

DREAMING AND ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ALTERNATE SELF (PART I I)

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Dreams where one's perception of the surrounding environment is dissociated from (or outside of) the body-centered experience that normally exists during wakefulness are described in the oral and written traditions of many cultures. The perception of looking down at one's sleeping body from an elevated position during an out-of-body experience (OBE) is clinically defined as a "self-looking" or autoscopic hallucination (AH). Another type of AH is the perception of encountering a mirror image of one's face or even one's entire body while dreaming.¹

An essential difference between these two experiences is the locus of visual perception. In other words, is the dreamer viewing the alternate self from a perspective of a recumbent sleeper without the dissociation of consciousness; or, from a perspective of a disembodied consciousness levitating in space and viewing one's body? Although the clinical significance of this distinction is unclear, both types of AHs are presumed to be hypnogogic or hypnompic cognitions due to abrupt wake-REM or REM-wake stage transitions, respectively.² The exploration of body misperceptions arising from these transitions is an important step in understanding the neurocognitive foundations for identity formation.³

Regardless of the visual perspective encountered during an AH, the dreamer is the exclusive source of these experiences. Consequently, personal narratives of OBEs and AHs have resisted objective analysis until recent times. In addition, the use of inconsistent and conflicting terms when analyzing these narratives has complicated efforts to document the clinical history of this remarkable parasomnia.⁴

RECORDING FLIGHTS OF FANTASY

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the experimental psychologist, Lydiard Horton, investigated AHs with the aim of understanding and encouraging their occurrence during sleep. However, his definition of autoscopia as "levitating or flying illusions" was more in line with the modern definition of OBEs without autoscopia.⁵



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Born in London in 1879, he traveled to the United States to pursue undergraduate and then graduate work in the psychology of fatigue and rest.⁶ Eventually, he developed an interest in dream content analysis, which motivated him to develop a systematic approach to study recollections of levitating and flying imagery during sleep.⁵ Because Horton's work predated the use of many technological advances found in modern dream research facilities, his investigative tools were limited to structured self-assessments that his subjects completed in the morning.

A dream, reasoned Horton, was the workshop of the mind. His Dream Analysis Record (DAR) was a multi-level assessment designed to interpret mental images encountered during sleep within the context of waking life.⁷ The DAR consisted of three sections: the Narrative, the Inventory and lastly, Associations. In the Narrative, subjects provided the storyline of a particular dream. Incidental details, seemingly irrelevant to the storyline, were itemized in an adjacent column. The Inventory section directed subjects to recall the locations, specific settings, and the weather as well as descriptions of both real and animated characters that populated the dreamscape. In addition, memories of any remarkable qualities demonstrated by the characters (specifically, unique physical postures, attitudes, exceptional or extreme abilities) were noted in this section. Personal thoughts or sentiments revealed through free association with any of the inventoried recollections were included in the last section.

SLEEP INDUCTION

Horton began his experiments by advising his subjects to enter a pre-sleep state of relaxed wakefulness through simple exercises, such as voluntary muscle relaxation. He referred to the induction of this state as "somnosis."⁸ In modern terms, the goal of somnosis was to reduce judgmental and logical thought processes, which would facilitate sleep onset. Horton observed that subjects in a hypnogogic state noticed sensations of lightness. According to Horton, these sensations were elaborated in dreams to create a storyline involving levitating and flying (see Fig 1).

Horton relied on the DAR to attribute meaning to the storyline provided in the Narrative. A survey of his findings will appear in the third and final installment of this article.



HORTON'S SKETCH OF A DREAMSCAPE WITH ACTS OF LEVITATION.(FIG. 1)⁵

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