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Letters

Perchance to dream

Even if dreams are a by-product of "random firing" of neurons in the brain ("Forgotten Dreams," SN: 9/17/83, p. 188), it does not necessarily follow that dreams are meaningless. The patterns that the sleeper imposes upon and hence perceives in such a random activity may still provide clues to the way he views the world, himself and others when awake. The fact that a Rorschach inkblot has no clear inherent meaning does not cast doubt on the value of a person's response to it; on the contrary, the un-systematic nature of the stimulus ensures that the individual's response is self-generated and indicative of his internal state. Dreams may be caused by a physiological process that has nothing to do with their content, but the content that the dreamer insists upon perceiving in that process remains a valuable psychological tool.

Jamie Hagedorn
Evanston, Ill.

The suggestion that the workings of the mind during sleep are best forgotten can be carried one step further — under normal circumstances, remembering dreams may not even be

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Cover: Growth retardation in the womb is responsible for the abnormally small size of many infants. This 740-gram (1 pound, 10 ounce) baby, born after about 34 weeks gestation, is less than half the expected weight. The infant, shown here with a feeding tube, survived the newborn period. . . But such babies may suffer longterm consequences of starting life so small. (Photo: Joseph B. Warshaw, University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas)
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possible. Logic would seem to indicate the need for some sort of neurological mechanism that would "shut off" the brain's sleeping functions from the conscious mind. . . .

A way for the brain to separate its two modes of operation would be quite practical. If such a mechanism does indeed exist, perhaps it is that the only dreams a person remembers — or can remember — are those that occur during REM sleep, or some other level of sleep when one is closest to consciousness; and when the control mechanism is in the process of "switching over" from one mode to the other.

Robert A. Palermo
West Orange, N.J.

. . . Francis Crick is not the co-discoverer of DNA, as incorrectly stated in the article "Forgotten Dreams." Watson and Crick discovered the structure of DNA, the presence or existence of which was already known.

Malcolm K. McClintock
Indianapolis, Ind.

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