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Consumerism dreams



Has Consumerism conquered our unconscious? Have we assumed its symbols and imagery to such an extent that they even become part of our dreams? Marlon Xavier's doctoral thesis, read at the Department of Social Psychology at the UAB, has explored how night dreams represent the colonization of subjectivity by the imaginary of consumerism. Using a sample of over 1,400 dreams, this thesis has attempted to show how consumerism has colonized, like a dictatorship, our very being -an increasingly commodified and dehumanized being.

Proposing a focus on the concept of unconscious, this thesis studies the social imaginary of consumerism, and the psychological subject it produces, through the *dream* -as both a leitmotif

or thematic lens, and the empirical object of research. Thus, this work pertains to the field of studies on subjectivity within the context of postmodern consumer society - in which the subject is defined as a consumer and even a commodity. For such study, it employs an interdisciplinary exploratory outlook, whose theoretical framework and hermeneutics, however, are primarily grounded on C. G. Jung's analytical psychology, in a dialog with sociological, anthropological, and philosophical traditions.

Such framework is structured in two blocks, based on the comparative discussion of two distinct forms of imaginary and two concepts of dream. Its first block explores the original symbolic imaginaries, their interrelationships with the unconscious psyche and night dreams, and how they configure subjectivity. The second block discusses the semiotic imaginary of consumption, whose characteristic logics of commodification and colonization, ideology, and forms of fabricating consumer subjectivity are explored through a focus on the concept of *consumption dreams* (as the desires, fantasies, and the social signification that is fabricated and circulated as a social imaginary through the logic of advertising).

The theoretical discussion and the empirical work were guided by the main research objective, namely, to explore how night dreams represent the colonization of subjectivity by the imaginary of consumerism.

Meeting such objective entailed employing a qualitative methodological design, consisting in a multiple-case study in which each night dream was a case. From a corpus of more than 1400 night dreams collected from various sources (but mainly volunteered on the Internet, as dream series, to non-clinical settings), 16 dreams were selected according to their themes, relevance, and information-richness. Most of them present a peculiarity: they have McDonald's, Disneyland, shopping malls or department stores as scenarios (*dreamscapes*), or main themes. The rationales for selecting them are: such scenarios signify typical forms of cultural colonization by the consumption ethos (forms studied in sociology under George Ritzer's and Alan Bryman's theories of McDonaldization and Disneyization); they represent what Walter Benjamin called "dream-worlds of consumption", and symbolize the imaginary of consumerism globally.

This study demonstrates that night dreams can reveal an objective and deep critique of sociocultural reality. Such critique was centered upon the idea that the imaginary of consumption engenders a massive colonization of symbolic imaginaries, in a process of absorption and substitution, replacing their symbols with fabricated signs and simulacrum. Its imagery and narratives appear as a totalizing ideology - the regime of consumerism- that simulates a religious, mythic imaginary.

Dreams represented such imaginary as producing manifold forms of colonization of subjectivity, which may be subsumed under a general form: the commodification of different psychological factors that are definers of subjective identity, but especially of irrational factors such as desires, emotions, imagination, and instincts.

Finally, dreams also disclosed many of the possible implications of such sociocultural and subjective processes; the most important implication seemed to be that the cultural mutation of imaginaries begets an anthropological mutation, which was symbolized as a progressive commodification and dehumanization of being.

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References

"Consumption dreams: How night dreams reveal the colonization of subjectivity by the imaginary of consumerism", Marlon Xavier's doctoral thesis read at the Department of Social Psychology at the UAB .

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