Working with Dreams Within Co-Creative Dream Theory: Using

Dreamer Response Analysis and Imagery Change Analysis

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From the standpoint of traditional dream interpretation, the dream is its visual content. Whether one believes the dream imagery is a clever disguise for an unacceptable truth (Freud, 1965), the message itself in symbolic language (Jung, 1984, 1986), a part of ourselves from which we are alienated (Perls, 1968, 1973), or metaphors that contextualize emotion to facilitate its integration (Hartman,), there is an assumption embedded in the Western view of art and dreaming (Sontag, 1966)—that the dream is representational, and that its value lies in the consideration of its visual content.

I have previously contrasted traditional content-oriented dream analysis with co-creative dream theory (CDT) (Sparrow, 2006; Sparrow and Thurston, 2010). The co-creative paradigm is based on the idea that the dream experience is a product of the real-time interplay of two interacting structures--the dreamer and the dream content--rather than derived from a single mechanism (e.g. the unconscious). Specifically, CDT predicts that dreams reveal measurable *dreamer awarenesses and responses* that precipitate *shifts in imagery* which, in turn, impact the

dreamer's subsequent awarenesses and responses. While CDT represents a significant departure from the content-oriented view of the manifest dream, there is theoretical and empirical evidence to support it, including:

- •The seminal work of Ernest Rossi (1972, 2000) who asserted that there is "a continuum of all possible balances of control between the autonomous process and the dreamer's self-awareness and consciously directed effort" (1972, p. 163).

- •The anecdotal and research findings pertaining to lucid dreaming, which has established that dreamers possess reflective awareness and exercise volition in at least some dreams (Sparrow, 1976; Gackenbach and La Berge, 1988; La Berge, 1985; La Berge & Reingold, 1990)

- •The research of Kahan (1996) and Kahan and LaBerge (2001, 2010), which has established that the dreaming mind exhibits the metacognitive capacities of the waking mind.

By emphasizing that dreamer self-reflection and volition manifests in dreams, these sources support the emergence of a new paradigm based on the idea that dreams are 1) comprised of dreamer *process* and dream *content,* as well as 2) indeterminate from the outset and co-creative through the interplay between the dreamer and the dream content (Rossi, 1971; Sparrow, 2006). While I have elsewhere described a systematic five-step approach to dream analysis based on CDT, in this paper I will present the two components (i.e. Steps three and four) of this methodology that are unique outgrowths of CDT—Dreamer Response Analysis (DRA) and Imagery Change Analysis (ICA).

Background

Intimations of CDT can be found in the works of earlier dream theorists. For instance, Jung viewed the dream image as a synthesis of conscious and unconscious activity, by saying that the dream image

> …is the result of the spontaneous activity of the unconscious on one hand and of momentary conscious situation on the other. The interpretation of its meaning...can start neither from the conscious alone nor from the unconscious alone, but only from their reciprocal relationship (Jung, 1966; p. 386).

> Jung's co-creative view of the image's creation, however, was largely superceded by his articulation of the impersonal aspects of archetypal dream imagery. Apparently, Jung himself rarely considered the dreamer's contributions, at least when presenting his interpretations in his major writings (Delaney, 1993).

Perls also intimated the emergence of CDT by treating the dream as something created by the dreamer. Indeed, he said "You prevent yourself from achieving what you want to achieve. But you don't experience this as your doing it. You experience this as some other power that is preventing you" (1973, p. 178). However, Perls ignored the dreamer's role in the construction of the original dream report, preferring to explore the relationship between dreamer and dream imagery in here-and-now reengagements.

Similarly, Boss observed that dreamers often exhibited volition in the dream (Boss, 1977). But he, too, refrained from treating the real-time interactive process as a significant focus of analysis.

Lucid dream research has also supported the emergence of CDT by advancing the idea that dreamers can become fully conscious in some dreams. However, by treating dreamer awareness categorically as "lucid" or "non-lucid, the lucid dreaming literature has effectively relegated non-lucid dreams to inferior status, thus overlooking the possibility that reflectiveness and volition can be observed to varying degrees in all dream reports, as asserted by Rossi (1971). Significantly, researchers Kahan and LaBerge (2010) have recently compared the metacognitive capacities of non-lucid dreams with their waking state parallels and confirmed Rossi's observation that significant reflectiveness and volition can be discerned in "ordinary" dreams. It has also been suggested that the way that researchers solicit dreams can effectively suppress the reporting of dreamer subjectivity, and that the dominant approach to analyzing dream—the Hall-Van de Castle approach—primarily assesses visual or structural aspects of the dream report, rather than subjective or process dimensions (Kahan and LaBerge, 2010; Kasmova   ; .

Co-Creative dream theory could represent a next step in scientific dream theory. While the activation-synthesis theorists originally asserted that dreams originate in subcortical structures and presumably can have no psychological meaning (Hobson & McCarley, 1977; Hobson et al., 2000), this position has been challenged by researchers who have established that dreaming disappears when certain higher cortical structures (Solms, 2000) have been damaged, and by other researchers who have posited a "two-generator" view of dreaming (Nielsen, 2000) based on labroatory data. And further, the work of Kahan and LaBerge (2010) has established that the dreamer is a reflective, self-regulating, and choosing participant in the ordinary dream. Hobson has said intriguingly that we have to treat the dreaming brain as "a unified system whose complex components dynamically interact so as to produce a continuously changing

state" (Hobson, et. al, 2000). This interactive model hearkens back to Jung's view of the dream imagery as partaking of two sources. Such a dynamic model might view dreams as a concurrent activation of, and interaction between higher and lower brain centers, thus raising the question of how these centers interface and produce the experience of dreaming. Such a model may eventually lend more support for CDT and further justify dream work practices that reflect a co-determining view of the dreaming mind.

An Approach to Dream Analysis Based on CDT

In contrast to traditional content-oriented dream work, CDT focuses on subjective, relational *process*. Indeed, it parallels exactly the way that we process and analyze a waking experience. That is, upon receiving a report of a significant waking event—such as, for example, an argument between lovers—we do not interpret it, nor do we focus exclusively on the lover or environmental features of the experience. Instead we first focus on the narrator, and assume that he or she is an autonomous, participating agent involved in an exchange with the other person in the construction of a shared experience. Then we treat the account as a relational event that developed from the input of subjective "feeds," including the narrator's feelings, thoughts, assumptions and behaviors that may have influenced the direction or quality of the experience, as well as contributions from the other person and the environment. This sensitivity to the constructed nature (Bergen,) of the person's narrative not only allows us to enter into the beliefs and values of the subject, but also to communicate an empathic understanding of how these subjective influences interact with the environment to codetermine one's experience of the world. CDT treats the dream exactly in the same way—as a relational experience (that becomes a

narrative in the process of recalling and reporting it) which is produced in real time through the interaction between perceiver and perceived.

Approaching the dream as an interactive process requires that we treat the dreamer and the dream as separate aspects of the experience. Instead of asking strictly content-oriented questions such as, "What does this symbol mean," or "What is this dream saying to you?"—which leaves the dreamer out of the picture—we track the dreamer's interaction with the imagery through the course of the dream. We ask open-ended questions such as, "What did you feel, think, or assume when…?" "How did his behavior toward you change in response to what you did?" and "What do think would have happened if you had done something different?" These questions are called "process questions" in family systems (Bowen, 1978) and are used to help the client get in touch with his or her contributions to a reciprocal or circular dynamic. Such questions convey the principle that the dreamer was potentially free to respond in a variety of ways, but elected only one of many possible courses of action.

Given the limited scope of this paper, I listed In Table 1 some of the differences between traditional dream work and CDT-oriented dream analysis.

Traditional Dream Work	Co-Creative Dream Work
Dream work focuses on *visual content.*	Dream work focuses on dreamer-dream *interactive process.*
Dream work does not focus on changes in dreamer response or alterations in imagery	Dream work focuses on changes in dreamer response, and reciprocal alterations in the dream imagery
Dream images or "symbols" are analyzed independent from the dreamer's own mindset	Dream imagery is always regarded *in a contingent, reciprocal relationship* to the dreamer's mindset

Traditional Dream Work	Co-Creative Dream Work
The dreamer is passive observer.	The dreamer is, to some extent, active and responsive in every dream, or at least capable of it.
The dream reflects content parallels with waking life.	The dream reflects relational dynamics and relationship patterns in waking life.
The goal is to translate visual content into meaningful insights about one's waking life.	In addition to the traditional goal, the goal is to discern both competent and dysfunctional response patterns that may be evident in dreams and waking relationships alike.

Dreamer Response and Imagery Change Analysis

Dreamer Response Analysis and Imagery Change Analysis are two techniques that go hand in hand in the analysis of the dream according to CDT. If whatever the dreamer does affects the visual imagery, and the imagery, in turn, influence the dreamer, then it is necessary to include these two interventions in any CDT-focused dream analysis. Indeed, the reciprocal relationship between dreamer response and imagery change is *the* foundational concept behind CDT, just as systems-oriented marriage and family therapists consider reciprocal exchanges between self and others to be "the governing principle of relationships" (Nichols and Schwartz, 2004). Operating within this systemic view, dream workers employing CDT must learn to "track" the dreamer-dream reciprocal process as it moves through time in order to discern pivotal moments in the course of its development—moments where the dreamer responded in such a way as to precipitate a particular shift in the dream imagery. CDT thus views the dream as a "branching" experience, the end of which is a single narrative, but whose process entails a number of responses and commensurate imagery changes that could have produced altogether different outcomes. These "branching" moments are characterized by choices or reactions on the part of the dreamer that might, in traditional dream analysis, go unnoticed, but within CDT comprise the

centerpiece of the dream work. A dream worker aligned with CDT will develop a sensitivity to such moments, and then help the dreamer become aware of them along with any commensurate changes in dream imagery.

I normally incorporate Dreamer Response Analysis (DRA) and Imagery Change Analysis (ICA) as steps three and four of a systematic five-step method. However, I have found that they can be used as a standalone tandem method or can be imported into any sequence of dream work procedures.

To see how the use of DRA and ICA plays out in the course of actual dream work practice, consider the following dream of a 49-year-old woman, Julie. (Before going any further, olease open the one-page summary of the FSM found in Module 4's resources.)

> *I am traveling in a car w/ two of my closest friends. I am driving, not sure where we are or where we are going, but I feel like I am on a mission and feel a great sense of urgency. My friends are happy and talking and laughing and don't seem to feel the way I do. I feel that I have to be somewhere and there is no time to spare.*

> *We come to a small town along the highway and are sidetracked. There is some sort of carnival going on, and before I know it the car is driving itself toward the carnival. That is, I am still driving, but feel the steering wheel pull to the side, and take us through a field and towards the woods where there is a parking lot. We get out and my friends want to stay and see the carnival and a play that is about to start. I am not happy about this and express it to them and anyone else around. I say that we need to go, and very soon!*

Then I am standing beside the highway near this place and waiting for my friends to come. I say, "Let's go!" I then say, "I am leaving now and anyone that wants to come with me better get in the car, now!!!

As I am saying this and standing along side the road, I see several tractor-trailers coming towards me at a high rate of speed. I watch them with caution, but I don't move or run. I stand my ground and watch them barreling towards me and at the last minute they shoot off the road to my right and go on their way.

Then we are at someone's house, not sure who, and stopping for a visit. Again everyone else is laughing and talking and at ease, in no hurry. I am still anxious and state that I want and need to get going right away! I am stern in expressing this, but no one gets upset with me.

Then it switches to just me and I am meeting the man I love and we are boarding a huge ship together, like a cruise ship, and we are very happy and excited. Then I wake up.

My work with Julie and this dream has been videoed and is available for viewing (Sparrow, 2012). To summarize my application of DRA and ICA, my first goal was to examine the dreamer's initial feelings, assumptions, fears, and thoughts, which I generically refer to in the dream work as the dreamer's global response set (Sparrow, 2013). I also make note of the dominant images in the initial scene. Linked by a reciprocal or circular causal process to the dreamer's responses, the imagery changes commence to mirror the dreamer's responses and their changes, if any, through the course

of the dream. Julie and I agreed that her initial response set was characterized by an intense determination to pursue a personal goal, and a sensitivity to any distraction. Given this opening response set, the car initially expressed the way that she saw herself proceeding toward that goal—that is, in a self-reliant mode (in her own car) that nonetheless accommodated the presence of relationships. The highway reflected her opening sense of direction.

When the car took on a mind of its own, she tried to redirect it onto the road, but failed to so. She then became aware of a carnival, or a context of playful abandon. She responded to this development, not by giving way to the shift in agenda, but by refusing to join her friends in a playful setting. I focused on this pivotal moment, suggesting that saying no to one's friends is an assertive act that can result in one's isolation. Hence it involves risk.

At this point in the dream, Julie becomes aware of the tractor trailer, which represents a relatively powerful means of transportation that she is not in control of. She responds to it by carefully allowing it to pass before proceeding on her own course. We discussed how the tractor trailer reflected her single-mindedness, which connoted more powerful and less "self-managed" sources of conveyance and authority, as if the process was no longer entirely within her control.

When Julie reflected on the changes of imagery, she was able to see that the car, the tractor trailer and ocean liner were all ways to get somewhere—all means of transportation—and that they were moving from smaller to larger, and from lesser to greater capacity, and from less power to greater power. Tying these changes to her

responses, she reflected on how the movement from car to tractor-trailer reflected an intensification of her refusal to take part in attractive diversions (i.e. carnival and friend's house) in favor of pursuing her own goal. She also realized that her eventual willingness to shift from a fiercely individualistic to a relational agenda was reflected in a shift in transportational imagery to the ocean liner. Significantly, while she was with people who did not seem to share her desire to move during the beginning and middle part of the dream, she ultimately joined someone who shared her goals at the end. As an interim image, the tractor trailer seemed to mirror a struggle between her desire for autonomy and her need to let go, as she would have to do as a passenger on an ocean liner. The care that she exhibited in the face of the tractor trailer's destructive potential was seen by both us as an indication of resilience and humility. Toward the end, she shifted toward a much larger and less personal vessel that will bear her on a new stage in her journey, showing a further willingness to abandon an exclusive self-reliance.

Meanwhile, Julie and I were able to analyze the carnival and friend's house as separate set of images that represented increasingly tempting challenges to her desire to remain true to her goal. She said that leaving the carnival —a playful context without a great deal of meaning attached—was relatively easy compared to leaving her friend's house and running the risk of offending or hurting others. Ultimately, she was able to see that she said "no" to her friends and acceptable diversions in order to say "yes" to her own aspirations, thus signifying in Julie's opinion a shift in her relational priorities and life goals. Given her history of taking care of others as a mother and as a leader among her friends, this shift signified a significant life change.

Throughout my work with Julie's dream, I drew connections between her evolving responses and changes in the two groups of images--those pertaining to transportation, and those pertaining to diversions from the journey. Asking Julie such questions as "What's similar and what's different about a car, a tractor trailer, and an ocean liner?" helped her to establish that these images fell into a *general categories* of images that pertained to general life domains because they fulfilled a similar *function,* but which conveyed a difference in *meaning* based on their unique properties.

Focusing on *classes of images* helps the dreamer understand that a series of outwardly disparate images can actually refer to a general life issue rather than to a diverse array of "symbols" with discrete meanings. Those familiar with various hierarchical systems of life domains, such as the Eastern concept of *chakras* or Maslow's hierarchy of needs, will find that this shift in focus from specific to general imagery is supported cy CDT, and will help the dreamer understand that a dream may reflect a struggle /and or a resolution of a basic problem related to survival, affiliation, power, service, or any of the other main dimensions of life that have been defined in such comprehensive systems. In Julie's case, it effectively reduced the array of compelling images to general life themes, and thus simplified what could have been a confusing and fragmented experience.

In summary, CDT supports a dream work model that opens up possibilities for two powerful interventions—dreamer response and imagery change analysis—that simply do not make much sense when the dream is considered fixed from the outset. By seeing the responses and images as *in flux* and reciprocally related, we can explore how

changes in imagery reflect the dreamer's own evolving or regressing response set. Moreover, we can more easily discern a *direction* in the dream's unfoldment by examining whether the changes in imagery and dreamer response represent movement toward some climax, or integrating event, or away from such resolution. On the basis of such analyses, we can assist the dreamer in celebrating significant inner shifts of attitude that may bring about positive changes in life circumstance, much as they may bring about reciprocal changes transformations in the dream imagery. Or we can help the dreamer discern how recoiling from the often-intrusive novelty of the dream on the basis of old fears or unexamined assumptions can thwart an evolving process and create turmoil in the dreamer's waking life. In both cases, the analysis of the dreamers responses (DRA) and the commensurate changes in dream imagery (ICA) amplifies and accelerates a dreamer's understanding of the role that they play in the co-creation of dreams and waking life experiences, as well.

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