

Book Review

Olivier Clerc (1984). Vivre Ses Reves (Living One's Dreams), Geneve: Jean-Luc de Rougemont.

**Reviewed by
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The purpose of this book, states the author, is practical; to help the reader make the most efficacious use of his dreams, a goal which can be achieved by interpretation, programming and expertise in dream lucidity.

A first background chapter describes the physiology and workings of the brain. This portion, based on the work of Roger Sperry, includes much of the now—familiar material on the functions of the left and right brain.

The latter, Clerc points out, expresses itself by such means as dreams, body language and psychosomatic illness. Many of its traits, in fact, resemble Freud's description of the unconscious (which might more accurately be thought of as a non-verbal consciousness).

We should learn, Clerc says, to use both brain halves in a balanced fashion. He closes the chapter with a survey of the sleep research of the fifties.

He then offers advice on the improvement of dream recall (by such means as self—suggestion and Gestalt techniques), and on how best to keep a dream journal.

His own 'relative' method of dream interpretation includes elements from the works of many writers, including Freud, Jung, Perls Garfield, and Faraday.

For most dreams, Clerc believes, three interpretations are possible. They may refer to:

1. Actual persons and situations
2. The dreamer's attitudes to actual persons or situations
3. To the dreamer himself and his inner world

As an example of the first, a person who dreams of losing control of a car because the steering mechanism gives way, should have the car checked; it is possible that the car is actual, not symbolic, and that the right brain has picked up information as to its condition.

To illustrate the second type of dream, Clerc uses one of his own dreams by means of which he discovers his actual feelings (hitherto not conscious) about two persons of his acquaintance.

An example of the third type of dream (again Clerc's own) is one through which he learns about his tears in connection with a task he has undertaken.

The author gives a step by step description of how he arrived at these interpretations, stressing the important role of intuition.

A dream that resists interpretation, he suggests, might be explained by Jung's archetype theory. Or later dreams may be "asked" to throw light on earlier ones, a form of programming.

Premonitory dreams, Clerc thinks, have a subjective meaning also; it is possible that the unconscious 'utilizes' the future, just as it does the past to manufacture a dream. Such dreams need not necessarily be paranormal; Clerc points out, and stresses the need for more research in this area.

This portion of the book closes with a brief account of Dunne's writings.

Clerc next takes up the programmed dream, which he compares to adolescence, the normal dream representing infancy and the lucid dream maturity.

Re describes the means of inducing programmed dreams, but points out that if the aim is merely pleasure, the dream may not be easily achieved. If there are urgent personal problems to be dealt with, the dream may be "busy" with its more primal psychological functions.

Problem-solving programming is discussed. Clerc remarks that most western world adults do not evolve in their dream lives, The fact that many continue to have nightmares as adults indicates our culture's neglect of the right brain.

Programming is especially efficacious with nightmares in that it deals with the problem during its manifestation; interpretation can be deferred. Clerc refers to Maltz's work on Pyschocybernetics to account for the fact that attitudes and skills practiced in dreams can carry over into day life.

Interpretation and programming are tools which can aid in the harmonizing and integration of the personality.

Clerc then lists the principal traits of the lucid dream, referring to such writers as Green, Fox, St. Denys and Casteneda. He points out that the lucid dream is chiefly the domain of the right brain, which accounts for certain deficiencies of memory and reasoning power during the experience. With growing expertise, many of these may be overcome.

Lucid dreams, as compared to normal ones with their bizarre aspects, respect physical reality, and the figures encountered in them have their day-life traits. In spite of this, there is a certain “non reality” aspect to the lucid dream. Surroundings tend to be vivid, and the dreamer may choose to alter these, or to perform “impossible” tasks, rather than letting the dream unfold.

Like the programmed dream, the lucid dream may be used for pleasure, for discharge of resentments, for acting out fantasies, or for practicing skills or success.

A lucid dreamer is simultaneously the hypnotist and the hypnotized in that his “I” has access to his right brain.

Clerc suggests that perhaps the lucid dream represents the partial awakening of the left brain, pointing out that it takes place in the two hours before waking, when the left brain does play more role. Also, the fact that we recall lucid dreams may suggest that memory is functioning in both hemispheres.

In other words, the lucid dream may represent an equilibrium in which the right brain is supplying surroundings, feelings and persons, and the left full consciousness of identity, will and decisions.

Clerc then discusses pre-lucid states, lists Hearne’s lucid dream activities, and describes his own method of inducing lucid dreams.

Starting with the premise that we are not usually truly conscious during the day, Clerc inscribed a large “C” on the back of his hand where he would be sure to see it often during the day and remind himself to be genuinely conscious. This soon resulted in his having one to one-and-a-half lucid dreams per week. He also remembered to be conscious each time a negative emotion arose, with the effect that these began to disappear. He also practiced Leonard’s method of viewing the world as an extension of oneself. Lucidity began to come spontaneously without the use of the “C”.

Clerc remarks that we can program the type of dream that will lead to lucidity, a dream of flying, or even a nightmare. The connection between flight dreams and lucidity, he feels, is a close one but as yet not clearly understood.

He describes the false-awakening phenomenon, and gives an outline line of Hearne’s research and his dream machine.

This is followed with an account of the lives of four lucid dreamers with the intention of giving the reader a better comprehension of the lucid dream and also of the connection between such dreams and parapsychological experiences.

1. St. Denys, Clerc thinks, may well have had such experiences though the references in his work which suggest this are ambiguous. He was the first writer to have carried out rigorous experiments based on a large number of dreams.
2. Clerc describes Van Eeden's dream categories, his interest in communication with the dead and his theory of "demons" as originators of certain dreams.
3. Fox is important as having established the connection between lucid dreams and out of body experiences.
4. Clerc regards Garfield's work as extremely important in that it establishes connections between western and eastern thought, especially with Oriental conceptions of energy centers and flow, as illustrated by Garfield's experiences with acupuncture and meditation.

Clerc goes on to describe his own dream experiences; how he learned to fly, to move objects at will, to pass through walls and ceilings, and refers to his attempts to use the lucid dream experience as a "springboard" for out of body flights. He believes that lucid dreams often use images that indicate the location of the energy flow, and that we need to learn to control the energy flow rather than be controlled by

He reports that he is currently using lucid dreams for three purposes: 1. out of body experience; 2. experiments in telepathy; 3. research on the connections between certain dream images and Jung's archetypes.

He sums up by saying that he feels it is now clear that the lucid dream has certain psychic-spiritual aspects, psychic in that one can learn to control use of psychic energy and spiritual in that the lucid dream is a microcosm of mystical experience. Furthermore, he concludes, the out of body flight can give us access to a realm of superior reality.

He gives steps to follow for psychological and spiritual development.

The novice should begin to keep a journal, to interpret his dreams, which will resolve major personality problems; to program dreams, which will facilitate interpretation and set up a dialogue. He is then ready to venture on the lucid dream.

Programming for pleasure only will soon cause the person to "stagnate," whereas the lucidity experience, though it will bring problems, will soon provide incentive for continuing.

The experimenter should learn to prolong lucid dreams, to carry out projects in them, to alter the environment, to fly faster and higher (which may lead to out of body flight) and to use his voice, which will function like autosuggestion and also establish a dialogue

with oneself. The dreamer will learn to control energy flow in order to experience, or if wished, to avoid out of body flights. (It is important that he be in a good state of psychic equilibrium before venturing on these.)

There is no reason, Clerc finally suggests, to assume that the out of body experience is a “final” stage in the development; others, as yet unknown, may lie before us.

Clerc is of the opinion that though the lucid dream may facilitate spiritual advancement, and that the out of body flight can give us answers to fundamental questions, it is a path that must be taken by the individual step by step; a dream machine or a drug is useful only to give us a glimpse of the goal which we must attain by our own efforts.

Two appendices give a survey of the basic work of Freud, Jung, Hall, Perls and Casteneda.

This is a very useful volume for a lay person, assembling in very readable form much material that is otherwise rather widely scattered. It should be of interest to professionals also, as containing original material and theory. Clerc deals with parapsychological concepts and possibilities in a fashion that is neither blindly credulous nor intrinsically hostile, and is very open and receptive to what is valuable in the work of many others.

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