
REVISITING DREAMS :
INTERDISCIPLINARY
PERSPECTIVES ON DREAM
RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

Introduction

Throughout human history, dreams have occupied a prominent role within cultures worldwide, often serving as a portal to mythical and religious realms. Due to their extraordinary ability to reveal the workings of the unconscious mind, dreams continue to fascinate scholars, practitioners, and innovators. How have dreams been perceived throughout history, and how do we understand them in contemporary society and the digital age? How significant are dreams in our broader comprehension of spirituality, waking reality, and culture? How can we understand the nature of dreams within current scientific and technological paradigms? What is the future of dreaming?

This special double issue of *Poligrafi* focuses on an interdisciplinary understanding of dreams, with an eye toward the most exciting horizons for research in the coming years. This issue began with the intent to gather contemporary philosophical, religious, and empirical perspectives on dreaming. Additionally, it aims to inspire readers to delve into the extensive and diverse historical knowledge related to dreams and dreaming to gain a deeper understanding of the current and future situation in the field.

Like other fields in the humanities, dream studies have been shaped by the cultural information space due to the rapid growth of digital technology. This has led to the emergence of novel, computationally driven methodologies in data analysis. The process of the mass digitalization of dream data is currently underway, facilitated by the rapid advancement of processing power. As a result, many researchers have already started to map patterns within extensive collections of dream reports. We estimate that this trend will continue as the large digital repositories of dreams continue to expand. These predictions necessitate

novel epistemological, ethical, and philosophical investigations that are likely to transcend binary distinctions and promote a cooperative approach and constructive discourse across the fields of data science and (digital) humanities. The aspiration is for the area of dream studies to serve as a model discipline in which the aforementioned symbiotic relationship is not only feasible but also essential in advancing a more comprehensive, methodical, and integrative approach to one of the most enigmatic phenomena that has perplexed humanity for thousands of years.

The contributions to this special issue represent the work of leading scholars from diverse fields, including psychology, data science, the history of religions, and cultural studies. Taken as a whole, the eight articles illustrate the high quality of scholarship in the field and its methodological diversity. Of course, many topics are not covered in this collection. It is not an encyclopedia or an introductory survey. Instead, the focus here is on the newest, most important, controversial, and/or under-studied topics in the study of dreams. Each article addresses an area of dream research with special urgency and contemporary significance.

Nina Petek provides an elegant review of a lineage of classic Buddhist teachings about dreams, consciousness, and salvation. In addition to illuminating the role of dreams in this religious tradition, she raises vital questions for all forms of dream research regarding basic conceptions of mind, truth, suffering, and salvation.

Victor Krebs reflects on the fate of dreaming in an increasingly technology-saturated society. He draws on the theories of Bernard Stiegler and Wildred Bion to warn of digitally-mediated threats to dreaming, threats with both personal and collective implications.

Laura Vollmer addresses the fundamental question of how conceptions of dreams relate to differing cultural and historical contexts, and to the regimes of power embedded in those contexts. Her article takes an inspiring and important step toward a true historiography of dreaming.

Carla Mento and colleagues report on the statistical analysis of a demographic survey among Italian adults regarding sleep, dreams, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This study adds a new perspective to the growing literature of research on dreams in relation to collective events like the pandemic.

Mary Walsh investigates clinical and experimental research on the interactions between dreams, sleep, and seizure disorders like epilepsy. Treatment methods for seizure disorders rarely take any notice of dreams, yet Walsh finds the frequency and contents of dreams can be useful information in diagnosing and caring for people with epilepsy.

Sheldon Juncker presents a pioneering study of dream research and artificial intelligence (AI). He explains how AI systems, if properly understood and deployed, can function as a valuable tool in the study of dreams.

Kelly Bulkeley describes new advances in the empirical study of dreams, with the development of powerful tools for analyzing the frequency of word usage in dream reports. He shows how simple methods of analysis can yield a host of accurate insights about the underlying patterns in a set of dreams.

Maja Gutman Mušič connects historical and cross-cultural perspectives on the nature of dreaming with contemporary advances in artificial intelligence, as a way of mapping a more fruitful future for the field. She outlines an approach to data-driven inquiry that remains grounded in both traditional epistemologies and archetypal psychology.

These eight articles may be read in any order, but the arrangement we have chosen aims to provide a gentle framing and contextualizing of intellectual themes. Thus, the first article introduces the earliest roots of dream research in ancient religious belief and practice, followed by two articles taking a more broadly philosophical and historical approach. Next come three articles addressing contemporary psychological and therapeutic issues using objective methodologies. The final two articles seek to integrate dream research with new developments in artificial intelligence, drawing on the benefits of this revolutionary technology while avoiding or minimizing its dangers.

For readers interested in learning more, we encourage you to go beyond the texts and seek connections with other researchers who study dreams. As these eight articles indicate, dream research is an international pursuit in which brilliant investigators and scholarly communities are actively working all over the world. The interdisciplinary nature of dream research means that people from many different academic and cultural backgrounds can make valuable contributions. The future

prosperity of the field depends on expanding and enriching the networks of people studying dreams from all angles and perspectives. We hope you can be part of this process!

Kelly Bulkeley and Maja Gutman Mušič