

Granular Dreams

by Craig Shockley

According to scientists who are supposed to know, dreams are bits and bytes of data left over or temporarily set aside as Subconscious mind sorts, files, and stores all that accumulated stuff we call memory. And everybody dreams. It's just that sometimes Subconscious is just too busy to tell Conscious, "Hey, I've been working here!" So it is quite possible we may not remember a dream in our waking moments.

Sometimes somebody says, "I never dream." Right away you know that person has a really busy subconscious, or a really lazy subconscious, or maybe, they're just dead. In the latter case you probably shouldn't have been talking to them in the first place.

Occasionally Subconscious works extra hard, puts in overtime, and then decides it deserves some serious recognition. This almost always happens when Subconscious accidentally connects pieces of data that Conscious could interpret as a possible "idea."

So Subconscious goes knocking on Conscious' iron bolted oaken door. If it's opened even a small crack Subconscious yells, "Hey! Look what I got here!"

Assuming Conscious sees something it believes has merit, the process of turning dreams to reality starts at that very instant.

Then it's Conscious turn to work. Mental filing drawers are pulled open and folders pertinent to the subject are removed. Special volumes are opened and reviewed. Loose leafed memory items are sorted and piled for instant access. Finally the forms for formulating are filled out and each line and box is checked against the format specifications. An idea is born.

Of course, people who haven't studied the background and foundation of the "idea" might call the whole thing stupid. They may say, "It's just a dream."

Linus Torvalds had a "dream." We call it the Linux kernel. Marc Ewing and Bob Young had dreams. We call them Red Hat Linux. Ian Murdock had a dream. We call it Debian. Bill Reynolds had a dream. We call it PCLinuxOS.

Dreamlinux, as the name might suggest, isn't really a dream at all. Still, at one time it probably was somebody's dream. Now it's something you can actually touch and put into your CD drive. But before you do, you must first attune yourself to the special vibrations of XFCE. And by the way, is "XFCE" an acronym for something, or is it just an alien way of spelling "Mouse?"

The computer is, above all else, a box of tools used for communication. If you write a sonnet using OpenOffice.org, well, that's communication . . . of a sort. If you build a data

base for a permanent record of your special photo collection (public toilet bowls in 17 countries) that's communication too. Only it's communication with yourself as no one else would ever want to look at your photos - or at your records. If you send an email (obviously communication) or buy something on eBay you're communicating; that is, you're communicating with the seller who in turn communicates with your credit card or Pay Pal account.

The amazing thing is that all this communication takes place in "virtual" space in a "virtual" world. Virtual worlds are where computers live.

What's "virtual?" Well, the dictionary says: "Being such in essence though not in actual fact."

It means "virtual" isn't substantial. It may look real, but it isn't. Dreams are much the same. At the time you're having one it may seem real, but as soon as you wake you know it was just Subconscious cleaning house. And this is where "virtual" and "dream" are very, very different.

When you wake up the day after spending wads of money on that platinum plated pickle perforator you found on eBay, your bank balance will be much, much lower, even though the transaction took place in a "virtual" world. If you only *dream* you bought the pickle perforator, your bank balance will remain intact.

Both dreams and virtual things are insubstantial. But with virtual things you can use virtual tools to change them. With dream things you're pretty much stuck with whatever Subconscious decides to give you. Bummer! Unless . . . unless, you use your dream as a basis to construct a virtual reality.

Can you really do that? Can you make a dream into a virtual reality if you tinker around with it using virtual tools? Obviously you can. That's just what Linus, Marc, Bob, Ian, and Bill did.

Other people have done it too. And this brings us to another dream that has rapidly become a reality. It's the result of really dedicated tinkering using those virtual tools. If you're reading this you already know what it is.

Yes, it starts with a dreamy cloud like texture, but if you dig a little deeper you can find artwork that's beautiful yet assertive and strong enough to let you know Granular is not just a wisp of imagination.

Let those attuned to an imaginary dream world where "Vista" means stellar performance and "Os X" means cheap hardware, lightly dance and twirl their way through the Granular menus. In Granular even a lumbering oaf can find interesting non-oafish things in the menu without needing a towel to mop up sweat. And exactly what will they find?

More dreams? Not at all. They'll find cutting edge open source applications. These are real tools used to accomplish real and necessary tasks in the real world.

Granular is a real thing in the sense that you can write it into a CD and then physically put the CD into the CD player. But the instant the disk starts to spin Granular enters the virtual world of your computer. True, you may not always like what you see. But remember that menu? You can easily find all the virtual tools you need to change your Granular virtual world to something that appeals to your own special aesthetic values – even if you're the public toilet collector.

On the slim chance you don't find the needed tool or communication device, you can still acquire it in the blink of an eye (compared to the time it would take you to physically travel to the software store and buy the thing). All you need to do is enter the virtual world of the Synaptic package manager and take your pick of applications you want to use. For free.

If even the Synaptic world fails you, you still have an option. Install from source, but you'll probably need to study a little before you try it for the first time.

Well, I lied. There is still a final option, but it is only for the truly dedicated. If you need something that doesn't exist, then you have nothing more than a dream. Turn your dream into an idea that morphs into virtual reality in your virtual world. Then maybe you could join forces with those developers who turned Granular dreams into Granular reality.

Enjoy Granular. It's no longer "just a dream."