

DREAMTER (DREAM-theaTER)

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What Are Dreams? *

Throughout history, mankind has attempted to understand the purpose of dreams. At a certain stage, scholars began delving into the complex dreaming process itself.

For prehistoric and ancient men, dreams represented a mystic essence, coming from *outside* our minds. They viewed dreams as divine or fateful messages.

Robert and his contemporaries define dreams as a link in the physical process, *inside* our minds, claiming that their role is to distill the human experience by more or less discharging and removing the extraneous elements collected and accumulated during day-to-day experiences.

Freud interprets dreaming as a type of compensation, a process meant to restore the soul's balance in the face of unfulfilled passions and desires (mainly sexual). Dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, which speaks to us in symbols, and they become our own private psychiatrist.

Jung, like his teacher Freud, asserts that dreams lead to the subconscious and also considers its language to be one of symbols. But he adds a universal dimension and emphasizes the role of dreams in resolving mental conflicts and compensating for disappointments and frustrations.

Nearly hundred years after Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900), we have come full circle back to Robert and his contemporaries' view of dreams as a physical activity:

Hobson and McCarley assign the role of neuronal activation-synthesis to dreams, effectively returning to the pre-Freudian period that considered dreaming a biological process.

Crick and Mitchison see dreams as a process of reverse ("un-") learning and repairing the neural network.

Nadel and Payne portray dreams as consolidating memories.

* For a full review of dreaming, see [Wikipedia/dream](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream).

The Meanings of Dreams

To the best of my knowledge, **Robert** was the first to present dreams as a tool for consolidating the experiences of the preceding day and capturing its main impressions, while disposing of irrelevant experiences (like a sculptor using his chisel to remove the layer hiding the sculpture). This school of thought is called the Junk School in the literature. I prefer to call it the Dynamic School, in the sense of dreaming as the last stage in the flow of the mind's life, the flow that begins with absorbing impressions and experiences in a waking state. During sleep and dreaming, the experiences accumulated in our brains from the distant and recent past are processed and stored. Again, sharing this approach, I am trying to elaborate on it and establish a broader evolutionary basis for it.

Our brains are formed of clusters upon clusters of cells nesting within or next to one another like soap bubbles. Each bubble is a category (the origin of categorical thinking). In the dreaming process, impressions undergo "scanning" and sifting in the "dreamer – editing room," weighed according to their informative value and sentenced "*to be or not to be.*" The dreamer, upon finding an experience worthy of being stored, performs a scan to seek a place for it in the proper category, where it will reside until its next review. If no such place exists in the proper category, the dreamer will rebuild the suitable category, diluting and filtering it based on its degree of importance, regardless of the length of its stay. Important impressions will remain and the unessential will be discarded. The bizarre nature of dreams stems from the old and the new being jumbled together in one mix.

The rules and criteria for editing dreams are unknown; we can only guess what they might be. Dream is to the soul as excrement is to body and smoke is to a fire – the last link of the process. Just as excrement lacks nutrients so the dream is devoid of meaning. But still dreams attest to our mind's state like excrement attests to our body's condition. Material perceived as meaningful when awake is not necessarily perceived as such when asleep.

Dreaming as an Outlet

Our brains can be rewired ("brainwashed") by new impressions; the pace of the recombination is like the pace of brainwashing. There is neither conscious nor unconscious but rather accessible and inaccessible, and even the inaccessible may be accessed. Accessibility is possible through hypnosis, meditation, heart-to-heart talking, and chemical and electric touch. The dreaming process has healing power by letting us drain, dispose of and forget disruptive elements in our lives.

The most urgent memories to be disposed of are anxieties and fears that have implanted themselves in our brains, disturbing smooth functioning in our daily lives and paralyzing our will to make decisions and take action. Eliminating them by dreaming is a kind of healing. It could then be surmised that dreaming is the key to recovery. Were it possible to control the "invisible hand" that concocts our dreams, we would be in control of our lives.

The Test and Logic of Dreams

Life impressions are absorbed in fragments (from the infinite world outside us – mass and energy in time and space - to the finite one inside us), but storing them in the brain requires orderly, logical organization that lends them sequence and method. This process enables us to theorize about the world, yet we don't know for sure if the world's orderly patterns originate in the senses or in the mind's capacity.

Dreaming is the last link in a cerebral/mental/physical flow (for a certain size of the material – less than an atom – let's call it mental flow; and from the size of an atom up, let's call it physical flow) and it teaches us nothing but the overload of experiences, extra fears and the stress accumulated from our impressions and memories since way back when, up to the present. All this stored content is emitted from our brains/bodies/minds in the dreaming processes as part of '*dreaming is forgetting and healing*'.

Test Cases of Various Approaches:

1. A Roman emperor executed a man who had dreamt of strangling the emperor. If we attribute a causal, sequential connection between the dream and reality, then the emperor acted based on logic...and if "dreaming is forgetting," then it was not logical.
2. Following is an example of a dream and the different meanings ascribed to it by various interpreters (**Jung**, 1974, "Dreams," Princeton UP, 29):

I was standing in a strange garden and picked an apple from a tree. I looked about cautiously, to make sure that no one saw me.

Proponents of the prophetic nature of dreams will advise: **Abundance that is not yours will come upon you.**

Freudians will say: **You will be able to obtain a woman who is not yours.**

Jungians will mention: **Feelings of guilt** about eating the forbidden fruit; the apple scene – an erotic scene (Jung, 30).

The Dynamists will interpret: **The knowledge inherent in the memory of "picking in a strange garden"** is superfluous and must be discarded. ■