

Metaphors in Dreams: Where Cognitive Linguistics meets Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

This article approaches the study of metaphors in dreams from an interdisciplinary perspective, which aims at bringing together the psychoanalytic tradition, and the main views that constitute what is commonly known as the contemporary cognitive theory of metaphor. Our perspective aims at showing how these approaches can (and need) to be integrated, and suggests why in this endeavour it is necessary to consider the personal background of the dreamer and her need to re-establish/confirm her identity within each metaphor.

Introduction

The most acclaimed contemporary theory of metaphor today is the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT), fathered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) and already anticipated in Ortony's collection (1979). As Gibbs points out, "CMT is the dominant force in the contemporary world of interdisciplinary metaphor studies" (2013, p. 14). CMT suggests that metaphors are matters of thought rather than mere figures of speech. The two authors, a linguist and a philosopher, argue that metaphors characterize our way of thinking and contribute to structure our conceptual knowledge, which is grounded in bodily experiences and reflected in the metaphoric linguistic structures that populate our everyday language. In the past thirty years CMT has had significant influence in both linguistics and cognitive science, generating a large amount of supportive research (see Gibbs 2011 for an overview of the empirical studies supporting CMT), as well as critical contributions (see for example Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). One of the main critiques of CMT is that in its first years of existence it was derived solely from the analysis of *verbal* expressions (McGlone, 2007). Another critic noted the fact that neuroimaging studies have recently shown that some metaphoric expressions are understood by native speakers on a linguistic level, as quickly as literal expressions, raising the point that at least some metaphors might remain a linguistic phenomenon, rather than functioning at a deeper conceptual level (Glucksberg, 2003). The debate remains open whether all metaphors are

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processed by comparison or whether some linguistic metaphors are processed as polysemic expressions that require a simple meaning disambiguation on a lexical dimension (Gentner & Bowdle, 2008; Glucksberg, 2008).

Another crucial debate raised by CMT is whether an alignment between two concepts (or two domains), always stimulates us to map exclusively features belonging to the source domain onto the target domain, or whether it pushes us to construct a new mental space where features from both domains are merged. The latter suggestion was proposed by the supporters of Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). According to this theory, metaphors stimulate us to create novel conceptualizations that result from the blending of two or more interacting mental spaces.

In more recent years a large body of empirical studies tackled the activation of conceptual metaphors and image schemas (Lakoff, 1987), i.e. bodily-motivated conceptual structures that derive from recurring sensorimotor experience (e.g., SOURCE-PATH-GOAL), in a variety of cognitive tasks that are independent from linguistic metaphorical expressions (e.g., Casasanto, 2009; Boroditsky & Ramscar, 2002), and in a variety of modalities that range beyond the verbal one, such as gestures, images, movies, and music (e.g., Cienki, 1999; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

Far from denigrating the importance of Lakoff's and Johnson's work, the most recent insights in cognitive semiotics and metaphor studies have also underlined the fact that the experiential bases of conceptual metaphors are not only subconscious, but also deeply rooted in personal, interpersonal, and cultural dynamics, and for this reason it is not surprising that conceptual metaphors vary across time and cultures. Such insights have prompted a new interest in the study of creative, deliberate, and epistemic uses of metaphor, in which "the individual is recast as a permeable cognitive system coupled from the start with its environment and with individual and cultural practices" (Fusaroli & Morgagni, 2013, p. 6). From this perspective, as suggested by Fusaroli and Morgagni, the richness and variety of dimensions added to the original Conceptual Metaphor Theory "call for more extensive integration of CMT into a complex framework of social and cognitive dynamics" (Fusaroli & Morgagni, 2013, p. 5). In other words, the focus on social, communicative, and cognitive functions of metaphors has recently prompted a new wave of enthusiasm and scientific study.

Within this complex and lively framework of discussion, we propose to address the analysis of the metaphors that emerge in the mind from a deep, pre-linguistic dimension, where the communicative function of metaphor is taken to an extreme border: the activity of dreaming. Since CMT has been proposed, to our knowledge only a few studies tackled the application of such an approach to dreams, which are traditionally considered a domain of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, as suggested by Borbely (2008), psychoanalysts have paid little attention to cognitive linguistics' claims, as "their knowledge base gains expressions in the idiosyncratic terminologies of rival psychoanalytic schools, making integration with cognitive science claims more difficult" (Borbely, 2008, p. 412).

In a notable contribution Marco Casonato (2003) analyzes the metaphors that emerge during therapy sessions, in relation to cognitive disorders and to the changes produced by psychotherapy. The author proposes an extensive analysis of the emerging conceptual metaphors, dividing them by type of disorder, and comparing patients in psychiatric

conditions to control subjects. For example, in a case study on patients with eating disorders he observes the emergence of metaphors such as BULIMIA-IS-A-GAME, and FASTING-IS-LOVE, which in control patients seem to correspond to the conceptual metaphors EATING-IS-A-GAME, and EATING-IS-LOVE. Casonato demonstrates that it is possible to track the process of cognitive transformation through the study of the metaphors used in clinical discourse and how they change during therapy.

Another interesting contribution is provided by Terri Eynon (2002), who suggests that metaphors that appear in dreams seem to reveal crucial information for the therapist. For example, Eynon reports the dream of a patient, who was suffering from depression and had a dream where a sheep was being rescued from the bottom of the ocean, and slowly pulled up, out of the deep waters. As the author points out, this dream employs at least two well-known conceptual metaphors: GOOD-IS-UP (depression is the bottom of the ocean, while a healthy state of mind is up, out of the waters), combined with MENTAL STATES-ARE-LOCATIONS. The patient feels half way through the healing process, a coded message for the therapist that the therapy is producing good outcomes. Lakoff himself applied CMT to the analysis of unconscious thought, and provided the interpretation of some dreams (Lakoff, 1992, 1993, 1997), suggesting that the function of metaphors here is to “map the dream onto the meaning of the dream, giving relevant knowledge of the dreamer’s life” (1992, p. 9).

In our opinion, these pioneering and valuable contributions aimed at integrating CMT with dream theory and psychoanalytic insights did not receive as much recognition as they should have. To the contrary, we realized that in the most recent literature about metaphors and dreams, the insights achieved from the integration of CMT and dream theory were left aside or even outlined in a misleading way. In a recent contribution published in a notable journal, for example, the authors (Edwards et al., 2013) indicate that “a common *linguistic* metaphor within the English language is the LOVE-IS-JOURNEY metaphor” (2013, p. 3): this claim suggests that the *conceptual* nature of such a metaphor (highlighted also by the conventional use of capital letters) was completely missed. Moreover, Edwards et al. claim that “Lakoff (1993) proposes that cognition during dreaming [...] involves the mapping of abstract concepts onto physical concepts” (2013, p. 3), while it seems to be commonly understood that the direction of the metaphor is the opposite, since portions of the meaning of the source domain are generally mapped onto the target domain, in order to shed light on its content. Lakoff himself writes, “what constitutes the LOVE-IS-A-JOURNEY metaphor is not any particular word or expression. It is the ontological mapping across conceptual domains, *from the source domain of journey to the target domain of love*” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 208). Even when Lakoff specifically says that the function of metaphors in dreams is to “map the dream onto the meaning of the dream” (1992, p. 9), he seems to suggest that the concrete realization of the dream (source domain) has to be mapped onto the meaning of the dream (target domain, plausibly a more abstract concept).

We believe that the pioneering studies of psychoanalytic inspiration about the role of conceptual metaphors in dreams (e.g., Lakoff 1992, 1993, 1997) together with the new wave of interest around the possible applications of CMT (Fusaroli & Morgagni, 2013) can generate new insights and new research questions about, for example, the relationship between emotions and metaphors in dreams. In this sense, we believe that emotions are subconscious forces that provoke the emergence of specific metaphors in dreams. A long tradition of empirical studies supports the crucial role of dreaming for gaining insight into

our emotional life (e.g., Freud, 1900; Rycroft, 1979; Blechner, 2001; Hartmann, 2010). Hartmann for example suggests that dreaming is a hyperconnective mental activity in which the connections created are *guided* by emotions. Recent neuroscientific literature supports the idea that (at minimum) REM sleep is involved in the process of consolidating and regulating emotional memories (Walker & Van der Helm, 2009; Perogamvros & Schwartx, 2012; Groch et al., 2013). Still, these insights have not been clearly integrated with CMT in a contemporary fashion. We argue that metaphors that appear in dreams, which are then reported verbally to the therapist during therapy sessions, are manifestations of a world that pertains to the dreamer: they carry meanings, and they are structured in a way that allows these meanings to be communicated between internal parts of the individual. These metaphors surely lack the communicative aspects that characterize communication between *two* individuals, such as the pragmatic and inferential elements that stimulate us to moderate and modulate our messages, taking into account our listener's previous knowledge and her/his ability to infer our communicative intentions, as indicated for example in Relevance Theory, proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986). But as we will see, metaphors that appear in dreams are indeed a form of communication whose main objective is to implicitly carry specific emotions by means of cross-domain conceptual mappings, and in this way communicating them to the dreamer.

Unconscious Thought in Psychoanalysis

With his psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud provided flesh for ideas that were already present in philosophy, addressed by philosophers such as Leibniz, Kant, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. The idea of an unconscious thought was already “out there”, but it was somehow lacking structure and contents, which have been provided by Freud, and later developed in different directions, by scholars such as Melanie Klein, Donald Meltzer, and Wilfred Bion. Klein, for example, proposed an unconscious intended as a complex combination of intertwined internal entities, which communicate to one another. With this idea, Klein distanced herself from the more “economic” Freudian concept of unconscious. She also disentangled feelings (and in particular adult ones) from oedipal figures, providing more space and new dimensions for unconscious thought. For Klein, unconscious fantasies are the result of non-conscious activity that meets feelings and emotions deriving from the body and the mind. Wilfred Bion (e.g., 1962, 1963), starting from this perspective, provides further developments for the idea of unconscious thought, widening its boundaries even more. For Bion, unconscious thought is not only what has been removed, but includes all the realities that continuously develop the experiences inside the self. Today we know that our unconscious thought organizes the contents of our experiences by representing them internally.

Unconscious thought, as described above, works day and night, without any apparent effort. Such activity is necessary so that we can feel, elaborate, and organize new thoughts, which can be expressed verbally or shown through our behaviours. In this framework, Carl Jung proposed the idea of unconscious thought as always active and wide enough to incorporate and represent the place where meaning is created, and thus is that from which consciousness emerges. Bion (1962, 1963) suggests that the activity of dreaming is characterized by a natural function, called *alpha*, which is able to determine a vocabulary of emotionally dense images. In this perspective Bion's unconscious is creative, complex, and infinite; as Grotstein suggests, Bion's objectives are deeply ontological, epistemic, phenomenological, and full of hope (Grotstein, 2007). In some

ways, Bion brought divinity back inside the human being, something traditionally conceptualized as an external entity.

With regard to emotions, we believe that such internal states lie somewhere in between the body and the mind. This hypothesis finds partial support in Lakoff's and Johnson's theory, and in general in the *embodied cognition* account, according to which our conceptual knowledge and therefore our ideas (even the most abstract ones) are grounded in sensorimotor experiences, and as a consequence their processing provokes a re-enactment of those neural substrates dedicated to sensorimotor perception and emotional response that are activated during real bodily experiences (Barsalou, 1999; Pecher & Zwaan, 2005).

In principle we believe that not all our emotional responses to perceptual experiences enter our mental (conscious or unconscious) life. Some of them get 'diluted' within our body, throughout our organism, and eventually come to the surface of the body through somatic manifestations. On the other hand, emotions that enter our mental life through our bodies can get shaped in the form of primary metaphors, i.e., some emotions are understood by our mind in terms of bodily reactions, which are often associated with those emotions in our everyday experiences. As Grady points out (1997), these primary metaphors cannot be explained by more sophisticated cognitive mechanisms such as analogy or cause-effect relation, but instead derive from recurring correlations between particular types of perceptual experiences that allow these emotions to be transformed into mental objects. For example, Grady suggests that we understand *affection* through the bodily experience of physical proximity, and therefore of physical *warmth*. This recurrent correlation between feeling loved and feeling warm (for example, during development children perceive their mothers' physical warmth), establishes a conceptual metaphor in our mind that can be expressed as AFFECTION-IS-WARMTH. From this perspective, the concept of *affection* becomes a mental object, which is metaphorically understood (at least in part) in terms of physical warmth. From this mental structure we can then derive linguistic expressions such as "she is a cold person", or "she warmly welcomed us".

Primary metaphors such as AFFECTION-IS-WARMTH explain how specific emotions can enter our mental life and be understood in relation to our bodily experiences (as Lakoff and Johnson suggest: "metaphors allow us to conceptualize our emotions in more sharply defined terms", 1980, p. 58). But in addition, there are conceptual metaphors that *carry* rather than *explain* emotions. In other words, conceptual metaphors that are not based directly on correlations in experience trigger emotional responses by comparing two apparently distant concepts. Emotions here are not explicitly explained by the metaphor, but they are implicitly triggered by the alignment of two concepts, thus behaving as *conceptual mappings*. This aspect, we believe, plays a crucial role when we look at converging insights across cognitive linguistics and psychoanalysis.

Concluding, in line with the psychoanalytic tradition and with the cognitive linguistic theory, we believe that metaphors that appear in dreams are structures that can be interpreted, even though they cannot be predicted. As a matter of fact, Freud suggested that dreams are not just confused associations but rather the product of mental activity (see Domhoff 2000 for an extensive, even though critical, overview on Freudian and Jungian theories of dreams). Lakoff himself suggested "the imagery used in dreams is not arbitrary" (Lakoff, 1997, p. 106).

Within the dimension of communication, evolution provided humans with powerful cognitive tools that we use to interpret other people's intentions and actions, simulating them in our own mind. From recent neuroscientific discoveries, we now know that human beings are equipped with neural structures called *mirror neurons*, which map sensory representations of others' actions onto the observer's neural substrates, allowing humans to understand (in specific circumstances) other people's actions, intentions, and emotions by reproducing the same underlying neural patterns inside their own mind (e.g., Rizzolatti et al., 1996; Gallese et al., 1996). Such a revolutionary discovery suggests that in order to get as close as possible to a deep understanding of other people's actions and behaviours we need to represent such actions and behaviours within ourselves. In other words, our visual system combined with logical inferential processes based on other people's utterances is not enough for understanding the deep meaning and intentions of others. Our motor system needs to get involved as well. However, in order to get our motor system involved, we need to have a previous experiential reference inside ourselves for representing other people's actions: as Iacoboni and his colleagues showed in 1999, and Gallese and his colleagues discussed again in 2011, the mirror neuron regions are only barely activated when we watch barking dogs, because our bodies do not afford such action and therefore do not allow a trustworthy internal representation of *barking* (Iacoboni et al., 1999; Gallese et al., 2011). This study highlights the self-referential quality of mirror neurons: in order to understand other people's actions, intentions, and emotions, we need to have a somehow similar experiential background that allows our neural system to mirror another person's behaviour.

The discovery of mirror neurons suggests two crucial ideas: 1) in order to interpret another person's dream, we must take into account and represent in our own mind the experiential framework (i.e., the personal background) of that person, because only by simulating internally similar patterns can we understand them; 2) dreams represent structured manifestations of the dreamer's mental life, guided by the dreamer's emotions, which emerge to allow the conscious self to access the contents of unconscious thoughts, representing them inside the mind through the dream. Such manifestations must already be part of the dreamer's mental life, otherwise they could not be represented nor understood (i.e., we cannot simulate in our mind and thus deeply understand the action of barking because we are not dogs). As Rizzolatti suggested in a personal communication after an invited talk in Livorno, Italy, in the fall of 2013, it seems a logical intuition that mirror neurons also would be activated during dreams. Dream expressions are manifestations of natural, spontaneous, but not casual contents.

Metaphors in Cognitive Linguistics

Effective metaphors are classically considered a prerogative of a few talented artists, created for producing artistic effects, with the intention of evoking vivid scenarios. However, today we know that our everyday language is pervaded by metaphors — that they are used consciously or unconsciously every time we speak: if life “goes wrong” (even though literally it does not go anywhere) we might “fall into depression” (even though we do not fall anywhere).

Metaphors allow us to think and talk about abstract and complex concepts, such as emotions, through easier and more concrete concepts. In this view, emotions to a certain extent can be understood through metaphors (e.g., as we described above, AFFECTION-IS-WARMTH, and therefore a person that manifests affection is defined as *warm*). On

the other hand, emotions (internal reactions that lie in between the body and the mind) are implicitly carried by metaphors. In other words, *metaphors carry emotions*.

For example, in Western culture, whose rhythm is defined through economic achievements and trading objectives, we often conceptualize *time* as if it was a tangible entity, such as *money*, and, thanks to this popular conceptual metaphor (TIME-IS-MONEY), we can “spend time”, “earn time”, “waste time”, “lose time”, “save time” and so on, as we do with money. This metaphor is a classic of our times, and it is often used as an example for explaining CMT. However, to the best of our knowledge, the fact that this metaphor carries specific emotions — such as the feelings of *urgency* and *desire* (or *greediness*) to accumulate time as we accumulate money — is almost always left aside. We understand easily this metaphor because it refers to an emotional substrate that is peculiar to our culture, where individuals are constantly prompted to earn and consume. Time is thus related to emotional conditions that pertain to human survival, the achievement of economic wealth, and the concepts of *life* and *death*. The underlying emotions of *urgency* and *transience* lead us to associate *time* and *money*.

Consider now the following novel metaphorical expression produced by Gibbs (2013) in a notable contribution where he assesses the strengths and the weaknesses of CMT: “my life as a professor has been one long, slow march through a windy desert”. As Gibbs argues, CMT suggests that people understand this metaphor by accessing the underlying conceptual structure LIFE-IS-JOURNEY (or CAREER-IS-JOURNEY). However, he notes that it is still unclear whether people process such sentences by fully accessing all the components of the more abstract LIFE-IS-JOURNEY structure. In any case, a deliberate expression like this clearly carries emotions and personal introspections that differ from, say, “my life as a professor has been a swim through an ocean full of sharks”, or even “my life as a professor has been one long, slow procession through a church hall”, even though all these three expressions point, eventually, to the LIFE-IS-JOURNEY structure. In Gibbs’ example one could arguably perceive a sense of fatigue, struggle, and isolation. The second example brings forth emotions such as fear, danger, and transience; in the third example one can perceive a sense of sacredness, desire for absolute recognition, and spiritual glory.

In this respect, it must be pointed out that CMT is traditionally concerned with the identification of those conceptual metaphors that are shared by individuals, and that characterize a way of thinking that is common of human beings. In other words, CMT is mainly concerned with those conceptual metaphors that are used by human beings to communicate with one another rather than with those metaphors that characterize a single individual’s identity. For this reason, conventional conceptual metaphors are commonly expressed at a superordinate lexical level.

We believe that the ultimate function of metaphors that appear in dreams is to keep a trace, in the mind of the dreamer, of emotions and personal experiences that are important specifically to the dreamer and contribute to shaping the dreamer’s identity. For this reason, and supported by the recent suggestion of Fusaroli and Morgagni, we want to highlight the personal dimension of metaphors that appear in dreams and the importance that this dimension has for the dreamer.

In psychotherapy sessions the therapist has the arduous task of carefully identifying the source and the target domains employed in the metaphors that appear in a patient’s

dreams, taking into account the patient's past experiences that motivated the metaphor as well as the meaning that the dreamer attributes to the words chosen to describe the dream. This is not an easy task, as it will be shown in the case studies, because the meaning of the words chosen by the dreamer to describe the dream is also determined by the dreamer's experiences (see Franco's dream). From this perspective, words are symbols whose meaning is grounded in the individual's experiences, and not simply defined on the basis of a social convention shared among individuals. The interpretation of the metaphors that appear in dreams should therefore take into account the personal life of the patient, focusing on the emotional contents that emerge within the metaphors, or that remain implicit in the mappings, which constitute the real feelings of the dreamer. Focusing on the emotional contents of metaphors that appear in dreams is crucial because, we believe, emotions provide the flesh and the force that structures the dream.

The point that we would like to stress here derives from the optimal integration of the psychoanalytic and the cognitive linguistic traditions: we believe that both, metaphors that appear in dreams, as well as the conceptual metaphors that have been identified by Lakoff and Johnson, are (at least partially) grounded in emotions. Emotions are activating forces, provided with their own autonomy, that constitute the basis of our indeed precarious and inconstant rationality (Bichisecchi, 1999). For this reason, it is necessary to approach psychotherapy sessions not only by taking into account a patient's phenomenological manifestations. It is preferable to observe both, the way a patient lives and expresses him/herself, as well as the way in which he/she dreams. In this view, metaphors can explain our thought's activity, relying on the assumption that the comparison that has been brought to life in the form of a metaphor is meaningful for the individual, and it contributes to establish or consolidate a feeling of internal unity.

Metaphor and Identity

Human beings have the natural need of perceiving themselves as coherent units. We need to elaborate the experiences that we live, and make them ours. "Being ourselves" means living the coherence of our internal emotional and mental states. Metaphors emerge from these constraints and fulfil these needs. In this landscape a contradictory metaphor cannot live in a fairly healthy mind, because it would clash against the need of personal integrity. Our mind would naturally discharge what enters in conflict with our sense of unity. Think about those situations in which we contradict ourselves. We do not do it on purpose. And at the beginning our mind is not aware of the contradiction. But when we see the contradiction, we quickly search for a possible alternative explanation, or we deny the thesis, or the antithesis. We feel the urge to re-establish an internal order. Similarly, metaphors that emerge in our mind have to be coherent with our identity, rather than expressing concepts in contradictions with one another, because contradiction is not perceived as truth. While our mind tends to reject contradictions that pertain logic arguments, what happens with regard to emotions? Contradictory emotions generate an internal conflict, and it follows that our aware mind tends to eliminate or to deny the contradictions that rise not only on a logical level, but also on an emotional level, in order to maintain an internal coherence. When we are not aware of the internal conflict on an emotional level, we suffer.

It is a metaphor's destiny to confirm and consolidate the identity of the individual who produced it. It could be claimed that metaphors are expressed 'out there', in our everyday language, shared among human beings. But, as a matter of fact, each individual has to

integrate a specific metaphor with his or her personal identity and sense of unity. In this view, the broad spectrum of the conceptual metaphors identified by Lakoff and Johnson are accepted and shared by the individuals of a given community because they contain elements of a societal and a cultural identity to which they feel belonging.

An individual's identity, in this sense, is not only the expression of a continuous relation between experiential contents, as indicated by philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume, but it is also the human destiny within the reality in which we live: our deeper need to elaborate the experiences in which we live, in order to make them ours. Therefore, an individual's identity is not only what makes him/her different from other individuals, but it is a necessary function that allows us to exist in our unitary mental life, which is the environment in which we live and for which we live. We exist because we have our own truth, our own unity, and our own uniqueness. Our mental life constitutes our primary environment, metaphors being the expression of its contents that allow us to feel congruence between the external and the internal world.

Even though the interpretations of a dream might arguably be various, for the dreamer the range of meaningful interpretations of a specific dream cannot be too wide. The interpretative space of a dream is delimited by what is known about the dreamer, his/her description of the dream, and the associations (driven by emotions) that accompany the description. In this we agree with Hartmann, who suggests that "dreaming contextualizes a dominant emotion or emotional concern. The dream, or the striking dream image, explains metaphorically the emotional state of the dreamer" (Hartmann, 1996, p. 147).

We believe that each individual wants to live inside his/her own ideas, which are associations and metaphors that are crucial for constructing and consolidating our mental world. An entertaining excerpt from Manzoni's classic novel *The betrothed* summarizes this need of cultivating an internal world of ideas in which we believe, and which reflect our identity: "Donna Prassede governed herself with her ideas as some would do with their friends; she had very few, but to these she was much attached. Among these few, were a number unfortunately a little narrow and unreasonable, and they were not those she loved the least" (Manzoni, 1834, p. 307).

As a last observation, we would like to point out that even a common say, such as "Paul is a sheep", can be interpreted in different ways, according to different background experiences, emotional responses, and internal coherences of the listeners. As a matter of fact, the person who produces this metaphor might want to underlie the fact that Paul has a quiet and non-aggressive personality. But the listener, having a different mental world, might understand that Paul lacks of personality, that he is a follower. In this frame, the sheep is interpreted in light of its impact on the emotional and conceptual background of the two individuals. Thus, we should be cautious in perceiving dreams as just "mundane" mappings of universally salient properties of the source domain onto the target domain.

In a communicative situation like the example sketched above, the need of transferring effectively a message and confirming our belonging to a common way of thinking, co-exists with the need of maintaining an internal coherence, and respecting the coherence of our own mental world. The two needs meet in that part of our mind where we internalized and we represented our listener. The situation is different when the presence of the other (the listener) disappears, and an individual's truth and ideas do not need to be mediated by a verbal expression, as it happens in dreams. The four case-studies reported below will

elucidate our claims.

Taking into account the psychoanalytic tradition, Lakoff's and Johnson's CMT, The Conceptual Blending theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), integrated with the need to focus on the dreamer's past experiences and emotional contents, we would like to propose an analysis of some dreams, collected during therapy sessions (all patients have authorized the disclosure of the presented data, and the patients' names have been modified to protect their identity). We avoided on purpose the use of specific techniques such as the *transference*, commonly used in psychoanalysis (see for example Freud 1916-1917), because we wanted to leave to the patient the maximum degree of freedom of expression. The practice of interpreting dreams, we suggest, helps the patient developing metacognitive skills, and searching for meaning with a reinvigorated motivation. This activity makes the patient feeling passionate about elaborating daily-life aspects, as well as other individuals' behaviours. We do not argue that the development of such metacognitive competences is an exclusive privilege of this type of analysis, but we believe that the practice of elaborating one's dreams within this framework contributes to suggest the establishment and consolidation the individual's identity and sense of unity.

Case study 1: Piero's dream

Piero invents precision instruments for aircrafts, and in his spare time he is a fitness trainer. He is around 40 years old, lively, smart, and quite reserved. He finds very difficult to establish relationships with Italian women, because, he says, he does not understand their way of thinking. Piero lives in Italy, but he spent a few years first in California and then in Florida. A few months ago, in Italy, Piero met a woman, who works at a store where he frequently goes. They start greeting each other and chatting, every time they meet at the store. Piero decides to contact her on Facebook, asking for a date, and through the social network he finds out that she loves sports, in particular skating, skiing, and trekking on the mountains. He also finds out that she is currently dating another man. From that moment, every time Piero goes to the store, the girl avoids his stare and pretends she does not know him, provoking Piero's delusion and sadness. In these days Piero reports the following dream during a therapy session: "we were both in California, at Venice Beach. She was skating and I was exercising. I was watching her and she was watching me".

The novel and personal metaphors that emerge in this dream are:

- COMFORTABLE/WELCOMING PLACE-IS-CALIFORNIA
(mappings: feeling safe, feeling accepted)
- PLACE WHERE ONE CAN EXPRESS HIMSELF AND WATCH OTHER PEOPLE-IS-VENICE BEACH
(mappings: feeling free to express oneself, feeling watched and appreciated)

Both these metaphors carry emotions, mapped from source to target, which are the containers of an individual's truth. As such, an individual's truth involves necessarily both, body and mind, and needs to fulfil the need of internal unity and coherence. Both of these metaphors fit into the pattern of a more conventional conceptual metaphor, which is GENERIC-IS-SPECIFIC, but the emotions that emerge from those specific source

domains, target domains, and mappings, are peculiar of Piero's identity and derive from his personal past experiences.

Finally, the two participants to the dream are meaningfully staring at one another, and this physical action represents a reciprocal feeling of affection: because MENTAL/EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT-IS-PHYSICAL INVOLVEMENT, then AFFECTION-IS-STARE, and the mapping is the reciprocity of the action described in the domains.

Piero has often referred about his life in California. Talking about women, he often pointed out that American girls tend to answer to a greet with a smile on their face, and they do not see any problem with going out with a man to get a drink or to see a movie. In comparison, Piero's perception of Italian women is that they deny any kind of contact because they feel threatened by the fact that they perceive males to have only sexual interests in mind. Piero's thoughts suggest that for him America is the place where he is free to express himself, seeing and being seen. Venice Beach is like a store window: a place where people are free to display their bodies and look at one another. As it was suggested above, *love* is often conceptualized as a *journey*. Even though Piero's dream lacks of explicit metaphoric expressions that point to this conceptual metaphor, the dreamer made a journey, because he transferred himself and the girl to California. Since in California, according to Piero, things go in the way described above, also the girl that in Italy avoids his stare, behaves in a different way. The dreamer makes the girl acting consistently with the environment, as it was conceptualized by him. The Californian habits and culture influence the Italian girl's behaviour. This suggests that Piero does not accept the girl's refusal, and he does not want to blame this fully on the girl's will. Piero seeks for an explanation of the girl's behaviour, that goes beyond the individual. He does not want to recognize and accept the refusal, and all the emotional consequences that derive from it. For this reason, he denies the girl's will and brings her to a place where, he knows, he cannot be refused or neglected, and therefore feeling inexistent.

The women's refusals, led Piero to lose his self-confidence, and to focus on his job, in an attempt to forget his feelings and his need of love. However, denying his need of love Piero denied a part of his own identity, and his integrity was not so solid anymore. The sense of integrity that makes us feel as a coherent unit passes also through the stare of a girl, on which affective fantasies have been projected. In this regard, everything that happens in a dream pertains the dreamer. Piero mentally brought the girl to California because it is in this place that he feels appreciated and loved, he can establish a communication with a girl, and he does not feel refused. In California she would skate and he would exercise, and they would stare at one another, and she would appreciate his physical ability. The girl would had confirmed and reinforced those aspects that Piero feels crucial for defining his own identity. This dream, therefore, constitutes an emotional experience that allows the dreamer to mentally reorganize past experiences: an essential step for the dreamer's psychic balance.

Concluding, we perceive a desire when we define it in our mind. For example, we desire a product after we have imagined it in our mind, and we have integrated it as an element of our mental world. At this point, if the product is denied to us, we feel bad, because it was already part of us, in our mind. For this reason, metaphors that appear in dreams, more than those that are used in verbal communication, reflect in a deeper way an individual's needs.

Case study 2: Franco's dream

Franco is 43 years old. During a therapy session he reports the following dream: "I meet a friend and, while talking with him, I feel that I want to abandon myself to him". Franco cannot describe explicitly his emotions during the dream, but he says that he did not feel passionate love for his friend.

The meaningful elements are the friend and the action of abandoning oneself. The co-existence of these two elements suggested that there was something unclear with the dream: the desire of abandoning oneself to someone else is generally related to feelings of love and admiration toward that person, but in Franco's case, these feelings were apparently missing. In this case, it was necessary to understand not only the content of the dream, but also the meaning that the dreamer attributed to the specific words he used. As a matter of fact, as we will see, if we followed the common meaning attributed to the words used by Franco, we would have missed the point. In order to understand the metaphor of this dream, it is necessary to understand the cognitive overlap between the concepts of abandoning and succumb, in Franco's mind. For the dreamer, these two concepts defined the same experiences, lived and cultivated in the relationship with his father.

The concepts of *abandoning oneself* and *succumbing* are generally perceived as different: the desire of abandoning oneself to another person, triggers emotions such as trust, confidence, and faith. We associate to this action a sense of tranquillity, peacefulness, and letting go. Instead, succumbing or submitting oneself to another person implies the recognition of the other's superiority, probably a feeling of pain and fear, in experiencing such superiority, and a lack of freedom. We think about domination and subordination, as well as surrendering to another person's will, in order to avoid negative consequences. However, in Franco's mind the two concepts seemed to be *blended* in a unique conceptual space:

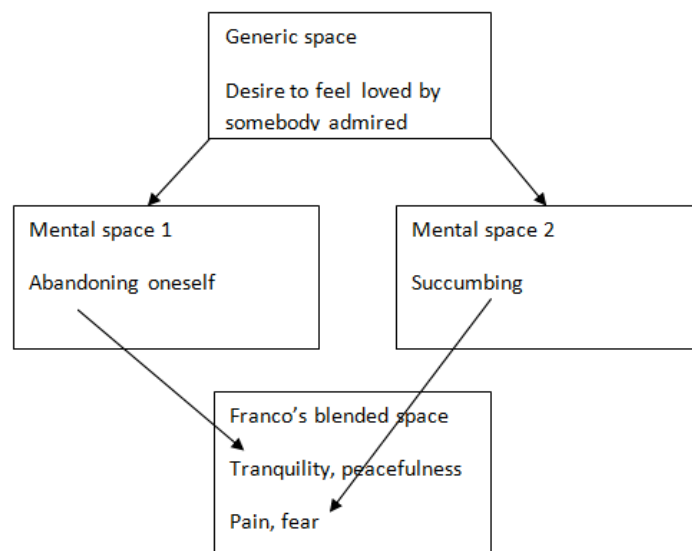


Figure 1

Franco's blended space

In such conceptual blend both the emotions triggered by each original domain are perceived: the pleasure of meeting somebody to talk with co-existed with the desire to avoid a relationship of equality. These two aspects were united in a contradictory existence that was not cognitively understood, and it was affectively suffered. While abandoning himself, for the need of affection, Franco reduced his defenses, stimulating the other to overcome and use him. Franco's will somehow wanted to succumb, so that he could abandon himself. The relationships that he entertained with other people encompassed simultaneously the abandoning and the personal submission. This was Franco's way to establish relationships with others. By feeling submitted to another person, he felt that he could completely abandon himself to that person, and this made him feeling alive, used, real, functional, dominated.

We reported this example to demonstrate that the interpretation of dreams can be misleading if we rely only on the linguistic expressions used by the dreamer, and on the meaning that we might attribute to them. Each linguistic expression must be carefully evaluated, in light of the dreamer's personality and past experiences, because it can reveal conceptual blends that are peculiar of an individual. In other words, sometimes it is not enough to rely on the common sense and the shared meaning that we attribute to words. We need to pay attention to the way in which the dreamer uses specific linguistic expressions, in order to understand the meaning that he/she attributes to them in context. Words that humans use are tied with meanings that are themselves linked to emotional states that constitute the individual's unity and identity.

Case study 3: Riccardo's dream

Riccardo is a young married man, who works in the field of education, in an institution where also his wife is affiliated. He suffers from insomnia, and his greatest desire is to have a deep and restorative sleep. He has a deep fear: he fears that people around him might not appreciate him or having a high esteem of him. This worry is constant, and pushes him to seek other people's appreciation, and to avoid critiques. He appears deeply respectful, correct, never annoying, and sometimes he observes and follows others people's choices, even if this might cause him suffering. Considering these feelings, which characterize Riccardo's personality, we can approach the analysis of one of his recent dreams with a key that allow us to give a very plausible interpretation of the metaphors involved. We chose this case-study because we would like to show a specific cognitive function of the metaphors that appear in dreams, which is a defensive function. In particular, in this case-study, Riccardo seems to use metaphors to defend himself from painful emotional states, which would deeply move and disturb not only his superficial tranquility, but also deeper emotional balances.

The dream is the following: "A colleague at work was pregnant, she felt desperate and exhausted, and she could not come to work. She was sad and crying because her husband was not present during the pregnancy. Personally I was very surprised for this absence".

The metaphors that emerge from this dream, and are explained below, are the following:

- IDEAS-ARE-CHILDREN with relation to development (therefore an important decision to be taken is represented by a pregnancy). More in general, THINKING/DELIBERATING-IS-GIVING BIRTH.

(mappings: it's a long and painful process, it requires energies and commitment)

The pregnant woman is in the condition of having a new reality growing inside her. The pregnancy is perceived as the expectation of a new mental event, a new decision.

- MENTAL ACTIVITY-IS-PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (in the case of the pregnant woman's husband) and therefore not contributing to take an important decision is represented as a physical absence).

(mapping: requires active participation)

This quite conventional conceptual structure suggest metaphors that seem to be conventional and shared across human beings. However, there is an additional metaphor that emerged from Riccardo's past, which provides a leap forward in the process of interpreting correctly his dream. Riccardo had previously referred in a brief communication that his wife, who works at the same institution, needed to make a difficult decision that could bring her to live abroad for a couple of years. The consequences of such choice would be, for Riccardo, living apart from his wife. The apparent lack of weight that Riccardo attributed to this event aroused suspicions. A loving husband is hardly insensible to this situation. In fact, Riccardo has probably managed to keep himself detached from such emotional shock by hiding his wife behind a non-better-identified colleague, and thus establishing the overarching personal metaphor WIFE-IS-COLLEAGUE, which unravels a new interpretative key to the conventional metaphors identified above. When the dreamer thinks about the colleague, his feelings are weaker and less involving than when he thinks about his wife. Another interesting point is the absence of the colleague's husband. The surprise perceived by the dreamer, in relation to the absence of the colleague's husband, suggests that he expected the husband to be there, to participate to the pregnancy. The dreamer, also in this case, projected on the relationship between the colleague and her husband, a situation that pertains himself and his wife, so that the emotional involvement is minimal. The dreamer is not present to the decisions that his wife is taking, which involve their future life together. He did not take part to the decision and avoided potential conflicts and attritions because these could had provoked his wife's resentment, and loss of esteem. He preferred to leave the decision to his wife, so that she would continue to love him in the same way.

Case study 4: Giuseppe's dream

Also in this case-study, as for the previous ones, we left aside the classic psychoanalytic idea of interpreting the dream on the basis of the transferences. We preferred to follow the ideas proposed by Bion: suspend judgment, forget preconceptions derived from theories, and just listen to the words and the associations provided by the dreamer. The interpretation, therefore, is achieved together by the therapist and the dreamer.

"I am in a church, where my former Italian teacher has gathered some people to celebrate her retirement. She gives a speech, but some people are not listening. A city representative interrupts her and starts talking about his own things. This man walks around and he stains my brother's shirt. My brother tells him to pay more attention, but the city representative instead of apologizing answers with offensive words. The man's

wife tries to calm him down but he walks away. I follow him and tell him that he still did not apologize. He goes away, crying. I am satisfied”.

The metaphors that emerge from this complex scenario are the following:

- SPIRITUAL POWER-IS-DREAMER’S TEACHER

(mappings: humble, peaceful, mild)

- MATERIAL POWER-IS-CITY REPRESENTATIVE

(mappings: arrogant, aggressive, unkind)

The dichotomy between the church and the city representative suggests that there is a clash between a spiritual power and a material power, the latter being associated with arrogance. These metaphors, however, need to be related to the dreamer’s life and perception. It is necessary to understand the dreamer’s feelings and his way of connecting these contents.

This dream emerges in the mind of an individual who is generally mild and respectful. He loves classic music and gardening. He is a good listener, lives profoundly the spiritual aspects of life, and expresses his ideas with clarity and determination. The Italian teacher had an important role in the dreamer’s life: she taught him about the importance of spirituality (not religious faith), making him feeling passionate about ancient history, medieval constructions, and nature. On the other hand, the material power, for the dreamer, is a necessary force that characterizes states and communities, and pertains concrete things. The dreamer is aware of the necessity to fulfil material needs, but he lives and he is projected towards the spiritual aspects of life, which he considers more valuable. In this scenario, the actions performed by the city representative and by the dreamer also acquire metaphorical meaning: in particular, the city representative’s actions can be interpreted as following: OVERPOWERING/DOMINATING-IS-INTERRUPTING ANOTHER’S SPEECH (the city representative interrupts the teacher’s speech); IMMORAL-IS-DIRTY³ (the man that is perceived as immoral stains another’s shirt); MORAL DEFEAT-IS-WALKING AWAY (the city representative is defeated and walks away).

The dreamer perceives a conflict between spirituality and materiality, two abstract concepts that he personifies in his teacher in the church and the city representative. In the confront, the city representative is not destroyed by the dreamer’s anger, but he is defeated by his words. The city representative in the end cries, expressing the presence of emotions inside him, which finally are manifested. Giuseppe lives inside himself the presence of a materialistic part, and he feels satisfied when this part is conciliated with

³ The conventional metaphor is commonly expressed by MORALITY-IS-CLEANLINESS, and it emerges in linguistic expressions such as “money laundering”, and “dirty job”, as well as in behavioural studies that suggested the existence of such metaphor beyond the above mentioned linguistic expressions (Zhong & Lilgenquist, 2006; Schnall, Benton & Harvey, 2008).

the spiritual part, establishing an internal balance that helps consolidating the dreamer's identity.

The role of the brother is also functional for achieving the final objective. The dreamer's brother is not exactly the dreamer himself, but a close person. Also in this case, if the dreamer himself was stained and offended by the city representative, his emotional conditions would have been more profound. Projecting the offense and its emotional consequences on his brother, the dreamer can maintain a sort of objectivity and partial dispassion toward this injustice, and he can approach and solve it, in order to re-establish his internal balance.

Conclusions

With this work, we tried to open the route to new interdisciplinary studies regarding metaphors and unconscious thought, in light of the recent plea launched by Fusaroli and Morgagni (2013), aimed at bringing CMT to a new level, where among other aspects the individual peculiarities and the individual identities of the human beings are taken into account.

As we pointed out in this study, when we communicate verbally we want to achieve two main objectives: on one hand we want to transfer a message, enriched with emotional, affective, and cognitive contents; on the other hand we want to make our words adhere to our truth, in order to consolidate our own identity. Creating good metaphors contributes to pursue this goal; since we need to continuously define ourselves, and confirm the harmony between our mental contents, when we perceive a metaphor as convincing, our identity is consolidated. Human beings express themselves through words and metaphors not only for communicating and explaining contents to others, but also for communicating and explaining contents to themselves. Metaphors, in this view, are cognitive mechanisms that allow us to expose ourselves, get out of balance, and eventually re-compose our identity in a deeper and more compact sense of truth. Through metaphors we consolidate and expand our own identity.

In the psychoanalytic tradition, and in particular according to Freud, metaphors are condensations: they gather contents and synthesize meanings in a new reality that is not anymore the simple sum of its constituents. In this process specific representations are substituted with new ones, which are associated to the original ones, by means of condensations. The result of such mechanism can be the substitution of an element with another, or the substitution of the verbal expression with another (see Freud 1900). The resulting new entity is an effect of the censorship that prevents subconscious desires from reaching our conscious thought. Thus, metaphors are seen as mechanisms that hide obscure truths. Freud's focus, in this sense, is on the parts that compose the new truth, rather than on the new truth itself. Yet, this new truth, resulting from the construction of the metaphor, enters the (conscious or subconscious) mental life of the dreamer, and therefore needs to find a place and a connection with the other elements of the dreamer's thought. We argue that metaphors that appear in dreams do not have simply the function to hide and cover deformed contents, but they are cognitive mechanisms that we use to confirm, reinforce, and expand our identity by enriching it with representations of emotional contents, whose power tries to break the surface of consciousness through the dream's manifestation. In this sense, indeed "the individual is recast as a permeable cognitive system coupled from the start with its environment and with individual and

cultural practices” (Fusaroli & Morgagni, 2013, p. 6).

Finally, we pointed out that in order to get as close as possible to another person’s thought it is necessary to carefully trying to reproduce a similar scenario in our mind. Neuroscientific findings support this view, in that we intuitively understand what other people do, by *living inside our mind the same actions* (e.g., Ramachandran, 2000). In order to understand and give meaning to other people’s words, we must reproduce inside our mind experiences that match those in the speaker’s mind. Language, in this sense, is a sophisticated tool that drives mental simulations also in absence of real perceptual stimuli. Yet, in order to fully understand another person’s actions and intentions, we need to simulate those actions in our own mind, and therefore we have to have somehow experienced them before. Through the case-studies proposed, we showed supporting evidence for the presence of conventional conceptual metaphors in dreams. However, we also showed that this is not the whole story: a helpful interpretation of the metaphors that appear in dreams needs to start from a basic level of interpretation, that starts from the mapping of features belonging to the source domain (the dream manifestation) onto the target domain (meaning of the dream manifestation). This process needs to take into account the personal experience of the dreamer, in order to disclose the emotional contents that are implicitly carried in the conceptual mappings. We also suggested that the main function of the metaphors that appear in dreams is to keep a trace of the emotional responses to personal experiences, in order to consolidate the dreamer’s identity. This goal, in some cases is achieved by the dreamer through a projection of deep emotional contents onto other participants to the dream (case studies 3 and 4). In this way the dreamer can protect his own emotional integrity, and at the same time can observe such emotional contents ‘from outside’, with a more objective eye.

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