Viewing the dream as process: A key to effective dreamwork

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Summary. The Co-creative dream paradigm posits that dreams are indeterminate from the outset and unfold in real time according to the dream ego's moment-to-moment responses to the emergent content. This interactive dynamic can illuminate *process parallels* between the dream and waking relationships, even if *content parallels* cannot be easily discerned. If generic process can be unambiguously observed in the dream report, and mapped onto waking relational process, then one might argue that the best initial approach to dream analysis should be to analyze the dream process as a prelude to further analysis, especially in cases where the visual content may seem unrelated to, or discontinuous with waking life concerns. We contend that the analysis of generic process establishes a context or framework that focuses, and meaningfully constrains the range of dreamer associations in subsequent steps of the dreamwork, and may reap considerable insights apart from those derived from a consideration of the dream imagery alone. As for research implications, we propose that the continuity hypothesis can be tested in a novel way by analyzing dreaming-waking process parallels rather than content parallels, and that a process-oriented approach to dreamwork may accelerate positive outcomes. We also suggest that the process narrative may represent an underlying "conceptual" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1986) or "major" metaphor (Ullman, 1969) that functions as a continuous plot (Hartmann, 1999) onto which the visual imagery is mapped.

Keywords: Dream analysis, dream theme, process narrative, co-creative dream theory, FiveStar method

A man dreams that he is on a boat with a friend approaching a dock where they intend to tie up. But as they approach the dock, the dreamer sees that the mooring lines are missing. His friend jumps onto the dock, but falls and hits his knee as he quickly tries to find a way to secure the boat. He looks angrily at the dreamer as if to imply that the dreamer had been derelict in his duty to make sure that the dock lines were in place.

The practice of dream analysis treats the dream "as a *product* drawn from sleeping into waking, to be worked with by the application of various waking techniques" (Moffitt, 2000, p. 162). Moffit's definition makes dream analysis sound rather open-ended, but in practice dream analysis tends to be theory-driven, thus bringing to the endeavor a set of assumptions that may ultimately constrain the range of the dreamer's own discovery. As Kramer (2016) asserts, "To establish the meaning of a dream, a system must be applied to the dream content." Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible for any theory-driven approach to allow for a complete range of possible meanings. Nonetheless, unsophisticated dreamers are usually unconcerned with such weighty matters, focusing principally on interpreting the dream's visual content, and raising questions such as, "Who or what does this dream (content) *mean*, or refer to, in my waking life?" Or more specifically, "Who or what does this 'symbol' or 'situation' refer to?" These questions derive from the traditional assumptions that 1) the dream is predetermined by some unconscious process, 2) is experienced passively as a "given" by the dream ego, and 3) bears a direct correspondence with people and situations in one's waking life.

Since the dreamer is usually interested in how the dream relates to the waking life, dream analysis typically arrives at equivalency statements in the form of, "This dream says or means this about that." Along these lines, the man who shared the above dream could see obvious parallels between the missing mooring lines and his lackluster commitment to his writing. He had been feeling badly about having postponed working on a book, and believed that the "missing lines" referred to as his lack of commitment in making (i.e. mooring) his work more available to the public. Such an analysis of the dream content relieves the dreamwork enterprise from deriving broader or contrasting implications from a generally ambiguous experience, but satisfies most dreamers in the time frame usually allotted for such exploration.

While it may be justifiable to correlate dream content with specific waking scenarios and persons if the goal is to distill something immediately useful, this approach can overlook less obvious dimensions of the experience. In particular, a content-focused orientation may disregard the *narrative process* that binds the content together, and which may hold broader meaning for the dreamer independent of the dream's specific visual components. In the above dream, it would be easy to overlook the effort that the dreamer's friend was making in the dream, and the difficulty or risk he faced in the absence of expected resources. The dream-

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er's initial interpretation of the missing lines also overlooks the dream ego's passive responses over the course of the dream, and how this lack of initiative may signify a much more serious problem than the apparent lack of resources. Indeed, the dreamer's relative passivity in the face of an urgent need underscores the dreamer's lack of agency when compared to his irritated friend, whose prompt unilateral action came at a cost.

The Co-Creative Paradigm

The co-creative dream paradigm (Rossi, 1972; Sparrow, 2013, 2020; Sparrow and Thurston, 2010) naturally values process over content by treating the imagery as indeterminate and responsive to the dream ego's mindset, much in the way that quantum theorists view subatomic reality as indeterminate prior to observation. Co-creative dream theory thus views the overall dream as unfolding in real time, portraying a "moment-to-moment vectoring" (Sparrow, 2013, 2020) of the dreamer-dream interaction on a mutable "interface" (Ullman, 1969).

From the standpoint of co-creative theory, a dream that is ambiguous from a content standpoint may nonetheless reveal a discernible narrative flow punctuated by the dream ego's responses and reciprocal relationship to the imagery. Further, this reciprocal dynamic may illustrate *interactive* or *process parallels* between the dream and waking scenarios, even if *content parallels* cannot be immediately discerned. For example, it is not uncommon for dreams to portray violent situations, such as the death of oneself or loved ones. Taken literally, it may be difficult to apply the dream to one's waking life. But when, for example, the literalness of "death" is seen generically as "loss," the dreamer can more easily understand its relevance to waking life, and accordingly develop strategies for dealing with such loss.

If generic process rather than literal content (e.g. "loss" rather than "death") can be unambiguously observed in the dream report, and such generic rendering maps more easily onto waking relational dynamics, then one might argue that the best initial approach to dream analysis is to analyze the dream process as an important prelude to further analysis, especially in cases where the dream content may seem unrelated to, or discontinuous with waking life concerns. Indeed, this analysis of generic process may effectively establish a context that focuses, and meaningfully constrains the range of dreamer associations in subsequent steps of the dreamwork process (Sparrow, 2013; Sparrow and Thurston, 2010). As we will see, the illumination of the dreamer/dream interactive process may reap considerable insights apart from those derived from a consideration of the dream imagery alone.

Relational Therapy Provides a Clue

The importance of process-oriented analysis has become especially important in relational therapy, where group and family interactions provide a clear picture of established relational patterns. This paradigm has dominated group and family therapy since Lewin proposed that therapy could be ahistorical and interpersonal, taking place in the relational field *between* group members, rather than within them (Lewin, 1951; Nichols and Davis, 2016). Building upon this relational paradigm, systems-oriented family therapy embraced this approach, and built its foundation on the premise that relationships were driven by reciprocal, synchronous feedback *between* family members, and could be analyzed by emphasizing *how* members related as opposed to the content of their interactions.

Structural Family Therapy (Minuchin, 1974) is one of the prevailing systems-oriented therapies built on the premise that "reciprocity is the governing principle of relationships" (Nichols and Davis, 2016). A fundamental tenet of SFT is the importance of assessing the "structure" of a family, defined as the "recurrent patterns of interaction that define and stabilize the shape of relationships" (Nichols and Davis, 2016, p. 303). More simply, "structure" means the *relational process* of the family's interactions, as opposed to the content of those exchanges. Once the interactive process becomes illuminated, then working with the problematic content can be surprisingly easy, since the family's basic competency in dealing with *any* content issue is fostered through coaching the family in altering the ways they interact in dealing with problems.

An Unexpected Contribution

Since dream reports detail interactions between the dream ego and significant characters and scenarios, analyzing dreams from a process-oriented, or relational standpoint is similarly justified if the goal is, at least in part, to understand *how* the dream ego relates to the dream content and, by implication, parallel situations in the waking life. However, the field of dream analysis has been slow to adopt a relational orientation for a variety of reasons, not least of which was the focus on analyzing dream content fostered by Freud and Jung, in particular, albeit from contrasting theoretical orientations. Freud embraced this view when he said,

> *…every dream has a meaning, though a hidden one, that dreams are designed to take the place of some other process of thought, and that we have only to undo the substitution correctly in order to arrive at this hidden meaning. (Freud, 1900)*

In the early 70s, one of the first indications that dream analysis was shifting away from a strict content orientation can be seen in the fruits of our collaboration (Sparrow, 1979; Thurston, 1978). Working together to understand a collection of over 600 dreams that were submitted for interpretation to Edgar Cayce—the "sleeping prophet" whose 14,253 trance-based discourses provided surprisingly useful philosophical and practical commentaries, we hoped to discern a consistent methodology in Cayce's approach to dream interpretation that could be useful to modern dream workers. Thurston eventually realized Cayce often provided succinct and useful interpretations by *removing the content and summarizing the dream narrative process*. We initially referred to this method in separate works as the "simple story line" (Thurston, 1978) and "the dream theme method" (Sparrow, 1979). Since then, several well-known dream workers and authors have incorporated the benefits of viewing dreams as process or theme rather than as content alone (Garfield, 2001; Gendlin, 1986; Gongloff, 2006; Schredl, 2015, 2019). However, the use of the word "theme" has deviated from our initial conceptualization. In recent studies (Maggiolini and Crippa, 2010; Malinowski and Horton, 2010), "theme" is used the describe *situations* in dreams, such as "running away" or "flying." But the "process narrative"—the singular term we have adopted since our original collaboration—is a statement of interactive action or process through the

course of the dream report. That is, instead of using a phrase like "running away" to describe a typical dream *situation*, we prefer using one or more full sentences with pronouns and verbs to describe as completely, but as succinctly as possible, the interactive process through the course of the dream. For example, an adequate process narrative that reflects a "running away" situation might be "I am running away from a threatening situation and succeed in finding a safe place." This elaboration on "running away" describes a complete process of unfoldment over time, rather than rendering the dream as a snapshot of a common situation. Hartmann (1998), whose dream theory focuses primarily on the significant "contextualizing" metaphors in dreams, recognized our view of the process narrative when he acknowledged that there was a "background plot" that connected the dream metaphors into a seamless whole.

All of this discussion of powerful metaphors of dreams does not imply that every element of every dream … can be seen as an emotional concern pictured as an image in the dream. There is also an element of "continuity"– an ongoing background … or a background plot. Even the most powerful dreams…also have more ordinary portions that seem to serve as continuity. (1998, p. 116)

The formulation of the process narrative thus establishes a continuous thread through the dream report that distills the complete action/interaction through time. In the contemporary dreamwork methodology known as the FiveStar Method, extracting a process narrative has become the second of five steps in a comprehensive method of co-creative dream analysis (Sparrow, 2013, 2020; Sparrow and Thurston, 2010). The five steps are:

1) sharing the dream in the present tense;
2) formulating the process narrative (PN);
3) analyzing the dream ego's responses and their impact on the imagery;
4) exploring the meaning of (or associations to) the metaphoric imagery for the dreamer;
5) formulating a plan of action regarding parallel future dreams and parallel scenarios in the waking life.

Students of the FSM almost universally report that formulating the PN is the most challenging step of the method (Sparrow, 2021). After all, two thousand years of Western thought regarding dreams has consistently emphasized that the dream imagery is the carrier of meaning, regardless of its origins (Sontag, 1966). Thus, the awareness of the dream's theme/process narrative is easily overlooked in conventional dream analysis.

How to Formulate the Process Narrative

The way to formulate the PN is to summarize the main action or story line of the dream, without mentioning the names of people, places or objects. To accomplish this, one must replace all specific names, places, colors, objects, etc., with generic pronouns such as someone, something, or somewhere.

As mentioned already, the value of the PN lies in its capacity to provide a content-free *pattern* that may parallel relational dynamics in the waking life, as well as in previous and subsequent dreams. By summarizing the generic process of the dream rather than the visual content, the PN illuminates often-overlooked *why*properties of the dream ego's experience, such as intention, conflict, resistance, avoidance, willingness, and resilience. Further, the PN assists the dream worker in assessing the movement toward or away from integration or personal development (Rossi, 1972; Sparrow, 2014). Take for instance, the following dream of a 25-year-old man:

> *I am living in a house that is mine, and Roger is visiting. Suddenly, I hear someone in the cellar, and know that no one else should be in the house. Alarmed, I run from the house, and get in my car, waiting for Roger. He hesitates, however, and suggests that if we leave, the intruder will still be there, and we won't have anywhere to go. So I get out, and go back in. We hear someone coming up the cellar stairs, and suddenly an elderly woman appears. She says she lives in the basement, and is only interested in getting along with me, but needs some quiet to live peacefully. I relax and assure her that we can live cooperatively.*

The PN is usually best stated in the first person in order to increase the dreamer's sense of personal responsibility and affective immediacy, unless the dream is so threatening that additional emotional distance is needed. Told from the perspective of the dream ego, the PN of the above dream could be stated as, "I become aware of an unexpected intrusion, and initially avoid it. I then reconsider and decide to confront the problem in order to protect my interests, and then find that I can coexist with it." While the PN is usually formulated from the perspective of the dream ego, it is often useful to state it from the perspective of other dream characters, as well, since it may help the dreamer appreciate other perspectives that may be inherent in a "parts of self" view of dream characters espoused by Gestalt therapists (Perls, 1969). Note that the PN replaces all names, labels, and places with general words and pronouns (i.e., "someone," "it," "the problem,") and retains only the verbs and modifiers.

This dream initially puzzled the dreamer because of its unfamiliar imagery. He was newly married and owned his own home without a basement, and the older woman in the dream was a stranger. Approaching the dream from the standpoint of Jungian psychology, however, the meaning of the imagery can perhaps be discerned from that theoretical perspective. The basement can be seen as a metaphor for the unconscious, and the woman can be viewed as the dreamer's female side, or *anima*, with whom the dream ego appears to have an uncomfortable relationship. However, formulating the PN revealed a broader context of meaning. The dreamer was able to see in his reactions an underlying *relational style* of avoiding situations that could become confrontational. Thus, the PN revealed the status of the dream ego's *relationship* with potentially a much broader content domain. Indeed, from a therapeutic standpoint, it was more important for the dreamer to realize how he had reacted reflexively to avoid strong emotions than it was to interpret the meaning of the elderly woman or the basement. This process-oriented assessment assisted him in applying the dreamwork in several areas, including his relationship with women and his own feelings, where avoidance of strong emotion had become a "chronic adaptive response" (Sparrow, 2012) that had impeded his ability to form close, secure bonds. By viewing the dream process more broadly, the dreamer was able to see that he was maintaining an uneasy relationship with a variety of feeling-based aspects of his life, including such diverse domains as creativity and romance.

We can thus see that by focusing overly on the dream's visual content and neglecting to troubleshoot the process narrative, as well as the dream ego's responses to the content, we may inadvertently underscore a client's sense of powerlessness and victimization in the face of distressing content, which then can inadvertently exaggerate a similarly powerless condition in the waking state. Of course, we can go too far in emphasizing client accountability, especially in abusive and dangerous relationships, but therapists often err in the other direction, especially when working with individual clients, from whom we inevitably hear only one side of the story. Through analyzing a client's dreams from the standpoint of relational process we can more easily avoid ratifying biases that effectively preserve the client's status quo. Indeed, the dream's PN (and a concomitant analysis of the dream ego's responses, which is the subsequent of the FiveStar Method) can assist us illuminating two important dimensions of therapeutic work: 1) relational deficiencies that can be rectified through client experimentation, and 2) relational competencies that can be supported and strengthened by the therapeutic process.

It is probably true to say that dream sharing naturally activates the unbridled imagination of listeners, and generates intuitive, but often precipitous equivalency statements that has little relevance to the dreamer. The harm that can be done to the dreamer in a dream group or individual therapy session has been recognized in the ethics statement of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, the flagship organization for dream researchers and dreamworkers, which strenuously advocates for safeguards against intrusive interpretive conclusions. In contrast, extracting a PN restricts all input to *immediately observable* aspects of the dream. Indeed, the PN is a description of events and actions within the dream report itself, and thus forestalls the precipitous projections from dreamworkers.

The Process Narrative Sets the Course for Effective Dreamwork

Extracting the PN can provide an immediate overview of a dream that guides a subsequent discussion. By postponing the analysis of visual content, it establishes a sense of movement or action *through the dream*, which then can be broken down into sections divided by the dream ego's responses to events in those sections. Take for instance, the following dream of a woman trying to get home on her bicycle at night:

> *I'm riding a bicycle and have my cat with me. I'm walking through houses of strangers, just trying to find my way home. I'm not sure why I enter their houses. I'm being a little sneaky about it, but it seems like it is just a way for me to get to the other side of the houses. One of the families sees me and asks me what is going on. I tell them that I am just trying to get home. I realize my cat has gone outside by herself and I look for her with no luck. The couple suggests that I spend the night with them and begin my ride in the morning. I tell the man/the husband that I live close by. I take off to ride in the night and I quickly realize it is a dangerous neighborhood. There is a group of monstrous looking men staring at me and I begin to flee with them chasing me.*

The dreamer shared this dream in an online group comprised of four participants and the leader. They arrived at the following PN, stated from the perspective of the dream ego: "I am trying to get somewhere on my own, turn down the help of others, lose track of something I love, and then feels exposed and vulnerable to people I perceive to be a threat." When presented with this PN, the dreamer was able to perceive a familiar tendency in herself to refuse the help of others, and understand how that tendency often left her feeling especially isolated and vulnerable in times of stress. Again, we can see that this PN illuminates the basic interactive process and dream ego responses by initially setting aside a consideration of the visual content. While postponing a consideration of content analysis may seem counterintuitive for those who are unfamiliar with co-creative dream theory, this disciplined preliminary step reaps considerable benefits because the dreamer-dream interactive process almost always maps onto the waking relational processes. Consequently, this process analysis results in significant insights on the part of the dreamer/client without having to analyze the dream's visual content. This assessment, which is often overlooked in traditional content-focused dream analysis, is at the heart of effective competency-based coaching, mentoring, or therapy; and thus, the PN illuminates what is arguably the most important dimension of the dream. If, as Ghandi once said, "You have to be the change that you want to see in the world," an analysis of dream process elucidates how the dream ego is responding to various challenges, and naturally.

While the dream content may be unfamiliar, even unknowable, the PN may indicate the level of waking ego's resilience or "relational competency" (Jordan, 1999) as it manifests in the dream encounter. Thus, it can be said that one can draw parallels between dreams and waking life by exploring *parallel process* before attempting to establish *parallel content*.

Perceiving dream process becomes easier once the dream worker's paradigm has shifted away from the traditional content-oriented approach to dreams toward the co-creative model. Indeed, once a dream worker views the dream as *an indeterminate, interactive experience*, then one's attention naturally shifts away from *what* the dreamer reports to *how* the dreamer proceeds through the dream experience, much in the way that a seasoned family therapist will focus on what's going on *between* people, rather than the problem as it has been presented verbally. Take for instance a dream in which a dreamer hooks a big fish.

> *I am flyfishing with C. in the clear water of a lagoon, near a shoreline. My deceased mother is standing nearby watching. I cast my fly blindly to a dark area where I sense a big fish lies. Something takes my fly as it sinks. There is slack in my line, and so I try to get tight to the fish, hoping that it will still be there. Sure enough, when I lift my rod I feel the steady heavy pull of a large fish that has not begun to fight. It swims toward me. I keep my line tight, preparing for the fish to run once it realizes that it's hooked. When it gets close, I am able to lift the fish to the surface where we can all see that it is a huge trout. But before I can land it, it comes loose. Then, almost immediately, it seems that I have caught a slightly smaller trout that I have in hand, waiting for my brother C. to take my photo with it. Mom stands beside me as I submerge myself up to my neck in the clear water, and hold the fish beside my face, just above the water line. C. takes one photo, and I immediately return the fish to the water, unharmed. There is a great sense of celebration among the three of us.*

Within the traditional content-oriented dreamwork paradigm, one's attention would gravitate toward the compelling imagery, including the dreamer's deceased mother, his brother, a giant trout, a smaller trout, a camera and a photograph. This preoccupation with discrete content would support the extraction of meaning from the individual components of the dream, rather than its interactive, interwoven process, which is comprised of much more than the visual imagery. Even Gestalt therapists—who customarily facilitate a here-and-now interaction between the dreamer and particular dream characters or objects—might disregard the overall narrative process in favor of singling out compelling images for a here-and-now dialoguing process. The PN, in contrast, precedes any consideration of content, regardless of theoretical or practical differences in how to treat the content, by omitting *all mention of specific content*. This is a tall order for those of us accustomed to treating the symbols or metaphors as the exclusive carriers of meaning. However, temporarily suspending all interpretive assessments—and for that matter, non-interpretive Gestalt dialoguing, as well— and concentrating on the overall narrative flow of the manifest dream, the dreamwork more easily reveals a sophisticated level of meaning expressed by the intact, generic process. In this particular dream, the PN could be formulated from the dream ego's perspective as, "I am connecting with something, but I am not able to sustain the connection. Then I am succeeding to a somewhat lesser extent by trying again."

The dreamer was able to relate the dream process to his struggle as a writer, and his fear that he's lost his creative edge. He realized that by persisting in his efforts—that is, by "taking up the slack and staying connected" with the process of writing on a regular basis, and celebrating modest levels of achievement while remaining unattached to the outcome—he would satisfy his deeper creative impulses. Without formulating the PN, the dreamer may have been overly focused on specific content parallels between dream images and his waking life. While, for instance, the big fish may represent a "bestseller," and the smaller fish a less significant work, such conclusions remain speculative, at best, and far too reductionistic to allow for a fuller range of possibilities. In contrast, the PN was unambiguous, but provided an open-ended course of action in regard to creative pursuits of all descriptions.

A tentative formulation of the PN can be done without the dreamer present, since it is based entirely on the manifest dream report rather than on hunches or theory-driven knowledge regarding the dream imagery. However, when the dreamer is present, he or she should be, as always, the final judge of whether the PN accurately captures the dream ego's movement through the encounter with the content. In our experience, the dreamer and the dream worker(s) typically work together to refine the statement to the dreamer's satisfaction. Because the PN is purely descriptive, however, the dream worker rarely knows what associations the formulation of the PN may set in motion in the dreamer. Nor does the dream worker know whether the process reflects a constructive development in the context of the dreamer's own beliefs and values. For instance, the dream ego may report killing a bully from childhood, or having sex with an old lover. The PN provides a values-free description of the process, and thus no judgment should accompany the initial dreamwork. It is then up to the dreamer/client to determine if such dream behaviors represent interim accomplishments that should be celebrated, or unacceptable behaviors from the perspective the dreamer's own values and morals.

The PN's Function in Therapy

We have seen how the PN represents a noninvasive preliminary step in the dreamwork process that can awaken a sense of cohesive understanding that would otherwise go unnoticed in a precipitous pursuit of "equivalency" statements. Such equivalency statements translate the content into familiar, if not already known waking parallels or widely accepted constructs, such as "the woman represents your mother (or feminine side)" or "the fish represents your life force." Such equivalencies may satisfy an immediate need to reduce the ambiguity of the dream into meaningful persons, situations, or categories, but from the standpoint of psychotherapy, it begs the question, "So, how does this translate into active strategies for living?" Unless the dreamwork initially clarifies the relational process—the dynamic movement of the dream through time, rather than an array of standalone components—it can easily neglect the dream ego's participation in the unfolding narrative, thus depriving the dreamer of any sense of agency, as well as a plan of relevant action going forward.

The PN is similar in many ways to what person-centered therapists refer to as a paraphrase. Although a Rogerian therapist can mention content (i.e. people, places, and other nouns) in a paraphrase, the emphasis in always on a non-interpretive, succinct summation of a client's communication, which inevitably focuses on process over content. As the relationship deepens, the counselor may also reflect on feelings and meaning inherent in the client's disclosures, but the paraphrase represents the first and least ambitious reflective tool mastered by the person-centered therapist. The "genius" of the PN and the paraphrase, alike, lies in the strict commitment to reproducing the therapy client's disclosures without embellishment or interpretation. In both cases, it takes discipline and faith on the part of the therapist by establishing from the onset an attitude of respect for the client/dreamer's autonomy.

Research Potentials

We believe that the PN offers a variety of research possibilities overlooked by purely content-oriented dream theory and practice, including 1) clinical outcome studies that would compare the subjective outcomes of process vs. content oriented approaches, 2) studies that would further examine the continuity hypothesis between dreaming and waking, and 3) the relationship of the PN to underlying "conceptual" or "major" metaphors.

Clinical Outcome Studies. In recent years, outcome studies of dreamwork efficacy have increased, following the work of Hill and her associates (1986; 2018), who have explored the clinical outcomes associated with the use of "Cognitive-Experiential Dream Model " (CEDM), in which a therapist works with an individual client to *explore* a dream, extract insights from it, and formulate future actions from it. A more recent study (Malinowski, 2021) has compared the Ullman group approach with an individual method developed by Schredl, and determined that both produced constructive outcomes, with Schredl's method achieving higher, albeit insignificant outcome measures. Given that Schredl's method includes a process analysis step, it encourages us

to foresee testing the FiveStar Method alongside methods such as Hill's, Schredl's, and Ullman's methodologies.

A particular research angle might involve testing the PN's rapidity in achieving "success" noninvasively when compared to traditional content-focused analyses. Of course, using any dreamwork method raises the question of how outcomes can be achieved without violating the dreamer's autonomy. Preserving the dreamer's authority in determining the dream's meaning is a centerpiece of modern dreamwork. Ullman stated that "Only he or she (the dreamer) is the final arbiter as to whether or not it [dreamwork] is done successfully" (1994). Taylor agreed, and went on to define a singular criterion of success:

> *"Only the dreamer can say with any certainty what meanings his or her dream may have. This certainty usually comes in the form of a wordless ´aha!´ of recognition… and is the only reliable touchstone of dream work¨(2013).*

If success can be defined, as Taylor proposes, as an "aha moment" for the dreamer, one might ask, What is the safest and fastest way to facilitate this discovery noninvasively?" As for safety, Ullman recommended prefacing interpretive statements with "If this were my dream," and Taylor further refined this statement by using the words, "In my version of the dream…" as appropriate qualifying statements for any interpretive suggestion. While such qualifying language can lessen the invasive impact of a dream worker's assignment of meaning to dream content, the content-oriented focus of traditional dream analysis, by definition, constantly runs the risk of generating invasive interpretations from the dreamworker(s). In contrast, formulating the PN may represent a relatively noninvasive method for fostering the dreamer's "aha" moment. Not only is the PN based solely on summarizing the manifest dream report, but it often awakens significant initial insights wholly unrelated to the interpretation of dream imagery. Thus the PN offers a safe but effective initial analysis of the dream's meaning, which may, in turn accelerate the achievement of the "aha" moment for the dreamer.

Given our experiences of formulating the PN early in the dreamwork, we believe that the PN may achieve this "aha" moment more rapidly than other methods. This hypothesis could be investigated empirically by conducting interviews with dreamers who have worked with the more traditional modalities and are being introduced to the content-free process narrative method, and/or by measuring the time it takes to arrive at an "aha" moment when summarizing the process narrative as opposed to engaging in content-focused analysis.

The Continuity Hypothesis. As far as we know, there's never been any research to examine empirically the *degree of continuity between generic dream process and waking state summaries that have been reduced to process-only narratives*. Considerable research has already been done on the relationship between dream and waking *content* parallels in attempts to evaluate the "continuity hypothesis." Deviating from a strict content assessment, Malinowski and Horton (2011) compared "themes" in dreams and waking narratives and found parallels between waking and dream themes; however, they used "theme" to describe activities, scenarios, and incidents rather than plot or generic process. Thus, "theme" did not focus on generic process, as we have defined it. Given the absence of research inquiry into dream-waking process parallels, we believe that future studies could provide additional support for the continuity hypothesis by removing content from dream reports and waking summaries, and then exploring whether the generic summaries of the same person could be matched by blind judges. This kind of study would test the hypothesis of whether dreams and waking experiences are isomorphic, that is, tend to express similar underlying processes *independent* of content bizarreness or realism. If so, the continuity hypothesis would not hinge so much on whether dream content is bizarre or congruent with waking life, but rather on whether the generic story lines were aligned. This would establish a new basis for exploring the continuity hypothesis, and perhaps to emancipate the question of waking-dream continuity from content alone.

The PN as an Expression of an Underlying Major or Conceptual Metaphor. In recent years, linguistic theorists (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff, and Johnson, 1980) and dream theorists (Jung, 2014; Ullman, 1969; Sparrow, 2013; 2020) have elaborated on the way that dream formation involves the successive sequencing, or "mapping" of specific images that coalesce or "vector" (Sparrow, 2013; 2020) the encounter between the dream ego and the emergent content as it occurs through time. Ullman was perhaps the first (1969) to view the entire dream as a metaphoric process that arises when the reduced vigilance of the waking mind encounters the intrusive novelty of emergent content, resulting in a need to "map" successive "minor" onto an underlying "major metaphor"—hence his allusion to movement in real time by his title, "Metaphors in Motion."

> *…the dreamer, forced to employ a sensory mode, has to build the abstraction out of concrete blocks in the form of visual sequences. The resulting metaphor can be viewed as an interface phenomenon where the biological system establishes the sensory medium as the vehicle for this expression and the psychological system furnishes the specific content. (Ullman, 1969)*

Indeed, this unfolding process is more fully anticipated within co-creative dream theory than through traditional content-oriented dream theory. The co-creative paradigm posits that dreams are indeterminate from the outset (Rossi, 1971; Sparrow, 2013; Sparrow and Thurston, 2010). While not specifically addressing this real-time, indeterminate aspect of dream emergence, Jung (2014), Ullman (1969) and Lakoff (1973) all propose that the specific metaphoric images represent expressions of an underlying superordi-

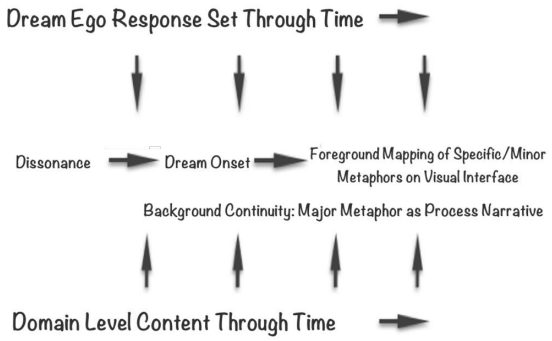

Figure 1. Process Narrative as Major Metaphor in Dream Emergence (Adapted from Sparrow, 2020)

nate concept, which they refer to, respectively, as the "third thing," (Jung, 2014), the "conceptual metaphor" (Lakoff and Anderson, Lakoff, 1973) or "major metaphor" (Ullman, 1969). Jung eloquently elaborates on the idea of a "third thing" to which a series of thematically related dream metaphors all refer.

> *…archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors. If such a content should speak of the sun and identify with it the lion, the king, the hoard of gold guarded by the dragon, or the power that makes for the life and health of man, it is neither the one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similes, yet – to the perpetual vexation of the intellect – remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula. (Jung, 2014)*

Metaphors (and similes) express themselves *in poetic language* as stated or implied equivalencies (e.g. "My love is like a red, red rose.") and *in artwork and dreams* as imagery that juxtaposes abstract ideas with grounding elements (e.g. "I cast my fly blindly to a dark area where I sense a big fish lies."). In contrast to the dream's surface imagery, the PN could serve as *an expression of a singular background metaphor in sentence form that unites the surface components.* While this may represent a novel premise, it could help to complete Hartmann's theoretical view of metaphors. While he did not acknowledge that the "contextualizing metaphors" (1998) appeared against the backdrop of a global unifying concept as articulated by Jung (2014), Ullman (1969), and Lakoff (1993), he did acknowledge the presence of a background component in the dream, which establishes a continuous thread.

> *There is also an element of "continuity"– an ongoing background…or a background plot. Even the most powerful dreams…also have more ordinary portions that seem to serve as continuity. (1998, p. 116)*

Hartmann stops short of identifying this "background plot" as a metaphoric expression itself onto which the surface imagery appears perhaps because it is not, itself, based in imagery. But it would have completed the picture of metaphor formation occurring at a deep, generic level that produces surface images capable of sequencing the dream ego's encounter with the underlying metaphoric theme through the course of dream.

When Lakoff and Johnson (1986) describe conceptual metaphors, one can see how the dream's process narrative can be viewed as a content-free summary of the underlying conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are global concepts, such as "Life is a journey," from which countless more specific variations can provide a specific angle on the global concept (Lakoff and Johnson, 1986). The more generic a PN becomes, the more it begins to encapsulate a global, if not universal concept. To illustrate the presence of a background, continuous theme that unites the surface components, the following dream contains discrete sections with commensurate metaphorical imagery that depict the dream ego's successive efforts to continue a journey toward a singular goal:

> *I am traveling in a car w/ two of my closest friends. I am driving, not sure where we are or where we are going, but I feel like I am on a mission and feel a great sense of urgency. My friends are happy and talking and laughing and don't seem to feel the way I do. I feel that I have to be somewhere and there is no time to spare.*
>
> *We come to a small town along the highway and are sidetracked. There is some sort of carnival going on, and before I know it the car is driving itself toward the carnival. That is, I am still driving, but feel the steering wheel pull to the side, and take us through a field and towards the woods where there is a parking lot. We get out and my friends want to stay and see the carnival and a play that is about to start. I am not happy about this and express it to them and anyone else around. I say that we need to go, and very soon!*
>
> *Then I am alone, standing beside the highway near this place and waiting for my friends to come. I say, "Let's go!" I then say, "I am leaving now and anyone that wants to come with me better get in the car, now!!!*
>
> *As I am saying this and standing alongside the road, I see several tractor-trailers coming towards me at a high rate of speed. I watch them with caution, but I don't move or run. I stand my ground and watch them barreling towards me and at the last minute they shoot off the road to my right and go on their way.*
>
> *Then we are at someone's house, not sure who, and stopping for a visit. Again, everyone else is laughing and talking and at ease, in no hurry. I am still anxious and state that I want and need to get going right away! I am stern in expressing this, but no one gets upset with me.*
>
> *Then it switches to just me and I am meeting the man I love and we are boarding a huge ship together, like a cruise ship, and we are very happy and excited.*

Each of the three segments of this dream (culminating in a fourth segment as represented by the dream ego's arrival at the ocean liner) can be seen as a repeat of the previous one, with new imagery and new challenges to the dreamer's progress. Obviously, each metaphoric situation offers a slightly different challenge, even though the underlying process can be summarized globally, as Lakoff and Johnson (1986) do when they point to "Life is a journey" as a global metaphor that encompasses countless derivations. In the case of this dream, the underlying conceptual or "major" (Ullmann, 1969) metaphor might be summarized as "Life is a journey involving various distractions from a singular goal." So, one can see that the relational dynamic between dream ego and emergent content does two things: 1) It accounts for the coalescence and sequencing of metaphoric imagery in real time, and 2) serves as a continuous thread that unifies the surface imagery. Thus, we suggest that the "conceptual metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1986), the "major metaphor" (Ullman, 1969), or the "third thing" (Jung, 2014) could be synonymous with the PN, which links the surface images into a continuous background (Hartmann, 1998) framework.

This novel hypothesis could perhaps be tested by: 1) selecting a series of dreams, 2) formulating the PNs for each dream, 3) extracting the metaphoric segments from each dream, 4) mixing the PNs randomly with the assortment of extracted metaphoric segments, and 5) asking judges if they can match the metaphoric components with the PNs. A positive correlation might indicate the kind of surface-to-depth, specific-to-general relationship postulated by the theorists that we have cited (Jung, 2014; Lakoff and Johnson, 1986; Ullman, 1969).

Summary

In summary, the analysis of generic dream process in the form of the "process narrative" permits a content-free restatement of the dream that distills the movement of action and interaction through the course of the dream's unfoldment in real time. The incorporation of this step can be seen in various contemporary systematic dreamwork methods, including Schredl's "Listening to the Dreamer" method (Malinowski, 2021; Schredl, 2015, 2019), and the FiveStar Method (Sparrow, 2013; Sparrow & Thurston, 2010). By revealing parallel processes in the waking state, the PN can serve to illuminate relational dynamics that have immediate relevance to the dreamer, somewhat independently from the interpretation of the dream's metaphoric content. By taking the time to discern the background continuity (Hartmann, 1998) illuminated by the PN, the dreamwork conceivably generates a cohesive framework into which the subsequent analysis of specific dream metaphors can be meaningfully structured.

Of course, dream workers can opt to explore the immediate insights stimulated by the PN without going any further, especially if time constraints prevent a more comprehensive application of dream analysis involving metaphor analysis, or the dreamer achieves an "aha" moment without needing to go any further. However, if the dream worker has the time, he or she may wish to encourage the dreamer/client to postpone making conclusions based on the PN alone until further steps can supplement the initial insights awakened by the PN. Indeed, we have found that taking the path of "slow arrival" in our own FiveStar Method (FSM), and covering other dimensions of the dream, works somewhat better than encouraging the dreamer to stop after achieving an "aha" from the formulation of a clearly applicable PN. We often find that the initial "aha" links the PN to a single situation in the dreamer's life, but that a more complete analysis often broadens the focus onto other areas, as well.

While dreamers are often tempted to run with the insights produced by the PN alone, embedding the PN as the second of five steps enables the dreamer initially to perceive a pattern that can be applied to more than one area of the waking life before proceeding with an analysis of the dream ego's responses to the dream content in Step 3, which increases the dreamer's sense of competent and dysfunctional relational dynamics that are exhibited by the dreamer's choices, assumptions, and responses. Only then do we explore the dreamer's associations to the dream imagery in order to supplement the insights afforded by the initial steps. We have found that this particular sequence of steps naturally generates a comprehensive picture of the dream's meaning that partakes of both process/relational-oriented and content-oriented analyses of the dream.

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