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Title: The world in between the conscious and the unconscious: a cause for dread or wonder?

In the essay I will explore Jung's views on dreams as the world in between the conscious and the unconscious psyche. I will look at how a dialogue with dreams might develop. In the end I will consider how working with dreams fits into practicing existential psychotherapy and why having a fixed method is never a good idea.

Jung has devoted much of his life to explorations of his own and other people's psyche. He considered many of his theories to be a "subjective view of the world", not starting out as a product of rational thinking (Jung, 1995, p. 264). This is why many scientists are highly sceptical of the nature of his realisations. However already in the year 1900 Husserl pointed out that subjective experience is everything we have at our disposal. Jung (1991) himself wrote that the "psyche is the only phenomenon that is given to us immediately and, therefore, is the *sine qua non* of all experience" (p. 139). Through subjective explorations of his dreams and fantasies he realised "that the psyche is transformed or developed by the relationship of the ego to the contents of the unconscious" (Jung, 1995, p. 235). Throughout the essay I will try to get a better insight into this relationship between the consciousness and the unconscious.

Jung (1991) defined the unconscious as the "totality of all psychic phenomena that lack the quality of consciousness" (p. 133). The personal unconscious is the receptacle of lost memories, (more or less) intentional repressions of painful thoughts and feelings as well as all contents that are still too weak to become conscious; "these contents are products of an unconscious associative activity

which also gives rise to dreams” (p. 133). The collective unconscious on the other hand is formed out of universal (not individually acquired but inherited) instincts, which compel towards a specifically human mode of existence and archetypes, which force ways of perception and apprehension into specifically human patterns. Jung (1991) posited that collective unconscious, “as the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche” (p. 152).

For Jung (2009) the unconscious was not merely a repression or a blockage but also an indicator of the way forward. In the whole functioning of the psyche the unconscious was for him as important as the conscious and it is our responsibility to try to understand it. Failing to do so conjures up the negative effects of the psyche (Jung, 1995). Jung (1991) believed the function of consciousness is to recognize and assimilate the external world through the senses, as well as “translate into visible reality the world within us” (p. 158).

Assuming that the contents of consciousness are the only things we can experience immediately, the dream is undoubtedly a content of consciousness; otherwise it could not be immediately experienced, although it reaches consciousness indirectly (Jung, 1991). Dreams regarded as the result of “unconscious processes obtruding on consciousness” (Jung, 1991, p. 144) can be seen as the link between the two, consciousness and the unconscious. Jung (1995) showed that “it is by no means a matter of indifference what attitude the conscious mind takes towards the contents of the unconscious” (p. 233).

In a phenomenological study of dreams (Lah & Kordeš, 2013) we showed that it does in fact matter what attitude we take towards dreams, but it does not matter what conceptions we have about them. Throughout four month of the study the participant were divided into three groups; in each group they were learning and analysing their dreams according to different dream theories: Freud’s, Jung’s and phenomenological. The participants’ dream imagery and content literally changed, fitting the theory they were learning. We supposed that this adapting

characteristic of dreams convinces any dream theorist he is right. Jung expected to find archetypal images in dreams, and he found more and more. Freud, too, found sexuality and mere wish fulfilment in every dream, proving he was right. It implies that working with dreams is a project in which our dreams can become active partners. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis about “dialogue with dreams”, i.e. the existence of a two-way exchange between dreams and waking life. Showing that dreams enter into a dialogue with us when we pay attention to them. In the language of Jung this could probably be understood as a kind of dialogue between the consciousness and the unconscious. Dreams of the participants changed according to their expectations and theoretical concepts. Participants also reported changing their thoughts and actions according to their dreams. No matter what model they were using for analysing their dreams, all participants have reported positive experiences when paying attention to dreams, saying they gained insights about themselves and their loved ones, and that dreams have enriched their everyday lives. The mentioned study was a scientific exploration of the elusive world of dreams and their dynamic with the waking life. The question here is what these results mean from a psychotherapeutic point of view and what we can learn from them as practitioners?

First of all the most important implication this study brings is the adaptive character of dreams, meaning it scarcely matters what kind of method we use to approach them. In any case the dreamer is always able to learn and gain something from his own dreams. Thus we ask ourselves why not make the dreamer the expert of finding the meaning of his dreams for his life? Generally this is how existential phenomenological psychotherapies approach client's dreams (Boss, 1958; Deurzen, 2012; Mustakas, 1994). In some way Jung (1964) was also practicing a more phenomenological exploration of the dream, as it appears to the dreamer. He disagreed with analysing dreams by “free” association as Freud first employed it; he wanted to “keep as close as possible to the dream itself” (p. 28). He evolved a method of circumambulation around the center, which is the dream picture. Disregarding every attempt the dreamer makes to break away from it, by relentlessly bringing his or her attention back

with the words: "Let's get back to your dream. What does the dream say?" (p. 29). Jung (1964) was not as interested in using dreams for tracing the complexes that cause neurotic disturbances but rather learning from them the psychic life-process of an individual's whole personality. The image of the dream, in Jung's opinion, expresses something specific that the unconscious wants to say, thus working with dreams in psychotherapy is the best way to understand it.

In existential psychotherapy the function, the cause, or the purpose of the dream does not matter. The dream is not understood as a symbolic disguise of something else. The only thing that matters is what the dream means to the client and what he or she can learn from it. Moustakas (1994) posited "each of the constituents of the dream exists in consciousness and has a particular meaning and significance in the life of a dreamer" (p.112). By seeing a dream as a "microcosm inhabited by the same intentions and worries as the client's actual world" (Deurzen, 2012, p.170), the dream becomes an invaluable asset for the therapist to understand the client and the client to understand himself. Moustakas (1994) wondered whether there exists any other human experience that is "more telling or more encompassing of past, present, and future events and meanings than the dream" (p.79). In dreams we are cut off from external reality and thus the dream can be seen as a construction of our inner reality that is a portrayal of our being-in-the-world. Because of the freedom that we have in our dreams, they reveal our innate existential capacity for free choice, performance and potential for development as well as our own constrictions of choices and possibilities.

Boss (1958) emphasized that our way of being in dream life is similar to that in waking life. Experiencing dreams is merely a different way of experiencing the world and both is equally worthy of our attention. Deurzen (2012) suggests for psychotherapists to sometimes turn the whole thing around so that "the client's life can be seen as a dream, in which the client is caught up but from which the therapist can remain free to perceive its internal contradictions, functions, motives, and purposes" (p. 170). But since the therapist should bracket her own views and prejudice, in this case she could serve as a neutral perspective of the

client's (dream) world and thus give him or her a sense that there is a possibility of many different worlds with different ways of being, just like in dreams.

Another way of working with dreams in existential psychotherapy is embodied imagination developed by Bosnak (2007) based on the works of Jung. With this technique dreams are re-experienced in a state of consciousness between waking and sleeping and the focus is placed on feelings in the body. In this way the rational search for meaning in dreams is bypassed and the only importance is placed on the embodied reaction to them.

Another important lesson to be learned from the above-mentioned study of dreams is the senselessness of any specific theoretical assumptions or routine approaches to dreams or psychotherapy in general. Jung held strongly that "the cure ought to grow naturally out of the patient himself" (p. 153) just like dreams grow out of our inner world. Always staying true to his experience was, in my view, Jung's most precious gift to humanity. Even though he was surrounded by a constant pressure to make psychotherapy into a mechanical science, with a solution that would work for everyone, he did not betray his personal experience of the world as well as seeing every client's personal experience and treating each one as individually as possible. He was not afraid to explore the outer limits of the unknown, the "impossible", he pushed to the brink of the world, not only rationally but with his whole being. All the while wondering why this brought such "anxiety" and "dread" to others (Jung, 1995, p.121). Maybe he was only a man torn by his irreconcilable contradiction between the »inner« and »outer« (Jung, 1995, p. 220) but then Freud and Nietzsche were victims of their tragic one-sidedness, without ever realizing they were trying to elevate their daimon into a dogma (Jung, 1995, p. 177). Contrary to them, Jung thoroughly explored his inner world before trying to impose it onto the outer world. In order to clearly see the dark side of his psyche and that of the whole humanity, he had to stop being an enemy to it and accept it. He knew that what he said would be unwelcome, "for it is difficult for people of our times to accept the counterweight to the conscious world" (Jung, 1995, p. 249)

The strong reactions to Jung's work, I see in others as well as myself, make me wonder why we are so afraid of the numen, of the unexplainable? Is it because of the fear of falling into another dogma like the one that the world is flat? Or is it because we already fell into a new dogma that the world is reasonable?

Our present lives are dominated
by the goddess Reason,
who is our greatest and
most tragic illusion.

Carl Gustav Jung

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