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**2012**

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# **DREAMS: Protoconsciousness and Elaborative Encoding**

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Dreaming has fascinated and mystified humankind for ages: the bizarre and evanescent qualities of dreams have invited boundless speculation about their origin, meaning and purpose. For most of the twentieth century, scientific dream theories were mainly psychological. Since the discovery of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, the neural underpinnings of dreaming have become increasingly well understood, and it is now possible to complement the details of these brain mechanisms with a theory of consciousness that is derived from the study of dreaming. The theory advanced here emphasizes data that suggest that REM sleep may constitute a protoconscious state, providing a virtual reality model of the world that is of functional use to the development and maintenance of waking consciousness.

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