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## *Such stuff as dreams are made on: Representing Emotions as Metaphor*

### **Abstract:**

Griffin's work on Dreams (1993, 1997, 2004) offers a new model to explain evolutionary, biological and psychological data. This concise but powerful theory proposes a fundamental Organising Idea, in which the REM-state and Metaphors play a central role. Potential implications for Emotions studies and many Humanities disciplines are profound and far-reaching.

ALK is looking at particularly direct applicability to Music-Drama circa 1600, and (in a modern context) at pedagogy of Flow as an Altered State of Consciousness amongst elite performers (performing arts, sports, etc). Griffin's work would suggest that these two investigations will turn out to be highly connected.

Griffin's theory has been applied with great success to the treatment of Depression.

### **Introduction:**



Joe Griffin is a research and clinical psychologist based in Ireland. His work was initially published in *The Therapist* from 1993, and brought together as a monograph *The Origin of Dreams* (1997). This was updated and revised in non-technical language as *Dreaming Reality* (2004). His theory of Dreams suggests a new Organising Idea with wide applications across many fields, and has led to the founding of a new school of Psychology, based on the Human Givens (Griffin 2003).

Griffin claims that the function of Dreams is to process unresolved expectations (whether positive or negative). Emotionally charged and unresolved situations are dealt with in Dreams by means of Metaphors – characters, objects and abstract concepts do not appear directly. Dreaming is associated with the Rapid Eye Motion phase of sleep. The REM-state can also be accessed whilst awake, in daydreaming, trance, hypnosis or psychotic states.

Griffin suggests that this establishment of waking access to REM-state was associated with the evolutionary development of language, and with conscious awareness of past, present and future. His metaphor for the REM-state is the Theatre of Dreams.

## **Applications to History of Emotions in general:**

Griffin's model places Metaphor (and therefore, story-telling) at the centre of human processing of intense emotions, and therefore offers an evolutionary, biological and psychological underpinning to the creative arts, as well as to emotional engagement with daily life, social interactions and major events throughout history.

Waking access to the REM-state offers a scientific model for religious visions, artistic creativity, events that appear to evidence mass-emotions etc. Specific historical phenomena featuring in the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions' investigations (history of religion, witchcraft, historical attitudes towards soul/mind/body, emotional connections that shape the modern) would appear to be case studies for which Griffin's model may offer a theoretical underpinning.

As an Organising Idea, Griffin's theory might possibly offer an entirely new understanding of historical emotions, as well as how emotions shape the modern, that could spearhead a powerful, wide-reaching, but fundamentally simple new understanding.

I suggest that Griffin's model of Dreams, REM-state and Metaphors has the potential to support the kind of Big Breakthrough that CHE would like to be able to demonstrate to the world-wide academic community, national politicians, and the community at large:

- An Organising Idea for the human processing of emotionally significant themes within different cultures.
- Dreaming, as an intersection of spirituality, culture, art and history, has particular resonance in Australia, as a resource shared (in different ways) between native Australians and settlers.
- Griffin's model explains why depression is increasingly prevalent in modern society, and why highly creative people are often the most susceptible, offering the promise of improved mental well-being throughout the community.

## Application to ALK investigations:

### 1 Historically Informed Performance of music-drama c1600

#### *The Theatre of Dreams:* Operatic Performance as an Early-modern REM-state Activator

The centrality of Metaphor connects with my investigation of *Enargeia: Visions in Performance*. Griffin's theory offers an explanation of how detailed visual description can have such a powerfully emotional effect. Period performance practices around the year 1600 show a strikingly close correlation to known gateways into trance (Erickson hypnosis etc).

Working from Griffin's model of the REM-state as the "theatre of dreams", I hypothesise that singers in the first operas were inducing their audiences into an Altered State of Consciousness by means of regular rhythm, particular patterns of speech, persuasive suggestion and authoritative commands, in which deep relaxation in slow rhythm was mixed with sharp calls for attention. In the REM-state, audience members would be highly susceptible to the metaphors and story-telling of 17<sup>th</sup>-century drama, which might well then succeed in 'moving the passions'.

Of course, in many periods and many cultures, we would accept that fine performers 'cast a spell' over their audience. However, I hypothesise that Griffin's model can explain precisely how that spell functions, and that circa-1600 performance practices were particularly closely aligned with trance-induction processes, in order to create the psychological conditions in which the audience's passions could indeed be moved.

My particular case-studies are Monteverdi and Landi's *Orfeo* (the emotions of a semi-divine performer, La Musica's introduction to how the passions are moved in a Story in Music) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Melancholy and the instructions to the Players)



**The Theatre of Dreams:**  
Operatic Performance as an Early-modern REM-state Activator

Griffin's model of *The Origin of Dreams* (1997),  
circa-1600 music-drama & trance induction

## 2 Flow

### Accessing Super-Creativity: *May the Flow be with you!*

Many musicians, sportsmen and women, creative writers and composers know the special state of consciousness known as Flow, or being 'in the zone'. It's that Zen thing. It's related to Mindfulness. You're relaxed, but wonderfully concentrated on the task at hand; you feel quietly confident that you can manage it, you feel calmly exhilarated at the challenge it presents to you; you don't feel self-conscious, you are just 'there', in the moment, in the groove; in a certain way, Time seems to slow down, so that you can calmly take in all the incoming information, and calmly make an elegant decision and execute your response perfectly; your artistic intentions and your manual actions unite perfectly; you are working at high efficiency, but you could continue for hours without getting tired; you feel happy, even elated.

It's a great feeling, and it is being in Flow that makes the difference between an elite performer, musician, martial arts practitioner or sportsman and one who is merely ok. It is being in Flow that can lift any of us beyond the limits of our normal abilities. Flow is the ideal state not only for high performance, but also for the most effective learning.

There is exciting work going on in Hungary and Holland about teaching Flow to musicians. Not just Technique and Interpretation, but how to get into Flow at whatever level of technical competence and interpretative insight. I suggest that we could teach Flow from the very first lessons, allowing students to make faster, deeper and more satisfying progress.

I hypothesise that Flow is an Altered State of Consciousness, which can be understood within the Griffin model of the REM-state. My aim is to build on existing work, and on my own experience of flow as an elite performer (music) and elementary student (fencing) in order to develop exercises, teaching techniques, training conditions and rehearsal methodologies that facilitate entry into Flow.

There are powerful connections with Feldenkrais Method, which teaches a holistic awareness of mind-body-performance question, and also with historical attitudes to Music as religious/cosmic and humanly embodied, not just sound (*Musica mundana, humana, instrumentalis*).

## **Creativity & Mental Illness**

Griffin's theory offers an explanation of the observed links between creativity and mental illness. It also offers a new model for the treatment of Depression, one that has proved highly effective in clinical work.

The model predicts that anti-depressant drugs will be largely ineffective (except in so far as they reduce the amount of REM-sleep in sufferers), that Freudian therapy involving deep introspection about negative events in the past will have a negative effect, and that the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and other talking therapies will be more effective if re-aligned in accordance with the Griffin model. These predictions seem to be borne out in practice.

The practical application of the model and clinical results are reported in Griffin & Tyrell *How to lift depression – fast* (2005) This book is written in non-technical language, and is intended to help sufferers and their families.