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WHY DO WE DREAM?

It is the most well known—and perhaps infamous—theory of dreams in the Western world. At the turn of last century, Sigmund Freud published his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, arguing that our dreams are nothing more than wishes that we are looking to fulfil in our waking lives. Some of these wishes are relatively innocent, and in these cases our dreams picture the wish just as it is. However, there are other wishes that are so unacceptable to us (such as sexual or aggressive impulses that we can't admit to or act out) that our dreams have to censor them.

Such unacceptable wishes are typically suppressed by the conscious waking mind but turn up in the dream in an unrecognisable and often bizarre way. But with the help of a psychoanalyst and methods like free association, Freud argued, the wish behind the dream could be discovered.

Despite the theory's fame and influence on other psychological theories it has fallen into disrepute in recent years, and been roundly debunked by modern dream scientists. Dozens of theories about why we dream now exist—from helping to process our emotions and strengthening new memories to rehearsing social or threatening situations. But no one theory now dominates, as Freud's once did.

REVEALING EXPERIMENTS

However over the past decade or so, a new series of experiments have begun to demonstrate that at least one part of Freud's theory might have been correct after all: that we dream of things we are trying our best to ignore.

The first of these experiments was conducted by Daniel Wegner, who noticed that when we are trying hard to ignore or suppress a thought, it often just keeps coming back. He suggested that this is because we have two psychological processes at work at the same time when we try to suppress a thought: an operating process that actively suppresses it, and a monitoring process that keeps an eye out for the suppressed thought. Thought suppression is therefore complicated and can only be achieved when the two processes are working together harmoniously.

Marcel Mariën, *Freud*

Valentine Hugo, dream of December 21, 1929

Wegner suggested that these processes might fail during rapid-eye-movement (REM) sleep. During REM sleep parts of the brain that are needed for thought suppression—such as those involved in attention, control and working memory—are deactivated. We know that a large number of our dreams come from REM sleep, so Wegner hypothesised that we would see a lot of suppressed thoughts making a reappearance in dreams.

Interestingly, he managed to test this idea in 2004. In his experiment, participants were asked to identify a person they knew and then to spend five minutes writing a stream-of-consciousness (about whatever came to mind) before going to bed that night. The first group of these participants were told specifically *not* to think about the person during their five minutes of writing, whereas a second group were told to specifically think about them. A third group could think about whatever they wanted. When they woke up in the morning, they all recorded any dreams they could remember having that night. The results were clear: the participants who were instructed to suppress thoughts of a person dreamt of them much more than the participants who were instructed to focus their thoughts on the person and the participants who could think about whatever they wanted. Wegner called this the “dream rebound effect”.

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An Oneiric Library (I)

So, on one of these last nights, while asleep, I was at an open-air market which was taking place near Saint-Malo, where I lay my hands on a curious book. The spine of this book consisted of a wooden gnome whose white beard, carved in the Assyrian style, descended to its feet. The thickness of the statuette was normal and did not prevent one, however, to turn the pages of the book, which were made of thick black wool. I was eager to acquire it and, upon waking up, I regretted not finding it next to me. It would be relatively easy to reconstruct it.

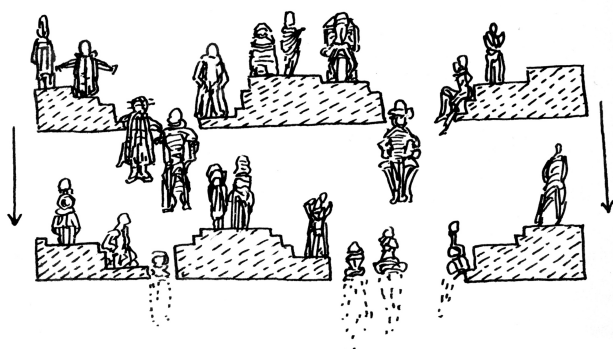
André Breton, in *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality*, 1924

I am reading *The Children of Captain Grant* by Jules Verne. The pages where the action happens at night are blue, and the ones where the action happens during the day are white.

Dan Stanciu, dream of March 11, 1977

I am looking at a painting that depicts a theater stage: the sets are very sketchy, and in the floor there are cut various holes of various shapes and sizes. The floor is very thick and some holes have steps on the edges. On those steps, occupying the holes, there are characters, arranged in such a way that, for most of them, only the upper body is visible, the rest disappearing under the floor.

The painting gets animated and a downward sliding movement brings in front of my eyes a second stage, which was underneath and whose ceiling is the floor of the first stage. This second stage is also pierced by holes that are occupied by other characters who are only visible in part, the rest disappearing under the floor. Above, suspended in the air, one can see the lower bodies of the characters from the first stage.



A new sliding movement downward, and I see another stage, other holes, and other characters that are only partially visible. This descent continues practically to infinity, and I realize that all those overlapping stages are the pages of a book that, while waking up, appears to me to be the Book of the Universe.

Dan Stanciu, dream of February 4, 1977

I am in a bookstore and see the book *How the World Was Mirrored in Antiquity*. It's not a theoretical book, because it shows different inventions and devices, all having mirror properties. It's a big and nicely printed book, but it costs 316 lei, and, unfortunately, I cannot buy it. I buy instead a book written by Captain Andddreddeiddo. The copy that I got has defects, so I return and ask for a different one. However, while walking away, I notice that this second copy is not good either—the pages from 59 to 91 are missing.

Dan Stanciu, dream of October 3, 1982

On a beautiful sunny day, I stroll along a Parisian boulevard, holding tightly in my arms a thick old book, which I have just found at the foot of a building with bricks of the same color as the cardboard cover of this volume (it is the *Complete Works* of Lewis Carroll). Suddenly I cross paths with a passerby, who, noticing the book, comes up to me and introduces himself—

he is Benjamin Péret. He proposes to have a drink in the nearest bar, across the boulevard, and I accept, of course.

Guy Girard, dream of October 22, 1990

I'm visiting a big cemetery in Paris, maybe Père-Lachaise. At the entrance, I'm looking for a map of the cemetery (I'm not looking for a particular grave, but I want to know who is buried there, because, depending on the names that interest me, I can choose my itinerary). However, my attention is drawn to several tombstones representing dogs and cats. They are sculptures, some of them painted realistically, others are in the color of stone or marble, and I realize that the occupants of the graves wanted to be buried with their pets, that either died before them, or later. I'm within a group of several people, they are friends and acquaintances, and we turn at random on an alley where we find that, at least in that part, all the graves are provided with some kind of wooden shelves: some are bookshelves, others are not, some are protected by glass, others are not. On these shelves there are arranged small objects and books. In some places there are only objects, in others only books, and in still other places there are objects and books together—all related, I suppose, to the lives of the deceased, or to some of their thoughts that they wanted to convey beyond death. We look fascinated at these things, read the titles on the spines of the books, some of us pick up a book and leaf through it. In one place, on the protective glass, I see the silhouette of a dog. It is cut from a glass that is thicker than the protective glass, but equally transparent, because I didn't notice it at first glance. It is in a kind of relief, like bas-relief carvings, and is somehow fixed *in*, or *on* the glass on the inside. If one looks through it, one doesn't see the objects behind the glass, but there appear, inscribed in brightly colored circles, various details of the female anatomy (one or both breasts, a hip, a shoulder, a knee, an ankle, etc.), but never a body in its entirety. I talk to someone about how we think this optical trick was achieved. Naturally, the books especially solicit my attention. I see a few that I would like to have, and start lingering more in front of certain graves, hoping that the rest of the group will go far enough so that I can get some books without being seen. But it so happens that, either there are people who remain around me, or there are other visitors who appear from behind, and I cannot take any book. At one point, I am finally alone in front of a shelf, and start browsing a book called *Autour de Jarry*. The book is tempting, it is a very detailed biography of Jarry, but, because it's pretty torn and dirty, I put it back. There appears an old man holding a bag, he kneels in front of the shelf, picks up a book entitled *YALTA*, and drops it in the bag. I leave.

Dan Stanciu, dream of August 16, 1991

Lád'a Fanta and I are going to the library to pick up some books by Karl Marx. The librarian promises that she will take us somewhere where something should be available. We are standing before a dreadfully demolished building. In fact, it is a house Loña Kryvošej and I walk past on our way to the Letná restaurant in Olomouc, where meetings of the "Šternberk group" take place. The librarian warns us not to stomp because there are books lined



up on the stairs. We draw the dust aside with our feet—and indeed, below our feet there are the books lined up with their spines turned upwards. Alongside books, there are also porn magazines. We begin to leaf through these immediately. The lady reminds us that we have come here to look for a different sort of reading. We answer that we need this as well. Suddenly a fat man appears under the staircase and starts yelling at us for being there. The librarian explains to him that we are studying philosophic literature. That doesn't help. The fat guy starts to yell at her too. We are forced to leave. In front of the building she promises we will be allowed to come back. Outside, the fat guy is yelling again and tells us it's going to be demolished, that the whole place will be blown to pieces.

Roman Kubík dream of May 16, 1994

I walk down the street, in Bucharest I believe, by the window of a second-hand bookstore. I know they carry art books there, so I decide to turn back a few steps and enter the store. I am in front of the art books stand, looking at the books. I find several art books on Max Ernst that I have, or I know. It seems to me that I see a black one that I don't know. I try to get it, but it got lost among the other books. I find instead a chapbook of collages by Ernst, that are made from comic strips (black and white). I find more of them, about seven or eight. I want to put them in order, so I can look at them. I realize that, except the first one, they are all color catalogs of Russian realist painters. I set them aside and browse through the first chapbook. It belongs to a cycle of collages by Max Ernst, issued apparently in France, and is the chapbook number 5, titled *Ego*. From the images that I see, I notice a human silhouette outlined by knives. I look for the price, which should be in lei—I expect it to cost about 300 lei.

Sasha Vlad, dream of February 20, 1994

I am in dark basement, which is a book depository (of a bookstore or library). I browse through the books, and when I open one of them I find several small chapbooks inside it. One is by Gellu Naum and is titled *Sand*. Now it is rather big, it has brick-colored covers and many drawings inside, some of them on larger sheets that unfold like maps. There are also poems in facsimile, and some pages are cut out, vaguely resembling butterflies. On the last page there is a drawing by Gellu Naum (the book has illustrations by other people too, but I know that this one is by him). The drawing represents a head seen in profile: a man (who I know is smoking, although I don't see a cigarette or a pipe) wearing a fur hat. He is a shaman. The drawing is rather small, on the lower part of the page, but it continues on the rest of the page, multiplying the same image. Behind me, Virgil Teodorescu appears, who is looking at the book over my shoulder. "Ah, this is one of our books!" he says.

Sasha Vlad, dream of July 7, 1995

I am with my wife and children somewhere on Van Ness Avenue (in San Francisco), and at one point we enter a building. There is a garage sale there, with all kinds of objects, most of them new and of the same kind, as though factory made. I see a shelf with books. I look at the books for a bit, but when I turn around to see where are my wife and children, the room is completely deserted. I pick from the shelf a medium-sized book, which is a manual of the Russian language written in Swedish. It has very interesting illustrations: very fine drawings that are distorted, with forced perspectives, etc. The drawings are splendid, and the book is, actually, in comic strips (three images disposed vertically on each page). I want to purchase it to use it for my collages. I see that near the bookshelf there is an older lady lying down on a bed, as if ready to go to sleep. I talk a little with that lady about the book that I have found.

Sasha Vlad, dream of February 23, 1998

I'm somewhere in the countryside, in the hall of a school or community center. I am there for the launch of a book that I did in collaboration with Dan Stanciu and Iulian Tănase, who are there too. The book has texts and drawings, the latter being made, I think, by Iulian. I open my copy and see that some larger letters are filled with drawings. Dan also has his copy, which he opens, and finds several drawings in the text. He modifies them using a pen that writes with invisible ink.

Marie-Dominique Massoni must also be there. I'm looking for her in the crowd gathered in the hall, but cannot find her. I can hardly move around, because, apart from people, there are many tables and beds in there.

I ask Dan and Iulian if we are going to have something to eat. Dan says that he brought some apples. He opens a briefcase full of green apples, and I pick one. I go into another room, still searching for Marie-Dominique. In that room too there are many people waiting to start a ceremony, but I think it's

about something else, not the launch of our book. I go back to the big hall filled with lots of people, beds and tables. I see Dan again, and want to ask him something, but I see that he just lay under a table to sleep. I think to myself that he's tired, and leave him alone. On one of the beds I see again his briefcase, and two books sticking out of it. One, which is black and narrow, I know: it's an older collaboration of ours. The other one, I don't know: the format is more wide than tall, it's quite thick (it has about 300 pages), and is written by Dan. It's used, with bent corners, and when I leaf through it, I have the impression that there are a few pages missing too. The title of the book is *Lucruri* (Romanian for "Things"), and it's actually a kind of anthology compiled by Dan, which includes material that appeared initially in the publication that he works for. On the cover there is a kind of index, and I see my name followed by the digit 7. I open the book to page 7, but find nothing regarding me there. I go back to the front pages, which are full of all sorts of charts, as though for combinatorial games, and tables. In a table I read "am propus/'ai proposé" (the book is, I infer, bilingual, in Romanian and French). I don't understand a thing of those combinatorial games that look very technical, but leaf on through the book. Somewhere, about in the middle, I come across some comics. I realize, in this particular case, what this is about: combinatorial games with comics. Two different comics (in style and narrative) are combined into one, thus giving rise to all sorts of unusual combinations of text and image. I like very much the result and admire Dan for this idea.

Sasha Vlad, dream of February 9, 2006



On the wall in a castle hangs a painting in a richly carved and gilded frame. Next to each other, in the chiaroscuro of the Baroque style are painted two open books, leaning against a kneeling desk and adorned with little noble crowns on their bookmarks. On the picture's frame there is a plate, saying: *Princes*.

Martin Stejskal, dream of October 9, 1999

I have this idea of writing a book about an imaginary surrealist group composed of two women and one man. In this way, I can ascribe to those characters all kinds of ideas and works that wouldn't be mine. The motto of the book should be this aphorism of one of its characters: "If you walk a lot, your eyes hurt. If you see a lot, you don't dream much."

Sasha Vlad, dream of November 27, 2009

I give to Dan Stanciu as a gift a book of about 100 pages in the Romanian language, that I made a *détournement* of by collaging photos in it. I don't know the book's title or author, only the name of the publishing house: "Sun and Moon." On the title page, above that name, there is a small logo that looks a bit medieval, representing the Sun and the Moon.

Sasha Vlad, dream of March 26, 2010

I dreamed that I was reading a book called *News from the Already Dead*. When I woke up I couldn't remember any of the contents, although I had a vague feeling that some of it had been to do with trains.

Merl Fluin, dream of December 15, 2010

(to be continued)

O N E I R I C E C H O E S

As keen observers of all things oneiric, we couldn't ignore the grand exhibition titled *Le Rêve* ("The Dream") that was presented recently at the Cantini Museum in Marseilles. Very ambitious in its scope, the exhibition was described as a sensational event, which was reviewed favorably by art critics and was attended in large numbers by the public. Why this theme and why now? "Because there are no limits to the dream. And because it is needed in our times." explains Christine Poullain, one of the curators of the show. We couldn't agree more. Let's take a closer look, however, at the way oneiric phenomena were addressed in this instance.



Claude Lévêque, *Rêvez!* ("Dream!"), 2008

Occupying several floors of the museum, the show was organized according to the following seven dream-related stages: "Sleep," "Night," "Dream," "Fantasy," "Nightmare," "Hallucination," and "Awakening." This rather artificial approach (since some of these stages—or, more appropriately, subthemes—do not belong to the dream *per se*) enables the display of almost a hundred works of art, from Goya to present day artists. It is a rare occasion for the art lover to be in the company of famous names, such as Gustave Moreau, Chagall, or Picasso, and among these names, the "classic"

surrealists get, evidently, the lion share: Dalí (alas!), Ernst, Magritte, Tanguy, Miró, etc. And yet, what the curators and the public fail to see is that most, if not all, of these works of art are only "about" dreams, or have a "dream-like" appearance—they are not direct representations of dreams. Actually, what we have here is just a mediated treatment of the dream. More than that: it is an attempt at taming the dream, with its mysterious and perturbatory functions, either by relegating it to the simple role of inspiring the creation of art (which was, of course, to be expected, given such a venue), or by presenting it as yet another commodity to be desired.

Needless to say, we will never subscribe to such debasement of dreams!

After having published several dreams about Marcel Duchamp (in Dreamdew #4, with follow-ups in #5, and #6), we are pleased to acknowledge yet another one of his oneiric apparitions, this time in a recent dream of Joël Gayraud:

Walking down the street on Rue du Puits de l'Ermite in Paris, I notice an old shop with a sign saying REPAIRS OF ALL TYPES. On the shop window, in white letters arranged in a semicircle and stuck on the glass, I can read: MENDINGS AND HEELS. It is, therefore, a place where clothes are mended and shoe heels are repaired. As the inner pocket of my coat has a hole in it, I think it's time to get it mended. I push the door of the shop and happen upon Marcel Duchamp, who is busy fastening thick black waxed threads, probably made of leather, to a wooden board. He greets me and then asks me if I went to the Breteuil Pavillon. I tell him that I went there the day before, and that I took advantage of that to do a little horse-riding. He then shows me the threads and specifies that they will be used to sew the mares' vulvas, so they resist the assaults of stallions and stop their ardor.

Dream of January 10, 2017

(continued from page 1)

Since that experiment, we've learned a lot more about the dream rebound effect. For example, it has been found that people who are generally more prone to thought suppression experience more dream rebound, and that suppressing a thought not only leads to more dreams about it, but also to more unpleasant dreams.

In some of my recent research, I found that people who generally try to suppress their thoughts not only dream about their emotional experiences from waking life more—in particular unpleasant situations—but also have worse sleep quality and higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression than others. In fact, we know now that suppressing thoughts is related to a whole host of mental health concerns.

Because of this, we really need to better understand what happens to thoughts when we try to suppress them. Paying attention to our dreams, then, could help us to identify things in our lives that we're not paying enough attention to that are causing us problems. This may mean that there is merit to exploring dreamwork in therapy. In fact, recent research has shown that exploring dreams is an effective way of obtaining personal insight – both in and out of therapy settings.

THE VERDICT ON FREUD

There are still plenty of aspects of Freud's theory of dreaming that haven't been (and can't be) tested empirically. It's possible to argue that fulfilment is involved in almost any dream, but it's impossible to prove or disprove it. In later writings, Freud admitted that the theory could not account for all types of dreams, such as the nightmares associated with post traumatic stress disorder. His theory also takes the agency of the dream interpretation away from the dreamer and into the hands of the analyst, which is at odds with ethical



Marcel Mariën, *The Bench of Dream*

guidelines for dreamwork that are now typically followed.

Nevertheless, some aspects of the theory have stood up to experimentation—for example, dreams from REM sleep are full of aggressive interactions, which Freud could have used as evidence of suppressed aggressive impulses playing out in our dreams.

So while the exact extent to which Freud's theory about dreams was correct remains unclear, in at least one respect, it looks like he got it right after all: dreams really are the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious—where banished thoughts live on.

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