

A DREAM THAT BELONGS TO NO ONE

Asa Horvitz

I'm standing in a wide landscape, to my right and behind me there's a mountain range, very tall, purple and blue and grey, all around me is a grassy plain, and just in front of me to my right there is a wide gold river.

The river is shallow, the water comes directly from the mountains and it's flowing downstream, clear and cold, there are little rocks in the river, too. Just a moment ago there was a big white snow leopard eating some kind of strange pale thin creature in the water, but they're gone now.

The sky is clear, it's windy, but it's warm, there's a kind of buzzing in the air. And the grass is purple and yellow and brown and green. I can see to the distant horizon. Everything feels very alive.

In front of me and to the left, over my shoulder, there's something approaching, what is it? It's got two heads and three horns on each head and it's kind of like a unicorn or a donkey or some kind of horse but it's pink and purple it's kind of like what is it it's kind of like a unicorn or a donkey but it's got two heads it's got two heads they're both attached to a body and it's right in front of me and it's coming towards me and it's sort of bowing its head to me and I look into its eyes it's four eyes and I see a kind of light and intelligence in its four eyes and it's got a pink and purple body like someone painted it with

watercolors and it's coming toward me and it's a little bit awkward and sweet and funny and it bows its head towards me and I bow towards it. The horns look sharp.

And right at that moment I have this thought, "huh, I just made this creature up, I'm dreaming" and I back away, I pull myself back away from this creature, I go up into this thought into my head and I can see as this happens, the creature looks sad, I can see a sadness in all four of its eyes, and it backs away a bit, it pulls away. As if I have taken love away from this creature. And I think "it's just something I made up, just something I made up in my dream". "I'm dreaming", I think, "and I imagined this thing". And then I wake up.

I'm lying on my back in my bed, light streaming in the windows, the dark green industrial walls, the flowering bushes outside, some kids yelling in the courtyard, and I want to go back into the dream and back to that creature because when I was with that creature, looking into that creature's eyes, I felt something, I felt something in my stomach, in my belly, some release of some tension that I didn't even know was there, some release of something that badly needs to be released, some sort of pink open vulnerable spot that I'm always running from, a little bit above my belly button, that I'm always moving from, on the way away from, and I want to go back to that creature, to capture that feeling, and I'm not sure what to do, so I draw it.

I'm not a good drawer but I try to capture that feeling again of that release in my gut, in my stomach. And I'm looking at this image that I've drawn and it takes me back to the image in the dream, which it seems is a space I can re-enter, it's still here and now, and I go there, and I'm again standing with the creature, with its two eyes on each head and three horns and the pink and purple and I'm looking at the light in its eyes, and it's funny awkward body and I feel this feeling in my belly, this strange release, and I start to wonder - why did it look sad at the moment that I pulled away, how did it know that I was thinking, "I just made you up"? And how the fuck does it move me so much, have such a strong affect on me? Which I can't quite describe but is as strong and slapping as being thrown against a cabinet or the knot in my gut when I'm scared - and how is it that as I sit there with this image this creature it is already bringing me to rich thoughts, sensations, territories, zones, landscapes, that I've never known before, or that I seem to remember from the edge of some flickering orange plateau?

One morning in the early 1980s my Mom's father called her out of the blue and told her that Mary, one of her six younger sisters, had disappeared overnight and no one could find her, and that she'd been acting strange for a while. Mary was 19. My grandfather asked my mother if she could go find Mary, who was last seen in Sacramento, he had no idea where exactly. My Mom realized her Dad would only be calling her if he was totally incapable of dealing with the situation, and she got on a plane to California the next day. She rented a car, drove to Sacramento, and just drove around. As she told me,

"It was very uncanny - I just had this feeling that I should go over to that part of town over there. So I went. Then to this part of that part of town. Okay. Then to this particular apartment building. Asked if she'd been there. No. Then to a similar blue apartment building complex, just by intuition, and asked at the desk, and yes, you're Mary's sister, sure, room 133."

She was so amazed she almost forgot to be shocked and went up to the apartment. Mary was alone on the carpet, no furniture in the whole place, nothing but a lot of empty Chinese food cartons and other trash and clothes everywhere.

"Mary was rambling and muttering and talking about God. But it wasn't anything to do with what she was saying. What

was crazy, what was really happening, was that she had a kind of magnetic field around her, that I could feel myself slipping into. I never experienced anything like this before or since. But it was like this field led me to her, and then once I was inside it, we went on this insane roller coaster... ecstatic thoughts about God, soaring as high as high can be, feeling so wildly joyful together, and then just crashing into the darkest feeling I've ever known, total disintegration, void, nothingness and utter despair and death. Meanwhile all that was going on was that she was talking to me and I was sitting there across from her listening, asking questions, trying to make sense of what the fuck was going on. I was in my mid-20s, and in the 70s and 80s people didn't talk about mental illness the way they do now, and this was my sister. It didn't occur to me until later that she'd had what was then called a schizophrenic break."

Mary refused to come home, my Mom told her father what she'd found, and Mary disappeared again.

sometimes

sometimes in the corner of my eye

sometimes in the corner

sometimes

you were there first

you were there first

you were there first

ooooooooo

come down and bless this little one

come down and bless this little one

come down and bless this little one

sometimes

“Watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. Remember: thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

- Tenakh

In the Jewish tradition there is a ban on making images. I've often wondered if there are so many Jewish thinkers of images because of this ban, if the ban has made the effects of images on Jewish people unusually strong (Benjamin, Freud, Warburg, Arendt, Sontag, Didi-Huberman, etc.)

At synagogue, images are produced through chanted language. Language turned into sound produces images, tells stories and shares laws and customs, and at the same time each letter and word has a mathematical, abstract correspondence which creates its own meanings that learned Rabbis have interpreted for thousands of years.

In the Masoretic Text, YHWH appears to Ezekiel, who is a man living in Babylon during the exile, and shows him a vision: other people living in Babylon, Ezekiel's friends and neighbors, have created idols in the temple. They have

created images of what they themselves have seen in visions: angels, other gods. YHWH, showing Ezekiel the men with their paintings and sculptures, says,

“Do you see what they do in the dark, each in the chamber of their images?”

They must be killed. Ezekiel seems to hesitate for a moment, and in this moment I read the following: does he not realize that YHWH is asking him to do exactly the thing he is supposed to kill these men for doing - make concrete, turn to action or object, that which he has witnessed in a vision?

I first met Mary in the late 1990s, when she re-appeared after almost 20 years, found living on the street, eating out of dumpsters. I was around 10 years old and I only remember three details from my first visit to her in the hospital in Sacramento.

First, she let her long tangled brown hair hang over her face and her fat breasts and belly. She rubbed the ends of it between her fingers and looked down and muttered. She barely looked up at me or acknowledged my presence.

Second, my Mom asked Mary about her conversations with Van Gogh on the phone (my Mom thought this was interesting, because Van Gogh had also spoken to people he couldn't see).

Third, Mary's fat body was surprisingly hunched, rigid, grabbed, had hard angles and contours, as if the forces that moved through her had reshaped her physical form, had acted directly on the cells of her body.

On the three hour drive home through suburbs and farmlands west towards the ocean something settled in my gut and as the car passed the white buildings outside I knew that Mary's fate was nothing besides horror, that there was no exit in her visions.

Romeo used to say, there are two roots of Western culture: Jewish and Greek. The Jewish root is monotheistic, bans the production of visible images, is more or less concerned with abstraction, numbers, language, sound, music, and above all else, the law. The Greek root is polytheistic, metamorphic, and above all else is concerned with images, gods as images and images as gods, and with movement and transformation. Romeo's not the first person who said this by any means, but he told me something interesting once like, "there's enough tension between these two roots to generate endless lifetimes of work."

There is a picture of Brigid that I remember, that I can't find, taken in the house we lived in when we first moved to California. She has her eyes closed and the flash is illuminating her face and dark sweater. Her right arm is raised, palm open, facing the camera, like a religious icon. The walls are painted yellow and it's dark inside, maybe a foggy afternoon.

Brigid would go in cycles, spirals, rounds. A few years in an institution, a few years living with us, a few years living on her own, until she would let herself be taken by a large wave at the beach and nearly drown, or take pills and hit her head in the shower. In bad years Brigid would cry twelve to fifteen hours a day. In better periods she drew and painted dark, tangled, intricately detailed works that she hung everywhere. She moved like a ghost, hardly seeming to touch the ground, and weighed almost nothing, but she smiled with a mischievous affection and unlike her sister Mary, her eyes were clear and lucid. She loved me and I loved her, and we spent hours together I know but it's hard to remember exactly what we did. Draw, I think.

When she was in crisis Brigid would call my Mom at all hours of the night, and my Mom would go into her studio and speak on the green telephone, try to comfort her, or do something else I'm not sure of. My Mom always seemed harrowed, exhausted, emptied by these sessions but she attended to them with something like sacred duty.

When I went to college and moved into a tiny brown concrete room with bars on the windows, in a bleak and freezing New England town, Birdie (as we called her) turned her attention to me: she started calling, saying she just couldn't make it, couldn't live through another night, and asking me how I was so strong. I felt the edges of a black whirlpool, looked over into the center, and decided it wasn't for me. I told my Mom, who was furious. She yelled at Birdie and told her to never call me again, and then coached me on how to get Birdie to leave me alone. After I gently told her off, Birdie stopped calling.

One Christmas Birdie sat on the green velvet couch at my grandparents' house the entire day, crying silently, whispering to anyone who came near, "how are you so strong?" An aunt or a cousin would grimace, my Mom rolled her eyes and tried to talk Birdie into doing something else, but mostly we did Christmas as usual: ate a huge meal, exchanged gifts, got drunk, threw food, insults, and jokes, went for a walk, gossiped, made fun of the cousins, all with Birdie sitting on the couch like a forgotten and unopened gift. At some point she must have driven herself home.

to give me legs

oh why have you come

to give me legs

oh why have you come

to give me legs

why have you

Gary once told me that someone having a psychotic episode has no inner images per se.

He said, “Try it... Go get a cup of coffee in the kitchen. Pay careful attention and you’ll notice that there’s an image, however approximate, that prefigures your action. Without this you couldn’t do it. Or maybe the image is inseparable from the impulse to get a cup of coffee? First the image, then you decide to get it or not?”

Gary believed this was true for small daily actions but also the great patterns that shape our lives. What we love to do and who we love – look closely enough and there’s an image holding the pattern.

But when you’re possessed by an image you only experience forces that more or less act on you, and you more or less act out these forces without filter: “Aliens are controlling my mind, I have to kill myself to stop them.” Not “I think Aliens might be controlling my mind” or “I’m seeing images that look like Aliens and they’re saying _____”. The image has you.

Gary liked to think about the possibility of experiencing an inner image as the possibility of negotiating with its force. Gary always described consciousness as a reflective vessel – a container, a cauldron, a vase, a well, a cooking pot, a room of mirrors – with the first step of reflection and pause, suspension, the gap between instinct and action, taking the

form not of language but of awareness of the presence of the inner image.

For me it also came in cycles, spirals, rounds.

One night when I was 13, parents out for the evening, distinctly, a voice, or several voices garbled, more a sensation than a sound, but definitely something that wasn't technically there. In the living room, just above the TV set, a few feet in front of the white wall. Everything seemed to ripple. I pretended nothing had happened and retreated into the kitchen, making occasional sidelong glances at the living room which was now full of a thick atmosphere of fear. When my parents got home they both immediately asked if I was alright. I said yes, no problem, my hands gripped tightly together in my lap, my body stiff and unyielding.

My parents wouldn't let me watch films or television

when I was a child. Some combination of Rudolf Steiner bullshit, reading too much Debord, and healthy radical left wing anti-corporate media vibes. But there was always an extra intensity to it, an urgency.

When I was 4 years old I saw my first movie, the original "Star Wars". I still remember it vividly, and apparently I talked of absolutely nothing else for weeks. The power the images had over me worried my parents, and I was forbidden to watch any other movies.

My question has always been, did the ban on movies create the strong impact they had on me? (Oh, the shame I felt crying in terror at a horror movie at a teenage slumber party). Or did it protect me from the very real power of images to take me over?

For me it also came in cycles, spirals, rounds.

Later, I took a brownie with LSD or something else in it at a concert, and hallucinated for a night and day, yellow construction equipment and the stars spinning visible in the daytime. But the strange feeling of floating above my body and the black shapes in the corner of my eye took months to fade. I wrote letters to Mary and Brigid in case my fate was to join them, and hid them in the drawer of my blue nightstand, terrified.

Later, in the shared bathroom, a sort of rift, a gap in the universe, a loss of time, staring in the mirror, not sure what just happened? A guy I kind of knew walked in and stopped, staring in horror, his mouth open, like in a movie. "You all right?" I tried to smile and shake it off but I could tell I had some kind of field around me that even this rugby dude could feel he'd stepped into.

Ibn'Arabi and other medieval Islamic philosophers

describe a layer of reality which they call the Alam-Al-Mithal that is the territory of idea-images, dreams, angels, djinns and demons. The presences in the Alam-al-Mithal are autonomous, they have their own agendas and exist with or without us. Alam-al-Mithal means, roughly, "in-between territory", which to these thinkers meant between the physical and spiritual realms.

The Alam-al-Mithal has nothing to do with imagination as we experience it today – it is not "made up". What we call imagination is rather an organ of perception that can sometimes, under the right circumstances, access this territory and affect and be affected by the presences within it. Sometimes a dreamer visits the Alam-al-Mithal in a dream. Sometimes the presences visit a human in the daytime. The Alam-al-Mithal has nothing to do with visibility. What differentiates the Alam-al-Mithal from other forms of visions or imaginings is a certain intensity, density, thickness, autonomy, impact on the body and emotions.

In Avicenna's visionary recitals of the 11th century, he met many presences in the Alam-al-Mithal. These performances included songs, texts, and ritual actions with precise staging, and lasted late into the night. The presences in the Alam-al-Mithal spoke with Avicenna but the meaning of the recitals seems to have been contact with these presences

as such, which acted directly on Avicenna, gave him energy and orientation and transformed his perception of the universe, produced new sensations and new thinking.

What is important is that the idea of the Alam-al-Mithal saved my life. I tried it on for size, walked around with it, lived with it, and it changed how I experience the images that come to me in the daytime without my asking, or when I close my eyes and *go down*, or that I meet in dreams. It gave me a way to relate, a handle, a starting point... a man made entirely of laptop screens in a shallow pool of water, a spinning knife, a deer who jumped on a table and over my shoulder in a snowy landscape, a priest in a cave under dusty red mountains... I met these and many other people, animals, places, strange presences, who demanded, asked, ignored, pleaded, gave, resisted, healed, attacked, criticized, accompanied, who I loved and who loved me, who I changed and who changed me. And yes, they like to be treated as autonomous, asked what they want, listened to, argued with, treated as colleagues, adversaries, friends. They belong to no one.

jessyca

jessyca

jessyca

stallin in tiny mode

far to see that

that is all

combined

shot *[a sudden opening]*

sweet

so set and fall

the start and fall

the start and the fall

the stop and the want to be that fallin

parks

shrine to say the startle the start of some foil and shine

wash it away in step of a corner to see you rise in my arm

i stay you rise in my arm

i see you rest in my own

i stay the rest in my own

i have to state a stone awhile and for a chance at to say

and for I call in still and store a step in far way

i'd like to steal another stamin

we were comin to play

i have to stay

dilili dilili

For me it also came in spirals, cycles, rounds

I feel I can't find the right tone or the right voice, it all starts to sound like a horror movie. Describe it in detail and people assume it's fiction. Just imply and you're overdramatizing. Convince people, prove it, and then you're crazy, an unreliable narrator, dangerous, not someone anyone would invite over for dinner. And then your story doesn't mean anything, it's just something that happens to crazy people, it's nothing, you're no one, an unopened present sitting on the couch during Christmas.

But I'll try: I could tell you about the night it was worst, sleeping in a bed in the strange shack outside the house where some red haired woman was having an affair with a boy, totally convinced I'd give in and kill them both, stab them with a kitchen knife, leave a horrible trail of blood everywhere, burn the house down, this deepest feeling of there is something wrong with me, there is something horrible and other inside me, that has nothing to do with me, all my fingers were on fire, my hair, my neck, my body, everything alight in the white blanket near the space heater, rain falling on the sloping field outside, turning over and over, pushing back, resisting, trying not to give in, until I called my father in the middle of the night and told him he had to drive to where I was and pick me up right now or else something terrible might happen. The worst was not the specter of violence but the way my vision, hearing, the space

around me, my feeling of my body, seemed to buckle, bend, warp, as if the images were going to shatter it completely.

Or I could tell you about the night I told my mother. Walking around the bird sanctuary in the warm dark of a California evening, told her exactly and in detail, and she grabbed my hand, and seemed to shrink, we were like two girls, two teenage girls, vulnerable and young and alone and in the dark, not sure which way was back to the car and the road and the lights and the house. And how after it seemed that she did everything (which later she did not remember) to keep me away from her for some months, I was not to sleep at her house, I should go elsewhere, I should not be too close, I should be distant, just in case.

It's like working with a dream in dreamwork. I tell you my dream, and as I speak about it, even if I tell you nothing about my life, something about me, indefinable, becomes revealed, becomes present between us. It's a revelation, a making-public, that has nothing to do with self-expression. It's something that is a by-product of contact with form. It's like watching someone play the trumpet: your breath is taken away, and you fall in love with them, even though you don't know the first thing about them.

Please, don't think about my story.

Please, no more performing ourselves, having reasonable conversations, sharing points of view, being good subjects, doing tons and tons and tons of hours of labor performing representing ourselves, me telling you my story, you telling me your story, smiling and nodding, on email on text on Zoom and in person, acknowledging our points of view, re-performing subjectivity, confirming it, representing it, selling it - it exhausts me it exhausts me it exhausts me, I can't breathe, I am going to scream, because there is no exit.

I need form to let things blur, to let myself unfocus, to become liquid, to take a vacation from being me.

I need form because I need an exit.

Philip Guston, in his dizzying, undoing, late period: "I don't paint to express something - I paint to make something that will change me!"

Come around round round

Come around round round

Come around round round

Come around round round

a strange part of you was never seen again

a strange part of you was never seen again

a strange part

a strange part of you was never seen again

a strange part of you was never seen again

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

oh it's wide

oh it's white

white

wide

white

wide

I'm standing on the side of a mountain, many mountains around, my dead father who I haven't seen in years now is standing next to me in a place we used to go when I was a kid but it looks different, much more steep, high up. We're looking across a narrow valley, the walls of the mountains a very steep, very tall, grey granite, ending in snow-capped peaks. It's quiet and then there's a rockslide, huge boulders falling all around us, grey, purple, granite, and we take shelter under a big rock sticking out of the side of the mountain. The rockslide is also going on the mountain across the valley. It goes for a while and then it stops and there is a sudden stillness. The air is thick. I look out under the overhang into the valley and I see a dark cloud floating in the air just a few meters from us, floating in space. It's maybe a meter across and moving with a charged intensity, vibrating, shifting, humming almost. It makes the air thick, it has a strong feeling around it. I look again and notice that it is connected, by a wisp of black cloud stuff, to my right arm. I'm wearing a thick blue jacket. I take out a knife and try to cut the black cloud away from my sleeve but I discover the jacket is filled not with feathers but with more of the black cloud. My father is gone now, and I think, suddenly, just before I wake up, is this black cloud thing somehow related to maybe a distant cousin of YHWH, the strange creature of voice and flame that our ancestors followed in the desert, who only many many many generations later became the all-knowing figure some people call God?

Gary once told me that the person who taught him how to work with dreams once asked their teacher, who had invented many of the methods Gary used, if he could summarize his work in a single sentence. The teacher, old, sitting in a chair in his garden by the lake, said, “my only contribution to the world was to re-discover the healing power of the image.”

you taught me to dive under the water

dive under the waves

at the same beach where i scattered your ashes

increase

let spring come

increase

here we go again dive under the wave

increase

let spring come

increase

i always thought of you as a seal then

increase

love is nothing

love changes nothing

that's how i feel with you

like sleeping in the backseat

and the increase when spring comes

like a taste of blood in the mouth

like a taste of blood in the mouth

steals all his lines

increase

increase

running down the street of a city you've never seen before

the light suddenly gold and slanting

and everything green increase

like when spring comes increase

increase

I know I was the lucky one. I escaped, I found an exit and my experience of images in the end was not a disaster ending in death. Strange terror, sadness, near destruction, a long slow labor of many years, but also, more, and always, joy, life, more life! The living, life life life, life, such life. And love, unashamed, unabashed love, full heart, grinning involuntarily. Like an oak tree, it's there, it's there, an oak tree there. An oak tree standing in a field. A sharp clear morning, standing around the oak tree there, on a summer morning, the air still lifting...

Nothing guaranteed this. I am not special, I had the right help at the right moments, inherited the right genetic roulette. So, if I address this subject, I have to say, I also do it for you Mary, and for you Brigid. I love you. I also do it for my father, and for Gary, another of the dead I speak to.

Now I listen for the coming dream. And the coming dream is *whatever* dream:

Penguins all around, a man who controls the flow of water at a dam with huge sheets of rusted copper, fifty naked men next to a pool all cumming at once in a huge fountain, six women you might have been at parties and weddings and in an empty warehouse, a dying king covered in flowers, bubbles underwater and so many fishes, an alpaca on a snowy mountainside, a girl lounging so perfectly in a white dress stroking the pelt of a leopard, a man in a wooden hut at night exhausted from fighting with bureaucrats who work in a university, an earthen jar, a tiger and a kangaroo in a space station, a beast of green snakes and rays in a river who turns into an androgynous god you make love to, a neighbor across the street you want to send music to, bring your sound to, buying a certain eyeshadow in a market in a country you used to live in, a nighttime war, running and hiding, a house with no windows and doors in a vast desert...

It's *whatever* in the sense that it's absolutely specific, but what it is doesn't matter, what matters is that it comes, that they come, they insist, and that you listen, you argue, you discuss, you fight them, and yell at them, and listen silently, and love them, and feel their subtle vibes in your system, and they touch you, you can feel them on your body, in your sternum, throat, in your groin, face, thigh, buttocks, your calves, your calves thrumming, they quicken something in

you, some bit of dark matter, something moves, a white stone in your chest moves into the right place, clicks, drops, deepens, and an unfolding, an unwinding starts and goes and goes, towards what you can't say, maybe you'll have to ask them, but not even they have the answer to the question, *who is dreaming?*



Fragments from a forthcoming book, written in parallel to the performance *A Dream That Belongs to No One*. Halfweg, The Netherlands, 2021-2022.

All by Asa Horvitz except *jessyca* - is lyrics to the song by Oneka von Schrader

Impossible without: Szymon Adamczak, Nahuel Cano, Maria Mavridou, Keyna Nara, Venuri Perera, Oneka von Schrader, Camille Verhaak, Esy Casey, Silvia Bottiroli, Andrea Bozic, Anne Breure, Konstantina Georgelou, Joachim Robbrecht, Mark Timmer, Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske

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