

EVA FRAPICCINI

Instruction Manual for Practical Dreamers

*We are such stuff as dreams are made on,
and our little life is rounded with a sleep.*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene 1

Sleep is that physiological and fleeting moment of our physicality that comes with a loss of consciousness, and it is at this particular time of suspension that our unconscious takes us into the magical territory of the dream, where imagination, truth and fiction merge and overlap. According to Sigmund Freud, the dream is the *via regia* to our unconscious, a path to be followed with the adventurous spirit of an explorer. Notwithstanding its centuries-long publishing history and the major theoretical and practical changes that have impacted psychoanalysis, Freud's renowned 1899 essay, *Die Traumdeutung* ("The Interpretation of Dreams"), continues to command enormous prestige among psychoanalysts and humanities scholars. For the former, it is the inaugural and most ingenious work of that discipline, for the latter it is one of the fundamental documents of European culture, "[...] the emblem of a troubled century, ours, which had to learn from events both that the sleep of reason produces monsters and that a too lucid reason when awake can also produce them¹." According to many psychologists, the interpretation of dreams is like a two-faced herm, a sort of contemporary Janus, with one face looking to the past (i.e., to the two classic texts of ancient oneiromancy, whose titles it replicates²) and the other to the new century, in which psychoanalysis has developed as a revolutionary method.

In Greek culture, Roman culture, and earlier, in Babylonian and Egyptian culture, dreams were thought to bring a privileged and yet obscure knowledge and hence required mediation and interpretation by figures such as a priest, a seer or a magician.

"According to the ancients, the protagonist of the dream – be it a deity or the spirit of a deceased – was external to the dreamer. Homer, for example, in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, does not hesitate to let us know that "dreams come from Zeus". Conversely, in Freud's works, the dream is entirely a product of the dreamer's mind, which creates the scenery, chooses and designs the characters, writes the script and, essentially, directs the entire play and interprets it³."

The ancients believed that dreams were a *trait d'union* between the human world and fate, a language through which the gods or the dead gave us a glimpse of the future. According to Freud, instead (and this is where his paradigmatic revolution lies), dreams tell us about our present and our past, our desires or their denial, episodes from our childhood that have just occurred or that upset or disturbed us.

¹ Fausto Petrella, *Estetica del sogno e terapia a cento anni dalla Traumdeutung in Il Sogno Cento Anni Dopo* (Stefano Bolognini), *Mimesis/Frontiere della Psiche* no. 76, (Mimesis Edizioni, Milan-Udine, 2016), 29

² One text is by Artemidorus of Ephesus, from the 3rd century A.D., and the other by Antiphon Sophist, which dates as far back as the 5th century B.C.

³ Aldo Carotenuto, *Nel Mondo dei Sogni* (Rome, Di Renzo Editore, 2003), 21

Nowadays, it is difficult to grasp the revolutionary impact of a text that addressed, without prejudice, a phenomenon that is ingrained in human nature but until then had been unanimously regarded as pertaining solely to folklore and popular superstition. The unconscious was the key player in this innovative discipline, which later on was partially challenged by Jung. The so-called “heretical disciple” of Freud, contradicted the master, claiming that “[...] the *via regia* to the unconscious ... is not the dream... but the complex, which is the architect of dreams and symptoms.”⁴ It was with Jung that psychoanalysis moved from the personal to the collective unconscious, rich with mythological and ancestral motifs, peoples’ cultures, and archaic images: our dreams are populated not only by personal memories, repressed desires, and the memories and traumas of childhood, but also by all those images and emotions so ancient and remote that they are lost in the mists of time.

Since, according to Jung “the dream is no longer entirely a product of the dreamer’s mind, or, more precisely, its symbols are not exclusively and strictly correlated with the individual creativity of the subject, but also tap into the broader repertory of images of the collective unconscious,”⁵ even dream analysis is revolutionised by the new theoretical contributions.

Human beings have always hesitated to identify totally with their corporality, so much so that along the entire history of humankind we may discern a tendency to view one’s physicality as a limit that needs to be overcome. In this connection, in many African cultures, the dream is the moment when our vital principle, our soul, finally relieved of the weight of the body, can roam; what a person sees in a dream is what the spirit sees in the course of its peregrinations.

The dream is also viewed with extreme mistrust by the Catholic Church, in that it eludes by definition the control of both the dreamers and those who are officially responsible for their souls, i.e., the clergy, as “[...] their own oneiric experience discloses the uncontrollable vertigo and seductions that a dream can arouse, the abysses it opens up to the imagination. Waking visions, which were apparently frequent, were thought to be less disturbing both because they took place before witnesses and because they were instantly subjected to the evaluation and interpretation of the religious authorities. The ungovernable night of the individual, which is exposed to the trickery of the Devil and the guilty complacency of the body, it was contrasted with the daylight of waking visions, which are filtered and guaranteed by the testimony of authorised mediators who stand as a bulwark against diabolical temptations”.⁶

The dream, analysed from an anthropological, social and artistic viewpoint, is the material used by artist Eva Frapiccini to construct her itinerant and habitable installation *Dreams’ Time Capsule*. Inside this inflatable, seamless, intimate and shielded capsule, the participants relate their dreams. This installation, which enabled visitors to change their status from that of mere users to activating agents of the work, was the catalyst for a process of sharing, where the most intimate experiences became part of a collective meta-memory. Since 2011, the artist has travelled with her *Capsule* to many countries, in Europe and outside Europe, collecting the dreams of thousands of people of different ethnicities, cultures and social backgrounds. One of the most interesting elements is that certain images and sensations are common to all human beings when they enter the so-called REM phase.⁷

⁴ Aldo Carotenuto, *Mondo dei Sogni*, 32

⁵ Aldo Carotenuto, 33

⁶ Marc Augè, *La guerra dei sogni, esercizi di etno-fiction* (Milan, Elèuthera, 1998), 63

⁷ “REM” is the acronym of Rapid Eye Movement, i.e., the movement of the eyes under the eyelids during this phase of sleep. When we are in a state of deep sleep, we lose control of our body, which is almost in a state of muscular paralysis; at the same time, the brain is in full activity. The REM phase of sleep is also called “paradoxical sleep” because it is the only one in which dreams occur.

This work on dreams took the form of the immersive exhibition *Dust of Dreams*, in 2022. On this occasion, the *Dream Capsule*, installed in the main courtyard of Palazzo Ducale in Genoa, was part of a more complex stage apparatus with projections and performances. Through moving images and dance, Eva Frapiccini created a sort of Jungian dream theatre in which the recordings collected in the archive, by activating video projections, made the spectators experience a personal oneiric dimension, which was their own and shared at the same time.

Precisely on account of this individual experience, which, at the same time, is shared through the archetypes, Jung views the dream as a sort of theatre where the characters are parts of our psyche; and it is precisely by drawing on the idea of a collective unconscious that the artist conceived a sensory experience in which the audience, from a mere sum of individuals, becomes part of a collectivity that shares fears and desires elaborated by the unconscious; thus, the archetypal collective images become in their turn keywords to enter into psychic resonance with the artist's work.

All this material, which goes to compose an incredible memory archive, also through the use of a special software that analyses the words that most recur in the narratives of the dreams, becomes in its turn the starting point for this second work by the artist, entitled *Dreamscape*. The sound installation, mainly centred on the experience of listening, is activated by the spectators who, by moving around the exhibition space, can "access" six sound sources, each of which is connected to a specific dream-related keyword. The artist worked to categorise the images that most frequently appear in our dreams and grouped them into six macro-categories: water, the fall (or the flight), the door (or the search for a door), the shadows (or the ephemeral presences), the teeth, the hole (or the boat, or the vessel). Oftentimes, those who dream they are immersed in water contextually dream they are sucked into a hole, with clear references to the moment of birth or life before birth. Another interesting aspect is the massive presence of nature: in many cases, the dreamers find themselves walking amidst green, luxuriant fields or in attractive seaside or mountain landscapes, surrounded by the peace and beauty of an unspoilt environment uncontaminated by human presence. Maybe these too are ancestral memories of a preindustrial world where the relationship of living beings with nature and animals was still one of respect and care. A desire to take down language, religious and cultural barriers through the narration of one's own dreams is the challenge behind this complex project in which anthropology, psychology and art continuously interact. No matter how much some narratives would have us think otherwise, science is theorising that all human beings can be children of the Mitochondrial Eve, a great mother as generous and welcoming as the earth that hosts us. Hence, we are all connected by prenatal memories and experiences and symbolic images of universal import, and dreams are the archetypes that link us to one another with invisible threads, and that recur similar in all cultures, at all latitudes.

To chase "the elsewhere" is the primary function of dreams. It is as though the mind was seeking new horizons and new boundaries, not to remain on this side of them, but to cross them and discover what our everyday lives conceal. To dream is to unveil the matrix, it is like taking the red pill that Morpheus offers Neo⁸, it is to be able to investigate the reality hidden behind the existence we lead day-by-day. In this work by Eva Frapiccini, the dream leaves the ivory tower of the dreamer's mind and becomes narrative; in its narration, it builds a bridge to reality and to those who will listen, thus becoming message, communication.

⁸ Neo Anderson is the star of the Matrix film franchise, a series of science fiction films produced since 1999, written and directed by sisters Lana and Lilly Wachowski

But, as Aldo Carotenuto writes: “[...] it is an altogether unique communication in that, while it comes out in the open, the dream remains [...] the exclusive property of the dreamer, who is its architect and at the same time its addressee. Even when it seems intended for another person, or when we feel the need to tell what has passed through our mind in the night, the addressee of all this always remains the dreamer, who, through that oneiric message, can gain insight and understanding, or even just have doubts and become curious. Indeed, precisely in this curiosity lies the power of the dream, its ability to extirpate certainties and open new doors, make us fly when we have always wanted to do so, or let us find a place we have always wanted to move away from.”⁹

*The dream is an inexhaustible source of spiritual information about yourself*¹⁰

(Joseph Campbell)

Paola Ugolini

⁹ Aldo Carotenuto, *Mondo dei Sogni*, 60-61

¹⁰ Quote by Joseph Campbell in Paolo Crimaldi, *Sogni ed Evoluzione, il mondo onirico tra Karma e destino* (Rome, Edizioni Spazio Interiore, 2014),11