A DREAM DIALOGUE

THE HUNTING OF THE DREAM-SNARK

Raymond Durgnat

J. Allan Hobson's exemplary article on films and dream-sleep physiology in the first issue of Dreamworks (Spring 1980, Vol. 1, No. 1) nonetheless provoked in this humanities-moulded mind a few friendly queries, which might interest other readers.

1. While Hobson is rightly critical of Freud's 1895 dream theory, I wonder how far it really constrains either psychoanalysis today or our response to films. I suspect that Psychoanalysis Observed and The Innocence of Dreams by the psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft summarize a widespread disrespect for Freud-as-Moses; while in film theory Lacan's claims that he reverts to the "real" Freud are neither true nor a recommendation.

In psychoanalyzing (not quite orthodoxy) various sequences and films, I felt that sexual symbolism (of which narrow genital symbolism was only a part) was one of the things Freud helped us to get broadly right. So my query would be: is Hobson a) highly, b) aggressively, or c) tolerantly skeptical of, say, my readings of Un Chien Andalou in Luis Buñuel or of This Island Earth in Films and Feelings? Suspecting that the answer is b, I wonder what sort of meaning would he substitute? Or does his skepticism extend to the whole assumption of a continuous structure in dream-like films as well as in film-like dreams? Or is this an area where dream/film parallels break down? Or am I asking him unfair and premature questions?

2. It seems to me very important to make room, as Hobson suggests, for aleatory and physiological input, especially since he's nowhere reductionist about meaning. Would he broadly agree that in dreams, recurring themes (defining which is another can of worms!) are likely to be usually thought-driven (rather than by habitually sleeping on one's side, etc.)? Would dreamlife, like consciousness, reveal (or betray) after interpretation an ongoing "drama" or agenda (a modifiable-but-identifiable set of responsive-but-semistable attitudes)?

Over many years I kept dreaming of finding violently inclined hooligans around or inside my house. Over the last ten years, the intruders became increasingly dangerous, until I began finding insane women in the attic (or on the bus that passes in front of my house). It looks to me like a thematic structure, and too consistent to be aleatory. But what sort of physiological input would propose it, or cook up analogous topics much as scriptwriters do?
3. I'm grateful for Hobson's suggestion that the dreamer's inability to move is not a concealed wish to be caught but an accurate reading of the state of his motor apparatus. Even after allowing for hypnotic bewilderment about whether one's awake or not, I'm pretty sure that I've sometimes awakened still unable to move, physiologically, as if my awakening had preceded, by what felt like half a minute or so, my motor reactivation. I was anxious the first few times. However, it strikes me that in-dream "inability to move" might be a symptom with alternative (or even converging) causes: 1) motoric deactivation; 2) a sense of helplessness in relation to some life-problem, in the sort of fairly transparent metaphor that's non-Freudian in the narrow sense; 3) while this fear might occasionally mask a wish, just as in conscious life one impulse fights another and makes us oscillate, sweat, shake, refuse to see the obvious, etc., 4) I'd like to retain some room for meaning sometimes, albeit without retaining Freud's compulsive over-generalizing from his occasional triumphs of deviousness-detection. The rider here is whether Occam's Razor can cut a bit too close, like Sweeney Todd's, in dealing with highly complicated, multiple-factor, systems-like thinking.

4. When Hobson writes "The Brain As A Dream Machine," is this mainly a catchy sub-heading, or is "machine" more serious? If the latter, what does it mean? The oxymoron comes on as pretty emphatic, but what does the description "machine" exclude? Is it meant to exclude "the ghost in the machine" (Ryle)? Does it exclude semantic factors as a generating, as well as an interpreting, factor? If so, how sure is Hobson that the mind splits into two subsystems like this when it dreams? Could the generator respond to interpretations of previous problems (so that my hooligans metamorphosed into madwomen as some psychodrama evolved)?

Would Hobson suspect that I'm being sentimental if I proposed that machines neither think nor dream, whereas animals do both? Or, if machines think, then animals do, so we might as well write "The Brain As A Dream Animal," or even "The Machine As A Mechanical Animal." I'm hinting that there are good scientific reasons for thinking that humans are more like other animals than they are like machines, and that the popularity of "machine" metaphors isn't always scientific. Although Hobson may have the thoroughly respectable purpose of combating a humanist sentimentality, which seems to me to be on the ropes, it's a machinist anti-sentimentality which now worries me. With Brand X Behaviourists (e.g., Eysenck), the machinery of laboratories blurs the differences between 1) the dumb machines we know so far, and 2) whatever sort of system wouldn't qualify as a machine. Are there open-ended systems for which machines are becoming a treacherous paradigm?

5. I know people often say that "film viewing...[is a] predominantly hallucinoid experience," but where would Hobson distinguish between the hallucinoid and "the willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge's very useful formulation)? Of course, it could be in the nature of that ornery beast, the mind, that the levels of consciousness slope up and down into one another or intertwine so tightly that there's a regular honeycomb of level-splitting going on.

But my worry is that film theory habitually exaggerates people's "belief" in film. For 99.999% of spectators never forget that Scarlett O'Hara is Vivien Leigh, who is "ever such a good actress", nor do they confuse her spare fare (turnips, isn't it?) with their popcorn. Could we rather say that the "hallucinoid" extends all the way down from Grand Extravaganzas to doses so mild that it's what we normally call "recollection" or "imagination" or "in my mind's eye". To oversimplify, is all thinking hallucinoidal? Is all thinking dreamlike?
For ghost-prone readers, a ghost story read at midnight becomes hallucinatory, and for lonely readers a pornographic story can become hallucinoid (with patent physiological testimony). Yet these "impressionable" readers will yawn their way through a movie which doesn't interest them. Do we habitually overrate the impact of the medium, and of its presentational "screen", and underrate the resonance of the message, i.e. of its associative content? And is there potentially a parallel temptation when we (legitimately) focus on the "presentational" aspect of dreams?

6. Similarly, I foresee possible (not actual) confusion from Hobson's occasional intimation that whatever isn't "rational" or plausible narrative tends to be more dreamlike than what is. Movie theorists who pretend to be film theorists (Metz is one) often forget how much discourse is neither narrative nor dreamlike. I'm thinking of mathematical formulae and syllogisms, of laundry bills and blue prints, of essays and editorials, of maps and lyrical poems. Hence I'd want to avoid any association, however transient, of narrative with "psychic determinism." Is Hobson's objection actually directed at semantic or associative association, and to the degrees of "absolutism" we find in Freud, in some science and in some literary criticism? Although I'm sure he's right (and that one "layer" of events, e.g. thoughts, responds to promptings from only loosely related or completely unrelated systems), I need reminding, like other artists and scientists, not to charge too simple-mindedly along with the assumption that all juxtapositions must be motivated. I wouldn't have thought that narratives are usually causal, in a tight sense, anyway; although Proppists, Lévi-Straussians and others owe something to 19th-Century notions that they are.

7. I'd like to be hypochondriacal about the "only" in "only through the play of chance." I know I've gone beyond this "only" later, and maybe his underlying worry that humanists make minds too purposively active can be neatly aligned with my worry that scientists sometimes make the mind too purposelessly passive. The fact that the mind is environment-dependent and -responsive means that we can't exclude chance, and since the brain is (in a weird sense) the environment of the mind, we need reminding, by Hobson, that the brain (and the mind) is chance-riddled, too.

8. I'm a vertigo sufferer and wrote about Persona, but still needed Hobson to point out the similarity. And on the basis he's provided, it occurs to me that Bergman says less about the swirling phase than about the creepy stillness (inanimate objects with point-like fixity, the blankness of snow) that precedes it; a sort of schizo-cold which will become cold sweat.

To be pedantic (about the intellectual "constructivism" of the mind, which is the constant theme of these notes), even if in full staggering vertigo I perceive that either I'm moving or space is, I know that, in fact, neither is true and that this is merely vertigo. Whether the "net effect" or gross effect, at a purely perceptual level, is the same, I don't know, as I don't live down there. Or at least other perceptual (kinaesthetic) inputs say. "Hey, wait a minute, your body's not moving, and if it were it couldn't move like this". This point is relevant to film/dream/reality differences, because of body fixity in film as compared to either aleatory free-fall or kinaesthetic meaning in dream and real movement in reality. When the avant-gardists of the '20s tried to make us feel vertigo by spinning the camera ("the world spun round"), they merely blurred the picture and we boredly let the blur go by.

9. While agreeing about the likely genesis of Persona, I wonder whether Bergman's vertigo was really much more than an autobiographical catalyst? If, for
instance, Fellini suffered from vertigo, wouldn't the from-traffic-jam-to-flying-up-a
trope dream in 8½ look like a classic metaphor for near-vertigo? If Hobson says it is,
since a sort of free-fall goes on in all dreaming, I quite agree. But the preoccupation
for obstinate interpreters like critics is that Bergman's spikes-in-snow resemble his
non-dream thought, whereas Fellini's lateral/vertical spaces are like his other
leitmotifs.

My worry here is that film theory may dismiss Hobson's point too quickly. I agree
with him that autobiography need not be irrelevant to a text, and that text/autobiog-
graphy correlations are legitimate and valuable.

But does the "fragmentation" of the images here need any more explanation
than any association of ideas, e.g., the association of symbols in poetry (where the
same theme often recurs in sets of patterns whose linkage, by analogy, is not
exactly determined, but nonetheless makes a sense which interests us)? I'm
thinking of the dream in Spellbound, where Hitchcock knows how the mind
quantum-jumps from forklifts in the tablecloth to ski-tracks in the snow. Or from
another angle, the logic or structure of thought in dreams isn't very unlike the logic
or structure of thought anyway. Free association is less determined than Freud
assumed; but is dream-logic basically free association, with certain functional
constraints removed?

10. I'd love to share the "two cultures" parallelism implied by Hobson's precise
matching of scientific and filmic dates. I fear social-intellectual history is rather
messier, with more lags and drifts. I'm not sure that Bergman's quite so central in
film culture. I'm thinking of the elaborate, lucid, non-Freudian dream-"logic" of
This Island Earth (which is also a very professionally crafted narrative-structure),
and of the equally non-Freudian dream-film parallels in A Matter of Life and Death
(Stairway to Heaven) (1946) and The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T (1952). I'm not sure
that Bergman is as Freudian as his American critics; and all his dreams or dreamlike
films take Christian interpretations with or without Freud. I'd be particularly
interested in Hobson's comments on the phenomenological texture of the dream-
within-the dreamlike-film in Renoir's The Little Match Girl. We might hazard that
dreaming in the French avant-garde of the '20s related to stream-of-consciousness,
with Freud absent or marginal, whereas between the '40s and the '70s Freud
seemed central and everything else didn't interest critics. This notion reverts to my
proposal that we don't understand dreams because we don't understand thinking.

11. Because we don't understand thinking I'm still uneasy about comparing the
brain (or should it be the mind?) to a camera/projector, and the general physiology
to what's on the screen. This isn't to query Hobson's valuable suggestion that we
write the scenario after we see the images. Paradoxical as that sounds, it's very
close to the young Eisenstein's notion that meaning stems from the montage. The
images come along (by accident, as it were), and the sensible part of the mind does
the rough-cut, says "Print it," and Memory prints it (with all sorts of laboratory
errors).

My problem here is that I agree with the older Eisenstein, for whom montage
began when you wrote the script, set up the action in front of the camera (mise-en-
scene), and composed the image for the camera to then see. Quitting the realm of
metaphor for that of psychology, how can we be sure that meaning doesn't feed
into the dream-screen-action, interspersed with inputs from physiological state-
dependence? I suspect that there's actually a dream-scenario, a reservoir of
associations which, when outside distractions are cut down, by sleep, is ready to
roll, mixing itself in with events of the day and physiological input like motoric

RAYMOND DURGNAT 79
oddlities and an overfilled bladder and the sheet over your face, and that the montage between these sources is more like a scenario than like an interpretation job. No, now I’m sounding too exclusive, let me modify that. I mean that part of the mind is a functional equivalent of the scriptwriter's typewriter and the plastering department and the studio. And though another part of the mind sits there watching it, like the film-editor or the critic, we risk letting our metaphor persuade us that those two parts of the mind are more unlike each other than they are. Hobson tends to put everything semantic on the “watching” side, and attribute the film to physiology.

12. That very stimulating Table 2, comparing film devices and dream processes, strikes me as still too cut and dried to do the job it implies. More’s the pity that we must all get involved in dream-phenomenology with introversion and subjectivity. But that table is doing it already, so can I tentatively venture these impressions?

a) Accelerated motion in film is unlike time compression in dreams when that corresponds to narrative duration. Naturally my own dream experience is not only poorly remembered, but it's limited to my dreams, which like my chronic dream-themes can keep evolving. But I can't recall a quick-motion dream, with dream figures running at undercranked speed, and slow motion is usually localised within the “image.” And even then it’s relative to some dream-rate rather than real-rate, which certainly makes undercranking possible. But whereas “accelerated motion” suggests mechanical speed, narrative duration suggests Bergson’s idea of duration.

b) Narrative duration often involves an abstract, or, better, off-screen, knowledge. Sometimes it corresponds to what a “Came the dawn...” subtitle or a voice-off might have said. But there is no subtitle, no voice; the dreaming-I just knows it. My dreams seem to be “saturated” by an “intellectual track which isn’t filmic at all, insofar as its content isn’t presented through audio-visual particulars. Is Hobson convinced that I forgot them, or could it be that the film-like part of a dream is only part of the dream? This content exists independently of the action, like authorial information in a book, except that (1) such information, though non-narrative, is visible in the book, and (2) even the pages of a book are too much like a screen for the way this information appears in-the-dreaming-I’s-head, much as thoughts about a film appear in-the-film-spectator’s-head. Once again, the dream goes on on both sides of the ego-in-the-dream. And that ego is notorious for its strange splittings. We’re in the dream in a way in which we’re not in the film. In the film, the monster chases a heroine with whom we identify; in the dream, it's after us. Sometimes the dream-watching-I watches another-I involved in the dream. And though this has a rough equivalent in spectator identification, it’s not clear to me that it’s functionally or genetically the same.

If it’s so difficult to explain how the dreaming-I seems to know something without a presentation, it’s because all thought is so difficult to semiologise. We certainly need a phenomenological mental-semiology, which would include a description of the forms of thought, but semiology as she is spoke disguises its ignorance by pooh-poohing the constructivist activity of thought (the individual subject can’t recombine ideas much, he doesn’t have much biology, only social codes, etc.). But I think there’s a fascinating stage in thought, that inaudible “click” where you know that you know what you must say before you know what it is and before you’ve chosen the precise symbols for it. And you can say the right thing without knowing exactly what you’re saying. You begin a sentence before you know what the end is, and by the time you’ve got to the end, you’ve forgotten what the beginning was.

(c) Why is “symbolization” reduced to “cross-cutting”? Does this come from the young Eisenstein’s suggestion that so-called “intellectual” thought gets into film
largely by cutting? But wasn't the young Eisenstein quite wrong? Aren't stories and settings and characters "symbolisations"? Aren't the films I mentioned in 10 full of symbolisation by decor, i.e. display?

Why is a "hidden cut" (invisible editing?) temporal, not spatial? Aren't matching cuts through time-only, obtrusive rather than visible, as when Méliès's omnibus (reputedly) became a hearse? Or are cuts hidden from naive audiences, yet obtrusive to the ordinary audience? Should we distinguish dreams where the dream—I spots a scene-change from dreams where he doesn't, so that what might be a spatio-temporal cut is really a more semantic discontinuity? I mean that scene-changes in words might be as good a paradigm for some dream sequencing as scene-changes in films. Are there cuts in these words: "I rushed through room after room"? If so, where and how many?

d) In Hobson's Table 2, is there a typographical ambiguity about where superimpositions, dissolves and opticals belong?

My dreams often seem to have been full of "slow transitions" whose temporal fluidity was less unlike a slow dissolve than like a cut. It wasn't quite blank frames either, although sometimes I (mis?) remember dim vaguenesses between sequences. Whereas Hobson is rather skeptical about '20s dreams-in-films imagery (slow dissolves, flowing gowns, etc.), I wonder if they're not a functional metaphor for unreal duration/compression and for a certain lack of detail clarity in many dreams. It could be the result of poor memory of dreams which were sharp, but can we be sure that dreams never share vagueness with memory (and stream-of-consciousness)?

e) We know that mental imagery has different degrees of sharpness, colorsaturation, detail, etc. Perhaps there's a graduated scale (or even a continuum) running from Penfield-lobe recall through photographic memory and the sudden sharpness which scents bring up, to so-called "abstract" thought. My dream-images, even when sharp and hallucinoid, seem to be made out of a chemical-crystalline substance which rather resembles my mental images as soon as my eyelids have closed and the glowing hues against black when I press my fingers into my closed eyelids. They're rarely "photographic" in texture, and if anything they're less unlike paintings. They never have precise frames. The perspective and outlines are regularly non-photographic—maybe very lax, maybe steep like dioramas. Sometimes they're as grey as those layers-of-gauze images beloved of '20s films.

Texture and continuity-wise, the most dreamlike movies I know are Norman McLaren's *La Poulette Grise* (which is appropriately hypnagogic, being animated pictures to accompany a lullaby) and his variations on Boecklin's painting in *The Isle of the Dead*. In non-narrative continuity, Borowczak's *Dom* rather resembles those episodic dreams, and I suspect that the symbolic structure that feels so right even though one can't explain it might subvert dreams too—both by generating and recuperating the dream's audio-visual track.

In dreams as in conscious thought, isn't much thinking motoric and kinaesthetic? Don't "Yes" and "No" sometimes come to us as physical impulses, faint jolts? For me "Yes" opens up like a flower whereas "No" is a shutter sliding across. Or perhaps "Yes" is opening my mouth or baring my body and "No" is an arm barring the way, and the kinaesthetics of it are so faint that to point to them I have to metaphorise and fantatise them.

13. We easily think of the brain as seeing or taking pictures, and I wonder if we should think of it as also making pictures? Even my mind as writer/director/actor metaphor is too timid; could the mind put *everything* in, like the painter's hand?
Which isn't to rule out the importance of physiological state and chance as inputs and the dire need for Hobson to remind us of them.

Is the notion of a dream-screen a bit dangerous since the cinema so grossly separates film and spectator, whereas the dream-cinema plays about with that too? ("At first I was only watching it, but then I was in the dream... then I knew I was only dreaming and kept trying to wake up, but somehow I couldn't quite...") Is there something at least in Julian Jaynes's thesis that primitive man's mind allocated more to hallucinatory presentation than ours? So that Hobson, confronted with such a culture, would find thinking and dreaming less distinct?

14. I wish one saw more articles about dreams and abstract thought (whatever that turns out to be); about perceptual-mental styles, dreams and painterly styles; visual conjuration in response to reading; daydreaming without wish-fulfillment; and so on.

Would Hobson's article make as much sense if his conclusions stressed the dissimilarities between dreams and films? Many are noted in Table 2, but I'm thinking of radical differences like:

a) Dream darkness is inner, film darkness is merely outer.
b) The film-watching ego is closer to the waking-ego than to the dreamer's-I (which may not be much like the waking-ego).
c) Film/dream analogies seem quickly exciting, whereas TV/dream analogies are rather boring. Is this because we mis-attribute to the medium what really belongs to the situation (sitting in darkness with only one thing to look at)?
d) Films are frequently extremely boring, whereas dreams aren't. They may be exasperating, and some are more exciting or welcome than others, and we may go to sleep hoping for a good program tonight. But could they be tailor-made for us (by us) in a way films can't be? Or is (as Hobson might reply) boredom a function of critical consciousness?

I hope none of these queries and hypotheses even seems to obscure the liberating effect of all Hobson's propositions.
ALLAN HOBSON'S REPLY

Raymond Durgnat's creative brain, activated by my essay on Bergman, has generated more thoughts and questions than I e'er dreamed of in synthesizing that article on dreams for the first issue of Dreamworks. I thank Durgnat for the richness and the freshness of his reaction which answers "my fond hope that Dreamworks would provide a meeting place for students of the art and science of dreams." Because of the very plenitude of Durgnat's thought, it is as overwhelming as it is flattering to enjoin this dialogue. I am not discussing the issue of similarities and differences between film, dream, and art media because 1) I feel that Durgnat and I are in essential agreement and 2) that I am not competent to argue the technical issues Durgnat has raised. In typical scientist fashion, I have extracted from his myriad musings these four fundamental questions:

Has Freudianism Misled Criticism?
Are Art and Science Two Cultures or One?
What Kind of Machine is Man's Brain?
Does Dreaming Have a Purpose?

Before discussing each of them briefly, I want to focus on what I perceive to be the very nub of Durgnat's basic concern. And that is the widely held fear that the activation-synthesis hypothesis of dreaming denies or minimizes cognition and meaning in its explanation of the dream process. I would like to assure Raymond Durgnat—and all our fellow humanists—that nothing could be further from our intent. Because the activation-synthesis hypothesis cannot yet provide a precise model for either cognition or meaning, the theory has not taken up these issues explicitly. But the implications for cognition and for meaning are already quite clear in both fundamental premises of the theory: the brain-mind is internally aroused in REM sleep (activation); in fact, the brain-mind is autonomic in REM sleep (synthesis). Cognitive functions, including meaning attribution, are thus seen by us as integral to the process.

Activation-synthesis asserts that the basic energy and the basic informational stimuli for the dream process are automated, stereotyped, and of low, precognitive order. This is our key point in contesting Freud's view of dreaming as driven by ideas (cognition as energy) and shaped by censorship and disguise (meaning as obscured). In our view, the synthetic processes that bind our peculiar dream perceptions into a seamless fabric indicate cognitive and even creative processes of high order. Indeed, activation-synthesis should be quite attractive to humanists since it contests Freud's much more demeaning disguise-censorship account of dream bizarreness, an account which attributed these elaborate and sometimes beautiful elements to purely defensive maneuvers. As a corollary, activation-synthesis views REM sleep and dreaming as having a very positive functional
significance for the brain and mind. For Freud, the dream-work was a process of meaning transformation only and most transformations were degradations. Activation-synthesis frees the investigation of dream cognition (including both meaning attribution and even symbol construction) from the Freudian strait jacket of historical and pathogenic determination by viewing dream synthesis as both original and conflict-free.

Durgnat asks: Has Freudianism Misled Criticism?

Hobson replies: Yes, decidedly. And in precisely the same way that it has misled both psychiatry and film making. To wit: If a group of artists (the surrealists, for example) agree with Freud that the sources of art are in the repressed unconscious and go on to adopt free association as a creative technique, they are likely to produce works of art that are congenial to psychoanalytically oriented critical analysis. Critic and artist whirl in the same orbit as patient and analyst in their often endless quest of a dream that will conform to the predictions of the analyst. This closed circle is not only logically and scientifically unacceptable, it is intellectually confining and artistically stultifying.

I do question whether Durgnat, or any other critic, could claim to have gotten sexual symbolism even "broadly right" since artist and critic often agree from the onset about two most dubious premises: that all motivation derives from the instincts and that the instincts are two in number: eros (sex/life) and thanatos (agression/death). What Freud did—and it was important—was to show that sexual themes (like everything else in the world) are subject to cognitive elaboration. He thus made us stop denying the obvious. But by assigning an omnipotent deterministic importance to sexual drive, he opened the door to outrageous misinterpretations of art that run the risk of equating talent with neurosis. A prime example is his seeing a vulture (representing homosexuality) in the drapery of Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks.

If I had reduced Bergman's artistic motivation to its possible stimulation by his vertigo in creating his Persona montage (1966), I would be guilty of equally ludicrous neurologizing. In advancing the vertigo hypothesis, I was only seeking possible cultural and personal explanations for the change in his formal approach to film and dreaming from that seen in Wild Strawberries (1957). I believe that my historical hypotheses are not only reasonable but subject to verification. This is almost never true of interpretation, be it critically or clinically psychoanalytic. If it feels right, it is right! But history repeatedly convicts conviction as an index of truth!

Durgnat asks: Art and Science Two Cultures or One?

Hobson replies: Art and science are two complimentary parts of one culture. In both art and science intuition and creativity are as essential to success as persistence, concentration, and luck. Durgnat sees the essential difference as between the search for a single meaning (science) and the search for multiple meanings (art). It is true that science takes one thing at a time and I agree that the exclusionary nature of scientific experimentation may lead to a temporary denial of other meanings or levels thereof. But the experimental method is strategic and I know that most scientists are quite cognizant of multiple meanings. Take, for
example, the already manifold mechanism and manifold functions proposed for sleep. None of us believes there is only one of each!

My own view of the essential difference is that art seeks to represent and to celebrate the same mysteries which science aims to solve. Mystery is what Durgnat means by the sense of complexity characteristic of artists and demystification is what he means by the consequentiality and usefulness of science. The modern renaissance of sleep and dream research actually permits one to celebrate mystery and attempt demystification and I, for one, would be as much artist and scientist as time, technique, and talent will allow. I wish that Raymond Durgnat and other humanists could have experienced Dreamstage so well described by Vlada Petric in that same first issue of *Dreamworks*.

Durgnat asks: *What Kind of Machine is Man’s Brain?*

Hobson replies: *I don’t know*. In the case of the brain as a dreaming sleep machine, a soft watch may be as good an analogy as a camera-projector! Scientists use existing machines as heuristically useful models for the physiological mechanism that they hope to describe. Durgnat worries about our view of dreaming as the noise of an automaton, a computer debugging its program offline. The computer just happens to be as close as a machine can currently come to being a brain. Many of us do believe the brain is a computer, but no one believes that to be an adequate description. Thus the functional analogy must also be inadequate for dreaming. But it could still be correct.

Consider the following mystery: Each human brain has 100 billion individual elements (neurons), more than there are people in the world. Each neuron is in simultaneous communicative contact with a million others. To be a neuron is thus a bit like being one person on a world wide party-line telephone. Incomprehensibly the system works: all day long complex information comes in; in a miraculous split second, integrated action goes out. In sleep information input and action output are cut off. But: like clockwork, information is generated within, motor commands are generated but not acted upon, and virtually no record is kept of the proceedings. This is dreaming.

Do you want to just marvel at this mystery or do you also want to figure it out? And if you want to figure it out, how do you proceed? Logic alone forces us to postulate an automatic mechanism for all of this. Nature never leaves such complex tasks to chance or to the vagaries of volition. Scientific methods have now detected and identified the mechanism. No question about it, dreaming sleep and dreaming are preprogrammed, automatic and absolutely non-cognitive at their root. Like breathing, you can’t decide to dream and you can’t decide not to dream. It is involuntary. It occurs whether you have conflict or not. Is that recognition demeaning? I think not. In fact, I find it rather a relief to see that my dreams are an integral part of my functioning instead of an attempt to hide from kinky motives. Not that kinky motives don’t appear in my dreams. They do—but quite transparently. Thanks, perhaps, to Freud they don’t seem to need disguising.

In my dreams, many wonderful things happen too. I fly or spin, see kaleidoscopic images, feel terror, make love. The “machine” that does all this, my brain-mind, is not yet reproducible by any means other than biology. But those means are as certainly automatic as they are autocreative. In thinking about its design, I try to use such words as switch, circuit, and pump, in useful, appropriate ways.
We should never have used the word random because it suggests disorder. What we meant was that, at its root, the activation process was both of informationally low level (pulses) and subject to informationally confusing perturbations (codes) that would render the task of cognitive syntheses difficult and perhaps impossible by the standards of waking mentation. I still believe this to be a refreshing insight. Perhaps the bizarreness of dreams is related to the fact that in REM sleep internally generated pulse codes arise in the absence of externally defined time-space continuum and must therefore be synthesized by the simple combinatorial rules of perception and cognition. Doesn't the phrase, "physiological Rorschach test" get this point across succinctly?

Durgnat thus wonders: Is Hobson's dreaming mind purposefully active or purposelessly passive? Forced to choose, I would certainly reject "purposelessly passive" in favor of "purposefully active". But when it comes to dreaming, I must consider "purposelessly active" as a third and real possibility!

You see, the forgetting of dreams interests me as much as it did Freud. He thought that this phenomenon was a sure sign of repression and further proof of the need to conceal unacceptable impulses. But it now appears that the forgetting of dreams may be simple amnesia, a passive non-remembering. If so, it could be that nature does not assign high informational priority to dreams per se. This, in turn, could mean that among other things, a dream is a noise the brain makes when it performs a basic and essential maintenance function. In fact, I believe that dreaming is the (sometimes outward) sign of a genetically determined, functionally dynamic blueprint of the brain designed to construct and to test the brain circuits that underlie our behavior—including cognition and meaning attribution. I also believe that this test program is essential to normal brain-mind functioning but that you don't have to remember its products to reap its benefits. This could be lucky for both scientists and humanists.

REFERENCE