Doctors of the Dreaming

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Alan Cohen suggests how the shamans of 'primitive' communism offer us a key to the communism of the future.

See also his book Decadence of the Shamans.

Talk given to the Radical Anthropology Group at Daryll Forde Seminar Room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW on 3 July 2018.

`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpp4Qf10zqk`

Introduction

I have to say that I'm speaking on a personal basis. I'm not representing any organization here. It's my own point of view that I'm putting forward here, obviously, hopefully, within a general framework of Marxism.

As Chris said, this book [Decadence of the Shamans] was published a few years ago, and I did give a talk to the RAG, as it was then, in Camden Town.

I think that I want to see it as not a finished work, but a work in progress. And so I'm going to spend a little bit of time trying to explain how I've come to the ideas that I have. I think it might help to clarify them.

Also to say what made me sort of come back and ask Chris if the time is right for another talk. It was reading a book by Davi Kopenawa, who is a Yanomono shaman, who I think has produced an extraordinary account of the shamanic worldview.

It's based on very, very long conversations with the anthropologist Bruce Alpert. And it's an extraordinary book.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it, but I would like to show a short video because I think it sets the scene for the kind of questions that we're hopefully going to look at tonight.

> This book is a message for the non-Indians. We want to teach people about our shamanic dreams. We think, dream and see in a shamanic way.
>
> There is a special tree in the forest; we take the powder and we put it in here and we blow it into another person's nose. Then they enter into the shamans' universe. The knowledge enters their minds.
>
> The knowledge of the world, the earth, water, sky, thunder, moon and the stars. This shows us everything that exists in the universe.
>
> The shamans are very important. We heal people, like doctors. But it's not just about health; we also look after the world. The shamanic spirits look after the sky, 'the falling sky'.

> When the shamans are looking after the world, we can live peacefully.
>
> I hope that the non-Indians will learn from the book and make them think about our history.[1]

This book is not only a fascinating insight into the shamanic world, but it's also a very trenchant criticism if you like, our world, what Davi calls the people of the merchandise. In other words, the system that is encroaching on and threatening to destroy this way of life and this way of perceiving the universe.

I'll come back a little bit to Davi, but I just wanted to give you that little taste of what it is that we're trying to understand here.

But I'm going to start with talking about Trotsky.

Trotsky

An extraordinary book, I think, that he wrote in 1924 called Literature and Revolution. He wrote this book in a summer holiday, 1924, which was just more or less the same time as Stalin was about to proclaim socialism in one country, which signified, for me, almost the end of the revolution. Trying to have a holiday, if you like, from the intense struggles that were going on inside the party at the moment, and trying to see, despite this sort of darkness that was closing in on the revolution in Russia, trying to peer into the mists of the future, as the young Marx had done in the economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844, to describe what humanity could be like in a truly communist future.

The whole book is really — although it's called Literature and Revolution — it's really about what humanity can be like in the future. It talks about art, the relationship between art and industry, the relationship between town and country, the need to preserve the wilderness and so on.

But it's the last few passages that I want to refer to here, where he waxes lyrical about what humanity will be like. And you'll have to forgive his sort of gender-centered language, but I'm just going to read some of the quotes.

> Man at last will begin to harmonize himself in earnest. He will make it his business to achieve beauty by giving the movement of his own limbs the utmost precision, purposefulness and economy in his work, his walk and his play. He will try to master first the semiconscious and then the subconscious processes in his own organism, such as breathing, the circulation of the blood, digestion, reproduction, and, within necessary limits, he will try to subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiologic life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical

[1] Yanomami shaman publishes unique book 'The Falling Sky'

> transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psycho-physical training. ... the nature of man himself is hidden in the deepest and darkest corner of the unconscious, of the elemental, of the sub-soil. Is it not self-evident that the greatest efforts of investigative thought and of creative initiative will be in that direction?[2]

So Trotsky is saying that in future communist society, where we've overcome all the problems existing in the current world, this will be a fundamental focus of humanity, to explore the unconscious.

I also want to quote Another Marxist of that period, who Chris has already referred to, Rosa Luxemburg, because she gives a wonderful, I think, perspective on the relationship between what we can call primitive communism and the communism of the future.

Here she's referring to the work of Morgan, which of course was a huge inspiration to Marx and Engels.

> Morgan has provided new and powerful support to scientific socialism. Whereas Marx and Engels, through their economic analysis of capitalism, demonstrated the inevitable passage of society, in the near future, to a world communist economy, and thus gave a solid scientific foundation to socialist aspirations, Morgan has to a certain extent emphatically underlined the work of Marx and Engels by demonstrating that democratic communist society, albeit in its primitive forms, has encompassed all the long past of human history before the present civilization. The noble tradition of the distant past thus extends its hand to the revolutionary aspirations of the future, the circle of knowledge is harmoniously completed, and in this perspective, the existing world of class rule and exploitation, which pretends to be the nec plus ultra of civilization, the supreme goal of universal history, is simply a miniscule, passing stage in the great forward movement of humanity.

That's from her book, Introduction to Political Economy, which is finally available in English.

In other words, she's talking, as Engels did, about a return, but on a higher level, a thoroughly dialectical conception, I think.

Of course, we also have to remember another important aspect of the work of Luxemburg, which was to show, through her economic analysis, that capitalist society cannot exist without completely destroying all the remnants of this primitive communism.

It's fundamentally hostile to primitive communism, because it has to impose itself on all previous civilizations, but above all, it has to destroy primitive communism,

[2] Literature and Revolution by Leon Trotsky

because it can't use it for its own ends. And along with this, I think, goes the whole tendency within bourgeois ideology to denigrate what was once called the savage mind, the mind of the primitive, the primitive mentality.

So I think it's something we have to bear in mind whenever we're trying to understand the thinking of the past here, this fundamental drive in capitalism, but both at the economic and at the ideological level, to denigrate and destroy all the remnants of communist society from the past.

Of course, there's the opposite danger of idealizing the past. There's a whole current link, perhaps, to anarchism called primitivism, which wants us all to go back directly to hunter-gatherer mode of existence, which is not possible. But I think we will, obviously, we'll try to steer course between these two false ways of looking at the past.

My History with Shamans

I'm going to talk a little bit, if I've got time, about my history with shamans, if you like, how I got interested in this question.

I was at university in the late 60s, a very good time to be at university, and impossible not to get politicised, to get involved in occupations and political discussions.

Of course it was also the time of the counterculture, psychedelics and all that, and there was a real interest in previous societies, in previous civilisations, and above all, in hunter-gatherer societies.

And I wanted to study history, but I also wanted to look at this aspect of things.

And I was fortunate enough to be given the chance to work with Professor Whitehouse, who was the professor of theology at the time, but he was very open-minded.

And we devised a course where I could sort of look at all these different questions, particularly shamanism.

and he introduced me to the writings of Messia Eliada, who's written the classic work on shamanism.

I just wanted to point out some of the things that struck me about those first readings that I came across in the work of Messia Eliada.

One is an essay in a book called Myth, Streams and Mysteries, which is called Nostalgia for Paradise in the Primitive Traditions.

And he points out While in past society, in the past, in 18^{th} and 19^{th} century, sometimes the primitives, so-called primitives, were seen as noble savages, as sort of inhabitants of an Arcadia, as well as the opposite view of seeing them as hardly more than animals.

Eliada points out that if you looked at the mythology of those societies, they also considered that the past had been superior to the present, that they were fallen from a higher state.

This was a theme which he linked very closely to the shamanic experience.

So this essay, *Nostalgia from Paradise and the Primitive Traditions*, focuses on a shamanic seance, or one or two different shamanic seances, where for him, through the shamanic experience, the shamanic ecstasy, the individual shaman, but through him the tribal group, is transported back to the mythical epoch, where human beings and animals were not yet estranged, where it was possible, much easier at least, to ascend from the earth to heaven, because there was a ladder that was possible to ascend, or a tree which reached from the earth to the sky.

And that That epoch, which was there at the beginning, was lost, but there is still the capacity to reintegrate it, to return to it.

And the shamanic ecstasy is the experience for Eliade par excellence of this capacity.

Another passage from his classic work, Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, stuck in my mind.

It's the story of, or the account, of a three-day trip by accounted by the ethnographer Popov of a Samoyed shaman in Siberia.

Siberia obviously is the place where the term shaman comes from. Of course, it's much more widespread than that. This was an account of a shamanic initiation, where the shaman lies sick for three days with smallpox. And during these three days, it's like he's traveling out of time, like those visitors to fairyland in folklore traditions, where you can go and spend years and years in another world and come back, and maybe only a couple of days have passed. But he goes through years and realms of existence, which initiated him as a shaman.

So I'm not going to go into the details of it, but it just struck me of the enormous capacities of the human psyche, whether this is all imagination or not, it struck me as the huge capacities of the psyche and of the unconscious.

So when I carried on my postgraduate studies, I was accepted by Mansfield College, Oxford, a 19th century theology college. And they had no idea what to do with me at all. I said I wanted to study shamanism and myths of the lost paradise. They had no idea how that would fit into theology. So they sent me along to the anthropology department. And the anthropology department at that time had absolutely no interest in shamanism whatsoever. Probably thought it was just a lot of hippie nonsense, I don't know, but they had no interest whatsoever in what I was doing.

So eventually I managed to, I was hooked up with Professor Zehner, Professor RC Zehner, quite a distinguished professor of Eastern religions, who'd written a book polemicizing with Aldous Huxley on the question of psychedelic experience. Can it lead to genuine religious experiences and so on? It'd be interesting to talk a bit more about him.

The other day I found a copy of the original thesis that I wrote trying to put all my ideas into writing. It was all hand scribbled. And poor Professor Zane had read through pages and pages of this confused scroll. And I knew he'd read it because he had sort of exasperated comments all the way through it. And at the end he said, clearly you have no idea how to write the thesis. But in my defense, no one actually, no one in those days, no one told you how to write a thesis. You were just thrown into

it and said, well, go ahead and write the thesis. No one actually trained you how to do it. That was completely, yeah, to come much later, I think.

Anyway, what I was able to do at Oxford was to look at some of the original sources that Eliada had referred to and get a much better idea of where they came from and the kind of background, the cultural background of the shamanic experiences that he wrote about.

And a few of them really, again, stuck in my mind, and again, for me, confirmed the importance and seriousness of this study.

Again, these passages that stuck in my mind then, one in particular by an Inuit shaman called Ijar Jakuk, he was referred, when Western explorers first came across shamans in Siberia or the Arctic and so on.

They usually described them either as lunatics, people affected with Arctic hysteria, or as frauds, conjurers, jugglers. They saw them as people who were deceiving the poor, superstitious natives for their own ends. This was a very common perception. And of course, there was the whole missionary view, which saw them as worshipping the devil as well.

But this is an interesting insight into the fact that among the shamans as well, there can be, if you like, gradations of seriousness. So he says this:

> "On my travels I have sometimes been present among the saltwater dwellers, for instance among the coast people at Utkuhigjalik...these angatkut (shamans) never seemed trustworthy to me. It always appeared to me that these saltwater angatkut attached more weight to tricks that would astonish the audience, when they jumped about the floor and lisped till sorts of absurdities and lies in their so-called spirit language; to me all this seemed only amusing and as something that would impress the ignoram. A real shaman does not jump about the floor and do tricks, nor does he seek by the aid of darkness, by putting out the lamps, to make the minds of his neighbours uneasy. For myself, I do not think I know much, but I do not think that wisdom or knowledge about things that are hidden can be sought in that manner." *(Rasmussen, Iglulik Eskimo.* p54f)

So here's a traditional Inuit shaman criticizing the practices of other shamans and saying, this is a serious business.

In order to get the knowledge of shaman, it's not a trick, it's not a joke, it's something that requires serious study. And he also adds that in order to acquire true wisdom, You have to suffer. You have to go through solitude and you have to suffer pain and so on.

That's something that perhaps if I get the chance, I'll talk about my own experiences with what's called neo-shamanism, where you can go away for a very pleasant weekend in a country retreat and have sort of a bit of drumming and then you lie down on the floor and when you wake up, you tell everyone about what wonderful spirit journeys you've had and so on.

And the words of this particular shaman struck me, in order to be a shaman, you have to suffer. It's not just as simple as that. You have to go through death and resurrection.

Audiance member: Don't you just pay loads of money? (laughs)

Alan: Yes (laughs), you have to pay money for those weekends. They're not free.

Anyway, another thing that really stuck in my mind was an account by an Australian "clever man" whose approach to visionary experience is extremely sophisticated and actually reminded me a lot of the way that the Buddhist tradition describes visionary experience.

That you have to, when you go into the sort of realms of higher states of consciousness, altered states of consciousness, you'll have all sorts of visions. But you have to be really careful because most of them will be false. Most of them will be projections of your own mind. So you have to retain a critical distance from them.

And here's An Australian Aborigine shaman said exactly the same thing. He says,

> "When you lie down to see the prescribed visions, and you do see them, do not be frightened, because they will be horrible. They are hard to describe, though they are in my mind ... and though I could project the experience into you after you had been well trained ... some of them are evil spirits, some like snakes, some are like horses with men's heads... You see your camp burning and the blood waters rising, and thunder, lightening and rain, ... do not be frightened. If you get up, you will not see these scenes, but when you lie down again, you will see them, unless you get too frightened. If you do, you will break the web (or thread) on which these scenes are hung. *(Elkin, Aboriginal Men of High Degree, pp 70–71).*

So he's explaining that the visionary experience is, to some extent, a projection of your own mind. But in order to go beyond that, you have to retain a kind of critical faculty in the midst of all this visionary state.

Another very important influence on my perception of this phenomenon was the writings of Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks.*

Black Elk was an Oglala Sioux who was present at the Battle of Little Bighorn, where they rubbed out Custar. He actually describes what happened at that battle, but he also describes the most tremendous visionary experiences he had when he became a holy man of the Iglala Sue.

He also posed the question, 'well, I had all these experiences, and I asked myself, are these just strange dreams? Or are they something else?'

And I came across the work of a Scandinavian scholar called Ardman who looked in great detail at the ecstatic experience in order to try and understand, again, what's the difference? Everyone knows what a dream is. So what's different about the state of the shamanic state?

One of the things he says that what's typical of these kind of, the true visionary experience is that you don't forget it like you do with dreams. It stays in the mind.

Although it has to be said that when you look at the work of Davi Kapanawa, sometimes he's talking about his dreams and sometimes he's talking about the trips brought on by the powder up the nose. He seems to have an unbelievable capacity for remembering details of dreams. I think it is possible to train yourself to remember dreams, details.

But again, we're talking about going back to Trotsky, psychophysical training. In other words, we're talking about an exploration of the unconscious.

When I was doing my thesis at Oxford, I included, obviously I included some accounts of what's so-called out-of-body experiences, which are quite common and they can happen to anyone more or less. They usually happen under conditions of extreme stress, illness, near-death, but they can happen in other circumstances as well.

There are fascinating parallels between the accounts of these out-of-body experiences and the whole shamanic trip. And I included one by Lord Geddes, which is in the book. That's a very interesting account.

It's very lucid, very clear, and seems to be talking about a very different experience from an ordinary dream, but also from a fellow student called Susan Blackmore.

Now, Susan Blackmore was, at that time, she was the founder of the Oxford Student Society for Psychical Research. So she and I would go along to Oxford Station and meet up with this week's speaker, which would be, I remember on one occasion, a witch. It was very funny waiting for people, we didn't actually know what they looked like, going up to them and saying, are you a witch? And one guy had appeared with a great long black cloak and a black hat, and I said to him, 'are you a witch?' He said, No, no, I'm not a witch at all. The witch was much more ordinary.

So she was very much into all this stuff, and she had, partly under the influence of physical exhaustion and very strong hashish, she'd had an experience of a kind of travel into another dimension, as she explained.

I put this into my thesis. It was one of the few pieces of original research that went into it.

One of the conclusions I drew from the thesis was that these experiences are indeed kind of universal, and that there are common patterns which go across cultures, which you can find in our society, completely secularized. You can find through, you can go back obviously and study the shamans, but you can also look at the whole history of yoga, Christianism and mysticism and whatever, you'll find the same kinds of experiences repeating themselves over and over again.

And this does seem to point at least to kind of some common features of the mind. David Lewis Williams, for example, is very interested in these elements. I think in a slightly mechanistic way, but that's another question.

And of course, they do concur, to some extent, with Jung's view of the unconscious.

But at that time, I was going through a lot of theoretical developments as well. And I got very interested in the writings of Freud. I read a lot of Jung, but also I sort of veered more towards the writings of Freud.

And Marx, of course, I was becoming more and more– initially, reluctantly, because I was more of an anarchist at the beginning– drawn towards Marx's view, and Marx's view of alienation and Freud's conception of repression, seemed to be clues to understanding why it might be that this myth of a lost paradise seemed to be so universal.

The idea that human beings could be, or had been, and perhaps could be, at a higher level of consciousness than they are in everyday life.

Anyway, that development eventually led to the production of *The Decadence of the Shamans.

Pictures

Ok, this one is probably a Siberian shaman, you've got this classic drum. You need the drum to enter the state of altered consciousness. You can use other techniques, but the drum is very widely used, especially in the Arctic and amongst the Siberian shamans.

This is a very well-known painting from the Le Trois Frere cave in France. And it provides, I think, a strong argument for the idea that shamanism goes back to Paleolithic times.

The figure of the, so-called theromorph, the human-animal figure, who's also a hunter, obviously, but he's also the hunted because he's the same species as the one he's chasing.

He has a bow, which is sometimes called a flute, but I think it's a musical bow, which is also a bow, a hunting bow.

So he's combining hunting and music.

And this picture and the next one, a so-called dancing sorcerer, reproduce again and again as evidence that Paleolithic hunters, thousands of years ago in Europe, had a shamanic culture.

This is a work by my son here, Joshua, which I threw into the pamphlet.

Actually, if we go to the next picture, which it's based on, this is a Tungus shaman taken, drawn in 1705, one of the early sort of explorers' impressions.

And you can see the very clear connection between the way he's dressed and the way he's acting and the Paleolithic paintings.

More nepotism drawn by my other son, Jacob. Hern the Hunter, who shows again the connection between this image and pagan Celtic, Norse, English mythology.

Hern the Hunter is a figure who apparently lived in the Windsor Forest. I won't go into the myth. But he's also, I think, very well reimagined in the television series, Robin of Sherwood.

This is a Sami shaman in a state of ecstasy. Again, the drum, which turns from a musical instrument into a horse or a chariot which he rides into the heavens.

Definitions

OK, I should say a few things about some definitions.

I think I am, to a large extent, following Eliade's idea that the key element of shamanism is the ecstasy, the altered state of consciousness, the ascent to heaven, if you like, or the descent to the underworld.

Now, some people have criticized this. They've said the key skill of the shaman is the master of spirits, the mistress of spirits, the one that could control spirits.

I don't think these two things are necessarily opposed to each other, because very often in order to take the journey, you have to first call your spirits or encounter your spirits in some way.

There's also the whole question of that shamanism is not a static phenomenon. And we can study the whole history of development of the figure of shamanism through the history of pre-capitalist societies.

It's interesting to note that the more complicated and hierarchical the society becomes, the more shamanism, like other things, becomes a profession and it also becomes much more male-oriented, although it's never completely male-oriented.

Whereas if we go back to a much more egalitarian form of social organization like the San in southern Africa, the shamanic experience seems much more diffuse and much more widespread. More people can attain it through collective dance. And there's less emphasis on the individual specialist.

But there always does seem to be differences of degree. Elkin wrote a famous book called *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*. It's the capacity of certain individuals to, if you like, probe further into these realms that I think perhaps has always existed. But that's something for discussion.

This talk, I've called it *Doctors of the Dreaming* and Davi Kopanawa already said we are doctors, we do healing. But then he said it's not just about the healing.

Obviously the healing is really important. The fact that the shamans are the doctors of these societies is absolutely crucial to their role. It wouldn't exist without it.

Similarly with the use of their skills for the hunt, and other fundamental elements of society. And you can't really study this whole phenomenon without bringing in the, if you like, the practical side of the shamanic vocation, if you like.

But I'm focusing more on the experience. And it's the same when we look more generally at the question of social organization, you'd think that someone who talks about being a Marxist, that they would focus a lot on the social organization. And I'm absolutely convinced that there has to be a connection made between the social organization and the function of the shamans and their experiences. But I think there's also, and again, Trotsky also insisted on this point, there is a certain autonomy of the psyche which we also have to recognize. That's why I'm focusing on this element and not so much on the social organization.

So we're coming to the question of the dreaming and the dream time. And so in order to understand the social organization behind the concept of the dream time, we have to look at other works, and I'm going to mention just one or two.

Rosa Luxemburg is one, again. She wrote about the Australian Aborigines and their totemic organization as a form of communist production and distribution.

She set, I think, an extremely important basis for studying much more closely their conceptions of life.

Of course, Chris has done a lot of important work, and the school around Chris, if you can call it that, in trying to understand the social basis for the dream time, if you like, for the mythical view of archaic societies. And also the degree to which the myths of, for example, of Australian and Aborigines are not simply symbolic, but actually reflect deep memory of the historical past.

So all that, I think, is something that has to be connected, but I'm not going to go into it today.

What is the dreaming?

So I'm going to talk a little bit about the dream time. What is it? What is the dreaming? What is it? We talked about doctors of the dreaming, the shaman as a specialist of the dreaming. What does that actually mean?

There's an essay that I read recently, which I think is worth looking at, by Lynn Hume, who works in the Department of the Study of Religions at Queensland University.

And she's called this essay *On the Unsafe Side of the White Divide, New Perspectives on the Dreaming of Australian Aborigines*, from the journal Anthropology of Consciousness.

She goes into the whole controversy about the term dreaming or dream time, which is continuing, because Much of what we take as being basic terms were made-up or were taken on by ethnographers and anthropologists who may not have understood very well the cultural concepts they were dealing with.

So Spencer and Gillen, who were the sort of early explorers of a lot of the tribes who were still living in the traditional way at the beginning of the 20th century, took the turn from the Oranda, particularly the term Algira or Alcheringa, which they translated as 'the dreaming' or 'the dream time'.

Others have said, actually, it's more about the eternal, seeing eternal things. It's more about the uncreated.

But again, whether those things are opposed to each other is another discussion.

There are many similar terms for the dream time, the mythical epoch, that is so important to the aborigines.

Some of them, many of them involve the concept of dreaming. But they also involve other concepts such as the rainbow serpent, which in some conceptions, almost indistinguishable from the conception of the dream. But Chris has given a long talk about that.

Anyway, in this essay, Lynn Hume draws out the main elements of the dream time. The mythical epoch, when things were not the same as they are now, but when through the action of the primal ancestors, the present order of things was laid down. The laws, the landscape, social organization.

So it's a period of creation, of unlimited creativity, but also of separation and definition, of marking things out as they have become later on.

So on the one hand, it's marked by its fluidity, the capacity for transformation, particularly the possibility of transformation of human beings into animals.

The idea, I think, that in that time, at the beginning time, humans and animals were not estranged.

But as well, it's the time before time or the time outside time. It's not simply a historical past.

It exists in some kind of dimension outside of ordinary time, and you can constantly return to it through the mythical rituals, and as I said, in particular through the shamanic experience.

But everyone in those societies can have access to it through the collective rituals, and particularly through the initiation rituals.

Why I think Lynn Hume is interesting is that she looks at the experience of the dreaming directly. What people are actually going through when they're having this experience, which is what Davi Kaponova also refers to.

She talks, for example, about the flow experience when the boundaries between self and other begin to break down. And she's not afraid to peer across what she calls to the unsafe side. In other words, the possibility that these experiences actually do open the doors to other worlds.

That conclusion is more or less strictly forbidden in most academic discourse, I would say. But she sort of said, well, if we're going to take seriously what some of these people are saying, we have to pose that question, what it actually means.

Susan Blackmore

Before I go on, I should come back to Susan Blackmore. Because I came across her, the one who'd been the head of the Society of Psycho Research at Oxford, I came across her some years later, not long after this came out, And she appeared on television and other media as a kind of spokesman for the skeptical side.

She had devoted her life to trying to show the reality of psychic experiences and so on, and had come to a conclusion through repeated scientific investigation that there's really nothing in it, or at least that it's completely unprovable, and that there's no way you can prove it.

And so although she herself had had this tremendous experience of traveling in other worlds and so on, she basically came to the conclusion that this out-of-body experience is really the mind just shutting down. It's not really opening up the gates to any kind of other state of reality. It's just a state of delusion, really. And of course, we have to bear in mind that she might be right, she might well be right.

But even if she's right, I think we have to remember that the dream, which no one disputes is actually a thing that happens, is a real thing, can provide insights to our humanity and to our needs and our repressed desires and so on. Of course, even this view of the dream is slightly old-fashioned today. In mechanistic psychology, the dream is simply a kind of lumber room which charges up the brain for the next day of wage labor (laughs).

However, for me, the analysis, the idea of analyzing dreams and trying to understand the symbolism of dreams remains valid. And similarly, the need to understand the symbolism of these other states of consciousness and what people are experiencing through them remains absolutely valid, even if they don't really open the door to another world. So I think that it remains valid.

Carl Jung

Interestingly enough, going back to Jung, in an introduction to a book on Tibetan yoga, he had come across the conception of the Dreamtime through reading Levi-Brule, the philosopher. He wasn't really an anthropologist, but he wrote a lot about so-called primitive mythology.

He said that he considered that the Dreamtime is really the unconscious. He said,

> In so far as the forms or patterns of the unconscious belong to no time in particular, being seemingly eternal, they convey a peculiar feeling of timelessness when consciously realized.
>
> We find similar statements in primitive psychology: for instance, the Australian word aljira means 'dream' as well as 'spirit land' and the 'time' in which the ancestors lived and still live.

> It is, as they say, the 'time when there was no time.'
>
> This looks like an obvious concretization and projection of the unconscious with all its characteristic qualities—its dream manifestations, its ancestral world of thought-forms, and its timelessness.[3]

And of course, we know that Jung considered the unconscious to be collective. He sometimes argued that this was what separated him from Freud. But if you read Freud carefully, you'll find Freud also was partisan of a view that the unconscious was a common property, if you like, of mankind.

And although Freud and Jung had fought hard battles in their early acquaintance over what Freud saw as the danger of a kind of reinvigoration of religion and of the occult through going into these realms, Freud, in his later life, also became convinced that there was something rather strange in the dreams of his patients. There seemed to be too many coincidences.

He came to the conclusion that perhaps the unconscious could be a means through which telepathic communication takes place.

In any case, both Jung and Freud seem to have come to the conclusion that the collective unconscious is collective not only in the sense that we kind of inherit it.

We inherit certain parts of our mind, connecting to our bodies, are inherited. But also the idea that it opens out somehow into other spaces and other times. Both of them came to that conclusion.

Philosophy of Yoga

Finally, I want to throw in a few insights from the philosophy of yoga, the Indian philosophy.

One of the most profound of the Upanishads, I think, is the Mandukya Upanishad.

It's an attempt to summarize the different states of consciousness that human beings can have access to. It says that there are normally three states of consciousness, and we're all familiar with them. The ordinary waking state, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

And these states of consciousness, if you can actually penetrate them, understand them, and unify them and synthesize them, You then can enter a fourth state, which is the unification of all the other three.

It's all connected with the whole doctrine of the well-known mantra, Aum, which is based on three letters, A, U, and M, and each one corresponds to the different states of consciousness. But if you put it together, it brings the fourth state. And it's also connected to the whole history of the if you like, the evolution of the universe.

If you look at the psychoanalytical view of dream, Freud considered dreams to be kind of regressive in that they were protecting sleep You dream in order to stop not

[3] Psychological Commentary on the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation

to wake up. You dream in order to give you a substitute gratification which would otherwise wake up. So the dream is always kind of regressive.

But one of his followers, Gesar Roseheim, who did a lot of study of Australian Aboriginal conceptions, because he actually looked at this Upanishad, and he said, what's being said here is that the dream actually is a transition from sleep to wakefulness. It's not just taking you back into deep sleep. It's taking you forward into wakefulness. In that sense, the dream has a progressive movement.

This was the subject of a whole study, I feel like the whole life's work, of the philosopher Ernst Bloch, who was, I suppose, the philosopher of utopia in many ways.

He based his whole life, his whole study on one phrase from Marx, which was a letter that he wrote to Arnold Ruger in 1843.

He said, where Marx says,

> Our program must be the reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analysing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become plain that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality.[4]

And for Bloch, this was summarized the whole, if you like, utopian striving, whereby the unconscious is not simply something that lies in the past, but is actually driving towards the future.

He called it the not yet conscious. He was focused more on the future possibilities through the awakening of the unconscious.

And of course, it's an old theme of Buddhism and other philosophies that we're not really awake. Even in our so-called waking state, we're still dreaming. We're still not really awake. And so we still have to move on to another level of consciousness, which of course would correspond to this idea of this fourth state, which is a higher state of consciousness where all the other previous states have been brought together.

Marx once talked about how 'History is nature becoming human'. I think he was groping towards the idea of a kind of universal awakening, if you like, that what humanity represents is the possibility of the cosmos becoming aware of itself. And that this, perhaps– Marx didn't say this, but Bloch, I think, and others suggest it in their writings– that this is the possible future that has been glimpsed through these mystical experiences, where there's a kind of state of unification of the world. And that this is this fourth state where there is no separation between the individual ego and the universe.

Marx talks here in the passage I've just read, he talks about how

> our task is not to draw a sharp mental line between the past and future but to complete the thought of the past. It will become plain that mankind will

[4] A letter from Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge

> not begin any new work, but will consciously bring about the completion of its old work.[5]

And it seems to me that, as I said at the beginning, when Trotsky talked about the exploration of the unconscious being the absolutely central concern of future generations of mankind, that if we look back in history, we see thousands and thousands of years where this attempt to understand the unconscious, even however incomplete, symbolically confused, it was a driving force for human beings for thousands and thousands of years.

And I think it's impossible to imagine that if we do reach that stage in the future, we won't try to understand at a much greater depth the experiences of the kind that Davi Koppenau was talking about at the beginning.

[5] Ibid.

Alan Cohen
Doctors of the Dreaming
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Radical Anthropology. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpp4Qf10zqk>