

Dossier

The Covid-19 pandemic and narratives of experience

Oneiric narratives and the sharing of (extra)ordinary experiences

Narrativas oníricas e a partilha de experiências (extra)ordinárias (resumo: p. 13) Narrativas oníricas y la compartición de experiencias (extra)ordinarias (resumen: p. 13)

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Oneiric narratives are fragments of extra(ordinary) experiences that may raise questions about the social place occupied by the dreamer and those people who exercise listening, building spaces of sharing about imaginary, impressions and affections. In this article we reflect on the different functions that the experience of narrating and listening to oneiric content produce in a community, while addressing the relationship between dreams and periods of political and health crisis in the context of Brazilian public universities, such as those imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the object of analysis, we highlight a dream presented in a university outreach project, pointing out dimensions of treatment of oneiric material that help us to find clues for other ways to inhabit society.

Keywords: Dream. Narrative. Pandemic. University outreach.



Introduction

To Conrado Federici

A generation that still got to go to school on a horse-drawn streetcar found itself homeless, in a different landscape in everything except the clouds, and in its center, in a field of destructive currents and explosions, was the fragile and tiny human body¹. (p. 115)

The launching of the book "O Oráculo da noite: a história e a ciência do sonho" by Sidarta Ribeiro² has contributed to the growing acknowledging of dreams as a key aspect for the critique of the civilizatory process that is moving towards the destruction of Planet Earth. Looking at dreams as producers of senses, triggered by ordinary experiences that have dreamers as their protagonists, is one of Freud's contributions³. Beradt's work⁴ is aimed at understanding dream production as a seismograph that detects the impacts of authoritarian political contexts on subjectivity. The warnings made by Krenak and Ribeiro⁵ detecting the extraordinary in the oneiric production invites us to build other possible political horizons. These productions have aroused interest in dream work in times of pandemic and will be the clues that we will follow to discuss the impacts of dream narratives on a community of destiny.

We understand that the dream is the result of a game of psychic forces that involves the subjects' perceptions of the data of reality and their own imaginary. It is a fruitful field of observation, examination and analysis of the events that touch us and that need some work of psychic elaboration in order to find a place in our subjectivity. In this sense, the dream is a potential field for the subjective manifestation of the experiences that arise in the encounter with the other, with reality, with power relations and with the world around us. Through it we narrate our sufferings, passions, anxieties, desires, confusions and all sorts of feelings that frequently could not be perceived and understood in the conscious state. The oneiric phenomenon would then be a way of enabling the narrative of suffering and desire in the lived experience, amplifying the imagetic spaces that belong to the unconscious logic inherent in psychic life, widening as well our capacity to appropriate the social and political moment that affects us.

In this article we set out to reflect on the importance of oneiric narrative, starting from the realization of the different functions that this experience performs for a community. As an object of analysis, we address the relationship between dreams and periods of political and health crisis, such as those imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the times when this article is written. Finally, we highlight a shared dream in a reach out project and point out dimensions of the treatment of dream material that can help us live with the stranger that inhabits our dreams and find clues to other ways of living in society.



Dreaming and its functions

The function of the dream as a compass guiding the direction of life was already emerging in traditional societies as ancestral wisdom. In Greece, in the second half of the 2nd century A.D., Artemidorus was known as the oniroman and professional diviner for having written a work entitled Oneirocritica. Oniromancy⁶ (or Brizomancy) refers to the divination of the future through the interpretation of dreams. It is an extremely complex task if we recognize that the dream is subject to a series of interpretations and depends on secondary considerations, such as the age, sex and social position of the dreamer. In a particularly memorable passage in the book, kings and governors consult dream readers for decision-making.

For Freud³, dream is the guardian of sleep and the means by which we fulfill our unconscious childlike sexual desires, with the exception of the traumatic dreams that wake the sleeping subject and seem to have another function: the elaboration of events that have produced excess anguish in the subject. In 1920, Freud⁷ addresses the dreams that repeat the scene of the traumatic event, especially the dreams produced by soldiers who survived the First World War in which the situation that caused the excess anguish was repeated to exhaustion. For the author, what triggers the dream are often daytime remains that refer to events that link to desires and excesses of affection asking for work of psychic elaboration.

The daytime remainders are loaded with elements from the social and historical context; there are continuities and discontinuities between the logic of the unconscious and conscious thought in the subjectivities that suffer the hardships of the history of the present. In other words, ordinary, everyday situations that affect us trigger the scenes, impressions and extraordinary scenery created by dream work.

In the 1930s, during Hitler's rise to power, Beradt collected more than 300 dreams and reaffirmed the connections between life experience and the transformations of a historically determined era. Dreams that, on the one hand,

[...] seemed to record in detail, as seismographs, the effect, within the person, of external political events, while on the other hand were derived from an involuntary psychic activity. In this way, dreams could help to interpret the structure of a reality about to become a nightmare⁴. (p.33)

However, we may ask ourselves: what interests us in the dream is its interpretation? Is it its relationship with the political context? Are the aspects common to all those living at a given historical moment? In this article we are also interested in how the narrative of the dream is constructed and the questions it directs to the dreamer and to those who hear or read it.

We also understand that the function of the dream is to exercise a restoring role of psychic processes such as imagination, creativity and flexibility in the face of the hardships of life. Ab'Saber⁸ invites us to exercise our capacity to dream, because the psychic elaboration present in the oneiric production expands our creative and aesthetic dimensions. Relying on Winnicott, it locates in the dream the creative capacity of the child, considers it as a space "between" subjects and produced in the interface subjects, objects and environment; a transitional space and potential of creativity, as described in the proposal of the scribble game.



Using these ideas as stepping-stones, we understand that it is possible to build spaces for sharing dreams through oral and/or written narrative addressed to real or imaginary people who have been part of the experiences and life trajectory of those who tell a dream. It is assumed in this article that by sharing the narrative of the dream experience, it is possible to transmit ideas and values that question the dreamer and the one who listens or reads the narrative.

The narrative experience of dreams

The process of narrating the oneiric experience is a way to get in touch and learn to live with the stranger that dwells within us - our humanity present in dreams transmuted into a shuffle of historical times, in the presence of strangely familiar people⁹, inanimate objects that speak and formal garments of those who occupy power functions that let their striped clown tights appear. It is necessary to narrate and listen to the oneiric narrative to build an attitude far from the productivity orders that demand linear and watertight stories. We can compare this attitude to that of the *flâneur*, to whom,

wandering aimlessly through the multitude of big cities, in deliberate opposition to their feverish and utilitarian activity, things reveal their inner meaning [...], and only the *flâneur*, in his/her careless error, manages to capture the message¹⁰. (p. 142)

Gurski¹¹ presents the *Flanerie* Listening as a way of articulating the possibility of listening and free speech implied by each one's time.

Narrating, speaking, writing, or recording dreams is a way of leaving traces of oneiric fragments in other people and in a community. Every oneiric narrative is a way of addressing another imaginary or real, and when there is listening, there is sharing and transmission of interpellations about the places of the subject in the world in front of power relations.

For Larrosa, *narrare* means "to drag forward", and is also derived from gnarus, which is at the same time "what he knows" and "what he has seen"; thus, we can then designate the narrator as the one "who carries forward, presenting him again, what he has seen and of which he keeps a trace in his memory" (p. 68). It thus requires a certain interiorization and exteriorization of the image that allows the subjects to see and reveal themselves to another.

In this way, the narrative experience is also configured as a practice of self-care, because by paying attention to oneself and one's dreams one can reveal the hardships and beauties of existence to oneself and to another. This exercise allows narrators to see themselves as central characters of their stories and to problematize them as lives that unfold in countless faces and personas. In this way, it constitutes a process that leads to knowing, building and reconstructing subjectivity as the personal story gains visibility in constant narration operations that are made before someone else and can be transformed into common and shared matter. It is, therefore, a way of making intelligible



the social world and the psychosocial phenomena that escape from a certain scientific logic and rationality, to assume knowledge and practices of common sense, through the elaboration of plots about the episodes witnessed and led by the subjects. The narrative of an experience depends on the knowledge built upon internally and on the context in which social interactions take place; and not so much on an essentialist, individualistic, stable and profound conception of oneself¹³.

Benjamin¹ presents three conditions for a narrative to take place and to propagate an experience in its full sense: (1) the transmitted experience must be common to the narrator and the listener, constituted in the same community of life and discourse; (2) the time and rhythm necessary for the narrator's voice, gesture and word to meet and transform each other, as well as the precise movements of an artisan; and (3) the narrative flow that occurs between narrator and listener must remain open to new proposals, enabling the story to be retold by the listener.

By narrating the dreams we are able to process the raw material that emerges from everyday relationships and extraordinary events that need to find a place for construction and deconstruction. Through this process, the narrative experience, at the same time, carries and transcends singular existence; it carries the transmissibility of the historical and cultural experiences of a given time, of the possibilities and difficulties shared among those who live the same historical moment.

For some indigenous ethnic groups, dream narration is a shared practice in which listeners become witnesses and keep the community's experiences alive. For Krenak¹⁴, dreams carry information and guidance necessary for life, such as the search for songs, cures, inspiration and resolution of practical issues and choices that appear in dream material as possibilities. The dream is in this way, an experience of people initiated in ancestral manners, similar to those who learn school contents or a dance; it is considered an institution in which everyone can participate dreaming and producing imaginary. The environmentalist speaks of the use of dream circular dances in communities where several dreamers are admitted who can learn from the oneiric subliminal messages that enhance the responsibility of each being to participate in the protection of their surroundings, in addition to preparing them to relate to daily life. It also affirms that the dream is a place to transmit affections that can help us to develop a proactive posture in face of the time to come⁵. The problem was that, in the advance of the capitalist system, humanity abandoned this capacity to scrutinize the future in favor of a western, immediate, industrial, capitalist way of life that values technique and abandons the dream as a space for the imaginary, creativity and the obtaining, deepening and sharing of ideas. If, on the one hand, we have witnessed as passive spectators much destruction and periods of crisis generated by the predatory use of the goods of nature, on the other hand, we have never had so much accumulated knowledge - the ancestral knowledge that calls us to dream the future again⁵.



Dreams, politics and pandemics - the (extra)ordinary experiences

Benjamin¹ warns us that both the experience and the art of narration are on the verge of extinction and the danger we run is the loss of the ability to share experiences. This can be easily understood in experiences that produce excess anguish in subjects, such as war, economic recession or destruction imposed by a ruler. In unusual situations, such as that we experience in times of pandemic, it is as if the fragile and tiny human body succumbed to the shocks of daily life that prevent the time necessary for the experience to be transmitted. In ordinary situations, what explains our inability to narrate are the transformations that come from the news, information, and opinions that come to us ready every day through newspapers and social networks. It is as if the excess of information replaces what passes through us daily and overcomes the time necessary for reflection, the patience inherent to listening dedicated to claudicating speech.

Oneiric narrative works with figments of memories, with impressions and with affections, so it's a way of not giving in to ready and quick explanations, on the contrary, it's a process of assimilation that takes place in deep layers of the psyche and demands a state of distension. Boredom and a meaningless daily life seem to impede the experience in pandemic times, in which days always seem to be the same and physical contacts are impeded for many who are following the rules of social distancing. When we sleep, we reach a threshold, a portal near the deadly sensation, between the state of wakefulness, sleep and dream; sleep, therefore, depends on the previous confidence gained in our life experiences with people and ideals that (re)live caring and welcoming bonds⁸. Therefore, the more dreams are narrated, the more one recognizes oneself as a subject, the more one keeps memory alive and the more one appropriates knowledge that helps us to project the future that is still unimagined.

In pandemic times, we can affirm that the function of dream work is the literalization of the lived experience, so it can act as a warning sign, vigilance, danger - a torment that is impossible to contain as conscious perception and that (re)produces the catastrophic experience in dreamlike language. It is in the search for energies to deal with the anxieties of an unusual experience that the work of the dream is to restore the memory of past situations in which the subjects exercised the ability to defend themselves in the least. In a daily life, when Brazilian subjects are forced to live with an unknown virus, while experiencing ineffective forms of pandemic management, what appearances would be populating the dreams of Brazilians? In the case of teachers and students, there is a recurring oneiric narrative that refers to the risk of extinction of federal public universities in the face of the astonishing setback in educational policies since 2016¹⁵.

In the dreams collected by Beradt⁴, Hitler's dictatorial figure appears ridiculed, dressed like a clown or in comical situations. In another dream, the leader of Nazi propaganda, Goebbels, appears limping. In this sense, we can affirm that there are dreams whose themes recover objects, impressions and images that are common among several dreamers who express a political context that does not cease to question the dreamer and his interlocutors ideologically, deepening, extrapolating and sharing the enigmas and absurdities that appear as hauntings of our present times.



His book inspired and continues to inspire several research and extension projects abroad and in Brazil. Abroad, we can cite Crawford's work¹⁶ in collecting dreams involving the figure of President Donald Trump, which is also presented in ridiculous situations. For the author, the dreams of the U.S. president speak of the dreamer passively inserted in a political context that can scarcely be changed.

In Brazil, we quote the projects that originated during the pandemic: "Inventory of Dreams" 17, "Oneiropolitics under construction" 18, "Oneiricpandemics" 19 and "Dreams in Pandemic Times" 20. What we can extract from these researches is that there is a psychic work in progress in the subjects in face of the strangeness that crosses them when facing an unknown and unpredictable virus. There is certainly a psychic suffering and a risk to life that submit the subject to fear and the threat of death, capturing singularities and daily life. What these experiences have in common is the function of the dream in understanding the political, economic and sanitary crises, specifically in Brazil, and in the ways of avoiding a greater danger, aiming at understanding how the historical moment imposes an inscription in one's own subjectivity.

In this article we will present the oneiric narrative produced by a professor in two meetings of the "Rounds of Talk About Dreams"²¹, an extension project whose objective is the sharing of oneiric experiences among university students who had their academic presence activities suspended due to the pandemic. The online space has been transformed into 60-minute meetings in which participants narrate their dreams and produce associations and functions as a way of mutual care, sharing the sensitive and intervening in times of negationism of a deadly virus for which there are no vaccines yet.

The narrative of the dream and the professor in the face of the destruction of the public university

We reproduce below the dream shared by a teacher in an online dream sharing conversation round²¹, as well as excerpts from the report²² on the exchanges of experiences that took place in two meetings, and exercised possible ways of treating oneiric material:

That night I cried the way I had not cried for a long time. In a dream. It was a long cry, hard to be finished, a good cry, the kind of those that wash you from inside. I was sobbing and there by the many, already sitting on the floor, I was saying as a child that no, no, it's not possible, it's not possible.

The night also cries in continuous rain while I write. Girl, be quiet. Until when? We were in many in an auditorium: curiously, it was the auditorium of a hospital where I worked as a clown years ago. The technical cabin, in the background, partially isolated, had been adapted as a dressing room and, from there, putting striped tights; we quietly spied the classes and medical discussions about serious situations.

Our campus director tried to pass the microphone to the administrative director. I had never seen him so firm, performatic and safe. He made an effort to reach another microphone further away and, with a strong voice, began



his presentation with old photos and memories of the construction of the university, the Baixada Santista Campus. The speech reached the current freshmen, of how they can lock the registrations. There was room for almost no questions, until he concluded: so it's over. The campus will close. He also explained a little bit about how some activities would gain more time, making others manage to maintain themselves, until everything stops. We all cried copiously. Even the administrative director removed the glasses he doesn't use to wipe his tears. However, I was sitting on the floor in front of the campus, with my head between my knees and crying a lot. I woke up at the moment of the gesture, a touch of him on my shoulder, a consolation. The rain got stronger and I was in doubt if I would ever sleep well again²¹. (p. 2)

The dream of anguish happened at the beginning of the pandemic and following the suspension of in-person classes at a federal university, whose demands for remote classes are much more challenging for first-year students. We can say that the material produced in it refers to the elements common to the participants of the same group that update the ideological questions directed to their subjectivities²³. In other words, what is at stake in the scenario built on the abovementioned dream is the subjective position occupied by the subject before the figures of power (the director, the federal government, the biological virus) and the hierarchical social ties of capitalist society.

In this dream, everyone's cry, as intense as the rain that was falling, reveals the suffering caused by the interruption of academic activities, the loss of the identities exercised by the dreamer and by everyone present there (director, professors and students) and the possibility of closing the university or its transformation into Distance Learning. It is about the non-fulfillment of a desire for continuity in the exercise of the identities of teachers and students and their functions in the academic community. These functions are as vital as breathing, feeding, touching, embracing, and that gain new configurations when these actions can lead to contagion and the extinction of the workplace itself. This feeling is reinforced by policies directed toward the destruction of the public university, which has been asphyxiated by the investment cutback led by the federal government¹⁵.

In the dream context, it is possible to perceive that objects are charged with senses and bear a certain familiarity with the dreamed scene. The microphone refers to the daily life of the university and refers to the activities in the hall where the assemblies and meetings take place for a larger group of people. It is the object that makes it possible to speak and be listened to and passed from hand to hand as in a clown skit, almost producing laughter among listeners. There is ambivalence of affection: there are possibilities of laughing at the scene like crying at what it reveals of the imponderable failure of the freshmen of 2020 to attend public university. Therefore, in the oneiric narrative presented, we have the familiarity of a scenario that shuffles different temporalities related to the present, past and future of the singular and present history of the dreamer: it is the auditorium, the director, the photos, the pandemic and the threat of closure of the university; it is the hospital where the dreamer worked for many years, the technical booth and the dressing room, the striped tights that refer to another profession of the aforementioned professor who acted as a clown in the "Doctors of Joy", and that refer to



a recent past. Elements as real as the transformations imposed by the threat of a virus that spreads through contact with an infected body and that led to the suspension of classes in person, and as real as the measures taken by the federal government that threaten universal access to higher education and the continuity of the public university¹⁵. In other words, the dream then shuffles different scenarios and temporalities in the life of the dreamer; sometimes it is the hall of the university that is transformed into an auditorium, as happens in real life, sometimes it is the booth in which the professor dresses in clown clothes, with environments and everyday objects, and is triggered by recent experiences in the life of the dreamer that are articulated with the historical and political moment.

There is a common sense of anguish that equals everyone when confronting a threat, that students who pass the admission process will not be able to enroll, because this is part of the real concerns of teachers and has never been realized in practice, but in pandemic times it is transformed into a threat that turns into specter and keeps haunting those involved.

In the dream conversation round of the above-mentioned extension project, one of the students is moved by listening to the oneiric narrative and puts her anguish at the transfer of her enrollment in a private university (which kept the academic calendar) to the federal university²². Therefore, the oneiric narrative cries on behalf of all of us and presents the anguishing impression of being in the throes of life choices we made before and during the emergence of an unknown virus and of the way health is being managed that aggravates the hardship of a government that imprints setbacks on health and education.

In the final scenes of the dream, in the gesture of the director who approaches the professor sitting on the floor and touching him, we can find an affection of solidarity and collective resistance for the (re)construction of the public university; an alert saying us that new forms of resistance to the political and health crisis that threaten our lives in all fields can be resumed or reinvented, so that our existence survives the destruction and genocide in progress. There is a prelude to a dimension of the treatment of dream material that - by crossing the singular dimension of the dreamer and the collective dimension linked to the sharing of the common - directs to the prospection of futures. As a prospect for futures, the dreamlike content can help us to build another political imaginary and another way, perhaps, of sharing the world more in solidarity. In other words, oneiric work can produce other imaginaries that support us in building a less predatory society, circulating words and affections that connect the sensitive world of people and their daily lives to the world of dreams.

It is possible to think about the prospective dimension of dreams with a view to new poetic, existential and political horizons⁵, therefore dialoguing with impressions, images and representations loaded with inventive ways of being in the world. The elaboration prompted by the oneiric process can overcome the deadly repetition of scenes of anguish and be directed towards the construction of other ways of coexistence between human beings, animals and nature on Planet Earth. It is related to what Ribeiro² points out as a projection of the future, in the sense that the dream can be an important moment of organization of our past experiences, aroused by the present moment and that inspire us to another time in which the challenge is to build new possible horizons.



The professor dreams of the environment in which the academic and collective activities are developed in his work and foresees that the end of the public university is approaching in the way we have known it until now. There is, in the oneiric content, a rearrangement of the objects used and the space occupied in daily life, which has the power to send the dreamer and his listeners beyond the restriction of immediacy. In this way one can sustain the construction of another possible political imaginary, different and innovative with respect to the current context marked by social inequality and devastation of nature¹⁵.

In the dream in question it is possible to approach contemporary discussions that point out that the emergence of the virus is associated with the climatic imbalances resulting from a capitalist system based on the exploitation of human labor and the devastation of the environment. Ribeiro and Krenak⁵ also affirm the oneiric content as a time of awakening to the ways in which men and women have occupied Planet Earth to this day, in order to devastate and destroy nature as if there is no tomorrow. The dream would create a space for reorganization, criticism and resizing of the ideals and values rooted in the pillars that sustain capitalist society. For Krenak⁵, the question that remains is to rethink the place of our body and its relations with consumerist needs. The question to be asked is: will we be able to build a lifestyle and "a new body that fits and respects Planet Earth"; and this lifestyle is able to prepare the Earth to embrace the next generations?



Authors' contributions

Jaquelina Maria Imbrizi - proposed the writing and conception of the work, being responsible for the elaboration of the topics related to the dream, its functions and the forms of treatment of the oneiric material, as well as for the authorization of the author of the report described and analyzed in the text.

Adriana Rodrigues Domingues - contributed to the structuring of the work, being responsible for the elaboration of the topics related to the narrative experience and collaborated in the development of the discussion.

Both authors actively participated in all stages of preparing the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

Both authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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As narrativas oníricas são fragmentos de experiências extra(ordinárias) que podem produzir interpelações sobre o lugar social ocupado pelo sonhante e por aquelas pessoas que exercitam a escuta, construindo espaços de partilha sobre imaginários, impressões e afetos. Neste artigo refletimos sobre as diferentes funções que a experiência de narrar e escutar o conteúdo onírico exerce em uma comunidade, e abordamos a relação entre os sonhos e os períodos de crise política e sanitária no contexto das universidades públicas brasileiras, como a imposta pela pandemia do Covid-19. Como objeto de análise, destacamos um sonho apresentado em projeto de extensão universitária e apontamos dimensões de tratamento do material onírico que podem nos ajudar a encontrar pistas para outras formas de habitarmos a sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Sonho. Narrativa. Pandemia. Extensão universitária.

Las narrativas oníricas son fragmentos de experiencias extra(ordinarias) que pueden producir interpelaciones sobre el lugar social ocupado por la persona que sueña y por las personas que ejercitan el escuchar, construyendo espacios de compartición sobre imaginarios, impresiones y afectos. En este artículo reflexionamos sobre las diferentes funciones que la experiencia de narrar y escuchar el contenido onírico ejerce para una comunidad y abordamos la relación entre los sueños y los períodos de crisis política y sanitaria en el contexto de las universidades públicas brasileñas, como la impuesta por la pandemia de Covid-19. Como objeto de análisis, destacamos un sueño presentado en proyecto de extensión universitaria y señalamos dimensiones de tratamiento del material onírico que pueden ayudarnos a encontrar pistas para otras formas de habitar la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Sueño. Narrativa. Pandemia. Extensión universitaria.