

Dream Appreciation

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In short, what actors need is someone who, in a non-authoritarian way, can be helpful and supportive.

ON DREAMS AND ART: PART VI

LAST ANALOGY:

DIRECTOR AND DREAM GROUP LEADER

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

As long as there have been movies, there have been movie directors. In connection with movie-making, I have alluded to the director earlier, but never singled him out for special attention as the one responsible for creating and maintaining an atmosphere most favorable for a successful outcome.

Although that role has evolved over the years and there are individual directorial styles, the general consensus is that the essence of the job is to tap into the talent of the actors to the fullest extent possible, enabling them to give depth and meaning to the script they are collectively working on. That collectivity involves a match between the creativity of the director oriented to the overall task of bringing the script to life and the creativity of the actors making their individual contribution to that

task. That unique level of collaborative pooling of creativity results in a bonding that has all the elements of whatever we mean by the word love. My earlier reference (Part IV) to Mike Nichols speaks to this in his reliance on and faith in his unconscious to come up with novel solutions to the many novel predicaments that arise in so complex an undertaking as making a movie.

I also referred to what actors openly and intuitively need from a director. In short, what they need is someone who, in a non-authoritarian way, can be helpful and supportive. Let's hear from the actors themselves about this.

Ron Howard

"Don't make a puppet

out of people. Turn them loose. Give them their head. You have cast the best people but they are still vulnerable. They need someone they can trust."

Willem DaFoe

"The director has to have an overview, give you a setup and see what you can do. Scorsese gave me such a beautiful setup. He provided me with a great place to pretend. He made room for pretending."

Sigourney Weaver

"Work with the actor to find the essence of her self and help her stay out of her head."

Ellen Burstyn

"Actors want freedom and the recognition of what they are up against. They want respect for

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Note:

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them as people as well as professionals. They need help and support and to be dealt with honestly. They want a director to be straight with them, take them seriously and be understanding of the actor's craft. They want to be stimulated and pushed in a direction they wouldn't go by themselves."

Danny Glover

"The director should be helpful without being intrusive. He should have a way of saying the right thing at the right time. Actors are vulnerable and should be kept in the comfort zone. He should make me a better actor. I don't want to be humiliated. He should have faith in you."

Harrison Ford

(On Mike Nichols)
"His approach is that of a charming host. He is one of the most brilliant manipulators of actors. He is so clear and insightful. You never felt his hand on your shoulder. He helps you do the right thing and feel it's the only choice you can make. He makes you want to be a member of the team."

Cathy Bates

"He should be smart and have been there before

me. He should have guts and passion and know how to work with actors. Acting is a lonely task. You need someone like Mike Nichols to be there for you, someone who comes from the acting profession. He knows everything

There are two guiding principles that structure the process of the dream group. Taken together they encompass what actors seek in the directors they work with: The Safety Factor and the Discovery Factor.

about everything. He is there waiting for me. He gets inside the character. He has a tremendous amount of love for the character. He has faith in my ability."

Jennifer Lee

"I want openness and trust. I don't like the feeling of being straight-jacketed. I want him to see things in me I didn't know were there."

Gene Wilder

"I want gentleness with actors because they understand actors. They should never shout at them."

Ellyn Barker

"I want them to help me become a better actor. I don't want to be humiliated."

Robert DeNiro

"Scorsese had a great respect for actors and knew how to get the best out of them."

Jack Lemmon

"I want them to be responsive to my suggestions

and let me try them out. Oliver Stone is a deeply passionate man. Passion is involved in anything worthwhile."

Susan Sarandon

"I want the director to create an atmosphere where creative processes can go on."

Goldie Hawn

"The director writes the music and I hit the notes."

Mary Stuart Masterson

"I want a director to be open and generous. I want to feel trusted. Don't tell me what to do. That makes me feel self-conscious. There should be intimacy and trust that we are on a journey and will encounter weird places on the way."

James Wood

The director has to be passionate about doing the picture."

Lee Grant

"I like a director who trusts me, who can surprise me and who is open to my suggestions."

Holly Hunter

"The ideal (seldom occurs) is that of a perfect marriage where the needs of both are met with ease and constancy."

Meg Ryan

"I don't like to be heavily directed. Let me do it my way. Let me be bad. Let me be good."

Angelica Houston

"I would like the director to love and appreciate the actor. I would like to be helped to move in the right direction."

Kim Basinger

"The director should know what he wants and to know what you don't know yet. At the same time he gives you freedom and is comforting."

Tim Robbin

"I want the director to respect my opinion and say, 'If you have a better idea, do it.' It becomes a community effort. The

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director's vision without the actor is nothing. Actors bring life, heart and humanity to the film."

Comment

There are two guiding principles that structure the group process of the dream group. Taken together they encompass what actors seek in the directors they work with. The first is designed to generate and maintain the feeling of trust in the leader and in the process that is to unfold. I refer to it as the Safety Factor. It calls attention to the fact that if the dreamer is to pursue and expose the feelings that shaped the images of the dream, he or she has to feel perfectly safe in doing so.

The task of getting to the unconscious roots of the dream is difficult and often involves the vulnerability associated with risk-taking. The task of creating the necessary level of trust for this to occur requires a second principle, the Discovery Factor. For the "comfort zone" necessary for the dreamer to successfully find the way back to the dream, the help offered to the dreamer by the leader and the group is shaped by the need to maintain the Safety Factor.

At the point, for example, when the group engages in a dialogue with the dreamer, there is a fine art in

the way questions are put to the dreamer. They are meant to be helpful without every being intrusive. They are not information-demanding questions where ordinarily one would expect an answer, but are offered as instruments for the dreamer to use in exploring his or her own psyche. The question may or may not turn out to be useful. If it is useful, it still is the dreamer's decision as to what to share. The important point here is that the dreamer is never obliged to share more than he or she feels comfortable sharing.

It is this respect for the dreamer's authority over the unconscious domain that frees the dreamer to do the necessary exploratory work. It is the dreamer's own interest and curiosity that drives the process without any outside authority standing in the way. No one is required to share a dream. It is an voluntary act on the part of anyone in the group, including the leader. In the case of the latter, it is analogous to Woody Allen taking the double role of director and actor. The mutual sharing at this level of honesty and intimacy generates the feelings referred to by the actors as the closeness of a team, and the feeling of family. When you get down to it, a palpable sense of loving energies is liberated.

This is not unique to dream work. It occurs wherever creative energies can flourish.

The role of the leader in a dream group is unique in only one sense. The leader is responsible for seeing that the structure by means of which safety and help are maintained remains intact. He differs from the director who usually does not assume an acting role in the movie. The dream group leader has the same option as others do to share a dream or not. He also participates in the same manner as other group members do to someone else's dream. As the one who is more aware of the pitfalls that can occur in dream work, he has the major responsibility for keeping the process on track.

Several directors have appeared on the program (The Actors Studio). Here are a few of them speaking for themselves.

I have already noted what several of the actors said about Mike Nichols' sensitivity and reliance upon the unconscious domain. Here are some of Nichols' own thoughts that highlighted the analogy to leading a dream group.

Mike Nichols

"The opening scene expresses the theme of the movie. It has to do with style. Style is beginning something in a way that makes things that happen later all follow from the beginning."

LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

A Leadership Training Workshop in group dream work will take place at Monte's home April 5-7. This experiential three-day workshop 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: April 5, 6 and 7

PLACE: 55 Orlando Ave.

Ardley, New York 10502

For information or to register call Monte Ullman at: (914) 693-0156.

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Comment

This applies in an interesting way to dream work. A dream is triggered by some current concern. Much effort is devoted to helping the dreamer discover these recent emotional residues. They are further elaborated on by recovering the connections to past and future concerns, where each new bit of information adds more meaning.

Mike Nichols

"When 150 people show up on a set, you need a plan. You need collaboration."

Comment

In no endeavor that I know of do you need so clear a structure in which to work as is the case of dreams. Dream work can be dangerous but the danger is not in the dream itself. The danger is in the eye of the beholder. By that I mean that the danger is anyone who approaches the dreamer in a way that supersedes the dreamer's authority over the dream. A dreamer can be victimized by any à priori theoretically based superimposed interpretations.

Mike Nichols

"After the Elaine May-Mike Nichols team broke up, I was drawn to directing. I just liked thinking

about directing and learning about it."

Comment

Mike Nichols came upon the perfect outlet for his creative energies. His art took the form of collabora-

*tion with others to produce motion pictures that were multidimensional. They touched both the conscious and unconscious domain of the audience. As he put it in connection with his first attempt at directing in **The Graduate**: "This is a very surreal movie. Some part of my unconscious made the ending possible."*

Nichols draws a sharp line between artists and managers. "The former learn from process; the latter don't. They are too literal. My process includes the unconscious." Nichols' process includes learning from others. "I have learned a lot from Jack Nicholson on how to deal with the company. He connected with everybody. Everyone was his friend." The director is not necessarily the one with all the answers.

I feel very much in tune with Nichols' approach. When I first embarked on group dream work, I was a group virgin. I came to it with a special interest in dreams fostered by my years as a psychoanalyst, and de-

Dreams are all about feelings. This requires the helping agency to be exquisitely sensitive to where the feelings are as the dreamer explores the dream.

veloped a certain intuitive sense of what conditions were essential for good dream work. They were the same conditions necessary for good acting, e.g., a non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical arrangement, respect for the dreamer, an openness to others more experienced in group work than I was, and a certain humility in regard to the unpredictable ways the unconscious domain can manifest itself. Every new dream is an entirely new learning experience.

Stanley Donen

It's all about feelings and learning how to trust your own feelings. If you do, you'll know when to say 'Cut! Print!' It's a struggle at times to find my way. It's like the sculptor trying to sculpt an elephant out of a large

block of stone. You chip away everything that isn't an elephant."

Comment

Dreams are all about feelings. This requires the helping agency to be exquisitely sensitive to where the feelings are as the dreamer explores the dream. That involves getting rid of all that isn't relevant to the dreams.

Norman Denison

"Acting is a very difficult profession. There are so many technical demands made on the actor. Actors are to be appreciated. It's about love, not hostility."

Comment

The same applies to dream work.

From time to time, I have received letters from those who have been in one or another of my dream groups. I suppose those who do write are the ones who responded positively to their experience. I do not wish to misuse the letters as any kind of endorsement, but rather because they spell out in a more heartfelt way than I can what any dreamer has a right to expect from a dream group leader. It's pretty much the same as

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what an actor has the right to expect from the director.

"I remember quite clearly that I have felt a gradual awareness as I worked with your method, that even nightmares contained a healing message. I have never honestly felt afraid of my dreams. A frightening dream is of course scary when it occurs and that feeling might linger when I first wake, but I welcome dreams now, and feel sure that even disturbing imagery can offer me understanding. No therapy or any other type of experience had ever before helped me with that terror. It's really an awful thing to feel so vulnerable to one's inner imagery, and the release from that fear was liberating. And your process is unique, in that it has a structure that is simple and solid, and is easy to pass on, but it's not confining—within the process, endless variations take shape. I never tire of dreamwork, or feel stifled by the structure."

"Your presence and responses assured clear, understanding, respectful, compassionate, patient, gentle, but sure and helpfully firm. You made just

enough self-effacing comments to suggest that this is the result of lifelong experience and refinement. I saw many areas in which I need refinement. I felt encouraged to think that I, too, am being refined and that my experience is adding up.

"The group context gave me a precious opportunity to test my understanding. That some of responses clicked with the dreamers was validating; that some proved off base or ill timed was clarifying and corrective. The dreamers' openness was inspiring. The magnificence of their lacy intricate dreams and the beautifully discrete process through which you guided us reinforced my spiritual premise, foundation, and my footing in it."

"Almost a week has passed since the beginning of the Dream Group Leadership training last weekend, but the work and your presence are still strongly with me. It's really hard to find the right words to say thank you. I

felt deeply touched by the process and by you—your sensitivity, integrity, wisdom and fun-loving being, and not least by your generosity of spirit. It is truly

wonderful work. I am presenting it to my classmates at Helix on December 14. I will endeavor not to be tentative,

but to be inspired by the spirit of your teaching which is that the dreamer knows what the dream is telling her—she simply needs a safe and stimulating environment in which to become aware of the message. I can do this, I believe—perhaps a little clumsily from lack of practice, but well enough."

"I would like to use this opportunity to tell you how much 'mileage' I got out of the fall workshop at your place: the work on the dream itself was very illuminating for me (if you remember, in the dream I gave away stones to supposed helpers who then ran off from me. Subsequently, in waking life, I retrieved the similar

stones from my childhood stone collection from my parental house. And that was only one step I could take and only the first aspect I began to see about the stone.) The dreamwork is ongoing. And that is what makes it so fascinating to me.

"I also wanted to tell you that the fall workshop has been very instrumental to the flourishing of the dream group in which I participate on a regular basis. We were already doing dream work according to your method, but I often felt a sort of hush, hush aspect about the dream work: 'Is this dream interesting enough? How long can people engage with someone else's dream? When is the novelty of a dream wearing out?' It seems to me that a lot of that was to be attributed to a general fear of sitting with someone else's anxieties and the unfamiliarity with the idea that there are skills available to all of us in that area. Despite my own fears, my patience with my own dreams in the presence of the dream group has grown tremendously and so, I believe, have other people's patience with theirs. The group work has benefitted from that."

What any dreamer has a right to expect from a dream group leader is pretty much the same as what an actor has the right to expect from the director.

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"I ask 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 the role of an authority on 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!"

"Thank you, Monte, for sharing the wisdom of your life's experience with the dream world with humility and compassion and for being a person who understands the importance of equality and love in our world. And thank you for reawakening my passion for working with dreams and helping me to realize that I have a gift I must start using in a broader world than I have until now."

The following quotation is from Dr. Robert Kugelmann, Professor of Psychology at the University of Dallas. I did not know Dr. Kugelmann at the time. The following quote is taken from a letter he wrote to a mutual friend who then forwarded it to me.

"I thoroughly enjoyed Monte's approach so I would be interested in the training group.

"Side note: I've been reading some of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* on my sabbati-

cal this semester. Monte's approach, with basically self-guided voluntary groups exploring dreams (with the theory of the

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unconscious that he argues along with the group psychology), strikes me as an Americanization of depth psychology that is in the American grain.

Tocqueville stressed the importance of voluntary associations as counterweight to US emphasis on privacy and individualism, and the importance of democratic—as opposed to aristocratic—social organization. The 'European style analyst' is more of an authority figure."

Comment

While actors often work with a variety of directors, the excerpts I have noted are limited to just one dream group leader, myself. I have parted company from my psychoanalytic colleagues in ways that I feel are more suitable to the universal appeal of dreams and their universal availability. Chief among these are the

benefit of embedding dream work in a group context, using an atheoretic approach derived from the basic phenomenological features of dreaming consciousness (current relevance, information and honesty), and providing the time necessary to focus on every element of a dream (usually an hour and a half). This in no way diminishes the importance of dreams in formal therapy. It simply provides a more natural and spacious way of receiving a dream.

The above encomiums should be taken as essentially tributes to the way the group process is structured. Dream work flourishes in a nonviolent atmosphere and the structure is there to bring everyone as close to that ideal state as possible. The trust that is generated and the way help is offered removes the obstacles in the path of the dreamer himself or herself finding the way back to the dream.

Originally, I thought I could develop the analogy between acting and dream work in three or four parts. The more I wrote, the more interesting the analogy became to me. This is now the sixth and final part. I realize that this analogy, like all analogies, is limited. It falters, but doesn't fall. Here are

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some differences between the two.

Acting is a profession. It's a job. It is the livelihood of those who go into it. A profession requires some uniform level of training experience and standards. Dreams, by their very nature, don't lend themselves to any kind of institutionalized structure. Just as there are different schools of acting, there are different approaches to working with dreams. There are a growing number of people who are being paid, as I am, for teaching group dream work.

While there is a need for training and standards, the ultimate goal is for our dreaming psyche to find its natural place in society. Reliable leaders are necessary to achieve that goal, but organizing and institutionalizing that training comes with its own dangers. There are many different schools of thought about dreams, and no generally agreed upon method of teaching dream work. This is the current dilemma faced by those of us working toward the universal availability of our dream life.

Art generally and acting specifically have always been essential features of

our cultural evolution. The hope is that dreams, too, will find their rightful place.

A number of more specific differences between dream work and acting should be noted:

Dream work flourishes in a nonviolent atmosphere and the structure is there to bring everyone as close to that ideal state as possible. The trust that is generated and the way help is offered removes the obstacles in the path of the dreamer himself or herself finding the way back to the dream.

1. Actors rely on a much more elaborate support structure than do dreamers. Dreamers just need a few other dreamers to work with, including at least one who knows how to go about it. The long list of credits that fill the screen at the end of a movie attest to the extensive array of talent and expertise involved.

2. Perhaps the most obvious difference between acting and dream work is that, while it doesn't undermine the validity of the analogy, introduces a qualitatively different dimension to the work. I refer to the fact that the ultimate goal of producing a movie is the presentation

to an audience. This in turn involves a fallout quite different from the more private effect of dream work, namely, public acclaim, celebrity status, etc. Theatricality and dream work don't mix. For the

dreamer, incremental behavioral emotional growth is the goal itself.

3. Acting is a specific talent. Dreaming is a universal talent. What is common to both is that talent cannot be taught. It is there to be discovered and developed.

4. We are all dreamers from early childhood on. While there are naturals such as Shirley Temple, most actors do not discover their talent that early.

5. Every movie has a director. In the course of the natural development of a dream group, once the structure is thoroughly understood and abided by,

the group can carry the process by itself, simply alternating leadership.

6. A final feature of interest is that in the acting profession, my guess is there is about an equal number of males and females. In dream work, my experience is that there are seven or eight females to one or two males. Men have more important things to do, like building missile shields.

It has been fun to look at the way various aspects of the dream work/acting analogy came into focus as I began writing about it. Linking dream work to acting and the dependence of both on the rich resources of the unconscious domain may contribute to a mutually beneficial linkage of the two.

Acting is an art that has long been with us. Dreams have been with us even longer, but insufficient attention has been paid to the intrinsic creativity of those visitations that come to us nightly. It is up to us to get on with the task of welcoming them to our waking existence. Far too long have our dreams remained in the closet. ❖

Dream Appreciation
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D.A. ENTERS ITS 7TH YEAR — AND ASKS YOUR INPUT!

It hardly seems possible that *Dream Appreciation* is entering its seventh year!

If you missed any of the issues, please check our website, (see address on front cover) for a complete listing of them and other articles by Monte.

If any of you no longer wish to receive *Dream Appreciation*, please let us know and we will remove you. This is a labor of love for which we do not charge, so this is a good time to clean up our mailing list and take off those who do not wish to receive the newsletter.

Now for an important request: We want

your input!

Are you in a group using the process Monte developed with Nan Zimmerman? Share your experiences with us! Ask questions! Share a problem! Tell us what you want to see in the newsletter! We are very open to the ideas of our readers.

We would love to have readers submit articles related to the group process and how it has affected them. Don't like to write? If you want, I can interview you and write something up for your approval. Don't be shy!

Here are some more questions to get you thinking:

What have some of you done to get dream groups started in your areas? What types of people have you done dream work with (e.g., students, elderly, etc.) What questions do you have about starting a group or keeping one going?

Give us your input and we will respond! All the contact information is below. Let us hear from you!

And thanks for making *Dream Appreciation* such a success!



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.
