

When is dreaming waking? Continuity, lucidity and transcendence in modern contexts of dreaming

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Summary. The continuity hypothesis suggests that dreaming is not fully independent of our waking lives. Several factors common to waking have been demonstrated to manifest in the dream-state. Yet, unusual instances of being awake in dreaming may represent autochthonous forms of consciousness that are not necessarily correlated with the parameters of the waking world. This juxtaposition of continuity/discontinuity parallels the natural attitude in the waking world and challenges to it in reenchantment. Addressing the correspondence between debates on continuity/discontinuity and contextual changes may provide an alternative perspective for redefining the boundaries between waking and dreaming.

Keywords: Continuity; lucid dreaming; natural attitude; reenchantment; transcendence

Introduction

Since the proposal of the continuity hypothesis (Bell & Hall, 1971), dream researchers have continuously investigated and debated the perceived discrepancy between waking and dreaming activities (e.g. Domhoff, 1996; Strauch & Meier, 1996; Schredl, 2000, 2006, 2012; Schredl & Hofmann, 2003), with the most recent exchange staged between Hobson & Schredl (2011). The continuity hypothesis attempts to redefine the significance of waking events in dreaming and to place the meanings of those events in dream contexts. It suggests that the nature of dreaming is not fully independent of our waking life and in many respects is strongly shaped by our actions in the waking world. Although the hypothesis takes into consideration cognitive differences in the two states (e.g. Hartmann, 2000), it nevertheless offers to identify major factors such as emotions and personality in correlating waking and dreaming activities (Malinowski & Horton, 2011).

In contrast to this hypothesis, Hobson (2009a) has offered a theory of protoconsciousness that challenges the assumption of dreaming as a derivative of waking life. More specifically, he has argued that dreaming is both a predictor and reflector of waking consciousness. In accordance with this theory, the dreaming brain may be construed as a processor of internally generated information. Therefore, dreaming itself can be considered “plastic and pluripotential, a state to be celebrated and used for its own sake, not a means to an end but an end in itself” (Hobson & Schredl, 2011, p.5). Although Hobson addresses cognitive differences between waking and dreaming, his theory is fundamentally a

discourse on the autonomous power of dreaming. In effect, dreaming can be treated as occurring in a discontinuous fashion from waking because it represents “the synthesis of completely original dream features” (Hobson & Schredl, 2011, p.3). The autocreative effects of dreaming stemming from this discontinuity is also suggested in his discussion of lucid dreaming, the rare state of consciousness in which the dreamer is simultaneously dreaming and awake (Hobson, 2009b). Stumbrys (2011, p.94) also concurs with this view that lucid dreaming may represent “an advanced protoconscious state in which the virtual model of reality is used in a creative way.”

In the wake of this debate, I would like to suggest that the question of the continuity between waking and dreaming has ironically arisen within the modern context, which sets conditions for emphasizing that “whatever else dreaming is like it is not like being awake” (Flanagan, 2000, p.58). In this context, the assumption that dreaming is fundamentally different from waking still constitutes the *raison d'être* of efforts to demystify the dream-state. Thus, to ask how it is possible to reconcile the reality taken for granted in waking life with that so egregiously occupying our minds during sleep is to reappraise the assumed differentiation between waking and dreaming. As a result of this reappraisal, two questions have become central to research on the continuity hypothesis, i.e. how and when are waking events incorporated into dreaming activities, and in what ways is waking life thought to be affected by dreaming. These two questions imply that reexamining the relationship between waking and dreaming would not only refocus attention on the purposes of dreaming but also address the contextual changes that are supporting the renewal of this attention.

Contextual changes suggest social conditions that can generate attitudinal transformations. In the context of the modern empirical world, certain assumptions about the power of science and technology have contributed to the formation of attitudes that supports the self-evidential reality of the waking world. Seemingly, modern insistence on the ultimate reality of the waking world makes us place greater faith on gaining mastery of this world rather than the dream

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world. Yet, there are modern individuals and researchers who do not dismiss dreams as trivial by cultivating alternative attitudes that valorize the dynamism of dreaming. For example, in 1935 Stewart (1972) discovered the dream techniques and interpretations of the Senoi, a term referring to the Semai and Temiar peoples of Peninsular Malaysia. He was fascinated by the way dreams featured in the daily lives of the Senoi and came to see dreaming as composing a deep form of creativity missing in the modern West (for critiques, see Dentan, 1983 and Domhoff, 1985). Similarly, Tedlock (1991) sought answers to the question of continuity by personal participation in the dream-sharing activities found in specific non-Western cultures. Through this participation, she came to see how her own dreams were made relevant to her daily life. The context in which these experiences were taken as evidence to suggest the mutual compatibility between waking and dreaming provides the basis for understanding the important changes in modern attitudes toward dreaming.

My goal here is not to elucidate the broader historical and cultural changes in the modern West that have come to reshape the meanings of dreaming but to outline the context in which these changes are influencing the debate on the continuity hypothesis. To accomplish this, I will first address the presumptions of the waking world that underlie the modern meaning of social order as theorized by Alfred Schutz. Then I discuss the recent shifts in attitudes that highlight the significance of creativity in dreaming, especially its reflexive components that allegedly arise in lucid dreaming. These shifts are not simply a passing phenomenon but grounded in a renewed effort of self-discovery that challenges the scientific banality of the waking world. In effect, they profoundly undermine certain assumptions of the continuity hypothesis by calling into question our natural attitude in the waking world.

Modernity, dreaming and the natural attitude

The presumption that everyday life in the modern world is principally structured by waking actions and interactions is poignantly represented in the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (1962-66, 1967, 1970). He was concerned with the question of how social order and reciprocity became possible in the way people went about their lives in the waking world. In theorizing this problem, Schutz came up with the idea of intersubjectivity to address the deep sense of understanding that individuals possessed to anticipate and carry through the actions of everyday life. This implicit understanding is treated as a "pure-we relationship" in which anticipations are mutually shared even though individuals cannot directly experience each other's stream of consciousness. In his view (Schutz 1970: 72), this comprises the natural attitude toward the meaning of everyday life:

We begin with an analysis of the world of daily life which the wide-awake, grown-up man who acts in it and upon it amidst his fellow-men experiences with the natural attitude as a reality. "World of daily life" shall mean the intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by others, our predecessors, as an organized world... All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teacher which in the form of "knowledge at hand" function as a scheme of reference.

First and foremost, the world of daily life is regarded as the waking world in which realities are formed and reenacted. It is not considered equivalent to the non-pragmatic world as experienced in sleeping and dreaming. For Schutz, this non-pragmatic world is inferior to the paramount reality of waking life. It is on the strength of intersubjective understandings that individuals are able to go about their daily lives by incorporating the belief in the waking world as the paramount reality of their existence. In this waking world, intersubjectivity does not only imply the presumption of shareable views and knowledge but also the relevance of subjective meanings. His reference to "knowledge at hand" suggests the commonsensical way in which individuals utilize their stocks of knowledge as recipes for meeting the contingencies of daily life. Hence, the pragmatic dimension of intersubjectivity compels people to share meanings as domains or systems of relevance in which priorities and preferences make an impact on how meanings are perceived and performed. In contrast to the pragmatic nature of the waking world, "the world of dreams is very intermittent and extremely variegated; with his awakening, man returns to a much more continuous, coherent, and enduring world of daily life" (Wagner, 1970, p.42).

Hence, intersubjectivity governs the meaningfulness of daily existence in the waking world. Only in the waking world can a person derive a highly attentive state of mind unlike that experienced in a non-pragmatic state like dreaming. This highly attentive state enables the person to distinguish between different realities because he or she can always fall back on the natural attitude in waking life as the central point of departure. As the fulcrum on which everyday life turns, the natural attitude composes the predominant attitude in the fulfillment of all social goals. Its predominance suggests two conditions that determine the way the waking world is apprehended, processed, and accepted as real. Firstly, all non-waking experiences are thought to have finite meanings with little or no impact on the intersubjectivity of the waking world. Secondly, any doubt of this intersubjectivity is suspended indefinitely. In short, intersubjectivity of the waking world is maintained so long as no significant number of participants seriously questions its ontology.

Because Schutz considered intersubjectivity to be a primary datum of the waking world, he did not examine in greater depth the meanings of the non-pragmatic realities. These realities were simply assumed to occur in certain ways but not with "the reality accent of the world of working," or the imaginations produced there were not regarded as sufficiently effective to transform the outer world (Schutz, 1970, pp. 255, 258). Consequently, the alleged dominance of the waking world implies the preexistence of firm boundaries between the outer world and the multiple or lesser realities. These boundaries therefore suggest the hegemonic position of intersubjectivity in the waking world over the realities of other worlds. Yet, Schutz (1970, p.256) has argued that these boundaries could be crossed through "a radical modification in the tension of our consciousness, founded in a different attention à la vie." This is a suggestion of cutting through, of experiencing the transparency inherent to both paramount and non-paramount realities. A leap of this kind represents a sudden shift to another reality that might compel a person to confront directly the assumptions sustaining the intersubjectivity of his or her paramount reality. Such an experience suggests that taking the dreaming state for granted could be problematic in itself. It leads to the

question of whether the suspension of doubt in dreaming could be lifted under such circumstances with significant consequences for the meaning of being awake.

Even though Schutz briefly addressed the radical nature of modified consciousness in non-pragmatic realities, he did not pursue the matter further because he continued to treat the intersubjectivity of the waking world as hegemonic to the presence of non-pragmatic realities. His focus on the natural attitude as an outcome of this intersubjectivity positions the cognitive and perceptual correlates of the waking state as indispensable to the quest for systematic control of the physical environment as well as the need for practical knowledge in realizing the exercise of this control. Thus, dreaming would be construed as ineffectual insofar as it is placed outside the bounds of practical knowledge for the accomplishment of mundane goals. The boundaries that are drawn for distinguishing between waking and dreaming emphasize the pragmatism of the natural attitude in maintaining the shared understandings between people in daily life. From this perspective, the natural attitude provides an implicit affirmation for the boundaries of the waking state to be taken as the primary source of social order, untainted by the putatively chaotic realms of dreams. Intersubjectivity itself becomes the binding sinews of these boundaries, solidifying the natural attitude and constituting it as a final frontier against the apparent irrationality of dreams.

If the waking state is construed as hegemonic, how then does this modern will-to-order confront the nature of dreams and dreaming? Firstly, research into dreams and dreaming over the past half-century consistently suggests the subordinate status of dream-states to the waking world. In summarizing this research, Domhoff (2005) addresses the issues of psychological meaning and adaptive function in a critical way to imply that dreaming could be meaningful to the extent that dreams generally demonstrate a reasonable simulation of waking life. At the same time, he also argues that dreaming may have little or no psychological purpose in the waking world since most people recall only a tiny fraction of their dreams. Consequently, dreams may simply be considered “the most dramatic and complex embodied simulations that the human mind can produce” (Domhoff, 2011, p.60).

If this summary is taken to represent the state of dreams and dreaming in modern society, then it unequivocally supports Schutz’s presumption of the social world as being a product of the dominant waking state. Thus, people who report their dreams to modern researchers of dreaming would be reaffirming rather than disputing the ontological basis of the waking world. It is in this context of waking predominance that the debate on the continuity hypothesis could be located. By focusing on the replay of waking events in dreams, the continuity hypothesis inadvertently draws upon the natural attitude as a template for making plausible the structural meanings of dreams. Continuity between waking and dreaming is inevitably weighed in favor of the former since consciousness is presumably conditioned by the natural attitude to assert the type of order familiar to everyday life. In other words, the intersubjectivity theorized by Schutz as governing the meaningfulness of social order may also correspond to an implicitly consensual recognition of waking events in dreaming.

Secondly, dream research itself is producing a radical problem concerning the boundaries between dreaming and waking (e.g. Gackenbach and LaBerge 1988; Blackmore

1991), that is whether it is possible to awake in dreams and if so, can it alter our perception and experience of the waking state? Posing this question opens the way to reconceptualizing these boundaries as fluid rather than solid. It suggests that boundaries were not cast in stone so as to impede the movement of consciousness. Making plausible the notion of awakening in dreams not only turns the natural attitude on its head but also implies a new freedom of individual consciousness transcending the solid limits of the waking world. For instance, McCreery (1973, p.114) described being awake in dreaming as producing “a wonderful sense of freedom” just as Fox (1962, p.33) expressed it as “so clear-brained, so divinely powerful, so inexpressibly free!” This sense of total freedom reflects the exhilarating experience of breaching boundaries as well as of deconstructing any social role constituted in the waking world. This is the experience that has come to be known as lucid or conscious dreaming. It is being promulgated in a context in which the separation of waking from dreaming no longer seems to be taken for granted as part of the social order. Instead, the suspension of doubt in dreaming itself becomes suspended. What exactly is this context and how does the continuity hypothesis feature in it?

Lucidity, reenchantment and transcendence

Unlike ordinary dreaming that rarely leads to doubt about the act of dreaming itself, lucid dreaming could come about by the raising of doubt in the dream-state. Consequently, lucid dreamers may come to ask what do they awaken to rather than presuming that being asleep is like not being awake. By casting doubt on the waking world as an ultimate reality taken for granted by most people, lucid dreamers are in effect questioning the suspension of doubt in the dream-state. When this inquiry is intensified in personal training, it fortifies a new range of skepticism to undermine the natural attitude of the waking state. For example, Harary and Weintraub (1989, pp.17, 28) discuss the dream rehearsal exercise by telling readers to imagine themselves as going to sleep even when they are preparing to confront the waking world in the morning. Readers are instructed to rehearse by telling themselves that the waking world is actually a dream. They are then asked to inquire about the nature of everyday activities, i.e. to stop and ask every now and then whether what they are doing is a dream. The boundary between dreaming and waking is treated as the basis of its own deconstruction by recoding it into a personal inquiry on the reversibility of both states.

By this questioning in and out of the dream-state, the assumed difference between the paramountcy of waking and the non-pragmatism of dreaming breaks down to suggest the possibility of redefining the meaning of being awake. For instance, Waggoner (2009, p.78), a veteran of lucid dreaming, expressed skepticism about the accepted juxtaposition between waking and dreaming:

The deeper we probe the nature of dreaming, the more we realize that referring to dreams as unreal is a false supposition. Moreover, when we consider that in physical life, people report hallucinations, false memories, perceptual errors, and so on, we realize that suggesting that the physical life experience is utterly real is equally unsupportable. Culturally, we have been led to believe an extreme dichotomy.

Waggoner was not just voicing doubt about the unreality of dreams but also the inter-subjective acceptance of waking as ontologically prior to dreaming. His argument therefore focuses on his varied experiences in lucid dreaming as rendering problematic the distinction between waking and dreaming. Lucid dreaming may instill a sense of skepticism toward the natural attitude and shift attention to the possibility of other realities, but it does not automatically produce anticipations of certainty and stability in the negotiation of dreamscapes. Lucid dreamers may want to experiment with these powers but they cannot always address the dream-scape as if it were constituted by a stable or enduring set of rules. However, some dream writers attempt to depict dreamscapes as stable locales as in the case of Moss (1996, p.128) who explained that despite “the fluid, fleeting nature of dreams, some of these locations appear quite stable.” He compared these dream locales to movie sets produced by other people and possessing a manufactured quality that resembles the structures of an “imaginal realm.” By using dream reentry techniques to return to these locales, lucid dreamers are believed to be able to find some form of anchorage in their oneiric journeys.

At present, aspirants of lucid dreaming are not confined only to one corner of the world but are globally interconnected through online dreaming networks and mobile workshops. Access to a growing corpus of works and manuals on lucid dreaming (e.g. LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990; Goodwin, 1994; Szul, 1999; Yuschak, 2006; McElroy, 2007; Wallace, 2012) is relatively unproblematic through online purchases or free downloads, direct sales and attendance in dream workshops. Lucid dreaming has become a consumer choice coinciding with dream research and practices that are making problematic the separation of waking from dreaming. These developments in lucid dreaming suggest that widely shared and repeated experiences in oneiric wakefulness can prompt the breakdown of the natural attitude. Developing alternative attitudes to question the exact separation of waking and dreaming as well as the instability of dreamscapes constitutes part of a broader quest to espouse the overall creative aspects of human consciousness. Embarking on this quest may represent an active engagement with worldviews and instructions that celebrate the dynamism of dreaming (e.g. Garfield, 1976; Barrett, 2001; Guiley, 2004). It exemplifies a predilection not to differentiate between dreaming and waking as if the two states were like oil and water. This predilection may be considered inseparable from a larger and more vibrant context that promotes the ethos of reenchantment (Lee, 2003, 2010).

Unlike disenchantment discussed by Weber (1946, p.51) as a basis of rationalization in modernity, reenchantment refers to a process of reinvigorating the fantastical and even various aspects of the irrational as being not invariant with the normal practices of everyday life (Tiryakian, 1992). The reenchanters represent those who breach the boundaries erected for the preservation of disenchanted views and practices in order to experience and embrace realities not considered plausible within the purview of the natural attitude. In this regard, reenchantment is not only a counter-process to disenchantment but it also engenders alternative perspectives for exploring the limits of control in dream worlds. For lucid dreamers, such exploration implies the cultivation of specific practices to enhance their capabilities in navigating dream environments. As Brooks & Vogelsong (2010, p.101) put it, conscious exploration of dreamscapes

inevitably activates dream control. It is as if lucid dreamers could write and enact their own dream scripts and even change their own character at will (Harary & Weintraub, 1989, p.61; Moss, 1996, p.157) by encoding new paths to creativity and making plausible the belief in dream mastery.

Within the framework of reenchantment, this view of the creative potential in lucid dreaming may convincingly offer an inner virtual model of reality as a means for reshaping the practices of waking life. It may promote the belief in the inductive power of dreaming as a tool for the preplay rather than replay of waking (Stumbrys, 2011, p.94). In other words, dream control is synonymous with the means to attain mastery of inner worlds. Dream worlds are therefore not to be disparaged as a mere fantasy à la the natural attitude but reconceived as the wellsprings of human creativity and self-development. From the viewpoint of the continuity hypothesis, dream control becomes a challenge to waking consciousness since lucidity may catalyze an alternative path of influence from dreaming to waking. This would be akin to Schutz's notion of a radical modification in the tension of consciousness that could alter the assumptions propagated by the natural attitude. Yet, not all lucid dreamers concede fully to the autocreativity of the inner virtual model of reality. For instance, Brooks & Vogelsong (2010, p.102) argue that the similarity between their suggestion theory and the world-modeling theory suggested by LaBerge & Rheingold (1990, p.127ff) emphasizes the feedback of waking experiences into reflexively generated dream realities. It implies that there are varying degrees of reenchantment corresponding to the way lucid dreamers attempt to explain the meanings of their experiences. For lucid dreamers who do not dismiss the significance of waking events in the constitution of dream worlds, reenchantment has only authenticated the meanings of dream control without invalidating the continuity hypothesis. In this case, lucid dreaming may actually provide insights into how waking consciousness informs meta-awareness in the dream-state.

On the other hand, reenchantment may augment a proclivity toward the sense of transcendence in which dream lucidity is considered a means of reawakening the inner self as well as enabling conscious links to new sources of spirituality and healing. Moss (2011, p.4) exemplifies this form of reenchantment with his advocacy of shamanic lucid dreaming, which is conceived as “talking and walking our dreams [and] bringing energy and guidance from the dreamworld into everyday life.” Not only does this approach represent the attempt to redefine the meanings of dream consciousness but it also seeks reconnection to dream worlds for spiritual guidance and healing. Thus, in rediscovering the dream practices of the Iroquois, Moss (2005, p.38) describes his shamanic approach as being derived from the realization that “dreams are at the heart of healing because they connect us with the unfulfilled desires and ultimate purposes of the soul.” Waggoner (2009, p.88) also subscribes to a deeper, holistic meaning of lucid dreaming but instead of referring to the soul, he prefers to speak about an inner awareness that represents an aspect of the subliminal self. By developing this awareness, lucid dreamers can connect with “the elusive psyche” and engage with the healing powers of the unconscious (Waggoner, 2009, pp.93, 172). These writers of the new dream consciousness emphasize the deeper knowledge that comes with the recognition of lucid dreaming for the meanings of everyday life rather than vice versa.

In view of reenchantment as a transgression of the natural attitude, it would be appropriate to consider how it is shaping attitudes to support meanings of autochthonous dream elements in the remaking of various aspects of waking life. Especially in the case of lucid dreaming that emphasizes transcendental and spiritual reawakening, reenchantment may be construed as an impetus for new forms of oneiric practice that bring to waking life alternative connections in the pursuit of self-realization. In line with the suggestion made by Stumbrys (2011, p.94), this reawakening might occur within the “crack” in the protoconscious state that could initiate deeper thought processes for promulgating spiritual searches. “Crack” is merely a metaphor that represents a rather imprecise way of describing the subtler processes that occur between primary and secondary consciousness in lucid dreaming. It implies that further research expositing a better understanding of that “crack” may reveal the underlying basis of autochthonous dream elements and how they may relate to transcendental experiences that are contributing to attitudinal changes in the context of reenchantment.

Conclusion

The debate on the continuity hypothesis seems to be at an impasse since supporters of continuity and those of discontinuity have yet to decisively offer irrefutable arguments for one or the other position. Indeed, this impasse has even prompted Domhoff (2011, p.50) to consider the exchange between Hobson & Schredl (2011) as having gone astray from the outset. Rather than treating that discussion as ineffectual, I have posited a view that highlights the changing context in which that discussion could be located. It is a context that challenges the dominance of the natural attitude in determining the normative givens of the waking world. These challenges arise from the sense of reenchantment experienced and perceived by people that no longer ascribe to the natural attitude its hegemonic influence in the constitution of the waking world. Instead, reenchantment forges alternative attitudes that not only question the natural attitude but also address the remarkableness of multiple realities spanning both the states of waking and dreaming. In this regard, the growing emphasis on dream creativity and lucidity represents the emergence of a reenchanting context for articulating the transformational powers of dreaming rather than reaffirming the presumptions derived from the natural attitude. Identifying these contextual changes may reconfigure the meaning of continuity to imply the fluidity rather than intractability of boundaries between waking and dreaming. It suggests that the continuity hypothesis could be reconceived not as an implicit endorsement of the natural attitude but as a means for inquiring into paradoxical moments when wakefulness in dreaming comes to challenge and possibly reorganize the meanings of social order in the waking world.

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