and now through the Windbridge Institute for Applied Research in Human Potential. It has been a lot of fun, and very interesting.

Ullman: Great, it takes a bit of doing to take the field seriously.

Schroll: So, this story you told us was a preface to your meeting with Gardner Murphy.

² A very detailed account of these séances can be found in *JASPR*, 95, pp. 57-109 (Ullman, 2001b). The strange accounts that Ullman and his group of friends discuss took on a greater sense of purpose beginning October 7th, 1933, when a discarnate entity and/or a composite personality referring to itself as "Dr Bindelof" contacted the group. Indeed Ullman and his group eventually called themselves "The Bindelof Society". According to Ullman (2001a, p. 11):

The Bindelof experience was the first of my four close encounters with the transcendental dimension of our existence; this in turn prepared the way for my sensitivity to an interest in the occasional telepathic dreams of patients in the course of my experience as a psychoanalyst. It also had much to do with a major career change when I gave up my private practice in 1961 to develop a department of psychiatry at the Maimonides Medical Center and to initiate a sleep laboratory where experimental studies in dream telepathy could be carried on. This third encounter flourished when Stanley Krippner took over the directorship of the laboratory and initiated the systematic studies that followed. The fourth and ongoing encounter is with the occasional telepathic or precognitive dream that comes my way.



Ullman: Well, no—I started my analytical training in 1945, and I finished it in 1947. Then, in 1948, I went on the faculty at Flower Hospital, New York Medical College. It was during this time period that Gardner would get a group of his students, lead them into my office, one at a time, and I would put them into a hypnotic trance or a hypnosis-like state. Then we had prepared drawings that we hoped might get into the brain/mind of the students under hypnosis. We played around with this for about a year or two. We

Ullman: Yes, at that time the American Society for Psychical Research was in a business building. I was on terminal leave, I had been in the war in France, and the very first thing I did, while still in uniform, was to look up the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR). I found the building, with its offices on the 14th floor (they had an elevator strike so I walked up to the 14th floor), and there was only one man in the ASPR loft, and this was Gardner Murphy. I had heard of Murphy from a friend of mine at Columbia University. So, there was Gardner on a Sunday doing some research.

Schroll: It is usually one dedicated person that makes these things happen.

Ullman: Yes. He was a charming guy and very soon the conversation turned to psychic phenomena. I had just opened an office in 1945 to practice psychiatry and Gardner was Department Chair of Psychology at City College. During the course of our conversation we made a bargain. Gardner would bring a bunch of his elite students to my office, one at a time, and put them on my couch. I was a conventional psychoanalyst at this time and we would spend our Saturday mornings trying out telepathic ideas on them, showing these students target pictures and so on.

Schroll: So at this time you had already completed your analytic training?

had a lot of fun with it and had some fairly striking results, and then other things came into the picture.³

Schroll: So you were the Sender, and the subject in a hypnotic-like state, the Receiver?

Ullman: Yes, and Gardner or Lois would prepare or select these drawings. We had a lot of fun with it, but we did not write this up for publication in any serious fashion. This is just how we passed our Saturday mornings.

Schroll: It would have been about this time that you had read Gardner Murphy's book *Personality: A Biosocial Approach to Origins and Structure* (1947).

Ullman: Well yes, his book had just come out on personality, a wonderful book.

Schroll: So this all came together, I mean all these events came together at the same time.

Ullman: Yes, Gardner emerged as a distinguished psychologist who seriously engaged in the support of psychic phenomena, and he was at this time President of the American Society for Psychical Research.

Gardiner: This was before J. B. Rhine?

Ullman: Before, oh no, no, no, J. B. was the one that got the public interested.

³ In an aside comment Monte noted that during this same time he worked with a group of psychoanalysts trained by Karen Horney, and was also involved with the William Alanson White Psychoanalytic Institute.

Gardiner: Were they active at about this same time, Gardner Murphy and J. B. Rhine?

Ullman: Well, they were both professionals at the same time, and part of the same generation. Murphy knew J. B. Rhine and respected him.

Schroll: So is this all taking place during the same time period when you start to think about where dreams originate?

Ullman: Well, I started thinking about dreams with the first patient I had in my office back in 1945, late 1945. Somehow or other, I did not care that much for reality but I liked dreams.

Gardiner: That's a reality!

Ullman: That's a more important reality. So I had wonderful days and nights with Murphy. He was such a wonderful teacher and supporter of young people; his students loved him.

Schroll: Okay, this all went on from 1945, and between this time and about 1962, or there about, how did the Maimonides Center for dream telepathy lab come about? I read that Gardner Murphy helped to raise the money for the dream telepathy lab. Let me recap a bit as I establish a time-line of events. First you start spending your Saturdays with the students from City College coming in, where you put them under hypnosis and then try to send them a target image. So, is this the initial idea that helped you work out the methodology you started with during the initial phase of experiments at Maimonides?

Ullman: Well, no. The original idea was when I was 16 years old.

Schroll: Ah, it goes all the way back to the Bindelof Society.

Gardiner: Were you thinking about dreams then?

Ullman: Well—yes, I was interested in dreams but not professionally, I was only 16.

Schroll: But doing all this—the activities of the Bindelof Society—provided you with some insight into the methodology that you used with Murphy and then at Maimonides. So then the question I have is what were the events that led you to the Maimonides Medical Center? Did you get an appointment there?

Ullman: Well, I never was in full-time psychoanalytic practice. I was engaged in psychoanalytic therapy, but I only spent the afternoons there. I always had my time off in the morning. I spent a couple years doing stroke studies at Bellvue, which—I incidentally suffered a stroke of my own a couple weeks ago.

Schroll: Basically, what I am trying to get at here is to establish a time period and your activities which led you from these early hypnosis experiments with Murphy, to the initiation of experiments with dream telepathy at the Maimonides Medical Center. In other words, because of your experiences with the Bindelof Society, was it you and/or Gardner Murphy that decided the dream telepathy lab could be created at Maimonides?

Ullman: Forgive my ability to properly recall these events, as I am still reclaiming my memory after a recent stroke. A brief answer to your question appeared in a recent issue of *Dream Network Journal*:

In 1961, I made a critical decision that led to my connection with Stan[ley Krippner]. I gave up my [private] psychoanalytic practice to accept a ... position at the Maimonides Medical Center to develop a department of psychiatry there. What was so tempting about the offer was that it held out the possibility of setting up a sleep laboratory to study dream telepathy. The discovery in 1953 of the connection of dreaming to Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep offered the opportunity to capture dreams at the time they occur.⁴ This was precisely what was needed for a dream telepathy experiment (Ullman, 2007, p. 11).

Still, it was not until 1962 that my vision of a dream telepathy lab was fully realized, when through Murphy's contacts at the Menniger Foundation he was able to obtain a grant to fund this project. Then what we proceeded to do was somewhat "illegal", or bent the rules a little. I was working halftime at Maimonides as a clinician, having taken the job because I knew they had some rooms with the equipment I needed.

Schroll: So none of the money funding the dream telepathy lab was from Maimonides?

Ullman: Maimonides gave me two damp rooms to rent in the basement; and no, they did not put a cent in.

Schroll: And they did not know what you were up to—they were not aware there was going to be a dream telepathy lab in the basement?

Ullman: No and they did not care; they were not using these rooms so renting them to me appealed to them.

Schroll: Just two empty rooms.

⁴ In September 1953, Eugene Aserinsky and Nathaniel Kleitman made the connection between eye movement and brain activity.

Gardiner: They had no idea what was going on down there?

Ullman: No, they did not (chuckling), at least not at first.

Schroll: This is an amazing part of the story that is not in the current historical literature.

Ullman: Yes, sad but true; no one at Maimonides was interested, although we did manage to pester Maimonides to give us a soundproof room for our experimenting—otherwise the basement was empty.

Schroll: So the location sounded good, I mean it was a medical centre, thus giving these experiments an added sense of credibility, yet it could have been any room anywhere.

Ullman: (chuckling) Exactly.

Schroll: Brilliant! Maimonides just happened to have the equipment you needed and by having the dream laboratory at a “medical centre” made it sound scientific and credible.

Ullman: Right; then of course Murphy found Stanley Krippner:

He plucked Stan out from his position as director of the Child Study Center at Kent State University in Ohio. So, in 1964, Stan found himself in Brooklyn with the task of organizing a laboratory and developing a research staff. Thus began the nocturnal approach to dream telepathy. It was an experiment that had to be done under airtight conditions that excluded all possible sensory cues to the specific target. Stan was meticulous about this. No one has ever been able to challenge the methodology he worked out to eliminate sensory clues to the target (Ullman, 2007, p. 11).

Schroll: I heard Robert van de Castle talking with Stan Krippner during dinner in 2005, where van de Castle mentioned he had also been considered for the Director of this lab. But this is another story.

Ullman: Oh, van de Castle was “the prince of percipients”, our most successful dream telepathy subject.⁵

Schroll: I’ll see van de Castle again in Montreal.

Ullman: Give Robert my best. Regarding Stan, he did a remarkable job thinking through a program and how to go about getting the best results with the work, which we did. He was someone that could really think through an experimental design, put it into practice and he stuck to it. Meanwhile, I was involved in a

psychiatric unit there that allowed us to rent the basement.

Gardiner: Now Mark’s reference to the basement takes on greater significance.

Schroll: This is an interesting connection that you just made Judy with my dream, the unconscious and the actual two empty rooms in the basement at the Maimonides dream lab. This is at least an aside coincidence worth mentioning when we discuss my dream this summer in Montreal (Schroll, 2008). In the meantime, I want to thank you Monte for this wonderful conversation that we had today.

Ullman: It was my pleasure.

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POSTSCRIPT

Montague Ullman (1916-2008) passed away on Saturday 7th June at 1 p.m., having suffered a second stroke on 5th June, just three days after reading and approving this interview. Thankfully, we were able to finish this. Left unfinished is a longer conversation with Monte that goes into his search for a new abode for dreaming, which was inspired by the holistic or transpersonal physics of David Bohm. I was hoping to go over this longer conversation with Monte in another meeting in late July, 2008. This longer conversation also includes a discussion of David Shainberg’s “non-deterministic” psychotherapy – also influenced by Bohm’s work. Shainberg was a long-time friend of Monte’s and the person that made it possible for Ullman’s 1974 meeting with Bohm in London. All this will be coming out in a [future article](#).

⁵ See Chapter 11, pages 138-153 (Ullman, et al., 1974).