

## **But I Can Dream, Can't I?**

by

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Michael's Dream

February 17, 1991

Arnold Schwarzenegger comes to my door and says "I hear you are doing a book about me." He then tells me that Maria Shriver thought that she could find out about him by peeling away his layers like an onion. But he says that the only way anyone will find out about him is by breaking him into little pieces.

Since we began our research on Arnold Schwarzenegger and his status as a pop culture icon over two years ago, my colleague Michael Blitz and I have tried to expose ourselves to every imaginable type of Arnold data and experiences. Taking Arnold's dream advice seriously, we "broke" him into little pieces. We collected every tidbit of information we could from academic archives, pulp magazines, gossip, cartoons and comic books, tabloid news programs and governmental publications. We considered his own writings, and the "Arnold stories" circulated by people who know him and people who fantasize about him. We attended the Arnold Classic bodybuilding competition, and began our own simple but enlightening weight training programs. We immersed ourselves in Schwarzenegger movies, from the unbearably camp *Hercules Goes to New York* to the astoundingly sophisticated and ominous *T2*. We exchanged hundreds

electronic mail computer messages that documented our own, and our culture's, encounters with Arnold.

What we were investigating was his extensive influence and remarkable presence which have gone beyond inspiration, hero worship, and entertainment. Not a day goes by without the likelihood of encountering something Arnoldian. He is impossibly everywhere— in the movies, on television, on magazine covers, as a *Jeopardy* category, in advertisements, on t-shirts, in toy stores, bookstores or video stores, in video arcades, in elementary school physical-education programs, in Republican party politics, and in everyday language. The phrases "Hasta la vista, baby" and "I'll be back" are guaranteed to conjure up Arnold everytime they are written or spoken. It is as if he permeates all our lives all the time— persistently, invisibly, quietly, in small ways as well as large.

We took it as our task to pay attention to all these occurrences in order to explain how and why Schwarzenegger has become the scale against which we measure our highest values and principles. Why at the end of the twentieth century can we not conceive of our culture without him? In what ways have we come to rely upon him to lead us into the next century— cinematically, technologically, artistically, psychically, politically, physically, morally?

In a curious expression of just how far Arnold can reach, we began encountering him regularly in our dreams. At first we each began having parallel dreams in which we feared Arnold would discover our project and actually stop us from doing any more research.

### Michael's Dream

March 8, 1991

I am taking Arnold's photograph, using a wide angle lens in order to somehow widen him. Arnold turns to a pal nearby and asks, "Why am I being photographed by such a ridiculous camera?" The friend comes over to confiscate my camera so I cut off his hand. For the rest of the dream I am running from Arnold's goons.

Coincidentally, several months after this dream, Louise actually had such an encounter with an Arnold staffer but did not go so far as to cut off his hand.

Later we began dreaming that Arnold would not stop us and that our project, with his dream approval, would take over our lives.

### Louise's Dream

July 22, 1991

I had won a contest to spend the day with Arnold. We were in a shopping mall riding up an escalator and everyone was staring at us, but more at me than at Arnold. Arnold is awkward around people so I am trying to make him comfortable. We stop at a machine that sells postage stamps and Arnold gets enthusiastic like a little kid. He wants to buy one of the stamps that has him on it. I fumble for change and when the stamp comes out I slip and fall on the ground. Arnold is delighted with the stamp. I introduce him to Tony Randall with whom I share a bedroom but not a romantic relation. Tony is hanging down from the upper bunk on our bunkbeds. Tony says, "Hi, I'm Tony Randall. I'm in M. Butterfly." Arnold is trying not to make mistakes

4

as we meet and talk to people. I say to him, "That's my job — to make you comfortable."

Somewhere in between we stopped dreaming about Arnold altogether and became frightened that we had lost all contact with him. After two years, we dreamed that Arnold died.

#### Louise's Dream

July 30, 1992

I dreamed last night that Arnold died. He was murdered and no one seemed to care. There was a group of women surrounding Arnold at the Olympics. Then his bodyguards, including some very tall women, escorted him away and then word came that he was dead. They were looking for a leather belt as the murder weapon. I saw a woman walking away with one, twisting it in her hands. I got the impression that Arnold was squeezed to death.

We have encountered Arnold more than 100 times in our dreams and we cannot recall every having dreamed so extensively, so violently or so erotically about our research before. Anytime you dream the same subject for months on end, it is a sure sign that the subject is clamoring for unusual attention, attention that is not normally allocated to such personal and uncontrolled forms of data.

Certainly one difficulty, either as a researcher or as dreamer, is deciding just what to do with dreams once you have them. The dream discourses available to us as EuroAmerican academics in the waning years of the twentieth century include the occult, the

medical, the psychoanalytic, the divinatory, the religious, the artistic, the cinematic, the mythological, and the narrative. None of these seemed entirely adequate for our project but each contributed insights into how dreams have been utilized for various agendas in different eras .

Using our dreams, actively engaging them and interrogating their functions became important to us. We electronically exchanged our dreams via e-mail and then incorporated them into our discussions, teaching, professional presentations, and writing. Whenever we had an Arnold dream, we used it as a signal that could suggest other avenues of research or other ways to interpret what we had been finding in other media. Michael's dream about breaking Arnold into little pieces suggested both a holographic and a digital model that we are pursuing. Louise's dream about Arnold's death came at a time when he seemed to be suspiciously absent from the media and made us acutely aware that we should pay attention to his moment of resurrection. The dreams also seemed to function as reminders of ideas we were letting slip by. Tony Randall's appearance hinted at issues of homophobia, collaboration, domestic strife, and communication that always haunted our project.

In the non-academic world there are various ways that dreams are used, even though dreams are not a common topic of social exchange. Some groups meet to exchange and analyze dream narratives, and dream interpretation books fill the shelves in mass market bookstores. Some psychics, mystics and astrologers use dreams to foretell the future or provide personal advise on love, money and business. Dream books are still commonly used in some

ethnic groups to easy interpretations of dream images and lucky numbers that can be played in both state and illegal numbers games and lotteries.

But to compare and classify one's own dreams on an ongoing basis is a rarity in the Western tradition except in the context of psychoanalytic or New Age therapies. In other cultures, dream exchange is often central to an understanding of both everyday life and the most complex intellectual ideas.

In anthropology, dreams have sometimes been collected from "primitive" subjects as a means of understanding the thought and belief systems of non-Western cultures or as proof that they experience a different reality. But generally, dreams have been "oddly neglected" by most anthropologists (Tedlock 1987).

Rarely have anthropologists noted their own dreams, fantasies, and obsessions or used them as aspects of their research. When Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish-exile anthropologist, did research in the Trobriand Islands during World War I, he kept a private diary in which he recorded his thoughts and obsessions about native women and his own sexual repression. The publication of this secret diary in 1967 by his wife caused an uproar, not least because it revealed a personal element that was so often hidden or denied in field work.

#### Louise's Dream

March 20, 1991

For some reason Arnold Schwarzenegger is in my house. He is sitting at the kitchen table. We are talking about something. I say to him flirtatiously, "You know we are writing a book about you but that we haven't been able to admit it face to face." I

7

tell him I am interested in the President's Council on Physical Fitness. I show him something on a small piece of paper which he gets up from the table to look at over my shoulder. I know he is looking down my cleavage and I am pleased.

Dreams and their exchange, it seems, are taken as suspect and unnatural aspects of our social and cultural life and certainly of our academic work. Why is dreaming or the discussion of dreams considered an unnatural act? It certainly is not because dreams are rare or uncommon in humans. Dream researchers estimate that all adults, whether they remember it or not, dream each and every night . Four or five times each sleep period, an episode of REM (rapid eye movement) will be accompanied by electrochemical operations and neuron activity that the brain translates into a narrative known as a dream. The dream is the brain's attempt to create a somewhat coherent story out of firing neurons, stored metaphors, visual images, symbolic associations, emotional baggage, chemical floods, and brain reactions.

Whether a dream researcher believes this process is random or, on the other hand, subject to the unconscious wishes and desires of the dreamer, it nevertheless is a common activity in the body/mind of human beings. The average number of dreams per person per year is 1,600. To dream seems a most natural act if natural is defined as something the body does without prompting and prosthetics. The body in sleep seems to revert back to its non-cultural habits. As Drew Leder suggests, "Nightly, I give my life over to those vegetative processes that form but a circumscribed region of

my day-body" (Leder 1990: 59). In deep sleep, he advises, we "discover the radical anonymity of natural existence" (ibid.).

But at this juncture in human techno-history, the dream as a "natural" event that is not manipulated for advantage is fundamentally unacceptable. Research efforts and popular books aimed at controlling dreams reflect this anxiety (see Kaplan-Williams 1990; Sockin 1989; Siegel 1990). A recent *Psychology Today* featured an article instructed readers to "repair" their dreams. The authors suggest a "dream therapy" where the dreamer rewrites "bad dream scripts" to make dreams come out "better" (Cartwright and Lamberg 1992).

#### Louise's Dream

October 24, 1991

I am at some sort of resort. I am in the gym with all these musclemen, including Arnold, who are working out on the equipment. I am making a documentary film. Arnold is at a machine, sitting split-legged. I focus the camera on his crotch and think this will be artistic. Arnold is sweating profusely. He comes up to me from behind and is dripping on me. He says, "I want to fuck." He kisses me and I taste his sweat. I say, "But you are married." We are face to face. He laughs and says, "So what!" I run off to attend a meeting on photography but it is over when I get there.

Dreaming is also unnatural because it puts the body in suspended animation, or rather, animated suspension. If "sleep is precisely a form of withdrawal from experience" (Leder: 57), then



dreaming, because it brings us back to experience, is a most bizarre transgression of the natural order of both sleep and the body. The experience that is engaged at this time is as unnatural as possible for it involves sex, murder, movement and metamorphosis without bodies. Or it engages bodies in decidedly unnatural and impossible acts including flying, falling without death, feats of unbelievable strength, and invisibility.

This makes dreams sound a lot like the unnatural worlds of virtual reality. In virtual reality, you can experience the illusion of being immersed in an artificial world. One potential of virtual reality is the sharing of images and experience through interactive technology. But rather than providing a new model for approaching dreams in an electronic age, virtual reality seems to endlessly borrow from the possibilities already enacted in dream worlds.

Dreams are far more obedient to the laws of the cinema than they are to either the rationalized orderings of everyday life or the virtual orderings of cyberspace. This is not surprising since the cinema elaborates many of the dream's mechanisms including the acceptance of and identification with the image, the articulation of desire, the manipulation of space and time, the condensation of many concepts into one loaded image/vehicle, and the displacement of meaning from its rightful place to a substitute one.

#### Michael's Dream

March 12, 1992

I dreamed that Arnold's father sent me a postcard on which was both a swastika and a Star of David. No other marks appeared so I couldn't be sure what

10

it meant. When I called you to yell about it you said, "They cancel each other out. Now we have to see if Maria is the Star of David or the swastika."

From its inception, cinema scholars and critics have made the connection between the films and dreams. Münsterberg's 1916 definition of the "photoplay," as he calls it, could be speaking about either dreams or films:

The photoplay tells us the human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination, and emotion. (Münsterberg 1970: 74)

As Linda Williams has shown, the Surrealists showed a keen interest in using the structure of a dream as a model for films and Freud's analysis of dreams shows "a tendency of the unconscious to discourse visually" (Williams 1992: 11). Christian Metz's "semio-psychoanalysis of the cinema" and even the discussion of Hollywood as a "dream-machine" lends credence to this analogy. For Williams, it is "this quality of being both more and less real than reality that film and dream have in common" (ibid.: 18).

In *Matinee*, a 1993 film that spoofs the old science fiction monster movies of the 50s and 60s, a young man is awakened by a nightmare in which a nuclear bomb has just dropped. As he bolts upright in his bed, he hears the sound of a movie projector running. A walk into the living room reveals his mother playing old family

movies on an 8mm projector. The confusion of dreams and films is rather vivid in this moment and in the entire movie which explores the reality of nightmares and the nightmare of reality during the Cuban missile crisis.

*Matinee*, however, misses its mark because it uses a 90s sensibility to represent a 60s condition. While its blend of movies and dreams seems convincing, the production relies heavily on notions of the blurring of reality and movies which was not a hallmark of the era. For example, the discovery that a Christian protester against B monster movies in the film is really a hired actor points more to the condition of today's relation between film, dreams and reality than it does to 60s notions.

Now, the dream world and the cinema blend with their real counterparts to form a world where these categories are virtually indistinguishable. We are beginning to understand that there is no longer a need or desire to make unnecessary distinctions between the real world where we are in motion, and the made-real worlds of film and dream where we are an image. Now, instead of separating and coordinating the alternate realities we have to engage, we are blurring them in mediated expressions that hold no respect or affection for former distinctions.

NBC's recent apology to General Motors about the doctoring of televised crash tests of a GM truck ripped open the supposed fine line between legitimate television news and the tabloids. The tabloids, which are the main purveyors of our collective mythologies supply the images that often seem more real than reality. Whatever differences we made between films, dreams, and "reality" have also

been negated by recent crossovers in which world events and Hollywood filmed events become not only mutually supportive, but less and less distinct. Not only do most major news stories eventually become movies, but newscasters regularly turn to canned popular film images to punctuate the “news” stories. Any flocking of birds in California always conjures up Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, while *Fatal Attraction* and *Dirty Harry* provide reference points for cases of obsession and vengeance. The recent case of two children who were left “*Home Alone*” when their parents went on Christmas vacation to Mexico is a perfect example. News sources not only casually used the *Home Alone* analogy but also dissected in detail those moments where the actual events did not match the movie.

These illustrations from film seem to be used because the film versions of events are snapshots which are formal, shared, edited and cleaned up. They are simple and relatively unambiguous or overdetermined. In this way, global events are given only those meanings which have already always been gleaned from the snapshot album of popular culture that, not coincidentally, film itself creates. Any analysis of the film industry can readily reveal that the narratives and myths there fall within an extremely narrow range and are controlled by an amazingly small number of people, Arnold Schwarzenegger included.

As the rapidly evolving trend which fuse the “real” with “animated” figures and geographies (i.e., in film from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* [1988] and *Beauty and the Beast* [1991] to *Cool World* [1992], *Toys* [1992], and *Aladdin* [1992]; in marketing in Disney, MGM and cartoon character stores; and in the new Disneyland

adventure called "Toontown") makes clear, the passage in and out of film life is no longer an issue of possibility or of fantasy and effect, but an issue of traffic. And the control of that flow as well as the movement itself is at the heart of the relationship between dreams, films and the understanding of Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Film has become a virtual membrane through which, as though by osmosis, the real and the unreal pass. This is symbolized dramatically in the hyped and hyper-physical worlds of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Arnold is a figure who has managed to secure easy passage across the border, or at least the illusion of it. It is not because real life, dream life, and film life are indistinguishable in him, but because he seems to be able to travel across the membranes in all directions at the same time.

This is aptly demonstrated in his last film, *The Last Action Hero* (1993). In the film Arnold spoofs his own earlier film roles by playing Jack Slater, an action movie hero. The movie focuses on the relationship between Slater and his biggest fan, a boy played by . The boy dreams of being like Slater and eventually manages to miraculously join him by stepping into the screen. Schwarzenegger, with this carefully chosen plot line, has once again placed himself smack in the middle of the most important issues relating films, bodies, memory, technology, and their natural and unnatural relations.

Equally significant is the blurring in Jack Slater of all of Schwarzenegger's personae: Arnold, Conan the Barbarian, Quaid, Danny Devito's twin, the Terminator, the chair of the President's Council on Physical Fitness, and Conan the Republican. In a February

publicity story for the film on *ET (Entertainment Tonight) Weekend*, we are shown a simulation of a movie premiere that takes place within *The Last Action Hero*. The premiere features real stars. In a confusing display of “Is this the film or is this *ET*?”, *ET* reporter Leeza Gibbons has a part in the film as herself interviewing the stars as they enter the premiere. When Arnold shows up on the scene/set with real wife Maria Shriver on his arm, he is interviewed by Gibbons and called Arnold but they both seem to be staying within their film characters (Maria, incidentally, is working on a film script about a Republican who marries into a famous Democratic family).

Arnold, during this staged interview on *ET*, announces (jokingly?) that he will make a movie about the life of Sigmund Freud. He will produce, direct, write, and star in the film, he proclaims, and then remarks that it will be amazing to see such a big man play such a small man. Arnold, who has decreased his bulk so that he could, as he announced once at a bodybuilding competition, “fit better on the screen,” wants to substitute himself for the master interpreter of dreams.

Arnold’s own interpretation of dreams has been articulated in what he oddly calls his Master Plan. Arnold’s dream is a fantasy of fitness in which he creates a world that is controlled, properly designed, and fit in all the ominous and innocent senses of the word. This dream of a world where everything fits has had its appeal for centuries but the achievement of this world comes at great cost. Schwarzenegger has been designing himself elaborately, properly and permanently so that he can not only inhabit but also orchestrate

this next world. The question for America is, who else will fit and who will be unfit in these Arnoldian times to come?

#### Michael's Dream

February 5, 1993

Louise had found in a novelty shop a 78 rpm record of Arnold singing Elvis songs. One side was "Love Me Tender" and the other side was "Jailhouse Rock" which, she told me, when played backwards, was also the "preamble" to Mein Kampf.

Arnold taps into the wish fulfillment we have traditionally relegated to dreams but that has always been a part of popular films. His films suggest a cutting edge awareness of what the next important issues are, and what the dreams need to be induced to form a compliant populace. If we seem more and more willing to give up control over our lives in order to get what films have previously promised—closure, control, and a place to fit in— it might be that our favorite Arnold films are facilitating this gesture.

Is it possible to actually control people's dreams? Beyond the speculations about "lucid dreaming" is the paranoid possibility that even our dream can be under control, and the control may not be ours. A study of the dreams of 300 citizens of the Third Reich in Germany in the 1930s provides frightening evidence that even in their dreams people were afraid to resist. Bruno Bettelheim evaluating this evidence, states that, "the regime was successful in forcing even its enemies to dream the kinds of dreams it want them to dream: those warning the dreamer that resistance was impossible, that safety lay only in compliance" (Bettelheim 1985:151).

As one Nazi official stated, "There are no private matters anymore." One difference between films and dreams has been the difference between public stories of desire and private individual ones. But now public and private distinctions are annulled by eyewitness news, surveillance cameras, tabloid TV, and America's Funniest Videos. Dreams, if they interact both with life and the cinema, cannot be private when they draw from the stock of characters and situations present in our ever-circulating pop culture.

This control of dreaming that characterizes a totalitarian regime is well articulated in Schwarzenegger's 1990 film *Total Recall*. Arnold plays Doug Quaid, a construction worker in the future who dreams of another life on Mars. His "wife," who is actually a secret agent, feigns jealousy that she cannot control his dreams in which his companion is another woman. "I'll give you something to dream about," she says to him as she undoes her lingerie and tries to distract him from his Mars fantasies. When he goes to a "travel agency" named Recall that can implant a memory of a vacation on Mars directly into his brain, Quaid discovers that the memory is already there and that he was, indeed, a secret agent who worked there. The rest of the movie plays with the possibility that Quaid and the audience can never know when we are witnessing a dream element and when we have crossed into real/film action. Their simultaneous naturalness and unnaturalness is the dilemma at the basis of late twentieth century life.

Our dreams about Arnold Schwarzenegger provide more than just evidence that we have unconscious desires or have crossed over unprofessionally into the subject of our study. What they suggest, in



the context of our research, is the permeability of previously guarded and reasonably solid boundaries. There is something that dreams can provide that the cinema, that closely controlled, obsessively manipulated medium, cannot. The effect of film stories is to provide narratives of what can happen with certain kinds of boundary crossings. What every American Hollywood film must do is provide a resolution to that crossing, but dreams do not have to do that.

Our dreams of Arnold Schwarzenegger have permitted us to elaborate upon both the minute and momentous impressions, anxieties and desires that each of us has about the man. These elaborations provide us with a far less limited point of view that we would have without the dreams. Our dream material provide us with a requisite variety in a society and mass culture that increasingly devalues such differences. Our interest is in the variety that dreams provide and that films and everyday life do not.

Dreams provide a source of living chaos that rarely exceeds the control of the living organism but always exceeds the previous scope of life and experience. They provide an alternative to our far-too-controlled existence that can be used productively even when put into a comfortable narrative form. The increase in vantage points available through dreams has been reason enough to include them in our work. Arnold's dream instructions to us — to break him into little pieces— we take as an instruction to dream. Paying attention to dreams and their chaos is paying attention to the possible variety for conscious, vibrant, alert human beings that is usually attenuated in everyday life. The very narrow appetites and needs we have learned

to accept as natural in our waking hours are challenged in dreams. Paying attention to how our minds negotiates and amplifies variety in the unnatural world of dreams can be instructive.

We are not discouraged by Arnold's own statement on the silliness of dreams. "Some people train themselves to wake up and write them down," Arnold has said incredulously about dreams. "Then what? What do you do with that information?" he has asked (*Rolling Stone*). Dream training may be the only type of training that Arnold disdains. In his training of the body, Arnold advocates control, rigor, cohesion, growth, development, health, balance, and fitness. Dreams are the closest thing we have to rejecting this and as a result they are with a vibrant source of intellectual and theoretical resistance because they can be wildly imaginative, fragmented, nearly and often uncontrollable, incoherent, non-cumulative, and suspect as commodities for everyday exchange.

#### Louise's Dream

February 23, 1991

Arnold is filming *Terminator 2* at UCLA. The setting is some rolling hills on campus—not any spot that really exists. It reminds me of two scenes-- the park from the movie *Blowup* and the hills from Kent State where the protesting students were shot by the National Guard. I am watching the filming and decide to take off my makeup with a cotton ball. As I rub off my makeup, it turns gray on my face and gives me an aged, alien look. I leave it on. The director comes over and asks me to be an alien in the movie in a bar scene reminiscent of the one in *Star Wars*. The bar is huge and oval-shaped and there is nothing in the middle—you just face other

patrons. I look in a mirror and I no longer have my own face because they have put a rubber mask on me. I am told that I have the major alien speaking part in the film. Cut suddenly to me in my poststructuralism seminar and I am telling my graduate students about this dream. We are sitting at a set of children's desks that are in the same shape as the bar— in an oval with a space in the middle. Suddenly Arnold pops up in one of the seats facing me across the room. His face is a caricature. I say to him, "I am the major alien in your movie."

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