



*The Dreamshare Seer's "Dream Cloud" (12.4.'24)*

## **Dream Theory on Sheppey**

Sleep, and the mind's-eye movie screening that goes with it, is a great common denominator. Every night, almost every one of us flips off the light and, sometime later, plunges into a vivid realm of wayward, frequently berserk imagery. Between fluttery light sleep, dream-laden REM sleep, log-like deep sleep and moments of staring blearily at the ceiling, our slumbrous hours take up somewhere between a third and a quarter of our lifespans; dreams themselves have been estimated to account for a twelfth of our lives, though of late this figure has increasingly been revised upwards. Yet we hardly ever talk about our nocturnal adventures, except perhaps to offer a brief dream recap to our waking partners, who usually don't know what to do with this information. Dreams seem to serve some evolutionary purpose, but there isn't scientific consensus on what. Sleep itself, then, is at once a statistically huge and barely addressed phenomenon. Not least because, beyond our awareness of its restorative function and despite what Freud said, there's so much about it that we simply don't understand.



Dream excerpt from *beacon-firefly-1286* (3.3.'24)

One thing we do know: sleep has become something of a battleground in capitalist societies. It has been noticed that you can't really work while you're doing it. The French Marxist Paul Lafargue knew that when he wrote his pointedly shiftless *The Right to be Lazy* (1883). So did the John Lennon of "I'm Only Sleeping" (1966). As American writer Jonathan Crary notes in his 2014 book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, since the industrial revolution there's been a long history of trying to defeat the night in the name of profit, from the electric lights that enabled the continuously running workplace to today's ideological, rise-and-grind ethos. Sleep, Crary notes, is 'one of the great human affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism', pointing out that his own countrymen's average nightly sleep has reduced in modern times from over eight hours to six and a half. Lately, gold has been found in the Land of Nod itself: we can pay for sleep aids or devices that track the quality of slumber we do get when not, say, worrying about how little sleep we're getting.



*Sleepers. Hole* (2012 –) punctured 35mm slides, Adam Chodzko

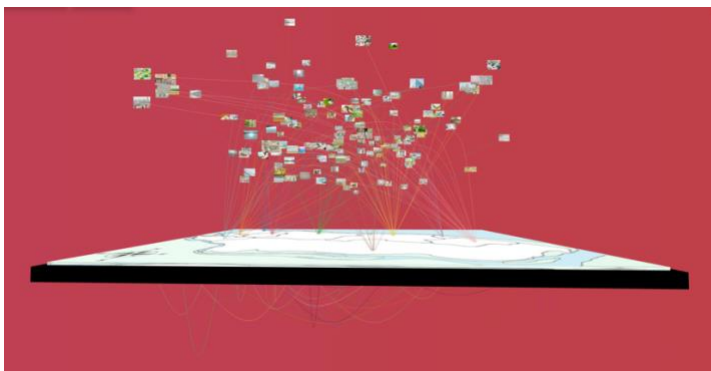
But this mercantile view of sleep as a resource – treat it as wasted time, reduce it, attempt to wring money from it – isn't the only one. Malaysian indigenous peoples furnish counterexamples: the Orang Asli tribes believe that their dreams are communications from their ancestors and from nature; taken seriously, dreams in turn shape their daytime actions. Twentieth-century anthropological investigations into the Senoi people concluded that they used a form of dreamwork in which dreams could be internally controlled, a la what we would call lucid dreaming; and the researchers, though sometimes lapsing into idealistic fictionalising, relatedly viewed the Senoi as an unusually healthy and optimistic people.

Field research into Malaysian dreamwork was the starting point for Adam Chodzko's participatory, AI-assisted online project *The Dreamshare Seer* (which a committee of Malaysian elders is overseeing remotely). The artist, here, is not so much trying to extract any truth of dreamwork as to disinter and translate principles from it: that a people using their dreams might live in a more harmonious relationship with nature, that having agency over the apparently uncontrollable might lead to a healthier life. And *The Dreamshare Seer*, crucially, puts these notions to work in a manner that sidelines any exoticism, and is comprehensible and appropriate to a technocratic, if ailing, twenty-first-century Global North culture.



[production still] *jengkuan* (2023), 4K video with sound, Adam Chodzko

The very word ‘dreaming’ in this context is usefully slippery. It suggests actual nocturnal dreams and, bridged by the semiactive notion of ‘daydreaming’, a larger speculative relationship to the future: an ability perhaps to visualise an ideal version of it, and to use that as a model for generating collective agency. All of this might sound a bit distant, because two perhaps interrelated problems with contemporary society are, firstly, our inability to visualise positive futures, and, secondly, atomisation – a lack of social bonds. At the same time, in the UK particularly, remaining spaces for what we might call ‘dreaming’, such as the humanities and the fine arts in education, are under threat since they inconveniently promote independent thought. If one were going to hold space for a project that might reveal the psychic weather of a nation while offering a democratic, literally horizontalised space for creativity, then the shared realm of dreaming might have great potential. After all, everyone can do it. Everyone can describe their dreams, at least a little bit. And, today, cutting-edge prosumer technology can assist in making them sharable, making a dreaming artist and connective node of every participant.



*The Dreamshare Seer's* “Dream Cloud” (25.3.’24)

*The Dreamshare Seer* takes its initial sample from a microcosm, an island within an island, Sheppey in Kent. There are various reasons for locating the project here: among other things, Sheppey was the birthplace of British aviation, and one early aeronautical engineer, the English philosopher J.W. Dunne, wrote the book *An Experiment in Time* (1927) about his precognitive, i.e. reality-anticipating dreams. If dreaming is in any sense a step ahead of reality, how do we externalise it? Attempts have been made in art history, most notably by the Surrealists, but their static paintings and even much of their filmmaking has a stiffness that dreaming eludes. AI is in its nascent stages, but the visualisations in *The Dreamshare Seer* – particularly how they bend and distort imagery and melt from scene to scene – do feel relatively dreamlike, and they use a technology that otherwise has the capacity to create dystopian futures for hopeful ends.



Dream excerpt from *stichwort-peppervort-5548* (11.4.'24)

Chodzko's art, in the past, has fought shy of simplistic utopianism, but since the 1990s he has consistently pursued a participatory, relatively non-hierarchical, forward-thinking model of artmaking. Engaging publics allows his projects to grow in unpredictable and inclusive ways, to be open-ended both in form and conclusion. Characteristically, then, *The Dreamshare Seer* doesn't anticipate or circumscribe its own findings, but there are certain ways in which it cannot fail. It cannot fail to show something of ourselves – our interiorities, as they're shaped by outside pressures, fears, desires – to ourselves. It cannot fail to create a symbolic model of community in which, via small actions (inputting a summary of a dream), the participants become part of a larger thing. It cannot fail to give emphasis to the very idea of 'dreaming', and of upward-

pointing rather than top-down action, however you interpret it. It cannot fail, either, to take a location that recent history has marginalised and make it the centre of something. If the UK becomes a laboratory of dreaming – a counterbalance to an inexorable downward pull – then Sheppey is where it begins.

*Martin Herbert*

**Martin Herbert** is a writer and critic based in Berlin. He is associate editor of *ArtReview*, and has written for international art journals including *Artforum*, *frieze*, *Art Monthly*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Spike*, and *Mousse*. His catalogue essays have appeared in publications for, among others, the Museum of Modern Art, the Serpentine Gallery, Kunsthalle Basel, the Hayward Gallery, and the Venice Biennale. His own books include *The Uncertainty Principle* (2014), *Tell Them I Said No* (2016) and *Unfold This Moment: The Art of Carol Bove* (2020, all published by Sternberg Press). In 2017 he was a juror for the Turner Prize, and in 2019 he curated the multi-venue group exhibition *Slow Painting* for Hayward Touring Exhibitions.