

# Oneiric bizarreness and continuity between waking and dreaming

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**Summary.** Based on real examples of oneiric bizarrenesses whose link with waking life of the previous day was established on the basis of the presence of similarities between the oneiric and waking-life feelings, the author presents observations that support the continuity hypothesis.

This continuity is robust and concerns barely mentalized, intra-subjective processes. The form of the elements that populate the dreams (animals, characters...) seem to reflect a vision that is governed by one's mind-set at that time and the oneiric elaboration presents itself as the fruit of a very precise process of creation that exploits a linguistic-like competence. The oneiric expression is better described as symbolic and regulated than metaphoric and fantastical.

**Keywords:** Continuity hypothesis, animal dreams, dreamed characters, symbolism

## 1. Introduction

The issue of continuity, an issue that can be summarized as “to what extent do dreams reflect waking-life of the previous day?”, is still under debate today. While this continuity can be understood as complete (that all elements of a dream reflect something from the preceding day's life) or as illusory (that a dream in no sense whatsoever reflects life during the previous day), it can also be understood as partial (that only one part of the dream reflects something from the life during the previous day). In the context of this debate, dreams presenting bizarrenesses have attracted particular attention because they are considered as representing possible cases of discontinuity (Hobson & Schredl, 2011; Malinowski & Horton, 2011). Here we give a contextualised presentation of our own oneiric bizarrenesses that produced affects that were sufficiently original as to render the idea of their possible link with waking-life viable. After presenting our method based on the principle of the oneiric replay of real-life affects, we demonstrate why our observations lead us to believe that dreamed bizarrenesses are not, in fact, a sign of discontinuity. We argue in favour of the possibility of a strong continuity that draws on a linguistic type competence.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Making the dream/previous days' life link by considering affect similarities

Recognising in every affect experienced in a dream, a re-diffusion of a similar, barely mentalised, affect experienced during waking life of a previous day (Ruyneau de Saint George, 2016b), we took the approach of relating the oneiric

image to a “primary” subjective stimulus (Ruyneau de Saint George, 2016a). This primary stimulus can be described as a barely perceptible psychological conglomerate. Given a mind that is otherwise occupied, this stimulus is only barely mentalised and the processes, while constituting real, albeit, muted experiences, emerge unawares and in a reflexive manner. We illustrate this with the example of finding oneself face to face with a tormenting memory, a primary subjective cognitive-affective stimulus that adopts the image of, for example, a vicious dog. Being confronted with this memory triggers a “secondary” sense of anxiety that could be expressed as “...will I manage to avoid being completely overwhelmed by this torment?”; if my defences are inadequate I will be bitten. We consider that this “secondary” sense of anxiety, the experience of which floats in the background during waking life, is fully experienced in our dreams. This similarity of affects allows us to forge a link between an oneiric experience and the real life experience from which an observation (an observed case) was produced.

These observations (that is to say, the paired oneiric/real-life elements that are related via the impressions common to both) can prove useful to the study of how dreams develop but, due to the method employed, not all are of the same quality. Indeed, in addition to the fear that can block any retrospective introspection, in addition to the risk of narcissistic, self-deception (and as a consequence, the risk of false observations) and in addition to the risk of losing oneself between the dream itself and its recreation, the technique applied here grapples with obstacles that could undermine the quality of the observations. To describe in greater detail:

- A mnemonic flaw

We have found ourselves unable to recall certain real episodes. A breakdown of 58 recent particularised dreams was carried out (2012- mid 2016: a “particularised” dream is a dream that was recorded in written form and whose details were studied, in contrast to those dreams that were merely synthesised and processed “on the fly”). This breakdown revealed that, after training (it is necessary to begin by familiarising oneself with the real-life experiences that we need to attend to due to their particular nature) mnemonic flaws affect approximately 15% of the dream/

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waking-life links. However, given that half of these memory lapses were concentrated over 10% of the dreams, the end result was that 90% of our dreams constituted acceptable material (with about 7% of scenes that could not be linked to waking life of the previous day due to mnemonic flaws). We point out also that over half of these dreams (55%) were not effected by this type of flaw.

- The issue of the uniqueness of a real experience

The linking of a dream and a real, lived experience reposes on a similarity of affects. Described in concrete terms, we look for the series of real affects that overlap with the sequence of oneiric affects. But, can we be certain of having isolated the correct sequence of real, lived affects? There is really no reason why a certain sequence of affects would not have been experienced several times during a single day and in several, different situations. That said, in certain cases, the uniqueness of a sequence of affects appears highly probable. Indeed, 20% of our particularised dreams contain an emotion or an affect such that, on the one hand, we can have little doubt about the link between the dream and waking life and, on the other hand, the probability of an unidentified recurrence of such impressions during the day appears very low. In addition, when the sequence of affects is especially long, the probability of its uniqueness is higher. We consider this to be case when the number of affects composing the sequence goes beyond 15 (which is true of 50% of our particularised dreams).

Thus, while the quality of certain dreams can be questioned based on our effort to create a dream/waking life link through a comparison of the impressions induced, others, on the contrary, present characteristics that facilitate our endeavour. The particular case of oneiric scenes that induce out of the ordinary impressions is especially interesting because they yield highly trustworthy observations.

## 2.2. "Raw" Observations/ "Fine" Observations

The principle of oneiric rediffusion of affects allows us to relate the dream to a moment in waking life of the previous day, and, depending on whether the experiences that we attend to are highly mentalised or weakly mentalised, the observation can take one of two forms.

To illustrate this, let us consider scene 3 of table 1. In this dream, I find myself face to face with snakes. By means of observation via a comparison of affects, we relate this scene to a moment of the previous day during which, believing myself to be the victim of malicious rumours spread by "poisonous tongues", I was confronted with the potentially painful thought, "...what will people say". Here we have the identification of a highly mentalised experience and, thus, the type of observation that we will refer to as "raw". We could attribute the snakes to the highly mentalised stimuli: the imagined, malicious rumours, or to the "poisonous tongues" that spread these rumours or, indeed, to the feeling encapsulated by "what will people say". However, a finer observation, one based on feelings that float in the background, would lead to another insight : something deep inside me would whisper, "Ah, had I not acted as I did, those poisonous tongues would have remained silent!". In reality, another story lies behind these highly mentalised ruminations: that of Myself being confronted by my own, potentially damaging, conduct; this confrontation was, therefore,

viewed as a challenge. In this "fine" observation, the snake is attributed to a painful, autobiographical peripeteia (my conduct); this corresponds to the general pattern observed in all of our examples of animal dreams.

Such "fine" observations, observations based on the barely mentalized, intra-subjective story (that is to say, observations that focus on the secondary processes that play out in the background) appear to give rise to certain constants in the oneiric conversion. It is for this reason that we consider that the "fine" observation provides fertile ground for studying dream. That said, a simple "raw" observation is sufficient to recognise, in the dream, the reflection of waking life of the previous day.

## 2.3. Methods employed – a sample

Our aim is to consider the phenomenon of oneiric bizarrenesses in terms of the theme of continuity and to limit ourselves to the question, "Does an oneiric scene with bizarrenesses embody a rediffusion of a recent, lived experience?". To help us respond to this question, we recapitulate, in table 1, the totality of the oneiric bizarrenesses that appeared in scenes characterised by affects classed as *hors norm*. If, in doing so, we can establish a link with waking life of the previous day, then this connection will, thereby, benefit from a high degree of reliability. Such a connection need not be anything more elaborate than a "raw" observation because such an observation is sufficient to recognise, in an oneiric element, a reflection of waking life of the preceding day.

## 3. Results

We counted 23 scenes with *hors norm* affects that present 32 different bizarrenesses and were able to link the totality of these scenes with waking life of the day preceding the dream. These dreams and their real-life antecedents are presented in Table 1. It can be deduced from the following that the oneiric bizarreness cannot be considered as an indicator of discontinuity.

## 4. Discussion – Perspectives

Thus, on the basis of highly trustworthy observations (as they are founded on a rediffusion of *hors norm* affects), it seems possible to postulate that the oneiric bizarreness itself can be related to an experience from the previous day. Occasionally, a parallel appears between the nature of the impressions: the bizarreness seems to reproduce impressions of incongruity, of surprise, of incomprehension, of facing an amazing thing experienced in real life. For instance, an element that is incongruous and unexpected emerges in a dream just as, in real life, an astonishing thought seems to emerge from nowhere. An example of this is a seemingly inevitable collision that is surprisingly avoided in the same way that, at the last minute, an unexpected intellectual pirouette saves one from a potential conflict. A meaningful juxtaposition of images may also arise, such as the example of the lion in the tree, which creates an image of a primary stimulus that combines that which the lion symbolises (see below) and that which the tree symbolises ( the attribution of meaning to this symbol has not yet been confirmed and, at present, we consider the tree as an accomplished task). The bizarreness, therefore, looks like a stylistic device that facilitates the replay of impressions of incongruity, surprise, the vision of something seen as being important.

Table 1. A summary of the bizarrenesses in the scenes characterised by *hors norm* affects.

Oneiric Scenes	Bizarrenesses	Corresponding moment from the previous day	Common impression
1. I am taking a shower	Unfamiliar place*	After some consideration, the polluting character of certain obsessive thoughts are eliminated (for good).	A marked impression of cleansing.
2. A lion perched in a tree.	A lion in a tree in France.	The vision of a great but all-consuming task.	A curious feeling comprising a combination of a tightening of the stomach and a sense of being sucked up.
3. Snakes handled in an unorthodox manner.	An unorthodox method.	Being confronted with an imagined "what will people say" directed at me. (A non-sentimental-sexual theme.)	Impressions of excitement, of concentration, of victory and of controlled fear.
4. Without warning, a white dog-bear, with a bizarre mouth bites me.	An animal, part dog, part bear with a bizarre mouth.	The reminder of a personal conduct (a memory) in which I saw myself as a "white knight", albeit, a bit heavy-handed. I ended up enduring personal torment.	Attraction, sudden pang then considerable anxiety.
5. An iguane attacks me.	Theoretically, when possible, an iguane flees.	Counter to all expectations, I am confronted with a memory, that should have remained inoffensive, but turns out to be painful.	Terror and the impression of being terrorised by something that should not cause such terror.
6. Attacked by a killer monster.	The monster.	Facing a particularly severe disappointment.	Terror and despair.
7. Physical relationship with a married mistress.	1. Unknown person*. 2. Behaviour.	The immense pleasure of a success achieved under the yoke of an uncustomary motivation. (A non-sentimental-sexual theme.)	An impression of excitement, pleasure and triumph combined with a lurking sense of guilt.
8. A sentimental embrace with P (partner), who is missing one tooth.	1. The power of the sentimental embrace. 2. They are missing a tooth.	Filled with a vision of what life might offer me, while, at the same time, anticipating something slightly upsetting. A non-sentimental-sexual theme.	An intense moment of well-being tainted by a sense of discomfort.
9. Amorous feelings with a young stranger.	A pretty, young woman expresses her affection for me.	Overwhelmed by a (dreamed of) opportunity. (One of the 2 scenes presented in this table that deals with a sentimental-sexual theme).	Hope, all-absorbing emotion of the kind experienced during one's first amorous encounter.
10. I am raining blows on my adversary.	I am beating somebody up.	I launched a pitiless attack on somebody.	An unfamiliar feeling of release and of domination.
11. Completely out of the blue, my car, which had been stationary, starts to spin around.	1. The car is spinning. 2. No visible cause.	Destabilization due to a realization following a shock, which, like an intuition-surprise, seemed to emerge from nowhere.	Surprise, the impression that things are reeling out of control, the impression of being acquainted with this type upheaval.
12. In the car and cannot put it into gear, so I remain at a standstill.	The gearbox does not function; it is blocked.	Unable to respond to a precise question, I remain stuck.	The marked feeling of being blocked and at a standstill
13. In the car, in a bend in the road, a tyre veers off the road.	1. To negotiate a bend badly. 2. It does not, however, lead to an accident.	A blunder committed in handling an affaire. I manage to salvage things.	A burst of adrenaline accompanied by a fear that, while significant, is not desperate.
14. In the car opposite a lorry and car side-by-side, which block the way. We pass each other without colliding.	1. A lorry and a car side-by-side blocking the road. 2. Passing without colliding.	With some academic pirouetting, I extricate myself from a conflict of interests (a clash of moral and economic interests).	Incomprehensible surprise, huge relief.
15. In a coach travelling at full speed.	The speed of the coach.	During a phase of activity, a sense of hurtling out of control.	The impression of being swept along.
16. A door suddenly opens at the side of the road on bend that the coach cannot take, due to the speed at which it is travelling. We pass through this door, which opened, unaided, onto a track, thus allowing the coach to break.	1. A door at the side of the road. 2. A sudden appearance "as if by magic". 3. The door opened autonomously.	As if by a surprise-intuition, a surprising and unforeseen solution suddenly appears.	Immense fear, surprise and a return to calm.
17. In an inflatable boat on a stormy sea.	1. An inflatable boat in the open sea. 2. The strange appearance of certain waves.	The impression of not being equipped to face a project strewn with upheavals.	Shocks that are peculiar and all consuming.
18. Wonderment while orbiting the world in a rocket.	In a rocket in space.	A phase of exaltation.	Wonderment tinged with a fear of the depths.
19. I am flying and am rattled when a stone is thrown at me.	1. I am flying. 2. A stone thrown from a distance and from below (implying that, theoretically, it has little force when it hits me) produces an impact that is powerful enough to rattle me.	Rattled by an accusation that would normally have had little effect while I considered myself at the height of a successful phase.	Shock, surprise, disarray, bewilderment.
20. I am not fully dressed.	Incomplete outfit.	A moment of disconcertment.	Disconcertment, the unusual impression of being "left out in the cold".
21. I eat a bar of chocolate while in the middle of preparing for an imminent bombing.	1. The bombing. 2. Eating a bar of chocolate at such a time.	A moment of respite whilst anticipating difficulties.	The curious feeling of having a brief moment of respite and of pleasure in the midst of a phase of anxiety.
22. I experience the onset of a malaise.	A malaise.	The culmination of a period of (accidental) melancholy	Despair.
23. Gassed by a post-card.	A toxic gas-emitting post-card.	In the grip of nostalgia.	The impression of passing away all the while remaining conscious.

Note. \*The discontinuities due to the unfamiliar nature of the places and characters are presented in other cases listed in the above table ; we make the most of them. Each one corresponds to a singular (a non-familiar aspect), real lived experience.

#### 4.1. A metaphorical expression

To explain an oneiric bizarreness, certain authors base their hypothesis on the continuity and advance the possibility of a metaphorical oneiric expression (Malinowski & Horton, 2011). On the basis of our “raw” observations we recognised this phenomenon of the metaphorical expression: in the dream we can fly, we can move at great speed and sail on a small, fragile vessel to re-diffuse the real impression of a certain type of well-being, to recreate the feeling of being “drawn into an affaire” that, at times, imposes its own rhythm or of being badly equipped to fulfil one’s goals; the examples are numerous.

We believe that this manifestation is the consequence of at least two phenomena that we frequently encountered: the phenomenon of resonance and that of reverberation. In the case of the phenomenon of resonance, a real, secondary affect seems to have the same substance as a primary affect. For example, the secondary anxiety of not handling a primary anxiety, i.e. the joy of being joyful... In the phenomenon of reverberation, the effect of a barely mentalized stimulus is similar to the effect of a highly mentalized stimulus, as is the case in the example of the snakes (an example presented in paragraph 2.2 in which the highly mentalized situation of being faced with the potentially painful thought, “what will people say” is accompanied, in the background, - and this is what is re-diffused in the dream -, by a memory of a personal conduct that we experienced as potentially painful). In these circumstances it is not surprising that the highly mentalized story is linked, by analogy, to the oneiric story, as the oneiric story often re-diffuses intra-subjective experiences that may resonate or reverberate with a highly mentalized story.

On the other hand, a fine study, a study based on intra-subjective experiences, is founded on a well-defined language and would, therefore, appear to argue in favour of an oneiric expression that goes beyond metaphor.

#### 4.2. A well-defined symbolic expression?

After a detailed observation of our 19 dreams involving animals we discerned a constant conversion: in all of our dreams, including those comprising bizarrenesses, the animal symbolised an emotionally charged, autobiographical peripeteia, real or fantasized (Ruyneau de Saint George, 2016a). The dog-bear (table 1, scenario 4), the iguana (table 1, scenario 5) and the snakes (table 1, scenario 3) represent memories of personal conduct from the, distant or immediate past. The lion (table 1, scenario 2), for instance, represented a fantasized, future autobiographical peripeteia (the thought of an imminent conduct had consumed us to such an extent that our awareness of virtuality disappeared at that time and throughout this imaginative flight everything was played out as if the future act, albeit imagined, had been a reality).

In line with what appears to emerge in our other dreams, the form that the symbol adopts seems to be founded on the momentary intra-subjective appraisal of the act, with a focus on the primary stimulus. Could it be that the conduct was considered as being noble? The animal did take the form of a lion. Did it possess any crude connotation? The animal adopted the form of an iguana. Did I judge myself as being irreproachable, albeit a bit heavy-handed? The dog was white and part bear. However, the consistency between the form adopted by the image and the reality appears to go

further still and the oneiric creation points to an astounding inventiveness and ability to re-create. Taking, for instance, the case of the iguana, whose bite and tail whip I fear, the generator of the dream adapted the form of the animal to the memory. This memory was ill-considered because of its association with a conduct that was deemed, wrongly or otherwise, coarse (element pertaining to the iguana). It was also a memory whose tormenting effect I feared (a focussing on what was considered a failure/a bite) just as much as its guilt-inducing effect (a focussing on a feeling of one’s own inadequacy/a laceration). In the case of the devouring lion, the generator of the dream forged a form in such a way that it echoed a behaviour that while perceived, rightly or wrongly, as noble, was also perceived as having devoured one’s time and, therefore, one’s life. Taking the case of the dog, a more classic form of an “animal” symbol; the generator of the dream produced a form that corresponded to a memory that was partly gratifying (the cuddly aspect of the dog) but that could “turn sour”.

The oneiric reproduction of the appraisal, correct or otherwise, of the primary stimulus, via the form of the symbol, seems to be just as effective in dreams comprising characters.

A study of 40 dreams involving characters permitted us to recognise in them a symbol of the “will to push forward” (an expectation, an obligation, a part of oneself that seeks to obtain this or to avoid that...), possessing a motivation of greater or lesser power, being in a state of greater or lesser satisfaction or dissatisfaction and of a motivation with a functional basis (the choice of character was consistent with the intra-subjective contexts; the “*I owe it to myself to...*” is converted into a figure of authority, the “*what I expect from life*” appears to manifest itself through the presence of a partner, a sense of motivation and inspiration symbolised by a peer...).

Thus, for example, the “raw” observation links the scene of amorous feelings shared with a young stranger (table 1, scene 9) with a moment of joyful hope experienced during the previous day while considering an opportunity. A finer observation revealed it to be a manifestation of an emotionally charged motivation that brought us closer to a sense of satisfaction; our frame of mind at that time was such that the driven character in question was cherished, although it was felt with a certain lack of maturity. The generator of the dream created a feminine face, young (and unfamiliar because the stimulus was not customary).

The plasticity of the symbol’s form is such that it seems that this same driven character could be symbolised by different characters. For example, the driven character attributed to P. (table 1, scene 8; a high probability of correct attribution) is the same as that attributed to the husband of the married mistress (table 1, scene 7; moderate probability of correct attribution). But this plasticity is very evidently regulated on the basis of the intra-subjective appraisal of the context: the married mistress was attributed (with a very high probability of correct attribution) to a driven character that is seen as complementing the driven character symbolised by her husband (by this we understand their marriage) and which, for a brief period, I embraced (the mistress). This motivation was considered as perverted and contrary to the driven character symbolised by the husband (the wife betrays a commitment made to her husband for no reason and, in the dream, this was experienced as the source of the husband’s misfortune).

We will not comment on the other dreams as these concerned artefacts (vehicles...) and, despite recognising them as constant and regulated conversions, we have not yet arrived at a satisfying global formulation. We take, however, this opportunity to point out an advantage of an introspective investigation that is carried out by the experimenter: this technique allows one to access those manifestations that have not been formalised and which would, therefore, elude the questioning of an external experimenter.

## 5. Conclusion

By means of the principle of the oneiric replay of experiences, 23 oneiric bizarrenesses were linked to recent real-life experiences. These connections are considered as highly probable because these oneiric scenes were selected on the basis of the out-of-the-ordinary nature of the impressions experienced therein. The observations presented support the hypothesis of continuity.

A finer observation of the oneiric conversion of intra-subjective experiences (i.e. secondary processes that play out in the background) has led us to believe that the oneiric imagery may be founded on a lexicon (the fundamental "symbols": animals, characters, artefacts, flora, natural elements...) whose form originates from an intra-subjective appraisal of the real-life moment replayed in the dream. This argues in favour of the hypothesis of robust continuity.

We do not wish to suggest that a real situation can only be expressed in one, specific manner, that is to say, by a single, pre-determined dream. Indeed, in the same way that a meaning can be conveyed by different sentences, there is nothing to prevent us from believing that the same real-life situation can give rise to different dreams. However, just as a sentence can express something pre-determined thanks to spoken production, the fruit of a miraculous routine that uses only those words that adhere to a grammar, we believe that a dream is the product of a process of creation that is just as routine-based and, at the same time, astonishing, and which uses symbols that are fashioned in a regulated manner to represent, in detail, something determined (the intra-subjective experience). Considered in this light, the hypothesis of robust continuity could be understood as the exploitation of a linguistic-like competence for the creation of a dream.

Of course, this perspective needs to be taken with caution as it arises from a sample of observations made by one person.

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