



Mystics and Scientists Conference, 15-17 April 2011, Winchester

## The Nature of Dreams: on the threshold of other realities

*Edi Bilimoria*

*Prospero: ...We are such stuff; As dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.*

William Shakespeare

*'...I was sitting writing on my textbook, but the work did not progress; my thoughts were elsewhere. I turned my chair to the fire and dozed. Again the atoms were gamboling before my eyes... But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. As if by a flash of lightning I awoke; and this time also I spent the rest of the night in working out the consequences of the [benzene ring] hypothesis.'*

Friedrich August Kekulé von Stradonitz

*'I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream... "Who is dead in the White House?" I demanded of one of the soldiers "The President" was his answer; "he was killed by an assassin!" Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which awoke me from my dream.'*

President Abraham Lincoln

Are mystics just a bunch of self-deluded dreamers destined to endure a patronising snort from serious scientists? Not really, if we consider what **David Lorimer** said during question time about a speaker at a previous such conference who proclaimed that there has never been any conflict between the first rate mystic and the first rate scientist; that all the disagreements we are so accustomed to hearing occur only amongst their second rate equivalents. This year's conference on a subject so apposite to our times *The Nature of Dreams*, drew upon first rate speakers of scientific or

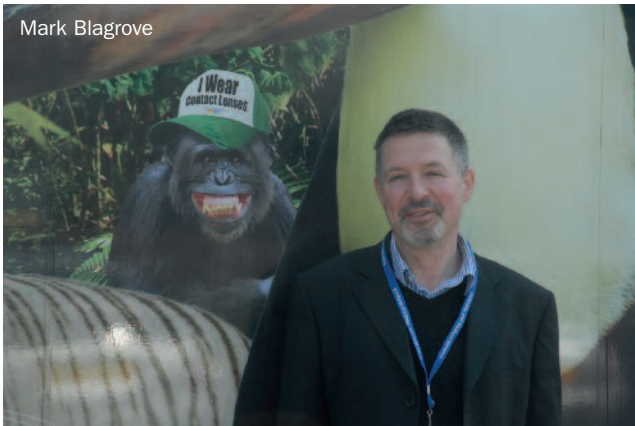
mystical bent. Predictably, the outcome was an atmosphere of ever-friendly, at times fervent discourse amongst the speakers and delegates, but never a trace of acrimony or entrenched views – a tribute to the organisers for a balanced programme that encapsulated the Network's core ethos of open exploration into truth, with rigour and most importantly, a plurality of viewpoints to obtain a rounded perspective.

In his opening remarks the chairman, **Professor Bernard Carr** announced that 160 delegates represented the largest gathering for some years [applause] probably due to the popularity of the theme. He highlighted the importance of the second half of the title *On the threshold of other realities* in relation to the fact that the SMN stands for exploring other realities and is not limited to the materialistic level. The President, **Peter Fenwick** then made three important points in his welcome: that we still do not understand consciousness (however he urged us to read neuroscientist Chris Firth's book *How the Brain Creates the Mind* to understand the materialist contention that consciousness becomes superfluous once we know how the brain works); that dreams are currently high on the scientific agenda; and that a lot of old theories on dreams are now changing, so now is an exciting time to have such a conference.

The first lecture *Introduction: Aspects of Dreams and Dreaming* was presented by **Paul Devereux**, prolific author and Research Fellow with the International Consciousness Research Laboratories group at Princeton University. Drawing upon a wealth of experience in the anthropologies of consciousnesses, archaeoacoustics and anomalous psychological phenomena, he first explained the dream cycle involving the hypnagogic and hypnopompic states, emphasising that dreams provide a gateway to an altered state of consciousness. Then he outlined dreams in their historical context (such as the dream temples of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks), the interpretation of dreams, transpersonal /paranormal dreams (e.g. precognitive and telepathic), lucid dreams and lucid archaeology, namely, dream experiments conducted at historic sites. We were warned about accepting generalised dream interpretations, and urged to learn our own dream language with the aid of a nightly dream diary. His talk was a valuable overview and a foretaste of many aspects of dreaming that subsequent speakers developed in depth. We were left in no doubt that our western civilisation has much to learn from aboriginal and tribal cultures about the technology of mind.

The scientific angle on dreaming was opened up in *The Psychology and Neuroscience of Dreaming* by **Professor Mark Blagrove**. As a leading academic on dreams and dream research, on the editorial board of prestigious academic journals as well as running his own sleep laboratory, he was eminently qualified to inform us what happens to the brain when we sleep and the relationship of different types of dreaming to the different physiological stages of sleep. We were shown how dream content is investigated scientifically, for example, the





effect of brain damage which seems to inhibit dream production and reporting in a significant proportion of victims. In studying dream content, he stressed the need to establish recurring patterns in order to counter the charge that "it's all delirium". A case in point was a scientific study that dreams after the 9/11 attacks on the USA had more references to the events of 9/11 than did dreams from before 9/11. Whereas there is no doubt regarding the connection between dream content and creativity, and the study of lucid dreams is important to scientific research on consciousness, we are still uncertain whether dreaming has a function and whether we dream the same in REM sleep as in non-REM sleep. Moreover, a maze of correlational data still leaves unanswered whether nightmares have a function or are symptoms. Notwithstanding these and other uncertainties, this talk made it plain that anyone who foolishly brushes aside the neurophysiology of dreaming under a charge of materialism will deprive himself from understanding half the story.

This scientific exposition was balanced on the empirical and mystical side by **Dr. Larry Dossey**, a physician of internal medicine, executive editor of a peer reviewed journal and author of eleven books on consciousness, spirituality and healing. In *Dreams and Premonitions: What They Tell us about Healing, Consciousness and Our Destiny* he narrated stirring cases of premonitions occurring during dreams and also the waking state, and what purpose they serve. This made a powerful impact because of its practical import and dramatic case histories. Concerning the latter, premonitions have a survival value, for example, soldiers at war. They also warn of health problems or impending danger, such as the chilling story of a mother who dreamt of a chandelier falling on her sleeping infant's crib and who rescued the child before the chandelier actually fell exactly as in her dream. Her dream premonition was camera-like in detail, including the specific event, the precise time, and even a change in the weather. Then in the medical profession nurses are the more



premonition-prone; but doctors also have premonitions, like knowing the results of laboratory tests before they come in. Dean Radin's presentiment experiments replicated by numerous laboratories, where a subject's eyes and body react in correlation to violent or calm images about 3 seconds *before* they appear, randomly generated, on a computer screen have shown a process that virtually proves that we can predict the future. This flagged the question whether time is closed or open: according to Brian Greene, the latest physics does not prohibit reverse time. It also raises the question what the underlying connections are and it was suggested that the Jungian collective unconscious that underpins the personal unconscious and the personal conscious is shared by us all. En route we were shown how to distinguish fact from fantasy, and how to cultivate premonitions. This talk forcefully illustrated not just the survival contribution of premonitions but much more: that they allude to nonlocal consciousness, therefore infinite in space and time, hence to an intrinsic unity between us that points to our immortality. The obvious ethical implication: "be kind to others because they *are* you".

**Ann Yeoman** is a Jungian analyst with a keen interest in English literature. After training at the Zurich Institute she lectured and ran courses at university and currently maintains a private practice. We were all grateful to her for standing in for **Dr. Cedrus Monte** and taking her title *Something Happens when we Dream: a Phenomenological View of the Dream World*. Her exposition was in three parts. Beginning with some quotes to give the sense of Jung's hypothesis of the unconscious and how he approached the phenomenon of dreaming, she then explained how Jung advocated working with the phenomenon of remembered dreams (in terms of their images, feelings, drama and narrative structure), finally explaining how a phenomenological view of the dream experience can help deepen the way we work with dreams. In fact Jung approached a dream as if it were a text he did not



understand. Unsurprisingly then, the approach of Jungian psychoanalysis to dreams is phenomenological. Whereas free association can lead away from the phenomenon towards old complexes, amplification was Jung's way of enlarging and focussing the phenomenon. Hence, to describe the dream is to return to the phenomenon itself. What is more, description prevails over explanation, which implies a specific meaning. Referring to the well known Jungian model of the psyche, we were explained how archetypal forms from the collective unconscious are cycled "upwards" as archetypal images into the personal conscious. The clear implication is that dreams of a prophetic nature that emerge from archetypal form to appear in dreams as archetypal images are always bound to be enigmatic because such dreams cannot be related to everyday experience. A couple of important points emerged. Firstly, we must not judge our dreams in terms of our ego consciousness as nonsense, or good/bad, otherwise we are in danger of "domesticating consciousness". The collective unconscious is not accessible to the ego consciousness, so we cannot talk of the former as though we know it. Secondly, we must shed our theoretical and philosophical prejudices and preconceptions by becoming conscious of them. A useful piece of advice was to record dream images backwards in order to capture the feeling tone, but without any narrative infill. This talk left the enduring message that because the psyche (like the human body) in all of its complexity represents the outcome of aeons of evolution and everywhere still shows traces of its earlier history, we have come into this world pre-equipped with all the human instincts and the foundations of the higher functions. A phenomenological view of the dream world is to aid in the flowering of the fully human being.

*Communing with the Gods: Dreaming in Cross-Cultural Perspective* was presented by **Professor Charles Laughlin**, who has considerable ethnographic field experience amongst the So people of Uganda, Tibetan Buddhist Lamas and the Navajo Americans, besides being an authority on the neuroanthropology of alternative states of consciousness and



Larry Dossey



ritual. He demonstrated why in all human society dream is intertwined with the local culture, culture being a pool of information, not an epiphenomenon. Whereas the mono-phasic cultures of the UK, Australia and the USA are grounded essentially in waking consciousness and generally disdain the significance of dreams because "it's only a dream", the poly-phasic cultures of such as the aboriginals and indigenous cultures regard dreams as another kind of reality, not an unreality. He went on to present a useful model of the cycle of meaning, encompassing cosmology, symbolic systems, direct experience, and their interpretation. He explained the close connecting sequence between myth, ritual and religion. A useful tip to use to test our mental creations was "imagined unreality is fantasy; imagined reality is creativity". Techniques were described for stretching the hypnagogic state to full 30 minutes. Performing intense dream work on himself he constructed a dream box to force himself to remain sitting up during sleep for months. He found lucid dreaming to be more real than the waking state, had many out-of-the-body experiences and recounted some fascinating meetings with Jungian archetypal divine goddesses and demons. In such work we are apparently under no obligation to interpret our experiences, but we need to interpret them to avoid going mad! But he warned us of the great dangers of experimenting in this way, manipulating the libido and wilfully attempting to control psychic energies without a sound guide. This talk had a palpable effect on us, as we would expect from someone who speaks from his direct experience.

*Dreams, Insight and Memory* was the final talk by the medical doctor, psychiatrist and family psychotherapist,



**Dr. Morton Schatzman.** He focussed on how the creativity of dreams can be used to enrich our waking-life goals. Describing some ingenious problem solving puzzles given to his patients, he showed that mental/intellectual processing indeed occurs during sleep. For this reason, creativity and dreams go hand-in-hand, but the dreamer needs to “pluck the flower”, meaning to solve a problem in dream. But where does that flower come from? Indeed, dreams can solve (or resolve) many a waking-life problem. But for many people, their dreams conceal answers that are unanswerable to the dreamer without the assistance of a psychotherapist. The value of this talk lay in the manner in which we were convinced about the problem-solving capability of dreams with evidence drawn from original experimental data and unusual historical material. Some of this evidence was assimilated from the feedback to a brain twister problem that he broadcast over the BBC in England.

Peter Fenwick reminded us that the final plenary session was just as important as the formal lectures. Among the many interesting queries that were raised was the schism between experimental science and our everyday experience associated with the excessive emphasis put on method rather than the actual phenomenon. The primacy of the heart over the head in the esoteric tradition in regard to consciousness was aired. But when all is said and done there is an indispensable need for a deep humility as Larry Dossey reminded us, supporting his case with the frank testimonials of several of the world’s greatest scientists who have openly confessed how little we truly know about what we take so much for granted.

This conference realised a rewarding balance between the scientific, psychological, phenomenological, therapeutic and practical aspects of dreaming. No longer can serious scientists ever maintain that dreaming is nothing more than a cerebral garbage processing function. And mystics would do well to keep abreast of the latest scientific theories about dreaming that help to provide meaning and structure to the dream experience. I have no doubt that all delegates will now keep a private dream diary on their bedside table to jot down their voyages into the elusive world of the interior.



## Consciousness and the Biosphere: Frontiers of the Future

*Deborah Parrish Snyder*

Director, Institute of Ecotechnics

### Programme arranged by:

*Institute of Ecotechnics, Scientific and Medical Network, and the Ecology, Cosmos and Consciousness Lecture Series*

What an inspiring afternoon and evening with four illuminated minds. SMN Chairman and expert cosmologist, **Bernard Carr**, with **John Allen**, a pioneer in biosphere science and inventor of Biosphere 2; **Ralph Metzner**, pioneer of consciousness research, cofounder of Green Earth Foundation; and **Amanda Feilding**, founder and director of the Beckley Foundation, a force for change in the fields of consciousness research and drug-policy.

These four free-thinking explorers of consciousness and the biosphere generously shared their knowledge and vast experience. **David Luke**, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich, London, and Director of *Ecology, Cosmos and Consciousness Lectures Series* moderated the colloquium. The event was recorded and will be available online through [Lifeartsmedia.com](http://Lifeartsmedia.com). Dr. Metzner’s talk is already available.





### A brief summary of the talks:

John Allen spoke on *Biosphere, Ethnosphere and Emergent Evolution*. The inventor of the Biosphere 2 project, this visionary polymath described some basic kinds of reality apprehensions held by humans relating to their biosphere and consciousness. He presented his concept of the human body being thought of as “a cybersphere, a feedback system of molecules, nervous currents, and orientations that can greatly increase or deepen a human’s consciousness of its reciprocal relationship to biosphere by systematically changing its perceptions of itself.” And that the “frontline of evolutionary action on this planet has become the cybersphere; the world of an individual human body.” His passionate and perceptive description of the world we (our bodies) live in under the control of financial capitalism and world markets broke open up our minds to possible new futures.

John is author of many books and papers including his award winning memoir, *Me and the Biospheres*, and his recently published novel of emergent evolution, *Far Out and Far Away*, which he read from later at the Synergetic Fusion Salon following the colloquium.

Ralph Metzner presented a brilliant overview of the *Expansion of Consciousness in the Individual and Society*, talking about many pioneers he knew and worked with in the field. He brought up “the notion of consciousness expansion. Many of us don’t think about that ... few people know that consciousness expansion happens every morning when we wake up! Maybe you’re in a dream ... then suddenly you become aware, here is my body. You become aware when you wake up ... Consciousness can also be contracted.”

Co-author of *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture* with Ram Dass and author of many books, Ralph is a practicing psychotherapist involved in consciousness research for over fifty years, including psychedelics, yoga, meditation, and shamanism. Professor Emeritus at the California Institute of Integral Studies, he is co-founder and president of the Green Earth Foundation, a non-profit educational organisation devoted to healing and harmonising the relationship between humans and the Earth

Amanda Feilding, scientific director and founder of the Beckley Foundation, dedicated to further understanding of the subject of consciousness and its altered states, spoke on *Frontiers of the Mind: Exploring Human Capabilities*. “If we could demonstrate the potential gains that humanity could harvest from the intelligent use of psychoactive compounds and consciousness enhancing practices we could hopefully make the world a happier place with wiser humans to take care of it.”

Founded in 1998, the Beckley Foundation works in collaboration with leading scientists around the world. It is dedicated to providing a rigorous, independent review of global drugs policy, which aims to reduce the harms associated with both the misuse of drugs and the policies that aim to control them. The Beckley Foundation has been influential in the development of many novel policy initiatives over the last decade.

Our last speaker was Bernard Carr, Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Queen Mary, University of London, and Chairman of the Scientific and Medical Network, speaking on *Cosmos, Creation and the Culmination of Consciousness*. He presented an engaging talk on the evolving view of how we understand the cosmos, and how the emergence of complexity and consciousness sciences and the role of mind and spirituality are coming together, extending science to factor in consciousness. We were riveted to our chairs while revolving in cosmic space.

Bernard Carr’s research includes the early universe, black holes, dark matter and the anthropic principle. He is the author of more than two hundred scientific papers and editor of “Universe or Multiverse?” His interests include psychical research and the relationship between physics and consciousness.

In sum, from David Luke who moderated the colloquium: “We’ve travelled very far in a short period of time: from the biosphere and technosphere to noosphere to the mythosphere to geocentric, to ethnocentric to galactocentric.” The day will be remembered by all who were there. See [Lifeartsmedia.com](http://Lifeartsmedia.com) for webcasts of the talks.

The afternoon was chaired by **David Luke**, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich, London, and Director of Ecology, *Cosmos and Consciousness Lectures Series*. The evening portion of the event included dinner with spirited conversation, poetry and dance.

**Cosponsored by Synergetic Press, the October Gallery, Scientific and Medical Network and Earthdance**

**Special thanks to Gennaro Ambrosino of Lifeartsmedia.com, Martin Redfern from SMN, and Jonathan Greet for documentation of this event.**

**Videos of the talks will be available through Lifeartsmedia.com.**

**Dr. Metzner’s talk is now online there.**

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