

FROM DREAMS TO CREATIVITY:

A Developmental Study of Dream Drawings and Dream Art

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Introduction

History abounds in creative productions that first occurred as visual symbols in dreams (Asimov, 1982). Psychoanalytic writings too, credit dreams with a special value in genesis of creativity (Freud, 1900; Blum, 1976; Noy, 1979).

How does unconscious symbolism of dreams, a function of wish fulfillment oriented primary process not intended for communication, come to be employed in service of creative (communicable) pursuits within the secondary process adaptation oriented realm? Our study of dream drawings and dream art aspires to shed light on the progressive interplay between primary and secondary processes (Freud, 1938; Arieti, 1980; Rose, 1980) and symbolisms, likely instrumental in such transformation.

The study is part of a psychoanalytic investigation of creativity in relation to personality development, including both creative-adaptive and maladaptive solutions (Papiasvili et al, 2012).

Development of Symbols and Genesis of Creativity

Psychoanalytic sources (Winnicott, 1971; Mahler et al, 1975; Blum, 1978) suggest that the first unconsciously derived symbols differentiate from the proto-symbolic matrix at the beginning of the second year, predating slightly the development of semiotic function (Piaget, 1929; Berk, 2006) of communicative (language) symbolism. Consequently, we expected the youngest participants' dream creations to have a tenuous symbolic presentation, and dream art becoming increasingly complex and multi-symbolic with age.

As to the genesis of creativity, we hoped to explore, whether the first "pre-communicative stage" of creativity is already present on the level of the dream.

Methodology and Concepts: Dream Drawings and Art

The production of Pribor (Czech Republic) “My Dream” art competition winners of several age categories, from 3 to 26 years of age, and the dream drawings and dream art of patients in ongoing psychoanalytic treatments in New York, from 8 to 45 years of age, were subjected to process and content analysis, using individually tailored interviews along with free associations. The study is in its third year and there have so far been 37 subjects enrolled in it. Because the study included artists and clinical patients, we were hoping to also explore the complex relationship between trauma and creativity throughout development.

For the purposes of the study, *dream art* was distinguished from *dream drawings*. Dream drawings tend to be simple snapshots of a dream scene, the best known being that of the Wolf Man’s dream (Freud, 1918). In our sample, similarly to Wilmer Brackel’s (1993), dream drawings became relevant in the clinical work with patients who could not, for dynamic or cognitive reasons, verbalize specific dream elements or associations. Dream art contains much increased complexity, and communicative properties: As a complexly motivated preconscious treatment of an unconscious process (Freud, 1938), it is a multiply condensed exposition of the dream, containing “movement”, an additional transformative (rotational) perspective, conveying an “optic insight”, evocative of an affective-esthetic response in the viewer, even if the viewer is the artist him/her self, “taking a second look”.

Vignettes and Findings

The 3.5 – 5 years old artists’ pictures characteristically contained either two animals with big mouth or two monsters with big eyes on the dark (night) background. Interviews revealed fears of being alone in the dark. The animals (cows) were observed during the daytime and were drawn with more technical mastery than the monsters. There was no rotation of perspective, but there was an indication of movement: the creatures “are coming at me”. The wish/fear in regard to the parents was rudimentarily symbolized via milk giving animals and scary monsters. “Huh, scary!”, scream and laugh the youngest artists as they take a “second look” at their and each other’s dreams pictures, now becoming “reality”.

Eight years old analytic patient first drew his dream of a flying Santa Claus on several pages, with himself taking turns sitting on various frolicking reindeers, finally settling himself with some satisfaction on the Santa's sleigh: "[I] can see everything from here". Pursuant to the session, he made a colorful "Santa's View" Christmas card that was commercially produced. "I am the Santa", observed the patient, looking at his card. "You are the Santa *and you are the gift*", said the analyst. Subsequent exploration of his anxiety about his mother's planning to have another baby followed.

Adolescent age artists, in pursuit of identity, revisit the themes of separation and attachment, with the dynamism of layered condensations of multiple perspectives. The "Who am I?" dream picture (Figure 1) conveys the conflicts and insight, revealed in associations: "[I am] lost in between, *looking for my own self...*"

During his 3-day "mini-analysis" inspired by his other worldly dream painting of tall yellow big eyed trees, and a little blind yellow figure merging into the grass by the lake, 26 year old anesthesiologist's associations reveal fantasies and memories of longing for his "rejecting" girlfriend and mother. Taking a "second look", he realizes the green grass is from another dream, freeing a repressed memory of his "warm and soft mommy", before she was lost to him after the birth and death of his younger brother. The trees are "big men, ganging up on me". The wish and the guilt are "visible".

The complex relationship between trauma and creativity traced in both samples yielded a contrast between acute trauma facilitating, and cumulative trauma depressing the creative output across all age categories.

Conclusion: Multiple Dimensions of Creativity

Sublimatory capacity, taking a "second look", construction of multiple perspectives and multiple condensations could be thought of as multiple dimensions of the interplay between primary and secondary processes and symbolisms, giving it a multidimensional character with its own development.

The rudimentary sublimation (use of creative activity to deal with one's inner experience), and the rudimentary "second look" (dream picture stimulates re-living the dream) are apparent

already between ages 3.5 and 5. With no multiple perspectives, tenuous unconscious symbol formation, and primitive technique, artists compensate by other means, e.g. dark background, huge eyes and mouth *to convey* fears and wishes.

During early latency years, multiple perspectives and (their) condensations appear for the first time, possibly ushering in Piaget's (1929) stage of Concrete Operations. (Figure 2)

As the alteration of perspective occurs first in the dream, it would appear that the (pre-communicative stage of) creativity does indeed already begin on the level of the dream.

All the prerequisites of the full visual art production – the sublimatory capacity; taking a “a second look” potentiating “optic insight”, construction of multiple perspectives and condensations, reaches its dynamic expression at the age of adolescence, when Pre-Oedipal (and Oedipal) conflicts reemerge. (Figure 3)

Oedipal themes “in the picture” and still more complex multi-symbolic interplay characterized the young adult artists (Figure 4).

Clinical relevance of the multidimensional multi-symbolic interplay was in the findings that dream drawings and dream art free verbal associative processes, and that acute trauma facilitates and cumulative trauma depresses creativity. Both findings underscore the importance of (internal and external) availability of creative choices over clinical pathology.

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