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Both the dreamer and the actor have to learn how to swim about in their own unconscious domain. This is a gravity-free zone. Our ordinary relationship to the three dimensions of space and the dimension of time no longer applies.

ON DREAMS AND ART: PART V

DREAMERS ARE SPEAKING: ACTORS LISTEN!

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

We are now ready to look into the question of how dream work might be of benefit to the actor. Before doing that, however, I would like to recapitulate what I have covered in the earlier segments with regard to the analogy of acting and dream work.

To resort to a metaphor to highlight this analogy, let us assume that the task for both actor and dreamer is to survive while learning how to swim under water for longer than one ordinarily does. They both find themselves having to adapt to an environment qualitatively different from what they are accustomed to awake.

Survival under water requires a different source of energy. Awake, that energy is derived from the

food we digest and the oxygen that is so readily available to us. Asleep and dreaming we also need an energy source, but the source of the nourishment and the oxygen take a very different form. To understand this we have to be more explicit about where the metaphor is taking us.

The watery domain in which we find ourselves is the unconscious domain of our existence. The source of our nourishment is entirely within us in the form of our memory, our imagination, and our intuitive and empathic potential. The fuel that ignites this source is our intrinsic creativity, a natural if underused feature of the unconscious domain. It now becomes our task to get at that hidden source

of oxygen/creativity, to act on that internal source of nourishment/imagination, etc. and transform it into the unique array of revealing/healing imagery we call the dream. The extent we leave our waking self behind (e.g., our concern with the risk of danger in going too deep or our self-doubt about not finding sufficient oxygen/creativity), we swim about more freely and more confidently.

To put it more concisely, both the dreamer and the actor have to learn how to swim about in their own unconscious domain. This is a gravity-free zone. Our ordinary relationship to the three dimensions of space and the dimension of time no longer applies. Our metaphorical muscles are called into play to cre-

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ate imagery than transforms space into emotional closeness or distance and transforms time into imagery that links past, present and future. The dreamer begins with a recent feeling residue and searches out its connections to past residues. The actor begins with his spontaneous feelings about the role, and with the help of sense memory, searches out relevant experiences from the past.

Another feature of this gravity-free zone is that we can either swim close to the surface—the dreamer having a common dream such as registering the need to urinate; the actor having a part that doesn't make too many demands on his or her emotional resources—or head into the depths that require both the dreamer and actor to reach into the very core of their being. Actors agree that when playing a part in a movie, they are engaging in something that is larger than life. This can also be said of the dreamer who, bypassing ego concerns, succeeds in confronting the feelings embedded in the metaphorical imagery.

In many ways, as we swim about in this unconscious watery domain, we enter into a realm that, compared to the waking state, is more spontaneous, more interesting, more informative

witness what goes on in a dream group in the hope of making the analogy a bit more concrete. Bear in mind that not being there and participating in the exchange, it is only like watching a pallid

understand how upsetting it was to kill all those bees.'

"Now there is no more white board. Someone says now there will be more money for teachers' salaries if we don't invest in these things (the boards). The board comes from New Mexico."

Comment

No one person is under any pressure to share a dream. It is a purely voluntary act. It is the dreamer and the dreamer alone who decides to share a dream and which dream to share. That choice is based on the dreamer's interest in and curiosity about the dream. The actor also is in the position of making a choice as to whether or not to accept a role being offered. Here, too, there is some special feeling about the role that influences the choice.

In the next stage the dreamer listens while the group makes the dream its own, talks about the dream as its own and comes up with whatever feelings and meanings it can bring to the imagery and the story being told in the dream. Without

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and often more enjoyable. Until both dreamer and actor learn they cannot only survive but also enjoy life under water, they need to know there are life preservers around in the form of the supportive structures that others provide. The reality is that once we dive in, we don't know in advance what depth we will reach. The water, of course, has to be kept free of pollutants. For the dreamer these are à priori theoretical ideas about what a given image means. For the actor it is bringing a judgmental bias to the character being portrayed.

At this point I'm going to invite an actor to

video replay of an actual scene. I will describe the unfolding of the group process in connection with the dream of a woman in her mid-forties. A comment in connection with each stage of this process will highlight the correlations between dream work and acting. We begin with the presentation of the dream.

"I am in school and there are bees buzzing around the white board with vocabulary words written on it. I kill six of the bees which are on me. Then I tell Leo (my husband) how upset I have been. He thinks I am kidding. I begin to cry and say, 'No, you don't

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knowing the dreamer's personal associations to the dream, these are simply their own projections offered in the hope that one or another may strike the dreamer as helpful.

Here are some of the projections the group came up with:

"I'm in school in a learning situation."

"I'm upset."

"I feel terrible killing the bees."

"I'm protecting the white board, yet it disappears. I'm confused."

"Six 'B' people."

"The white board has words that can be erased. I want to take back my words and my actions."

"My kids at age of six."

"Learning of sex as a child, of the birds and bees. Killing my own sexiness."

"I'm not interested in sex with Leo."

"I want the white board to disappear. They are only words. I'm feeling unappreciated for the work I do. People are taking something away from me."

"New Mexico suggests change, a new me,

more freedom."

"White and black. Truth and untruth."

"I didn't get bitten by the bees."

Comment

This is only a pump-priming exercise. It doesn't matter how many, if any, of the group's projections hit home. It is our hope that some will be helpful for the dreamer, but at the very least they open up a range of possible areas for the dreamer to consider.

Even when they are wrong, they sometimes have the effect of defining what the dreamer doesn't feel, bringing the dreamer closer to what she does feel.

The actor also starts in a pump-priming way, learning all he or she can about the character from others or through research and the help from all those involved in creating an atmosphere that facilitates their identification with the character. This includes costume designers, coaches, set designers, etc., as well as the help from the director and co-actors. For both actor and dreamer, it takes input from the outside to help ease into the work to be done from the inside.

Let's see where the dreamer stands after this exercise, when she is now invited to share her own associations and thoughts about the dream. Now begins the work from within.

"A lot came up from all that you (the group) said. I made connections I had not made before. My names means bee in Hebrew. Actually, the insects in the dream were between bees and wasps. Wasps are more aggressive and sting when they are mad. Bees sting to protect the hive. They sacrifice their lives for that. They work for the good of the whole. They are concerned with mothering their young. I was recently reading *The Life of the Bee*.

"I recall, at five, a day in the Catskills and the excitement I felt at being in the country. Suddenly I saw a wasp on my hand. I was scared. In my fear and innocence I whacked at it. It stung me. That's the way, as a child, I experienced my father's aggression towards me. It seemed to come out of nowhere, but I felt responsible for it somehow. My arm really

blew up from that bite.

"In the dream, the white board came from New Mexico. My sister lives there. I had a terrible fight with her about the family inheritance when my father died. A client of mine who just visited New Mexico reminded me of her. I have hardly talked to my sister in 10 years. I felt abused by her at that time as by my father. I recall screaming into the phone how hurt I was by her.

"When my mother was sick, it was I who had to take care of her. My sister was never there. I felt like an only child. Then, when my father died, my sister wanted me to give her the whole inheritance, as if she were the only child. Although I didn't need it as much as my sister did, my parents had said they felt they had abused me by not helping me to pay for college and they wanted to make it up to me. So they left me half. I wanted to honor what my parents wanted, and what I felt I needed emotionally, yet realizing that my sister needed the money, I only kept 10% instead of half. But she said she

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didn't care what "stupid reason" they had for leaving me money. "You (the group) were so "right on" about my feeling guilty. I didn't have the words then to talk it through with my sister. I was so hurt that I resorted to crying and screaming. It was a horrible experience. Her tone was so vicious, it cut me to the quick. I felt stung by her and stung her back by withdrawing from her. In a way, I lost a part of my own life. At the time I had to protect myself, but lately I have started to feel what a loss that has been. I robbed myself of whatever relationship there could have been between us. I think this brought back the memory of the wasp. It feels like the wasps are my aggression which can protect, but can injure too.

"The night before my father died in New Mexico, although I didn't consciously know he was dying, I dreamt of his death. In part of the dream, he lifted a hammer. Either my mother pushed me in the way of it, or I pushed her out of the way (or both) and I took the blow on my

shoulder. I had protected my mother all my life. I felt the blow reverberate in my entire body. I had taken on the family anger. I think it's mine to heal now.

"Six was my favorite number as a little girl. I used to say I wanted six children, six dogs, and six horses. In the dream there are six people. My family now consists of four. Then there's my sister and her companion Sam. I adored Sam. My children missed out on having a relationship with their aunt and with Sam. It's sad. It was a loss for everybody. I saw the situation then as black or white in terms of self-protection. I didn't have the vocabulary then to deal with it. In a way I thought I was sacrificing myself for the good of the hive."

In response to questions put to her by the group, the dreamer brought out more of the recent emotional context that set the stage for the dreams.

"The dream occurred just before a session with my analyst. I had had no

dreams for a while. Then this night I had one dream after another. I had been working on my anger toward my analyst. I had taken a long trip up to see him and we were supposed to have a two-hour session. He had to shorten the session to one hour. I was angry, but I wanted to cover over my feelings. Rationally, I could understand his decision, but the little girl in me felt hurt and upset.

Comment

The dreamer got enough from the projections of the group to set her going in a number of different directions. The associations to the dream were now richer than she could have brought out on her own. She touched on events in her current life as well as connections that reached back into her past. The pump has been primed. We are now ready to take a closer look at what is ready to gush out and, to mix metaphors, what further light can be shed on the images in the dream.

At this point, having gone as far as she can with the dream on her own

and in response to the stimulation resulting from the group's projections, the dreamer is invited to more carefully explore each image in the dream in its relevance to waking life, present and past. The dream is now read back to the dreamer one scene at a time. She is now in possession of more information than she had before and thus in a position to see more connections between dream and reality.

The first scene (first paragraph) was read back.

"I went back to my high school several months ago. Perhaps that's where the white board came from. It's an all black area now, an area of poverty and deprivation, just as I feel a poverty in myself. There was violence in the school even when I was there."

The rest of the dream was read back.

"Words were said on the board that came from New Mexico. It had to do with how much I miss my sister. I want to forgive the past, what hap-

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pened. People can change.

"The client I mentioned reminded me of my sister and New Mexico. She stirred up thoughts of my sister, the possibility of writing to her and what it would mean to me."

Comment

The playback of the dream heightened the main issue, the volcanic eruption of the dreamer's rage at her sister, the price she paid for it, and the current thought of now working it through more constructively. She, herself, had gotten to the essence of the dream. Would her own emotional growth help to make a new start?

For the actor, rehearsal serves the same refining purpose. The character being portrayed comes more alive in the presence of and with the help of all the others involved in putting finishing touches to the scene. Just as dream images assume a reality for the dreamer, the character assumes a reality to the actor. In both instances, dream and character say things that often surprise their creator!

There is a final stage to the process where a few additional touches from the group help to bring it all together for the dreamer. Any group

of sadness and loss away."

Group member:

"Your client stirred up a deep and still ongoing issue, how to deal with ag-

gression coming from others without 'killing' the other. It was profoundly disturbing and neither your husband nor your analyst could give you enough relief in this situation. You dreamt about it and brought the dream to the dream group, perhaps a new and potentially helpful 'school.' The dream group became the container for many submerged feelings after the incident with your sister.

their unconscious domain and the extent to which they depend on it in giving depth and spontaneity to the part they are playing. They are also very aware of the psychological blocks in the way of effectively reaching into this domain. When they do succeed, however, in taking that "leap of faith" they experience a true sense of connection, not only to their co-actors, but beyond that to the audience who will ultimately be the judge.

If the analogy I have drawn between acting and dream work has any meaning, then the question arises: Could dream work contribute to the actor's understanding of and connection to this subterranean terrain? There are, indeed, several reasons to think it can.

Here are a few features of dream work that might prove helpful to actors.

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member who feels he can offer any further clarifying comment to the dreamer about any aspect of the dream takes this opportunity to do so. It is offered as the group member's own projection and remains a projection unless it is validated by the dreamer. When these projections are validated by the dreamer/director, it's as if the entire orchestra is in tune with its director. In fact, I refer to this as the orchestration stage. Here are two examples offered to the dreamer:

Group member:

"Your sense of fairness and decency comes through. 'The moving hand, having written, moves on.' You can't wash the feeling

Comment

For the actors, there is the last take that results in the word all actors love to hear—"PRINT."

As Mike Nichols and others have noted, actors are very much aware of

1. It would serve to demystify the unconscious domain. It would become known for what it is, a natural healing system working for the benefit of the individual in the same sense that our

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various bodily systems do. Its concern is with the repair and maintenance of emotional "tissue" rather than with our various physical organs. It does this repair by exposing emotional sore spots, mobilizing our resources, and by confronting us truthfully with aspects of ourselves that are in need of attention. It is every bit as useful to our survival as human organisms as our physiological systems are with our physical survival. Like our various bodily organs, it operates outside the range of our waking ego.

2. Far from being a container of repressed demons, the unconscious domain is a never-ending source of creativity capable of registering and responding to the outcropping of novel experiences as they occur in waking life. All too often we cast a blind eye on novelty in favor of maintaining a given status quo. Our dreams provide us with an alternative. Novelty requires novel solutions. It's as simple as that. Simple, yes, but easy no. Change is diffi-

cult but never impossible. It only becomes impossible when we fail to recognize the need for changes. That's where our dreams come in.

3. Our dreams prepare us for change. Dreaming consciousness provides us with a far richer source of memories and a more lively imagination than are readily available to us awake. We put those resources to good use in our dreams in a language no one has taught us. Metaphor is the language of feelings. Asleep and dreaming, our feelings are captured in metaphorical imagery. Awake, they are expressed poetically or through artistic expression. The remarkable thing about it is that we have a never-ending source of fresh metaphorical imagery in our dreams, at least until we take our last breath.

We are not the masters of this unconscious

domain, but at least we can come to friendly terms with it. There is

much to be gained from the knowledge it contains of who we really are and of our behavior toward others. I have outlined what I consider to be the basic

features of this domain. Dreams are, as Freud put it, the royal road to the unconscious.

Can we be more specific about how the features of group dream work can find ready application to the craft of the actor? Solutions to life's problems that elude us awake are more readily addressed in our dreams. An interpersonal tension and its underlying cause can become more transparent in a dream and thus create the possibility for change. Such tensions arise in any group endeavor, and certainly acting is no exception. Success depends on group cohesiveness. Aside from tensions that might arise

among the members of the team, might a dream come in handy when an actor encounters a particularly troublesome area in identifying with the character he or she is portraying?

Actors grow in their work, not only in their skills but as persons. Group dream work is oriented to personal growth and sets the conditions for it to occur. Anyone who shares and works it through with the help and support of the group comes away feeling both humble and enhanced. Humble because we alone don't have all the answers to our personal problems, and enhanced because deepening ties to others results in personal growth. In honestly sharing a dream with others, one is seen for who one is, warts and all. To be met with respect, caring, and help is to experience a depth of connection to others that can only be described as love. And we all know that love is the prerequisite for emotional growth. You can't dislike anyone who has the courage to honestly share and work with a dream. ❖



DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

HEALING DREAM WORK AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

BY WENDY PANNIER

The events of September 11 have changed our lives and, for many of us, have had an impact on our dream life as well. Even those not directly touched by the tragic events, have found themselves with disturbed sleep and disturbing dreams. As I have worked through my own troubled dreams and those of friends and members of my dream group, I would like to put forth what I believe is the positive and healing role dreams can play — if we let them.

Monte gave a speech at the Association for the Study of Dreams conference in 1995 on *Dreams and the Politics of Connectedness* that made a deep impression on me. I would like to share parts of it with you, and my thoughts about how this ties in to current events.

At this point in our history we seem to be generating situations that are getting messier and more and more resistive to anything our current generation of leaders seem able to do about it. So far there do not appear to be any effective answers to the increase in violence at an individual, societal and international level, or to a growing level of ecological damage that outstrips our efforts to contain it. We seem to be caught up in what might be called the disastrous politics of disconnectedness, a politics

that has led to alienation, cynicism and resignation.

Yes, the terrorists are obviously disconnected from mainstream humanity. But in what ways are each of us also disconnected? Can dreams serve as an adaptive survival mechanism that can help us improve the connectedness in our lives? What implications might this have for our world?

Monte addresses this by saying:

The survival task ultimately comes down to the way individuals in the culture relate to each other and this, in turn, determines the way different cultural groupings relate to each other. The task goes directly to the heart of the adaptive function of dreaming consciousness. Dreams zero in on areas of disconnects between ourselves and our past and

ourselves and others. Anything that continues to interfere with that quality of connectedness in our lives, be it trivial or life-threatening, becomes the organizing focus of dream content. This is not to say that our dreams cannot be positive, full of fun and openings to treasures within us that we have hardly been aware of. The important point is that, in order to enhance our connectivity to others, it is time to connect with our dreams.

Sharing dreams in groups, even small

groups, fills an important social need. It allows us to explore and undo unresolved residual tensions that have led us to disconnect within ourselves and with others. This empowers not only the dreamer, but also the people in the group who are empowered as they develop the skills needed to become healers for each other.

I am sure many of you who have participated in dream groups have seen disconnects become connects and have seen the healing that can occur,

The Association for the Study of Dreams has created an extensive section on its website (ASDreams.org) on nightmares, with information for individuals, parents, clinicians and trauma workers.

ASD has also joined with cyberdreamwork.com to create a national nightmare hotline for adults and children impacted by the terrorist events.

If you know someone who has been troubled by their dreams since September 11, these resources may be helpful to them.

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not just for the dreamer but for the other members of the group as well. What one person dreams can resonate with many others, reminding us of our interconnectedness.

In the same talk Monte said:

Asleep and dreaming, we forsake linguistic categories as a primary mode of expression. We risk feeling our way back into this underlying unity and set ourselves the task of exploring both internal and external hindrances to the full range of the manifest order and its rootedness in

a deeper order of connectedness.

Since the events of September 11, more people are aware of their dreams and talking about them than ever before.

There is an opportunity — a responsibility — for those of us doing dream work to reach out and share our knowledge. If you have been thinking about starting a dream group, perhaps now is a good time to do so. If you are already in a dream group, perhaps you could consider opening it to new members.

There is healing that we can bring about by the dream work we do, and it could extend far beyond the dreamers in our groups. As we each heal our own disconnects, we

make our contribution to the interconnectedness of the species which in turn, combined with other efforts, could help us move toward species unity and world peace. ❖

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

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