

Essay

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Essay

LOGICS OF DISCOVERY III: What 'Sleeps' When We Are Dreaming? Dream Consciousness as Suspension of the 'Will' to Narratively Organise Our Experiences

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Abstract: Contemporary diagnostic practice in psychiatry relies on the tick-box approach of diagnostic manuals. In light of the obvious limitations of diagnostic systems, narrative formulations, whether in the form of biological, psychodynamic or behavioural cognitive ones, have been proposed. Their approach, which can be caricatured as one of drawing arrows, enriches our clinical tools and practice but in their explicitly theoretical orientation, as well as expanding the field of discovery, they also constrain it. In two previous papers I summarized the resulting limitations, with specific reference to the patient's experience and proposed further enriching clinical perspicacity by attending to images and parataxis. The specific intent of attending to the patient's experiences through a process that explicitly eschews narrativization, but allows clinical phenomena to "hang loose", is to facilitate a process of clinical discovery and healing through practices of co-production between patient and clinician. In the present paper, I expand the range of phenomena that may assist in this co-production through adding attention to dreams to that of images and parataxis. In particular, I turn to the work of the Italian novelist Guido Morselli. Morselli argues that the self is created through bundling experiences together through acts of "will" in order to establish our personal narrative. In doing so, however, the "will" forbids access to phenomena that do not fit the dominant narrative. Experience is therefore impoverished. Dream consciousness is a type of consciousness not harnessed by the constraints of narrativity. It allows a slipping of the narrative vigilance which bundles phenomena together to create a coherent narrative and thus offers a richer menu of potential experiences, including "bizarre" images that can serve to challenge our usual self-narrative and offer a new perspective on ourselves.

Keywords: co-production; dream consciousness; Guido Morselli; identity obsession; narrative obsession; now-vigilance; self

Introduction: splendors and miseries of narrativity

Neo: What is it?

Trinity: A déjà vu is usually a glitch in the matrix.

It happens when *they* change something [1]

Narrativity is now credited as one of the fundamental devices in the field of medicine and psychology. Its success affects not only the field of clinical care, but globally human existence. Storytelling, whose archetype is the fairy tale, is linked to memory, to the possibility of giving coherent form to events, to the ability to make and exchange experiences and to the possibility of giving and receiving advice [2]. As literary critic Walter Benjamin writes, the narrative addresses the "moral" of the story, drawing therapeutic benefit and healing from it [3,4].

With rare exceptions, clinicians seek to resolve their doubt not with narrativity and creativity, but with data. EBM has earned its reputation mainly downplaying the importance of the singular narrative of the patient and the individual judgment of the doctor, and has inflamed clinicians who feel belittled by it, calling it authoritarian and even fascist [5] (p. 297). In relatively recent times, narrative has begun to be considered an alternative to the most common medical practices. "Taunted by death, chilled by the unknown, reproached by ambiguity, we doctors defy the dark, brandishing

whatever truthiness we might have at our disposal”, including humours, meridians, alchemy, molecular biology - or evidence-based medicine [5] (p. 296). Narrative-based medicine has thus been considered as a possible remedial avenue. In the clinical context, the success of narrativity is due to two fundamental elements: the first is the balancing, in the context of the collection of the patients’ medical history and the assessment of their symptoms, of elements that go beyond the pre-established categories represented in standardized diagnostic systems and diagnostic procedures, giving space to patients’ subjectivity. The strength of narrative-based practices consists mainly of seeking a balance within the main tensions upon which clinical care finds itself: universal/particular, known/unknown and body/self [5] (p. 297).

I criticised the limitations of the standardized approach of evidence-based practices in a preceding paper where I called this practice *ticking boxes* [6]. Within the *ticking boxes* framework, the clinician’s main goal is to discover whether a patient showing psychopathological phenomena meets pre-defined diagnostic criteria. The process of discovery is, within this framework, compared to two people assembling a puzzle where the patient has the pieces and the clinician has the image of the completed design. Narrative-based interviews can help overcome this limitation since their aim is a wide-range understanding of the patients’ morbid subjectivity, not constrained in a priori fixed schemata or procedures such as specific rating scales [7]. What is sought is not only an anomaly in the sense of a phenomenon that deviates from the norm; but an anomaly in the sense of a phenomenon that is not foreseen as it is not included in the list of symptoms or signs normally used for diagnosis. In this sense, narrative-based interviews are endowed with a significant *heuristic power*. They are useful for the clinician to collect elements of the patients’ life history that go beyond the expected and codified phenomena, to enrich the clinicians’ vision of the patients’ psychopathological condition, and even to discover new symptoms and syndromes.

The second reason for the success of narrative-based practices lies in the attribution of a real *therapeutic power* to the narrative itself. I named this practice *drafting arrows*. It consists in constructing causal or motivational diagrams that display linear relationships between biographical “nodes” connected by arrows to other nodes. These causal diagrams are explanatory narratives and include e.g. biological and psychodynamic ones. It is beneficial for the patients to tell the story of their suffering and illness. Putting their symptom into a story is the same as explaining its causes and making sense of it. Making the symptom “my own” symptom sometimes has the effect of attenuating its traumatic potential: the symptom is not just something that comes from the outside and traumatically interrupts the course of my life, but something that is an integral part of the course of my life. Healing stories are “healing” because they help to reappropriate my symptom as a part of my story as a human person and thus recover a sense of agency and identity. Only if we place symptoms, and especially psychopathological ones, and the existential questions accompanying them, in a narrative that considers them as an integral part of the human condition, can we manage them with due respect and not merely undertake to eliminate them as one would eliminate something inhuman [8].

Notwithstanding these advantages, there are relevant limitations in narrative-based practices. *Narrative vigilance*—the tendency to watch over experience via narrativisation, and to tether the concrete particulars of experience to the hypothetical structure of a narrative signification - may come at a rather steep cost: it may overwhelm the concreteness of details of experience with the overarching syntax of a narrative itinerary. In this way, narrative-based interviews risk perpetrating the same (or similar) mistake as ticking-boxes interviews. Narrative vigilance may become *narrative obsession* and narrativity turn into its degenerate form - *narrativism*.

To explore further these doubts about the limitations of the narrative paradigm in clinical care, I turned elsewhere than to the specialist psychopathological or psychotherapeutic literature. I had to do this since much of mainstream literature adheres to the narrative paradigm. So far, I have set out my views in two published papers [6,9]. I first turned to an art historian suffering from a severe form of manic-depressive psychosis (Aby Warburg), then to a poet suffering from schizophrenia (Friedrich Hölderlin); now I summon a writer who was probably affected by some form of

cyclothymia and died by suicide. This way I hope might get closer to achieving co-production in psychopathological and therapeutic knowledge.

In this paper, I will explore dream consciousness as a non-narrative, or at least semi-narrative, form of consciousness. During the dream, the suspension of narrative vigilance produces discontinuity of images and allows unassimilable, uncanny and revelatory moments to emerge. In the first part of this paper I will discuss this phenomenon building on and extending Italian writer Guido Morselli's hypothesis on dream consciousness as the suspension of the "will to identity". I will then examine his ideas in the light of some contemporary studies on this topic. Before drawing conclusions, I will add some historical, social and cultural reflections on the advantages and disadvantages of narrativity in clinical care and in human affairs in general.

Dream consciousness as the suspension of the narrative function

Dreams have the notable capacity to encompass highly heterogeneous images and themes in a seamless scenario. They depict loosely connected or bizarrely discordant fragments of experience. A science of consciousness must explain why in dreams so many aspects of our experience float apparently unrelated to each other, whereas in wakeful consciousness they are usually integrated in a continuous flow. This has been called, in contemporary neurosciences, the "binding problem" [10] and it has been hypothesized that REM sleep may constitute a protoconscious state during which the binding function is suspended [11].

My mentor into the exploration of dream consciousness as a form of non-narrative consciousness is neither a clinician nor a neuroscientist, but Guido Morselli (Bologna 1912 – Varese 1973), an Italian writer, novelist and essayist active during the middle of the last century. He developed an original conjecture about dream consciousness which preceded and anticipated contemporary hypotheses. A child left alone for a long time, Morselli was predestined to become a writer. The loss of his mother at twelve made him experience a profound sense of loneliness. When, at times of excessive exuberance, he was punished and locked up in a storeroom cellar, to react to isolation and immobility he let his imagination run wild. He matured into a reflective character, subject to sudden mood swings: highs were followed by gloomy melancholies. An evident tendency towards cyclothymia, which makes human relations not easy, but offers in return the ability to descend into the deep territories of the Self - and the gift of writing. He was a restless reader with meticulous flair, self-taught, making up for the deficiencies of his school curriculum. An existence entirely dedicated to the study of the classics, sparsely populated by one's peers, immersed in nature, a sober lifestyle (healthy eating and sports practice). An isolation that is shy but not wild, prone to frequenting of humble people, the elderly and children [12]. All his novels were published posthumously and this can only have accentuated his personal suffering. Today, he is considered a modern classic and many of his works are translated into several languages.

It is not easy to date with certainty the writing of the article - *Il sonno e I suoi prodotti* [13] – in which Morselli shares his ideas on dreams. Undoubtedly, Morselli's interest in dreams dates back many years earlier: in December 1943 he wrote a telegraphic note that reads "I met myself in a dream". There are numerous references to dreams in his novels. Criticism of Freudian dream theory is frequent in his *Diaries*, and in 1967 he elaborated an original hypothesis on the "mechanics" and "function" of dreams [14]. The genesis of *Il sonno e I suoi prodotti* is in its way a literary detective story. Morselli presents it as the review of an essay by a French psychologist named Etienne Vignard entitled *Le sommeil et ses produits*, published by La Tradition de France in Bordeaux. He also adds that an Italian edition of Vignard's essay is in preparation. In fact, I have personally verified that the "reviewed" book does not exist, nor does its author and publisher. Through the editor of Morselli's work, Valentina Fortichiari, I also verified in Morselli's library that Vignard's book could not be found. We concluded that this was a literary joke concocted by Morselli.

But why attribute one's ideas - brilliant and original - to another person? Why invent the title, author, and publisher of a book, instead of taking credit for a theory, or at least a hypothesis, that might not have shaken the national psychoanalytic milieu (at that time in Italy rather conservative and self-centred), but would nevertheless have gained the interest and favour of a few isolated

scholars, ready to confront and correspond with our author? These questions will never be answered. Let us therefore go further and focus on the content of Morselli's short (not even seven printed pages) essay.

According to Morselli, a function called "will" (*volontà*) is suspended in dream consciousness. While dreaming, what rests or is released is the "will". The biggest problem this essay poses for the reader is to understand what is meant by "will". "Will" should not necessarily be understood in its usual inhibiting function, that which in waking life adheres to the moral canons or social customs and forces us onto the track of a given behaviour. This would be the "willpower" that prevents one from committing immoral acts and instead ensures we follow the straight path of an honest life. What is suspended in dreams is also, and above all, the "will" that allows us to be a Self and to assert ourselves as such - a will that imposes itself on one's Self.

"Will" – Morselli argues - is what gives continuity to our Self, or rather that allows the insertion of our experiences into an organic temporal pattern. The very pattern of our existence as a person - that is, being a Self - consists in *willing to be a Self* and of *lasting as such*. "Will" plays a role similar to that of the historian - it keeps the episodes of a life together, ties them to one another in a chronologically ordered sequence according to its own conventional measure, imparts its own rhythm to the narrative, and strives to group the episodes so that they make sense of one another. In short, according to Morselli the "will" that watches over our waking consciousness has the task of historically connecting the multiform flow of our immediate experiences so as to avoid fragmentariness, lacunae, disconnections. Waking consciousness is first and foremost narrative consciousness.

In dreaming, the supervision of our "will", the guardian of our continuity over time, is attenuated. Morselli does not say so explicitly, but he does imply that what he calls "will" is the psychic function that presides over the integrity of what classical psychopathology calls "ego criteria" - i.e., primarily temporal continuity, but also unity, internal coherence, demarcation from the external world, etc.

What is suspended in dream consciousness is our "will to identity" (remember that the word "identity" derives from Latin *idem* which means "the same"), especially in the sense of *idem identity* – remaining the same over time. Morselli's explicit philosophical reference is Henry Bergson's concept of *durée* [15], understood through the literary work of Marcel Proust (on whom Morselli had written an important essay, one of his rare works published during his lifetime) [16]. – He writes - "The foundation of psychic life, in wakefulness, is the inner succession (according to a rhythm that is anything but merely chronological), with which the subject identifies himself and which he prolongs and orders with an incessant effort, without allowing himself intervals or overlaps, welding every link of the chain, every instant to the preceding, because in this is its duration" [13] (p. 133).

"Will" is what binds each instant of one's life to the previous and the next. In dream consciousness, time is other than that which "will" in wakefulness organises our *durée*, and in doing so when we are awake makes our Self congruent, typical and recognizable by an external observer. Therefore, the succession of experiences in dreams is a new kind of flux that takes place ignoring the stable pattern within which a Self identifies itself and is identified by other people; and which then the Self strives to prolong and order incessantly, without allowing itself interruptions or overlaps, welding every link of the temporal chain each instant to the previous one.

To the dream, therefore, belongs a dissident temporal organization. Contrary to the function of the "will" which is to connect experiences narratively, dream consciousness is non-narrative and substantially *paratactic* in the sense I defined in the paper on Hölderlin's late poetry [9] – parataxis being defined as the practice of placing phrases or images next to each other without subordinating conjunctions. That is juxtaposed without clear connections, so that the contrast may generate novel and unexpected combinations between these dissimilar fragments.

Morselli's ideas on dream consciousness, temporal binding and "bizarreness"

In the concluding lines of his essay, Morselli expresses his hope that these notes on the function of dreams can serve as a starting point for future research in anatomy, physiology and empirical

psychology. Indeed, Morselli's ideas resonate with some contemporary naturalistic explanation of the function of dreams in human existence.

Consciousness varies dramatically in quality when we are awake, asleep or dreaming. Some brain processes are enhanced during sleep and especially during dreaming, others are suppressed. REM sleep is the brain state which is mostly correlated to dreaming. Dream consciousness is characterized by vivid, internally generated sensations and perceptions, non-logical and bizarre thought and commanded but inhibited movement [11].

Dream consciousness is richer than waking consciousness not only in its ability to create a remarkably reliable simulacrum of the world, but also for its notable capacity to include highly disparate images and themes [11] (p. 803). The hyperassociative property of dream consciousness suggests that dreaming could represent a set of predictive scripts or scenarios for the organization of our waking experience [11] (p. 807). This is supposed to be the function of dreaming: the protoconscious state of dreaming is as much a preparation for waking consciousness as a reaction to it. We are as much getting ready to behave as we are getting over the effects of our behaviour.

Yet, what is called "hyperassociation" by neuroscientists can be experienced by dreamers as disunity and incoherence. Although dreams often may present a narrative organisation, they typically present one or more images or scenes that are surprising for their being unrelated to the overall storyline of the dream. In our dreams there are "foreign bodies" whose meaning is not easily understood because they are alien to the other images and scenes produced in the dream – let alone alien to our established sense of identity, habitual world-experience and world-view. As an example, neuroscientist Allan Hobson [11] reproduces and comments on surrealist painter's Salvador Dalí's *Dream caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening*. In this painting, Dalí depicts a loosely connected set of dream images in the space above the sleeping body of his wife Gala. The painting includes bizarrely discordant images: an exploding pomegranate emits a fish that belches out a tiger which is in turn transformed into a bayonet pointed aggressively at Gala's body. Also, an incongruously long-legged elephant roams behind these loosely associated images.

About the disjointedness of dreams Freud writes: "On the one hand it may be doubted whether what we dreamt was really as disconnected and hazy as our recollection of it; and on the other hand it may also be doubted whether a dream was really as connected as it is in the account we give of it, whether in the attempt to reproduce it we do not fill in what was never there, or what has been forgotten, with new and arbitrarily selected material" [17] (p. 512). This passage from the *Interpretation of Dreams* describes the struggle between the waking consciousness and the dream consciousness (in Freud's terms: secondary process and primary process), and the former's attempt to re-establish the order jeopardized by the latter. In a footnote, he adds this remark: "in so far as a dream shows any kind of order or coherence, these qualities are only introduced into it when we try to recall it to mind. Thus there seems to be a danger that the very thing whose value we have undertaken to assess may slip completely through our fingers" [17 p. 512-3].

Phenomenally, a striking characteristic of dream experience is the disunity of consciousness, that is the incoherence in the dream plot between images. We may agree with Hobson that images are "associated" in the dream, but in the sense that they are *juxtaposed* - not in the sense that they are organised in a linear and coherent story. Some images and scenes in dreams are not temporally bound to the others. Temporal binding, the effect of the synchronization of cortical neuronal activity, is believed to be essential to waking consciousness [10] and to be less pronounced in dreaming. The disunity of consciousness during dreaming and the *bizarreness* of dreams are closely related to the concept of "binding". "Bizarreness" can be conceptualized as referring to unusual combinations of dream images and to the way they are or are not coherently bound together [18]. Bizarreness is not just the implausibility of a perception or sensation (e.g., a fish popping out of a pomegranate), but an anomaly of the *dream plot* (e.g., the appearing of a ferocious tiger over a sleeping naked woman). At the level of the dream plot, bizarreness can be defined as discontinuity or incongruity of images associated in a dream [19].

Bizarre images are not only striking in themselves, but also because they appear incongruously, breaking into the plot of the dream. In other words: the dream plot can be coherent and continuous

until an incongruous image emerges, extraneous to the storyline of the dream. A bizarre image is something disturbing, that should perhaps have remained hidden but instead surfaced. It is the opposite of what is expected. An uncanny feeling [20], a sense of surprise, arises from this incongruous image. The “uncanny” – writes Freud – is “something secretly familiar” [20] (p. 245). It is the appearance of something “near” and “close” to us, however remote it may seem to us at face value. I suggest that it is perhaps because of his or her astonishment that the dreamer “senses” that the dream “means” something to him or her. This is, to use Freud’s metaphor, the “dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down to the unknown” [19] (p. 525). The feeling of strangeness aroused by the incongruous image speaks to the dreamer, at the same time, of something intimately his or her own and of something not included in his or her habitual self-narrative.

Another concept that can help to understand the bizarre character of these images emerging in dreams is “dissonance”. These images are not necessarily “repressed”, in the psychodynamic sense of the term, because they are in themselves emotionally intolerable for waking consciousness. Rather they remain “subtrack” - implicit, in the background - because they are *dissonant* with respect to the elements linked together by waking consciousness in a coherent narrative. These images are *narratively dissonant*. With “narrative dissonance” I mean the following: when two experiences, or (in the case of dreams) images, are not consistent with each other, narrative vigilance does all in its power to ignore them so that one’s self-narrative remains consistent, or change them until they become consistent. The discomfort is triggered by dissonant experiences clashing with one’s established self-narrative. Narrative vigilance – the editorship of waking consciousness - tries to find a way to resolve the contradiction to reduce discomfort.

Temporal binding “binds together”, in our waking consciousness, those experiences (sensations, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, etc.) that are compatible with each other and with our habitual self-narrative by which we hold ourselves together. Therefore, our waking consciousness selects those experiences that “fit into” our usual self-narrative, confirming our habitual self-narrative and “ruling out” what exceeds it. Dream consciousness attenuates the narrative vigilance and related temporal binding that characterises waking consciousness and tends to obliterate the time continuum by which we first and foremost hold ourselves and our world together when we are awake. The suspension of narrative vigilance/temporal binding allows to emerge and manifest themselves experiences that are dissonant with respect to our habitual self-narrative.

I suggest that what neuroscientists call “temporal binding” is what is called “will” by Morselli – or, at least, that temporal binding is what “will” achieves in waking consciousness - and that in dream consciousness narrative vigilance, the editorship of waking consciousness *sensu* Freud and “will” *sensu* Morselli are in a state of “sleep”.

Narrativity in a historical, social and cultural context

Before concluding this reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of narrativity in clinical care, I would like to add some historical, social and cultural reflections.

We should be aware that to historical, political and cultural circumstances play themselves into our sense of self through selective exclusion, inclusion and amplification of images, experiences, feelings, thoughts, etc. Also, the success or failure of narrative practices on which the building of our self is based is subject to historical, political and cultural circumstances. As has been pointed out, the tragic events of the last century contributed to marginalize narrative from the realm of discursive practices. As Walter Benjamin has written [4], at the end of the First World War, people returned from the front dumbfounded, no richer but poorer in communicable experience. It was the trauma of trench warfare that rendered an entire generation incapable of recounting their experience, in a scenario where the human body, at the height of its fragility, was suspended between the mud and the implacable gaze of the sky, in a force field traversed day and night by deadly currents and explosions. The trauma of the Second World War, and even more perhaps of the Shoah, has further weakened our ability to make sense of human events and tell their story, despite the efforts of survivors whose novels express the profound disorientation of the narrator, his uprooting and

isolation, the incommensurability between human events and a plausible and reassuring historical sense.

It is no coincidence that 20th century art and literature relied less and less on narratives and instead developed non-narrative forms of representation, such as avant-garde art, photography and film montage, alongside the preference for the unfinished, the fragmentary and the marginal [21] (p. 30). Further expressions of this profound crisis in the faith of historical narration are the literary montage and dialectical images developed by Walter Benjamin himself as a method for his innovative historiographical project, and the montage by Aby Warburg of photographic reproductions of works of art to study the migration of images in the course of art "history" [6]. In order to recount events that do not respond to the logic of progress, of the pacifying synthesis that follows the opposition between a thesis and an antithesis, new forms of representation and new logics of discovery are required.

A second important point for historically situating the ups and downs of narrativity is the "identity question". Part of the history of the last 100 years is the paradoxical contrast between the crisis of trust in grand historical narratives and the success of narratives whose purpose is to root and reinforce the identity of a social group, e.g., of a state, a nation, or the believers of a religion. While in the "high" cultural spheres (as described in the previous paragraph) there was a critique of narrativism, History (with capital H) and identity, in the "low quarters" - those inhabited by ordinary people - these apparatuses were increasingly used. Examples of the "identity obsession" [22] are the German identity narrative that resulted in Nazism, or the "Roman" identity that ideologically supported fascism; or the current European, Christian, etc. rhetoric that opposes the threat allegedly emanating from the Islamic world, or other hostile ethnic or religious groups. "Identity" is a wanting to defend "us" against threats of alteration. Those who elaborate identity narratives always feel threatened; they invoke and assert their identity because they are particularly sensitive to threats from the Other. Identity obsession is thus a defence strategy, indeed a hyper-defence strategy. Identity-obsessed people feel much more fragile than others and precisely for this reason are much more dangerous because they foment not only defence strategies but also offence strategies by reducing the Other to an enemy. The identity narrative is always ready to resort to the "final solution" - eliminating the Other once and for all.

There is a connection between identity obsession and narrative obsession in the sense that they feed off each other. To sustain identity obsession requires a narrative that includes what is "mine" and excludes all that is "other". Also, excluding all that is "other" from one's identity narrative requires particularly careful and selective narrative vigilance. In the light of these considerations, giving free rein to elements outside one's own identity narrative, and being willing to attenuate one's narrative vigilance, has not only a therapeutic value (as I am trying to show in this paper), but also a political and social one. Recent history shows us that the use of narrative can lead to abuse: searching in one's past for that which gives us an identity and distinguishes us from the Other, and in so doing mummifying our being and hindering our becoming.

A third critical point concerns the clinic very closely because narrative and identity obsessions are directly reflected in our diagnostic categories. An emblematic example of this is the so-called "borderline personality disorder". As it is well known, this condition is defined as a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self image and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts. Diagnostic criteria include Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.

According to Kernberg [23,24], identity diffusion reflects the inability to integrate positive and negative representations of the Self and the Other. The result is a shifting view of the self, with sharp discontinuities and a sense of inner emptiness. Are these experiences always to be considered as a deficit (e.g. of narrative capacity), or could they in some occasions be seen as consequences of the patients' "different will"? Are they always "painful" and "egodystonic"? Does a critique of narrativism encourage to think that notions like "stability" and "substantiality" of the self (coherent and consistent over time) are cultural, social, and historical artifacts? Diagnostic manuals have aspired to be atheoretical and stick to the facts but, as we all know, all facts are already theory. In

their attempt to disavow their theoretical presuppositions, DSM's are therefore significant professional, political and ideological documents [25]. Should we suspect that if features such as incoherence, instability, etc., of the self are deemed psychopathological phenomena (and sometimes stigmatized as such) this is a consequence (or a side effect) of their being socially and politically censored? Should we perhaps consider that stability and identity are deemed psychopathological phenomena because contemporary clinicians are influenced in some degree by narrative obsession? We, as clinicians, are very well aware of the strong association of borderline personality disorder with morbidity and mortality which make of this condition a severe form of psychopathological disorder. Yet, are we, to some extent, entitled to assume that the practices of "borderline" people are extreme reactions to the dominance of the values of people who - like most of our contemporaries - suffer for some form of identity obsession? Is there some kind of salutary identity diffusion and stable instability? [26].

Conclusions

Contemporary diagnostic practice in psychiatry relies on the tick-box approach of diagnostic manuals. In their attempt to be evidence-based, these practices attempted to disavow their theoretical presuppositions. Yet, they are ideological and political documents. In light of the obvious limitations of diagnostic systems, narrative formulations, whether in the form of biological, psychodynamic or behavioural cognitive ones, have been proposed and employed widely. Their approach enriches our clinical tools and practice but in their explicitly theoretical orientation, as well as expanding the field of discovery, they also constrain it.

In two previous papers I proposed to further enrich clinical perspicacity by attending to images and parataxis with the specific intent to explicitly eschew narrativization and allow clinical phenomena to "hang loose". In the present paper, I expand the range of phenomena that may assist in this process of discovery through adding attention to dreams. Dreams have been credited with many different functions: divine guidance, inspiration, precognition, telecognition, and more recently being the gateway to the unconscious, escape valve for repressed contents, creative problem solving, learning via the creation of a set of foreordained scripts for the organization of one's waking experiences. In this paper, I argued that the function of dreams is silencing, at least for a while, that grim guardian of the coherence of the story we tell about ourselves when we are in the state of waking consciousness. In particular, I turned to the work of the Italian novelist Guido Morselli who argues that the self is creating through bundling experience and phenomena together through acts of "will" in order to establish our personal narrative. In doing so, however, the will forbids access to phenomena that do not fit the narrative. Experience is therefore impoverished. Sleep, and particularly dreams, which allow a slipping of this "will" to bundle things together and create a narrative, offers a richer menu of potential experiences, including generative potential of new experiences through attention to the parataxis of images in dreaming. The function of the dream is to suspend narrative vigilance, to give importance to the detail instead of the whole, even to the contingent, in order to break free from the "sacred monster" that is History. Morselli, in one of his most successful novels entitled *Contro-passato prossimo* [26], states that he does not believe in History, and that he does not believe in Society: "there are but single events, just as there are but groups of individuals, or better, single individuals" [27] (p. 118). This critique of History with a capital H is at the same time a critique of personal history, of our self-narratives (and also of collective identity narratives).

The navel of the dream is the "glitch in the matrix" [1] - that which breaks the enchantment of narrative consonance, which unmasks that our self-narrative - with its claim to unity, coherence, etc. - is illusory. The "glitch in the matrix" which surfaces in dream consciousness reveals that what we fear most is incoherence, that is, not having an identity - our identity obsession. Narrative vigilance is identity vigilance and both reveal our identity obsession. While dreaming, narrative vigilance (and with it identity vigilance) finally dissolves. What waking consciousness really censors is not an obscene part of ourselves; rather, what we do not want to be aware of is that the story we tell ourselves is ultimately arbitrary - one of possible stories that can be told - and that we are responsible for it. Our self-narrative is a scissors-and-glue story held together by an illusory coherence - illusory

because it does not take into account the disparate multiplicity of the pieces of which we are made. The navel of the dream is that fragment, that detail, left behind by narrative editing, which re-emerges - thanks to the drowsiness of narrative vigilance - forcing one to recombine the elements of one's self-narrative.

Dream consciousness teaches us that an alternative temporality is possible, against the predominant version of continuous, chronological, narrative time. "Time differentials" [28] (p. 1992), including interruptions, discontinuities, unassimilable moments and uncanny repetitions are key characteristics of this alternative, non-narrative temporality. The time differentials included in dream consciousness are dismissed by vigilant narrative consciousness as worthless and not candidate for meaning. This "trash of history" [28] can be revealed by alternative kinds of consciousness (like dream consciousness) only insofar as it is released from the cycle of repetitions and removed from its embeddedness in a dominant tradition of memories and interpretations.

What the dream indicates is that the worst enemies of "Know thyself" are narrative obsession and identity obsession. To know ourselves we have to let our narrative vigilance slumber and let emerge what are in fact mere fragments, but potentially tesserae of a new mosaic. It is not a question of recognising which whole they are fragments of - we must not strive for an archaeology of these fragments. Rather, it is a question of imagining what *new* whole they can help to form. What we need is a *kairology*, a method "designed to exorcize the historical" [29] (p. 463), that is, an assumption of responsibility that looks at the present as the opportune time for action. Clinicians must learn to listen as one dreams, by paying attention to the trash of history and not exclusively to what fits into history itself. Morselli's conception of dream consciousness recalls Benjamin's notion of the *Jetztzeit* [30] - the "now", the present moment, *now-moments* with their instantaneous, flashing and concentrated character. Grasping now-moments requires the utmost vigilance. We could call this *now-vigilance*, a vigilance quite different from narrative vigilance. Seizing the image that presents itself in a flash, while listening to a patient or attending to a dream, requires the utmost alertness. The now-moment is a hyper-concentrated form of temporality that must be grasped as a unique chance [2].

To conclude: narrativism is an antagonist to self-knowledge and to clinical care. It crystallises, mummifies the flow of life and the combinatory power of imagination. Dream consciousness may help the subsequent waking consciousness to be more accurately sensible and perceptive. Whereas waking consciousness, subjugated by the need to bind together experiences into a coherent narrative, can lose contact with intense, vivid and emotionally charged single sensations; dream consciousness can freely be impressed by them, appreciate of their nuances, singularities and strangeness, providing the substrate for a more accurate perception of one's own internal world and of external reality. Dream consciousness, during which the narrative function is sleeping, contributes to moments of awakening and to a process of discovery in which it provides scraps of experience emphasizing perception and emotions at the expense of their narrative integration and domestication, arousing perplexity and disrupting previously acquired self-representations. Also, dream consciousness provides a space for the recombination of the disjointed images which surface, establishing links between them within a network of resonances and analogies, with the active participation of the dreamer and the observer [6].

The potentialities of dream consciousness, provided that it does not focus on the story it seems to tell, but on the individual elements that it proposes [17] (p. 527), are nicely encapsulated by Susan Brison in her insightful personal report of recovery from trauma: "when your life is shattered, you are forced to pick up the pieces and you have a chance to stop and examine them. You can say 'I don't want this one anymore' or 'I think I'll work on that one'" [31, p 20].

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