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An Abundance of Conference Photos Inside!
Jennifer Windt has written an impressively detailed book that merges form and function: the heft and weightiness of the physical tome (798 pages) is matched by the seriousness of its fundamental argument. Windt, who teaches philosophy at Monash University in Australia, has done a service to all dream researchers by illuminating the full range of philosophical issues that are raised by any effort to explain or interpret dreams. In the course of this massive text she guides readers through the various conceptual challenges of treating dreaming as a mode of consciousness or self-awareness. The most exciting thing about her work is that she shows how dreams have unique qualities that make them a potentially valuable resource for the broader science of human consciousness: “the analysis of the concept of dreaming can provide an enrichment and extension of our conceptual repertoire.” (xv)

The first general issue that Windt addresses regards the “conceptualization problem of dreaming,” which means how best to think about dreaming in relation to waking states. She outlines theories of dreams as perceptions, hallucinations, and acts of imagination, and shows why none of these approaches does complete justice to the dreaming mind either theoretically or in relation to empirical research. This highlights one of the great strengths of Windt’s book, and one of the reasons it will likely have so much influence on future investigations: she emphasizes the necessity and importance of including empirical research findings when we try to devise grand theories of the nature and function of dreaming. This might seem like an obvious point—a theory should be built on facts—but Windt shows how often it has been violated by those who theorize about dreaming without fully accounting for the results of scientific research on actual dreams. More than that, she shows how many truly important findings have been generated by dream researchers over the past several decades. We already have a lot of great data, so now we need a better way of explaining what those data can tell us about dreaming and consciousness.

To point us in the right direction, Windt addresses several other issues that are involved in almost any form of dream research. One regards the validity of dream reports, insofar as they always seem to fall short of describing the entirety of dreaming experience. Windt develops a bracing method of “antiskepticism” that takes the critique seriously but still affirms the legitimacy and trustworthiness of dream reports for use in scientific research. Another issue regards the ways in which dreaming is “embodied” and integrated into the physiological processes of the sleep state. This leads her to reject strong neuroscientific reductionism in which dream experiences are viewed as nothing but brain activities, and to promote theories that connect dreaming with the sleeping body. Not surprisingly, she devotes considerable attention to the phenomenon of lucid dreaming and the evidence it provides of high-level cognitive activities within the sleeping brain and body. She points to studies showing a range of metacognitive processes in dreams as clear indications of the range and complexity of conscious experience that is possible in dreaming. However, she says that the significance of lucid dreaming research is not simply to reveal the presence of consciousness in the dream state, but to show...
how dreams bring qualities of “higher” consciousness into a dynamic relationship with “lower” processes of unconscious emotional processing, imagery creation, associational memory, etc. It is this strange alchemy (my term) between all these cognitive elements that makes dreaming such a distinctive and powerful mode of being.

Windt provides fair warning to her readers regarding the length and density of her text. She gives clear summaries of her ideas at the beginning and end of each chapter, and explains every theory under discussion in straightforward terms. The metaphor of cartography and map-making, which she uses to frame her argument about scientific efforts to “map” the territory of consciousness, also applies to the structure of the book, which is filled with well-marked trails, helpful guideposts, and beautiful vista points.

This would not be the first book to give to a person interested in dreams; it does not offer interpretive tips or engaging narrative stories. Most college students would probably struggle with it, too, although it would be an excellent text for upper-level undergraduates in psychology, philosophy, or cognitive science.

The most important audience for Windt’s book will be graduate students and researchers already active in the scientific study of dreams. Dreaming articulates the philosophical principles that can provide the best conceptual framework for future progress in the field. The book highlights the valuable work already being done by many current researchers and gives directions for the next generation to expand their scientific inquiries into new areas of dreaming experience.

Art Show 2016: Ingrid Capozzi (Nederland) Homeless Soul (31x31x3, Glas, enamel, messing, fotoprint, goudpoeder, hout, canvas, acryl, verf/glass, enamels, brass, fotoprint, gold powder, wood, canvas, acrylic paint)
Omstedt stresses the value of analytical, critical thinking in scientific work for identifying and evaluating arguments, and for finding hidden agendas behind flawed ones. But he also has personal experience of how slow and limited this mode of thinking is, and how intuition is needed to open new and creative horizons. Working with intuition is possible for everyone, and one can be trained in intuitive thinking. Omstedt has some exercises in his book which he has found very rewarding for himself, illustrating how rational analytical mind and non-rational intuitive mind can be connected. Dreamlike photos in this book by Hillevi Nagel illustrate the Arts while Omstedt’s marine diagrams illustrate Science.

Omstedt sums it all up by stating “where our conscious and unconscious dimensions meet, is the playground of creativity.” This view is appreciated by psychologists and artists but there are not so many who also understand its indispensability in the most important innovations of hardcore natural sciences. Einstein’s statement is icing on this cake.

More about Omstedt and the book from the publisher:

Omstedt has written around 200 articles and books, more than 80 of which have been published in peer reviewed international journals. He has also had many years experience working with dreams, and is an approved dream group leader according to the Swedish Dream Group Forum.

Connecting Analytical Thinking and Intuition stimulates students and scientists to improve their skills in thinking, communicating and learning more about being humans. A guide to connecting analytical thinking and intuition is presented using the ‘dream group’ method developed by Montague Ullman.

Markku Siivola, MD is a specialist in general and liaison psychiatry, and has practiced both in Finland and Sweden. Siivola began his collaboration with Prof. Montague Ullman in 1980. He co-founded The Dream Group Forum in Finland and has authored numerous books and articles.)