DIRECTIONS IN CULTURAL HISTORY

DREAMS AND MODERNITY

A Cultural History

HELEN GROTH AND NATALYA LUSTY

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ROUTLEDGE

Dreams and Modernity

Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History explores the dream as a distinctively modern object of inquiry and as a fundamental aspect of identity and culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

While dreams have been a sustained object of fascination from the ancient world to the present, what sets this period apart is the unprecedented interest in dream writing and interpretation in the psychological sciences, and the migration of these ideas into a wide range of cultural disciplines and practices.

Authors Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty examine how the intensification and cross-fertilization of ideas about dreams in this period became a catalyst for new kinds of networks of knowledge across aesthetic, psychological, philosophical and vernacular domains. In uncovering a complex and diverse archive, *Dreams and Modernity* reveals how the explosion of interest in dreams informed the psychic, imaginative and intimate life of the modern subject.

Individual chapters in the book explore popular traditions of dream interpretation in the nineteenth century; the archival impetus of dream research in this period, including the Society for Psychical Research and the Mass-Observation movement; and the reception and extension of Freud's dream book in Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century.

This engaging interdisciplinary book will appeal to both scholars and upper level students of cultural studies, cultural history, Victorian studies, literary studies, gender studies and modernist studies.

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Dreams and Modernity

A Cultural History

Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty

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Preface

As a co-authored book, the rationale driving the investigation of this particular dream archive has been shaped by the complex relationship between an emerging dream science and an increasingly vernacular interest in dream interpretation, a vibrant and diffuse discussion that often gets overshadowed by the publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. While Freud and psychoanalysis form an important and fascinating part of this discussion, one of the aims of this book has been to disrupt the 'before' and 'after' logic that situates 1900 as the *annus mirabilis* of modern dream theory. In line with her expertise in Victorian literature and culture, Helen Groth has authored Chapters 2, 3 and 4 while Natalya Lusty, drawing on her expertise in modernist cultural studies, has authored Chapters 5, 6 and 7, with the Introduction and Afterword co-authored. The resultant collaborative approach has opened up the often-strict divisions between Victorian and modernist scholarship, allowing a clearer focus on the correspondences and tensions informing intellectual and broader cultural approaches to dreaming in this period. This more expansive but delimited approach has allowed us to demonstrate the uneven development and reception of dream theory in this period, revealing the historical contexts shaping dream discourse as often distinctive, but also equivocal.

1 Introduction

Dreams and modernity

In his essay 'The Metropolis of Mental Life', George Simmel mapped the new psychological conditions of modernity as 'the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli'.[1] Simmel's sociology of modernity concentrates on the frenetic sensory experience of metropolitan social life, observing the contradictory psychological experiences of alienation and freedom as a condition of the struggle for individuality against homogenizing cultural and economic institutions. The psychological conditions noted by Simmel were earlier encapsulated in Baudelaire's description of the flâneur, that quintessential observer of modern life, as 'a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness.'[2] In evoking a nineteenth-century fascination with optical illusion and new forms of mechanized perception, Baudelaire characterized the consciousness of the flâneur in the urban crowd as a receptive surface onto which fleeting patterns and intense sensory stimulation chaotically cling. In describing 'modernity' itself as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent', Baudelaire rendered modern consciousness as an intensely dream-like experience, a collision between urban phantasmagoria and a heightened sensory experience (p. 13). The frequency with which nineteenth-century dream theorists employed the analogy of the kaleidoscope is an obvious point of reference for Baudelaire even as he extends that analogy into waking consciousness to account for the intense visual stimulation of urban experience. The speculative and ambitious theories about dream life that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and continued to evolve well into the early decades of the twentieth century coincided with a collective desire to apprehend the experience and culture of modernity.

As the experience of modernity began to be mapped through the contradictory forces of alienation and overstimulation, detachment and immersion, the dream, as an object of knowledge, was subject to a new level of plasticity in order to account for the intensity of its stimuli. While some nineteenth-century dream theorists clung to the theory of somatic stimulation as an explanation of the dream's etiology, increasingly dream writers turned to the role of memory and repression, as well as recent impressions and events, in

order to understand the source and meaning of dreams.[3] The tension between the desire for ordinary human self-understanding and an emerging science of mind captivated by altered states of consciousness – hysteria, double consciousness, multiple personality, mesmerism – shadowed the development of a distinctive dream science that struggled to articulate the enigmatic and non-rational elements of experience against the epistemological certainties of philosophy and the positivist claims of science. The explosion of writing on dreams during this period continued to grapple with existing theories, ancient and more recent, even as it stimulated greater appreciation of the dream's role in furnishing evidence of the uncertainty of a self-evident reality and a fully knowable and coherent self. These rich and varied perspectives of the dream and the persistent claim that dreams are indeed meaningful and important sources of knowledge about individual psychic life coincided with an increasing sense of the flux and fragmentation of modern experience.

Dreams and Modernity takes up the challenge of a cultural history of the dream in the period beginning in the early decades of the nineteenth century and extending through to the middle decades of the twentieth century. Rather than provide a comprehensive history of the dream in this period, we have turned to those sites in which a distinctive intellectual, vernacular or aesthetic discussion of dreams illuminates the wider contours and changing patterns of the culture of modernity. As such the dream emerges in this history as a social and cultural object as much as a part of individual psychic life. The shifting experience of individual life and the psychic processes that were newly understood to form a key element of both individual and social consciousness, and the tensions between them, helped to shape the discourse on dreams across this period. Central to this discussion was the idea of the dream as a precarious epistemological and scientific object, often demanding a degree of legitimization that prompted a rich tradition of cross-disciplinary theorizing as well as historical accounts that contextualized the dream's enduring fascination. Of all the thinkers encountered in this book, it is Walter Benjamin who most forcefully argued for a cultural history of the dream as an antidote to a teleological conception of history. For Benjamin the dream is an important historical object that allows us to see individual consciousness as a part of a wider collective process of historical experience, one that sets in play a dialectic between the repressed and unfulfilled desires of the collective and the historian's critical role as dream interpreter.[4] In wedding a psychoanalytic conception of the dream to a Marxist analysis of material and economic culture, Benjamin saw the dream as an important critical tool for historians precisely because it brings into view the dialectical relationship between sleeping and waking, forgetting and remembering, as central to understanding the social and cultural processes of history.[5]

This study aims to show how the intensification and cross-fertilization of ideas about dreams in this period became a catalyst for new kinds of networks of knowledge across psychological, philosophical, aesthetic and vernacular domains. Tracking these networks has revealed how innovative approaches to

the study of dreams resulted in the eclectic application and extension of those ideas across a range of popular and specialist domains. For example, the popular reception of Freud's dream book in England in the early twentieth century was facilitated by the existing interest in dream research, conducted by seminal figures such as Frederic W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney, and the Society for Psychical Research. Similarly, the professional legitimization of dream analysis and its incorporation into psycho-medical practice in Britain was assisted by the pioneering research of W.H.R. Rivers and his work with war neurosis. André Breton's inclusion of many of the pioneers of dream science in the first surrealist manifesto, including William James, Frederic W.H. Myers and William Herschel, as well as Freud, is profoundly significant for the broader history of the dream in this period. No other aesthetic and cultural movement was as preoccupied with the dream as Surrealism. Indeed the founding of the movement rested on Breton's determination for the 'resolution of these two states, dream and reality' which became the catch-cry of the first manifesto. But even before the movement was officially founded, Breton had absorbed an eclectic range of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing on spiritualism, dreams and the unconscious mind, citing Myers' 'beautiful work', *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, Théodore Flournoy's 'exciting accounts of the medium Hélène Smith' in *From India to the Planet Mars* and Charles Richet's *Treatise on Metaphysics* as important influences to the early history of the movement.[6] But Surrealism's early experimental culture, demonstrated through its founding of the Bureau of Surrealist Research in 1924, was also inspired by the modern human sciences of ethnography and sociology, progressively absorbed by the Surrealists through the work of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. Baudelaire's description of the flâneur, as both part of the crowd and detached from it, exemplifies the figure of the participant-observer who came to dominate modern ethnographic practice as well as the aesthetic mode of experience adopted by the Surrealists. Benjamin's description of the flâneur's 'anamnestic intoxication' as he 'feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes' purposely evokes the irrational and irrepressible qualities of dreaming.[7] This new observer, drawing on the unstructured observational practices of the modern poet or artist, as well as the new social disciplines of anthropology and sociology, was of paramount importance to the foundation of the Mass-Observation movement in Britain. The influence of Surrealist ethnography and Freudian psychology on the Mass-Observation project prompted its extraordinary collection of dream diaries in the late 1930s as part of its broader ethnographic investigation of everyday life.

The difficulties and obstacles that pertain to an archive of dreams form part of the fascinating story of the dream's assimilation into formal modes of historical knowledge, a process that was well underway with the expansive cultural histories of the nineteenth century. Tracking these correspondences and forms of influence has created a distinctive historical narrative that is certainly not the only story to be told about the culture of dreams in this period. It is a narrative,

however, that extends our understanding of psychological culture across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in ways that reveal the dream as an important source of interdisciplinary theorizing and individual self-reflection.

A cultural history of modern dreaming

In a well-known passage from *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* Thomas De Quincey recounts a conversation with his friend Coleridge about a series of engravings by Giambattista Piranesi. Inspired by Piranesi's rendering of the 'Antiquities of Rome', Coleridge had recalled another series of images by the artist inspired by visions he had experienced 'during the delirium of fever'.[8] De Quincey erroneously entitles the series *Dreams* before describing 'from memory' Coleridge's haunting evocation of Piranesi's images of 'vast Gothic halls' filled with 'all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults' which he reads symbolically as 'expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome' (p. 70). Creeping along the walls of this gothic industrial space Piranesi himself appears 'groping his way upwards' on an endless series of staircases that continue upwards 'until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall'. This image, De Quincey concludes, is analogous to the 'power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams' (p. 71). Thus transformed, Piranesi's *Il Carceri* becomes a dream sequence. In De Quincey's selective retelling, Piranesi's wanderings represent the infinite layers of the mind that the dream opens up to the dreamer. To dream, as De Quincey later observes, is to surrender to the unknown within, the 'mysterious handwritings of grief or joy which have inscribed themselves successively upon the palimpsest of your brain' (p. 145).

De Quincey's borrowing of the words and visions of others to elucidate the infinite 'self-reproduction' of his own dreams enacts a synthetic descriptive process that will be a central focus of this book (p. 70). Indeed this particular passage from the *Confessions* was one of the most popular sources cited to reinforce very different arguments about the relative significance of the dream in a wide range of nineteenth-century works devoted to the subject of dreaming. Fragments from De Quincey's dreams were variously enlisted to illustrate the symbiosis between memory and dreaming, the complex relationship between mind and body heightened by excesses of addiction, the spatial and temporal characteristics of dreaming, as well as the visual experience of the dream as the mind surrenders to streams of unconscious thought. Exemplifying the fluid nature of writing on the mind and on dreaming throughout the nineteenth century, De Quincey's dreams became part of a common archive of typical dream narratives that writers drew upon to exemplify their speculative theories, a process of mutual citation that simultaneously legitimated the anecdote as the central focus of dream interpretation, while ensuring the contested status of the dream, given its susceptibility to multiple interpretations.

While contesting the status of the dream as a medium of truth dates back to antiquity, this book traces the complex and distinctive convergence of interpretive traditions that establish the dream as a serious object of inquiry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period of dramatic cultural transformation that saw the rapid expansion of print media, a gradual rise in literacy and the emergence of the new sciences of psychology and psychoanalysis, the dream takes on a new significance. While popular traditions of prophetic dream interpretation and inspired or religious dreaming continued unabated in dream guides and later in spiritualist circles, new modes of writing about dreams emerge from the early decades of the nineteenth century that promised a more systematic approach to the epistemological and ontological conundrums that the multiplicity of dream phenomena generated. A common mode of dream writing that emerges in the early decades of the nineteenth century takes the form of an expansive cultural history of dreams, extending back to antiquity and moving forward to the present. These encyclopaedic histories of the progress of culture towards a more enlightened present were addressed to a general readership in search of a mixture of instructive entertainment and useful knowledge. De Quincey's dreams recur throughout this genre published from the 1830s onwards, performing a similar inspirationally digressive role to Coleridge's account of Piranesi's *Il Carceri* in the *Confessions*.

Another strand of writing on dreams in the first half of the nineteenth century combined existing philosophical, theological and literary traditions of writing on dreams with the findings of the new science of mind. Often penned by physicians, works such as Robert Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1830) or Walter Cooper Dendy's *On the Phenomena of Dreams* (1832), consisted of miscellaneous citations from Aristotle, Locke, Descartes, De Quincey, Coleridge and others. These works included detailed discussion of the intricate connections between mind and body, the complex nature of human consciousness, the moral and physiological impact of unconscious thought and action, the often tenuous line between madness and sanity, while carefully distinguishing their contemporary enlightened marriage of theological and scientific concepts of mind from the primitive superstitions and charlatanism that had plagued earlier stages of cultural development. Paralleling and reinforcing this demystifying instructive approach to the dream and other psychological phenomena, new journals devoted to the new science of psychology appeared throughout the nineteenth century, including the *Journal of Mental Science*, the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* and *Mind*, while magazines and periodicals addressing a more general readership – such as the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Westminster Review*, the *Cornhill Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine* – published articles and reviews on a variety of psychological subjects, including dreams.

Reflecting the protean nature and broad cultural reach of psychological debate in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, some of the most seminal and exploratory writing on the dream as a revelatory means of

understanding the nature of the unconscious mind was published first in general interest periodicals or magazines then reprinted in collections or book-length studies. Few may know of James Sully, for example, with the exception of those interested in the history of nineteenth-century psychology or recent readers of Freud's historical preface to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which praises Sully's image of the mind as palimpsest in his essay on 'The Dream as a Revelation', but the wide circulation of Sully's work typifies the dynamic network of writers publishing essays on the mind in the middle to late decades of the century. Prior to securing a university position in the 1890s, Sully made his living by publishing in the great periodicals and magazines of the day catering to a broad middle-class audience, as well as respected works such as *Illusions – A Psychological Study*, which included a section on dreams.[9] Unlike Robert Macnish, Walter Cooper Dendy and other precursors, this new generation of writers – which included Sully's mentor George Henry Lewes who coined the term 'stream of consciousness', not William James to whom it is commonly ascribed – depended less upon the words of others, and more on their own experimental data, personal anecdotal experience, as well as the work of peers who were beginning to shape the contours of the growing field of nineteenth-century psychology at this time, such as William Carpenter, Henry Holland, Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer, Alfred Maury, Wilhelm Wundt, Théodule Ribot, George Croom Robertson, and William James.[10]

Collections of dreams also continued to be published well into the later decades of the nineteenth century, paralleling the literary and visual exploration of dream states by writers and artists, and facilitating a pervasive engagement with the narration of dreaming and reverie as a means of reading character. As many have noted, the lines between the nineteenth-century novel and the new science of mind were particularly blurred, with novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot and Robert Louis Stevenson drawing on a wide range of contemporary psychological theories ranging from phrenology to psychical research.[11] Eliot and Stevenson, for example, notably shared a common acquaintance with Frederic W.H. Myers, one of the leading figures of the Society for Psychical Research, whose interpretation of Stevenson's stories as dreams exemplifies the fertile connections between literary culture and the emerging field of psychology. Myers embraced the generative connection between literary inspiration and accounts of inspired dreaming. He believed both were forms of unconscious or automatic action that could be used as evidence of the multiplex nature of human personality, a metaphysical approach to the mind that also marked a significant divergence from the network of evolutionary and experimental psychologists to which George Eliot and her partner George Henry Lewes belonged.

Dreams were a vital element of Myers' exploration of what he would call the subliminal self. Myers, along with his colleagues Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore, created a very particular kind of dream archive as part of their monumental study, *Phantasms of the Living*, one of the seminal publications of the Society for Psychical Research of which they were founding

members.[12] While the membership of the society ranged from the religious to the sceptical, they were united in their commitment to the study of the human mind as essential to the progress of the human species and as a basis for self-knowledge. Reflecting the society's influential commitment to the empirical explanation of psychic phenomena, *Phantasms of the Living* identified the dream as a vital element of their broader ambition to demonstrate the survival of human personality after bodily death. Myers, Gurney and Podmore collected an extensive number of dreams from correspondents who claimed to have experienced a telepathic connection with a loved one through the medium of the dream. These claims were then submitted to a process of verification in which the dreamer would be interviewed and 'objective' witnesses required to submit corroborating evidence. This marked a significant departure from Lewes' reading of the dream as part of the stream of consciousness, or Sully's concept of the dreaming mind as a palimpsest that seemed to be moving towards a more complex reading of the manifest content of the dream. Myers' approach to the dream was nevertheless multifaceted. While Myers agreed with Gurney's literal interpretation of the manifest content of the dream, he also shared Gurney's passionate interest in Pierre Janet's work on hypnotism and the multiple dimensions of the unconscious mind. Myers' systematic exploration of the unconscious mind and the limits of personality was also appreciatively read by other admirers of Janet and the Society for Psychical Research, including William James and Henri Bergson, who were fellow members and equally concerned with the relationship between the dream, memory and the evolution of human personality. Even Havelock Ellis, who was not a member, drew on the society's proceedings in his own venture into *The World of Dreams*, although it was to psychoanalysis that he ultimately turned as both an inspiration and a point of resistance.

The publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 has assumed a monumental status in terms of heralding a new era of dream theory. Without wanting to underestimate the enormous influence of Freud's dream book to a vast array of disciplines and cultural practices, some formal and many informal, the point of this book is to query the neat epistemic break between nineteenth- and twentieth-century approaches to dreaming. Freud forged a distinctly creative approach to the analysis and interpretation of dreams, although his particular 'royal road' to the unconscious was hardly a straightforward path toward the future. As an important interlocutor of nineteenth-century dream science, not only in the initial chapter of his dream book, but in the ensuing clarification and biographical framing of his dream theory, Freud continually reaches back into the history of the dream in order to propel it into the modern world. In establishing the author of the dream book not simply as a scientist of mind, but as an ethnographer of everyday modernity, forging an intrepid path for the self-analytical capabilities of individual dreamers, Freud created a distinctly modern culture of the dream that was nevertheless informed by the interdisciplinary approach to dreams well established in the nineteenth century. The historical and critical work on *The*

Interpretation of Dreams in recent decades has begun to examine the influences and divergences from nineteenth-century approaches to dreaming, thereby continually framing Freud's innovative approach as a product of his sustained engagement with a rich and varied history of dream writing.[13] Freud's lifelong insistence on the scientific basis of psychoanalysis alongside the biographical exposé accompanying his own self-analysis, established in his dream book, has created an enduring tension between the interpretative and scientific elements of his theory of dreams. If Freud's detractors found his speculative and experimental theoretical approach to dreams unscientific, this was often expressed through an emotive reaction to the popularizing ethos with which the culture of self-analysis became a fashionable pastime, fuelled by a concomitant search for individual meaning amid the uncertainty and turmoil of the new century. The professional and popular reception of Freud's dream book in Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century illustrates the uneven and eclectic engagement with his theory of dreams and the widespread curiosity about its self-analytical and clinical implications. The history and reception of psychoanalysis in Britain has been well documented although less attention has been paid to the diffuse reception and modification of Freud's dream theory across professional and popular domains. Freud's dream writing fuelled a broader culture of self-observation and a fascination with oneiric experience that prompted an eclectic and unorthodox extension and modification of his dream theory, from the formal experimental practices of Surrealism to the Mass-Observation movement's psychological attention to everyday life.

Surrealism's unorthodox incorporation of psychoanalytical concepts into its aesthetic and ethnographic practice was significant in extending and adapting Freudian ideas to the experimental conditions of an avant-garde movement intent on reformulating the conditions and possibilities of experience. The movement's early fascination with 'psychic automatism' and dreams extended the domain of the unbounded imagination, revealing how the unconscious processes that inform the dream animate everyday life. While Breton and other Surrealists would never countenance a Freudian model of repression as the explanation for the relationship between manifest and latent content, they were interested in how the elements of dream-life informed lived experience in the manner in which Freud shows how displaced desire informs everyday gestures, speech and actions, which he outlined in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). In the first Surrealist Manifesto (1924) and in his later work, *Communicating Vessels* (1932), Breton sought ways to harness the internal world of dreams and the external world of material experience, not only suggesting the connection between these two realms but using the dream to understand the ubiquity of desire and revelatory emotion for the transformation of human experience. The experimental ethos that drove the Surrealists' early investigations sought to bring the dream to bear on its politics of social and psychic liberation, as a way to break the stranglehold of instrumental rationalism that infused bourgeois, capitalist life. In other words,

the dream was not solely a means toward poetic or artistic inspiration but would carry a powerful utilitarian goal. Summoned as 'a new declaration of the rights of man', the dream became one of Surrealism's most powerful emancipatory tools for rehabilitating immediate, everyday experience.[14] In proclaiming the importance and coherence of dream-life Freud had provided Surrealism with a means to explore a defamiliarized everyday world presided over by imagination and desire.

The realm of ambiguity and half-light that informed the Freudian dream image powerfully resonated with Walter Benjamin's conception of modernity. In extending the temporal schema of the Freudian dream image (childhood memory, day's residue and the anti-historical unconscious) into his investigation of forms of 'perceptible history' Benjamin refused a simplistic causality of historical events or master narratives of progress. The half-light of the frosted panels of the Parisian arcades has become one of the enduring images of Benjamin's fascination with the material culture of the city as a corollary of the Freudian dream image. Benjamin's urban dreamscapes insist on the collision of past and present, forgetting and remembering, the conscious and unconscious, dreaming and awakening as exemplary of the collective's relationship to capitalist modernity. Positioning the cultural historian as dream interpreter and Surrealist rag-picker, Benjamin insists on a dialectical relation between the dream world and the experience of awakening, signifying the transition from one form of consciousness to another as an important threshold experience. For Benjamin, such an experience illuminates the wider significance of the interplay between material and psychic forms to historical process. Benjamin's historical methodology rests on an aesthetic approach; utilizing forms of montage or correspondences that draw out the fragmented traces of modernity, it allows new forms of critical reflection to more fully explicate the relationship between past and present. In drawing on Freudian dream theory and Surrealist aesthetic and ethnographic techniques, Benjamin carved out a distinctive historical dimension for the dream.

The collection of dream reports and diaries by the Mass-Observation movement signals the eclectic absorption of modern dream theory into an everyday understanding of ordinary people's lives, helping to transform the very concept of the everyday into something that encompasses both the concrete and the irrational. The Mass-Observation archive of dreams reveals an eclectic and individualized attention to dream-life that obscures any sense of its distinctive role in furnishing evidence of the collective psychic life of ordinary mid-century Britons. The collection of dream reports and diaries also reinforces the opacity and heterogeneity of the Mass-Observation archive and its ambitious goal in recording the diversity of human behaviour and observations. The inclusion of dream reports, as just one of its many topic collections, was nevertheless significant in connecting the practice of self-reflection and self-observation to the wider goal of self-culture and collective empowerment. The influence of Freud and the new psychology alongside Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings' interest in a distinctly English 'democratic

Surrealism' undoubtedly shaped the movement's initial activity. But if Freud and Surrealism were guiding influences in reconciling the objective and the irrational, the artist and the scientist, the dream reports themselves reveal a community of dreamers for whom subjective life and the uninhibited expression of thought countenanced by dream narration, exceeded the aims and limitations of the movement. The Mass-Observation dream archive, in revealing the complexity and diversity of psychological life, aided the democratization of the dream and its future orientation as a mode of historical knowledge.

Interpreting the dream archive

While dreams have been a sustained object of interest from the ancient period to the present, the period that this study covers is one of the most significant moments in the history of ideas on dreams precisely because it marks the emergence of the dream as a rich and varied object of inquiry. What sets the period apart is the unprecedented interest in dream writing and interpretation in the psychological sciences and the migration of these ideas into a wide range of cultural disciplines and practices. Investigating the contexts for why and how this occurs is significant for understanding how the social, cultural and intimate life of the modern subject is shaped during this period. Dreams played a central role in the debates about the nature of memory, the relationship between mind and body, and the connections between dream life and everyday experience. Dependent on the vagaries of memory, the narrative capacities of individual dreamers, and the interpretive limitations of analysing the obscure mechanisms of the sleeping mind, dreams posed particular methodological obstacles. But dreams also inspired a rich culture of interdisciplinary analogy, self-reflexive anecdotal reflection and methodological innovation that tested the limits of both empirical knowledge and speculative theorizing. Rethinking the limits of cultural historical knowledge by reflecting on the challenges posed in taking the dream as an important object of inquiry is, therefore, one of the defining tasks of the following chapters.

Speculating on the possibility of writing a cultural history of dreams, the eminent cultural historian Peter Burke once observed that if 'dreams tell us something about the individual dreamer, then historians need to pay them more attention'.[15] Warning his readers of the necessary opacity and occlusions of the dream as historical document, Burke suggests that if 'dreams have a cultural layer of meaning as well as a personal and a universal layer, still more exciting possibilities open up for historians' (p. 28). Limited to the vestigial traces of the manifest content of individual dreams, Burke advises that historians must deal carefully when speculating on the latent or repressed elements of dreams, and seek instead to identify emergent 'culture patterns' in dream series as the basis for a more substantive evidence-based form of cultural historical analysis (p. 30). Culture patterns, according to Burke's method, take the form of persistent themes that recur in the recorded dreams

of an individual or group of dreamers which potentially reveal an unexplored dimension of the configuring impact of public history on the private emotional lives of dreaming subjects. As this stress on aligning public and private suggests, one of Burke's objectives was to counter the dismissive attitude of his fellow historians to the dream as a worthy object of intellectual inquiry by outlining a systematic empirical method of typing groups of dreams and identifying tentative historical alignments between their manifest content and literal historical events. Burke wonders, for example, whether the repressed 'wishes, anxieties and conflicts' that find expression in dreams might 'help historians reconstruct the history of repression' (p. 29). The implication being that the measure of the dream's historical significance lies in its mediation of more general cultural and political truths.

Few historians have taken up Burke's challenge to write a cultural history of the dream, as Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper note in the introduction to their invaluable collection of historical case studies, *Dreams and History*.[16] Indeed there is to date no monograph-length study, such as our own, that endeavours to write a cultural history of the dream in a dedicated historical period, although there have been numerous collections and single figure studies of dream writing.[17] Sensitive to the tendency to 'view the past teleologically' as a 'simple progress of knowledge', Pick and Roper's introduction uniquely addresses the particular historiographic challenges the dream poses (p. 7). For them, the terms of the debate about the historical significance of dreams hinge on the tension between 'contingency and universality' (p. 15). Historians writing in the wake of Foucault, they argue, are divided between those 'who insist on the fundamental continuity of human nature over time', and those who insist on the historical contingency of the self (p. 15). While recognizing that Foucauldian analyses of the history of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis, medicine, as well as biology, and economics and criminology have fundamentally altered our understanding of the discursive and institutional formations that produce assumed truths, Pick and Roper ultimately insist on the need to balance 'an historically contingent discourse of dreams' with a recognition of an 'age-old phenomenon of dreaming' (p. 15). Few would argue that we all dream, to slightly reframe the terms of the debate, but the challenge still remains to demonstrate how the history of dream writing has a vital claim on present understandings of the dream and its role in expanding our cultural historical knowledge of individual life.

In his polemical rewriting of the history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dream science in *The Dreaming Brain,* J. Allan Hobson unapologetically reads a very selective archive of past dream theorists that serve his anti-psychoanalytic cause.[18] Establishing a clear line of succession culminating in his own work, Hobson begins with the nineteenth-century physiological psychology of Hermann von Helmholtz. Observing Helmholtz's distinction between the 'subjective experience of the dream' and the perceptive physiology of the dreamer, Hobson concludes that the former is easily dispensed with if one concludes that the dream experience merely 'reflects underlying neural activity'

(p. 28). Moving on to the seminal experimental psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, Hobson elaborates on his physiological explanations of dream phenomena. He also praises the influential French scientist Alfred Maury as 'physiologically committed' to a brain-based genesis of dreams, despite his mistaken search for 'peripheral sources for the initiation of all dream imagery' (p. 34). Hervey de Saint-Denys' exquisite aesthetic evocations of dream imagery are given an equally selective reading and his most significant contributions deemed to be his emphasis on the 'self as a scientific instrument' and autosuggestion as the key to dream lucidity (pp. 41–2). Hobson concludes that what unites all these scientific minds is their modernity. They are modern 'in method and theory', because they observed, experimented, and recorded their findings as the basis for their theoretical conclusions (p. 42). By contrast, Freud inaugurates a radical historical break with this physiological tradition, dismissing the organic theories of his precursors in preference for a mental, rather than brain-based, theory of the dream dependent upon an anachronistic reliance on unsystematic anecdotal evidence (pp. 42–3). Hobson distils the limitations of Freud's backward looking interpretation of dreams down to two fundamental flaws:

> On the one hand, there is the bland, humanistic, but technical and anti-biological revision of the hermeneuticians – clarifying perhaps, but unscientific. On the other hand, there is a profusion of quasi-technical linguistic elaborations – obscurantist and pseudo-scientific.
>
> (p. 53)

As this scathing assessment indicates, Hobson's history of dreams discounts precisely the aspects of Freud that are the central concern of this study: the cultural hermeneutics that attend the history of ideas about the dream, the human and social histories that infuse the dream and its narration, the often obscure linguistic contortions that the intrinsic opacity of the dream inspires, the vital historical interest of scientific failures and speculative hypotheses that do not conform to teleological narratives of progressive enlightenment, the vexed relation between mind and matter that the dream perpetually enacts. Resituated within the fusion of scientific, aesthetic and cultural histories that unfold in the following chapters however, the early historically oriented chapters of Hobson's *The Dreaming Brain* can be read as a continuation of a far more nuanced and variegated history of modern dream writing that like his own depends on the interweaving of histories of interpretation in the quest for lucidity and coherence in the face of an aspect of mental life that continues to perplex and inspire.

Notes

1 George Simmel, 'The Metropolis of Mental Life', in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds) *The Blackwell City Reader*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 103.