

Dreams and art: Dreams as the bedrock of art

Kurt Forrer

Maldon Victoria, Australia

Summary. Skill can build a bridge to Heaven's Gate, but Art alone unlocks it! This is not to downgrade skill, but to put it in its rightful place. Skill is one of the three pillars of art: Head, Hand and Heart. Yet more precisely, skill is a combination of the two pillars of Head and Hand. It's not until an IDEA comes to the head that art begins, or more accurately, that the *process* of art makes itself apparent. But where do ideas come from? Not a question over which the artist generally loses any sleep. Yet occasionally he or she will acknowledge that it came in the middle of the night, which might lead us to surmise that it was spawned by a DREAM. It would certainly seem to be a most natural inference, especially since waking up at that time of the night with an idea that promised to catapult us into a fresh phase of creativity, could only have stemmed from a dream that was intimately bound up with what was in the head of the dreamer upon waking. My own research certainly confirms this and more. By this I mean that it isn't just inspiration that's dream-based, but life in general. Indeed, since life is transitory like a dream it must be seen as a form of dreaming and thus as comparatively illusive. What on the other hand is constant and real is consciousness. It is not only real and constant, but in fact the *sine qua non* of existence. Thus, being the ground of existence, it must also be the creative force that brings about the spectacle of the world; and since the artists are an intrinsic part of the world dream, they must be an intrinsic part of its creative impulse. In this light, artists are no longer independent creators of arbitrary works, but *an interdependent channel of the creative impulse of consciousness*. What is readily forgotten about this creative impulse is the fact that what it manifests is not a permanent entity, but like the dream, a transitory product. In other words, *the emanations of consciousness are constantly reabsorbed into Absolute Consciousness, the matrix of existence*. This process is intrinsic to the character of creativity whether it be that of the world dream or of the individual artist. In short, this innate principle of manifestation and reabsorption makes the work of the individual artists to a natural channel of reabsorption into the ground of existence with the result that not only the artists themselves are constantly drawn back to their origin, but also the ones that contemplate their work.

Keywords: Asceticism, Concept(-ion), Consciousness, Creativity, Fractal Image, Idea, Mandyion, Manifestation Span, Theta , Unconscious

Skill can build a bridge to Heaven's Gate, but Art alone unlocks it! This is not to downgrade skill, but to put it in its rightful place. Skill is one of the three pillars of art: Head, Hand and Heart. Yet more precisely, skill is a combination of the two pillars of Head and Hand. They are the visual pillars, as it were. Everyone knows that a work of art requires ideas and skill. It's when an idea comes to the head that art begins, or more accurately, that the *process* of art makes itself apparent. This implies, of course, that there is a component to art that remains hidden up to the point of being made aware of an idea.

Indeed, the very word 'IDEA' personifies this hidden aspect of creativity since 'idea' means 'Inner Goddess'. (1) This affirms not only the clandestine aspect of art as the first phase, but also suggests that at least the 'gestation' of a work of art is a feminine activity. It might be likened to the growth of a foetus, which takes place in the womb of mothers.

While ancient occult traditions maintained that ideas emanated from "the Female Soul of the World", mediaeval

theology adopted Aristotle's astrological determination of thoughts, thus replacing the feminine 'idea' with the masculine 'concept', which used to mean 'conception', the gathering up of semen. (Ibid.)

Of particular interest is here that the "early Christian Gnostics regarded God the Creator as a mere demiurge, the child of the Mother who created in his mind all the 'ideas' he used to make (into) things in the material world. *His sin was that he arrogantly claimed all these ideas to be his own, because he was ignorant of the ideas of whatever he created and of the Mother herself*". (3)

Amazingly, this describes precisely the general comportment of the majority of contemporary artists. "It was MY idea", so they say, giving the hidden aspect of the process scant or no consideration. Although, on occasions one or the other artist will say, "I woke up in the middle of the night and there it was", when asked where the idea came from. But alas, with that such responding usually halts unless there is a further question to follow such as, "could that mean, perhaps, that ideas may flow from dreams"?

It would certainly seem to be a most natural inference, especially since waking up at *that* time of the night with an idea that promised to catapult us into a fresh phase of creativity *could only have stemmed from a dream that was intimately bound up with what was in the head of the dreamer upon waking*. Yet only very few artists and inventors will bother to contemplate such matters, after all, not even Jung, the professional student of dreams who had recorded numerous dreams that *came literally true* went so far as to ask himself: "*If one dream is coming true, why not all?*"

Corresponding address:

Kurt Forrer

26 Parkins Reef Road, Maldon Victoria 3463, Australia

Email: dnaofdreams@gmail.com

Submitted for publication: January 2021

Accepted for publication: January 2021

DOI: 10.11588/ijodr.2021.1.79343

This doesn't mean that he disregarded meaningful forward connections between dreams and waking. Quite on the contrary, for unlike Freud, who believed that the dream was forever looking back, Jung saw the dream as a *kind of reconnaissance flight into the future*. In doing so he credited the dream with a certain foresight, which however was not an unalterable prediction. Instead, he regarded its anticipatory characteristic very much in the spirit of a medical prognosis, which left ample room for human intervention. This, despite the many occasions that forced him to concede that in the end the dream had its way, that the fate it intimated took its destined course. (4)

Curiously enough, *in some instances he intuitively grasped the fatal quality of a dream at once*, as for instance, in the case where a colleague of his told him the latest dream in which his elation of reaching the summit of the mountain he was scaling engendered in him a feeling of wanting to climb right into space. Jung's response was swift and unwavering: *"Let me implore you not to go (climbing) alone from now on"*. The caution was, of course, promptly ignored with the dire consequence that three months later Jung got the unwelcome news that his colleague had fallen to his death while climbing alone. (5)

In my own research I have found that dreams invariably come true. But since they only seldom manifest literally, this is difficult to see and even more difficult to prove. However, I have managed to *devise a predictive test that is readily replicated, especially by any student of Freud*. (6) In view of what I have said of Freud so far, this must come as an unmitigated surprise. *Indeed, it is thoroughly ironical that Freud, who so decisively denied the dream's anticipatory character, should provide the very basis of such a verification procedure*. Even more so, since this test is based on Freud's sexual interpretation of the dream, the very interpretation that ultimately split the friendship, or indeed, the master-student relationship between the two giants of dream lore.

Why the sexual interpretation lends itself so readily to the purpose of verifying the dream's meaning is the fact that *its waking realisation has the shortest manifestation span*. In other words, that particular aspect of the dream within a steady relationship manifests invariably on the *dream day*, which is the period between waking from the dream and the next sleep. In fact, in the case of the 'wet dream' the sexual component of the dream finds its realisation just before the actual awakening. *This fact alone is a decisive signal that it is in the nature of dreams to manifest in the waking state one way or another*.

In contrast to this, the non-sexual aspect of the dream does not lend itself for a reliable predictive verification because *it has very complex and drawn out manifestation periods*. While some aspects of it become waking reality on the dream day, other facets will manifest on the second day or even weeks, months or years later. Complicating matters even more is the fact that dreams tend to manifest serially where variations of one motif will recur several times on one day or even extend beyond it. Because of the complexity of the non-sexual manifestation it might be surmised that the sexual interpretation would be out of sync with the non-sexual version. Amazingly, this is not the case *since any dream describes both the sexual and non-sexual thrust by means of one and the same story*.

Clearly, in light of this the source of inspiration, or more precisely, the conveyor of ideas from their source to the head has to be the dream. In short, without dreams there

are no ideas, no works of art. In fact there would be no life. Astonishingly, this is precisely the tenet of the Old Testament. Its best and most condensed version of this view is given in Job 33:15-16. *"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then he openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction"*. It could hardly be clearer and more concise. Indubitably, Job maintains *that God's instructions are sealed, that there is no room for anything we might want to have different or not at all*. Yet this is not all. As if to vouchsafe the truth of this proclamation, Job adds a prediction to it, saying: *"God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not"*.

This is certainly the case now as much as in Job's day. And so it is not surprising that my research and predictive test are able to demonstrate that *the dream is the basis of creativity*. Certainly, Hinduism acknowledges the dream as a crucial element of art. One example is the Hindu artisan's preparation for his impending work that requires purification and mental practice, which is no different from religious practices such as yoga, for instance. *"The relaxation of the body and mind helps to evoke the intuitive faculty, while 'dwelling on the knowledge that presents itself in dream or sleep'"*. (7) Of greatest interest here is that REM dreams and intuition share the brain's Theta frequencies of 4 to 7 Hertz. In short, *intuition is nothing more mysterious than recollecting dream content*. Psychology sees intuition as part of the subconscious realm. This is a *vague and most assuredly unscientific designation*. It is the result of the fact that *the founding fathers of psychology were not aware that our dream memory uninterruptedly shadows the waking phase, so prompting every waking move and thought*. In fact, it employs the same mechanism as does the *posthypnotic command* that implants a suggestion in the memory of a subject under hypnosis, together with a time of execution, which then in waking is performed to the letter within the exact time frame stipulated by the hypnotist. *And here again, the hypnotic state vibrates in Theta, just as does the dream*. (8)

Such preparation for the execution of sacred art is, of course, not restricted to Hinduism, but is the norm among religious artisans all over the world. In the West, the most familiar example would be the icon painters of Mount Athos in Greece. There, the monks still follow the ancient tradition of iconography. *'The painters diligently pray and fast before taking up their brushes, eat only on Saturdays and Sundays and celebrate divine liturgy daily and all-night vigil twice a week'*. (9) It's not difficult to see that such a rigorous agenda would not only shunt the mind of these painters unflinchingly into Theta, but would largely hold it captive there. It means, that *true to the characteristics of Theta* the mental disposition of these devout artisans would be mostly in the arms of a deep sense of spiritual connection and oneness with the Universe.

The rigor and asceticism of such artisans demonstrates in no uncertain terms that they are intent upon producing works that would *transcend the realm of skill most decidedly*. The legend of Mandylion, as I have heard it in my youth, best encapsulates the essence of their iconography. I was told that when king Abgar of Edessa fell ill, he sent for a portrait of Jesus in the hope that gazing upon the Lord's face would relieve him of his ailment. In time, a messenger brought him a piece of cloth on which the face of Christ had appeared miraculously. The moment king Abgar beheld it he was healed.

I consider this version of the legend to be the quintessential mission of true art. Its emphasis is on healing. While on the lowest level it is only concerned with curing the body, in the fullest sense of the word healing means 'making whole', restoring the individual to its original state of being. This is not something that medicine can achieve. In the simplest of terms it needs the grace of God, the requirement of which is eloquently expressed by drawing our focus towards the miraculous appearance of the face of Christ the Healer.

Christianity in general makes much of miraculous healing, but unfortunately its focus is mostly on medical ailments with the result that the attention is caught up with the body instead of the mind, or more precisely the spirit. Physical miracles are helpful in as much as they are symbolical of the higher form of healing, which entails the recognition that we are not the body, but a soul that has left its spiritual home to wrap itself in flesh and bones. Recognising this wisdom means having the focus on unlocking the gates of Heaven.

Of course, it is not the iconographer's burden to spell this out in such terms. For him it is sufficient to represent the accepted icons in the spirit of the monks of Mount Athos. His devotion and asceticism will enable him to transfer echoes of his own divine experiences spontaneously embedded in the style and aura of his works, for just as the handwriting of an individual reveals much of his character and lifestyle, a painting or any other work of art betrays the spirit of the creator. If he or she has traversed the transcendental realm, the effects of their experience will subtly emanate from their creations, so pioneering the unlocking of the gates of Heaven for the ones who contemplate such works.

A good example that conveys the spirit of the transcendental experience is this poem by the Sufi mystic Shabistari:

*"Know that the world is a mirror from head to foot
In every atom are a hundred blazing suns.
If you cleave the heart of one drop of water,
A hundred pure oceans emerge from it.... (10)*

In this verse distinct echoes of transcendental ecstasy reverberate. They transport us beyond the physical realm and induce a kind of homesickness in us. We long to taste the ambience of this realm in person. Thus, the mystic poet and the ascetic iconographer turn out to be the Pied Pipers of the realm beyond the Gates of Heaven.

But where does that leave the secular artists? Are they excluded from the troupes that storm the Gates of Beyond? When we consider that all creativity is rooted in dreams, that in fact, life is governed by our dreams, then all works of art must have the same source and intent whether they are sacred or secular.

The ultimate question at this point is, of course, *'just what exactly is the source of our dreams?'* Within the religious context it is God, of course, who instructs us while dreaming and seals those instructions. Christianity pictures this process also by means of an angel, a messenger in other words, sent from God informing us of what is to be. Although such an image is art par excellence, the secular artist will reject it for one reason or another and replace it with something according to his own understanding of the creative process.

So what could possibly stand in place of God? For one thing it would have to be no less fundamental than the no-

tion of God since according to sacred doctrine he is the Alpha and Omega of existence. In short, it would have to be something without which we simply would not exist! Even though at first thought we might think that there could be nothing as fundamental as the idea of God, there is actually something. *In fact, it is something that is even more fundamental than the notion of God.* This absolute sine qua non of existence is simply *consciousness*. Indeed, without it even the notion of God could not arise.

The recognition of this fact changes the face of creativity considerably while its mechanics remain the same. *It changes its face since in light of this our existence is now a spontaneous emanation of consciousness rather than the outcome of an act of a divine creator.* On the other hand, its mechanics remain the same since we are still in the clutches of the dream, even though it is no longer sent from God, but is simply arising spontaneously from consciousness.

Perhaps the classic illustration of this is Michael Barnsley's recurring nightmare (11) that plagued him for twenty years; a terrorising vision that he was unable to understand and act upon, yet ultimately led to a final dream that unmasked the mystery of his night terror, thus, at long last, enabling him to design his image-compression software and be free of the nightmare forever. This case demonstrates beyond any doubt that the nightmare, and hence consciousness, 'knew' right from the start that Barnsley would in time 'invent' the resulting software. When I put it to him in a phone conversation that it was really the dream that had designed his software, he indignantly protested against such a preposterous idea, although he himself had said: *"The discovery of how to automatically calculate the collage of an arbitrary picture came to me in a dream. I woke up in the morning and I knew I had discovered the total secret to fractal image compression. How to automatically look at a digital picture and a) how to turn it into a formula, and b) an entity of infinite resolution."* (12)

This whole scenario not only typifies the general attitude towards dreams and their function, but at the same time also directs our attention to the unfortunate term of *'the Unconscious'* as the source of our dreams and life in general, which our fathers of psychology had adopted. Of course, we can't blame them personally for their designation, because ultimately they were directed to do so by their dreams. For this reason we must regard misleading terms such as the Unconscious more as a *reflection of humanity's mental predisposition of the time*, or at least of western mentality, instead of laying blame at the feet of the originators.

In other words, the choice of the Unconscious in place of God simply reflects a *shift away from a religious framework*. We actually have an historical record of a part of this process in Jung's "Psychological Reflections" (13). There, on page 68, in paragraph [XXVII, 50 f] he writes: "It (the ego-consciousness) considers the objective data of the dream as a report or message from the unconscious 'all-one' soul of humanity". Thus the dream, for Jung, was no longer an angel sent from God, but instead, a message from the *'unconscious unitary Soul of humanity'*.

The interesting thing here is that he still shares the view of the ancient occult tradition that the source of the dream is humanity's Soul, thus neatly circumventing the notion of God. What however is unfortunate is the wording that tends to direct us towards the idea that the Soul is unconscious, when in fact he surely means that *we are unaware of the Soul and thus of the source of the message or of our dreams.*

It is for this reason that I propose that within a secular framework the notion of God be replaced by consciousness because it suggests in one single term that consciousness is the source of our personal life and dreams, while at the same time implying that it is the indispensable basis of existence, its *sine qua non*. And since most of us are only seldom aware of consciousness as the indispensable ingredient of existence, just as our eyes are only seldom remembered, although we constantly use them, we can say, if we must, that we are unconscious of consciousness.

But above all, in this way the most fundamental quality of the source of existence and of our dreams is stated *unambiguously*. Moreover it brings us closer to the source than either the notion of God or the 'unitary soul of humanity'. In this light, creativity, whether on the universal or individual level, is seen as a spontaneous consequence of the innate properties of consciousness. Put another way, we are creative because it is in the nature of consciousness. Indeed, living quite generally is a creative act for it requires skill and ideas to meet the daily tasks of surviving.

This means that the artist's creativity is simply a case of bringing into specific awareness what goes on in life in any case. It does this by compelling him or her to analyse a particular natural property of consciousness and refining it consciously only to be encouraged to discard such intellectual know-how in the subsequent implementation of newly gained technicalities in favour of unmitigated spontaneity. It is this very process of peering into the heart of creativity that in secular art holds the place of prayer and fasting.

Such probing varies widely according to the artist's predisposition, or more precisely, according to the particular dreams the different artists receive. *Indeed, the dream is a complete package, containing both the preparation for the creative act and the prefiguration of the work of art itself.* Put succinctly, on that level all artists, like all human beings, are equal. None of them is entitled to claim to be the originator of his or her work. In short, all artists are in the same position as was Michael Barnsley, except that generally only few are able to recall the dream or dreams that dictated the plan of their creation. However, that is totally irrelevant with respect to outcomes since recalling of the precursory dream or dreams has no bearing on the quality or characteristics of the resulting work.

In other words, Paul McCartney's realisation that he had dreamt "Yesterday" had no impact on the composition itself, but only alerted him to the fact that in this case he was not the composer, something which could possibly lead him onto the path of realisation that all compositions are determined by the dream and ultimately by consciousness, which then might end in the recognition that we and our works are merely an expression, a manifestation of the potential of consciousness.

This means that ultimately it is not the artist that unlocks the Gate of Heaven, but consciousness itself, or as it would be stated in a religious context, the grace of God. So when Shabistari is able to give the reader an inkling of transcendental bliss it is not his doing, but the result of his dreams that cleared the way to going beyond the Gates and the dreams of the reader of his work. The same is also true for a reader's ability to recognise the echoes of Heaven in the poet's work.

This alerts us to the fact that art's ability to unlock the Gates of Heaven is not at all absolute, but relative to the artist's gifts together with the disposition and receptivity of the

viewer. In other words, it explodes the illusion that there are absolutes in this world, that one and the same artwork has one and the same effect on all viewers, which incidentally is quite a common misconception from which even highly intelligent individuals are not exempt.

A good example of this is the case of Shakuntala Devi, (14) an exceptionally gifted mathematician whose brain was constantly transposing her surroundings into mathematical formulae. When she was told that not everybody saw the world in terms of mathematical and geometric relationships, she was quite astonished. It seems such an obvious thing that the world would naturally be appreciated according to the capacities and predisposition of every individual's brain, yet we seem to forget this unfailingly until we are up against an Einstein or a Mozart, or indeed a Srinivasa Ramanujan. *The latter is incidentally the classic witness of ideas being transmitted through dreams.*

Ramanujan understood this like no one else in the field of mathematics. He was a devout Hindu for whom mathematics and spirituality were one. He worshipped Namagiri, the Hindu Goddess of creativity. He would pray to her after which she would send him a dream with new ideas, theorems or sometimes complete formulas. (15) Clearly, it is as in Barnsley's case, the inventor is the dream or more precisely consciousness and not the dreamer. *The latter is merely the last link in the chain of manifesting the unlimited wealth of consciousness.*

So finally, what is art, and what is its role in society? Art, or more explicitly, human creativity is simply a *specific aspect of the general self-expression of consciousness*. It is important to remember here that the world is an individual projection and not an independent objective reality, as the rationalists would have it. It is salutary at the same time to remind oneself that objects have no point of view from which follows that the world is a solipsistic entity. Seen in this light, together with the fact that world-awareness and ego-awareness are foreshadowed together in every dream that comes to us. *It means that the world with its myriad of things and the individual beholder are no more separate from each other than the dreamer and his nocturnal world. Indeed, as Chuang Tzu says in his chapter of 'The Identity of Contraries': "The universe and I came into being together; and I, and everything therein, are One".*

Clearly, under such circumstances it is easy to understand that the creativity of the individual is merely a particular aspect of the world's unfolding. It is simply one instrument in the symphony of the world's orchestra of manifestation, where the music is a revelation of Absolute Consciousness. But since this revelation is at the same time an obscuration and indeed a falsification of Absolute Consciousness, there arises within the individual in the course of this manifestational spectacle the natural urge to return to the purity of Absolute Consciousness. This urge is as innate in consciousness as the urge to wake up from a dream in the morning.

From this is easy to see that art has a dual function. On the universal level, that is within the world creation, it is the revelation of the wonder of consciousness and its continuous absorption into the Absolute, while on the level of the individual artist it is the revelation of the potential of consciousness and its capacity to reabsorb him and the viewer into the Absolute.

It is this reabsorption or return to Absolute Consciousness that is least appreciated and understood as a function of art. That it is an act of appreciation of existence, of the

manifestation of the potential of consciousness, is readily grasped. But that this should at the same time also be an obstacle to a deeper understanding of the artistic process and indeed, the most precious gift of art, is understood only by those few who have reached a level of great maturity. Yet self-absorption resulting in total spontaneity is sought by many schools of art and praised as the hallmark of great art since its contemplation induces a state of self-absorption in the viewer. This may not lead at once to the return to the Absolute, but it will, at least, be a pointer in that direction. Thus, the contemplation of such works will have always a salutary effect on the viewers, nudging them gently towards final Absorption.

Chinese art makes much of such small steps advancing towards the ultimate experience. It strenuously advocates the perfection of skill only to advocate its eventual banishment from awareness while in full flight of creativity. Their way of advocating this is in the advice to the painter to adopt the '*method without method*'. Results of this approach are anecdotally illustrated. One example is the case of a landscape painter, who after his last brushstroke walked into the scenery he just had depicted, vanishing forever.

Another story pointing towards the subtleties of ultimate spontaneity is illustrated by the anecdote of a painter who took his painting entitled "Sleeping Pig" to an exhibition. But when he heard everybody whispering of a dead pig, he took his painting down and returned to his studio in order to conjure up a pig that was indubitably asleep. After several attempts he returned to the exhibition where his latest effort was greeted with: "Ah, sleeping pig"!

References

- (1) Barbara G. Walker, 'The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets', page 424. Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1983, ISBN 0-06-250925-X
- (2) Op. cit. 424.
- (3) Op. cit. 424-5.
- (4) There are several examples of this in "The Practice of Psychotherapy", Bollingen Series XX, Pantheon Books. An instance is on page 142, paragraph 302: "The upshot was that the fate depicted in the dream ran its course".
- (5) Op. cit. in (4) page 151.
- (6) Forrer, Kurt, "To test or not to test that is the question", is there a way of verifying the validity of the interpretation of our dreams? International Journal of Dream Research, Vol. 7, No. 2, October 2014
- (7) "The Hindu View of Art", Mulk Raj Anand; Asia Publishing House, Madras. 1957
- (8) Forrer, Kurt, "The Dream as Posthypnotic Command". 'Sleep and Hypnosis', a Journal of Clinical Neuroscience and Psychopathology. Dec 2017.
- (9) <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwimw7OE2vXeAhVXWX0KHRJSBGMQFjAAegQIAhAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmountathos-eshop.com%2Fen%2Fproduct-category%2Ficonography%2F&usq=AOvVaw3XJKAMAzazTD1GUMqXlyH2>
- (10) Shabistari, "Garden of Mystery" The Gulshani-I Raz of Shabistari, 1974
- (11) Forrer, Kurt, "To what Extent does the Dream influence the creative Process", International Journal of Dreams Research, Vol. 7, No. 1, April 2014.
- (12) From the documentary film, 'Colours of Infinity', hosted by Arthur C. Clark.
- (13) C.G. Jung, "Psychological Reflections", Bollingen Series XXXI, Pantheon Books.
- (14) Shakuntala earned the name of 'human computer' because of her brilliance in calculations. Professor Arthur Jensen tested her abilities by asking her to calculate the cube root of 61,629,875 and the seventh root of 170,859,375. Shakuntala had the answers before Jensen could write the numbers in his Notebook. Wikipedia.
- (15) Aum = mc^2 , Science and Non Duality. The Web
- (16) Chuang Tzu, Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic. Translated by Herbert A. Giles; George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London; 1961. Page 41. .