

CASE REPORT

Infra-Dreaming and Dream-Awake States: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The rare occurrence of the continuation and magnification of dream content, “reality,” and “free-wheeling” dynamics (fleeting, poignant, meaningful, and meaningless), intersecting with and interspersed within awake reality and consciousness is here described, for lack of better terms or known conditions, as infra-dreaming, or infra-reality. This term is borrowed from a literary source, “infrarealism,” because it captures the seamless spilling over of dream and dream-like consciousness into wakeful consciousness with a melding of the two, without obvious or diagnosed mental disorders, but with significant (observable) temporary deficits in short and long term memory.

Keywords: REM, infra-dreaming, long-term memory, dream-wakeful lucidity

(*Infra*: below, further on)

*...Mathematicians and theologians, diviners
and bandits emerged
like aquatic realities in the midst of a metallic reality.
Only fever and poetry provoke visions.
Only love and memory...*

--Poem excerpt, “Dirty, Poorly Dressed,” by Roberto Bolaño (2008)

INTRODUCTION

This mostly phenomenological and case study report addresses the rare occurrence here described as infra-dreaming. This term is borrowed and adapted from a literary source, “infrarealism” because it captures the seamless spilling over of dream and dream-like consciousness into wakeful consciousness with a melding of the two, without obvious or diagnosed mental disorders, but with significant (observable) temporary deficits in short and long term memory.

The author (JCS), a chronic sleep paralysis experiencer and lucid dreamer for almost fifty years, has only recently (the last five years) experienced, upon waking up and lasting several hours, a poignant and naturally occurring meshing-confluence of dream and awake information and realities—their seamless amalgamation—upon awakening and continuing several hours afterward (5-7 hours, postdormital). All three circumstances and events occurred near or in the middle of the Pacific Ocean—Maui, HI, and La Jolla, CA. (For related and additional

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work—its significance to this case study—see Conesa (2000; 2002).

Phenomenological Characteristics and Description

Infra-dreaming (for lack of a proper term or known definition), is the free-wheeling-creative (and unstable) machinery of dream processes usually forgotten unless they are personally relevant, lucid, or associated with ongoing conditions or situations, continuing well after awakening. Dreaming itself, and the conjoining of dream content with ordinary reality, are in an interactive and consciously recognizable (discriminable) but not always cognitively optimal “free play” (fleeting, poignant, meaningful, and meaningless). That is:

- 1) The process-flow and details of the previous night's dream content (and from other dreams or dream-like material) continues, overlapping and interspersed with ongoing awake reality. Process, meaning and images are shared, interchanged, updated, in a present and converging experience, between recognizable and distinguishable dream and awake realities--juxtaposed.
- 2) Mostly dream visual and verbal information dovetails precisely, antagonistically, and/or creatively—also in harmony with—ongoing wakeful cognitive processes in seamless and almost fully functional fashion with noticeable semantic memory interference for certain types of information (read below, #5, for a description of some cognitive deficits).
- 3) Rather than a true melding or mixing of dream and present reality contents, there is a meta-recognition and awareness that these are two distinct but interactive experiential (cognitive) stream-tracks or flows of, if not consciousness, at least information.
- 4) The experiencer (JCS) recognizes (distinguishes) and follows, with full facility of lucid cognitive function and unimpaired physical movements, in tandem, the products of this dual and mixed mentation.
- 5) Significant deficits in short and long term memory are also experienced during the peak and at the tail-end of the occurrence. During the intruding dream

mentation, and while waning, subject forgot frequently used and very familiar computer passwords, song titles, etc.

- 6) The confluence of dream content, confusing or seemingly nonsensical information (mostly images and text), and also meaningful creative processes with ordinary reality is relatively short-lived and occurred starting in the morning hours—5-7 hours post awakening—from 8 a.m. until about 3 p.m., with peak experiences 4-5 hours postdormital.

The experiences above described are analogous to the literary ambiguity of unaccountable nouns (e.g., “information”). A mass noun, “information,” cannot be counted. We cannot say, for example, “one information,” or “many informations.” Employing this literary analogy, recognizable dream content is neither with itself nor part of awake reality. Rather, an amalgamated and fused experience (also discrete and unambiguous; as the observer-experiencer can readily and easily tell the difference between dream-like or dream content per se and ordinary, ongoing reality) emerges with recognizable features (memories) of both dream content and ongoing information while in ordinary reality (fully and functionally awake).

Using the words of David-Hall Green (1986) and describing the work of artist Stanislaw Kors, this dual but conjoined experience seems to integrate dualistic aspects of “reality” (“organic and inorganic, man and beast, or fire and rock”). It is “free-wheeling” and non-discriminant—open-ended but in narrative, sequential form.

Most references found in the literature, that on the surface resemble the above state, if it is a state at all, describe dysfunctional (depriving of health and psychological well-being; e.g., drunkenness) states. To the extent that the author and experiencer is only an infrequent consumer of alcohol and does not use other mind-enhancing or altering drugs, and is healthy, other conditions and states might be contributing to infra-dreaming, such as fatigue after mental exertion and unusually rich (intellectually and interpersonally demanding) or complex social interactions—university teaching. More positive descriptions are akin to creative fugues and insights.

Sleeping, Memory, and “Other” Conditions

In two of the three occasions when infra-dreaming was recognized as a unique and infrequent state of consciousness, closely observed and catalogued, the subject was sleep deprived and/or had been cognitively engaged, intensely so—teaching, going over new information and concepts, lecturing, and managing learning in a classroom. That is, JCS went to bed four or five hours past his normal bedtime, after teaching five hours, was late to rise, had not eaten well or at all, and had been engaged in performing multiple tasks—an unusual array and overload of both cognitive and physical activities—unusual and infrequent task demands. Thus the demand characteristics (cognitive, situational, interpersonal, intrapersonal, creative, etc.) preceding and perhaps even triggering this unusual and longer lasting experience were both intense and non-habitual—outside normal functional parameters.

Unlike previous occasions, the most recent event lasted longer, close to eight hours, and could be perfectly and clearly described as any other observable and ongoing cognitive process in real time.

Without known relevance or causal connection at this point, but of scientific interest nevertheless, the latest occurrence coincided with a considerable change in barometric pressure (the precise barometric transition from high to very low and fluctuations in between) and a major storm system that lasted several days. During the events described above and transitions thereof, the sea level pressure fluctuated between 1008.2 mb (1/4/'16 at 13:51) and 1013.9 (mb) (1/5/'16 at 9:51) (US NOAA's National Weather Service). It is not scientifically known at this point whether physiological changes of this type can be attributed to changes in environmental barometric pressure, which might also trigger changes in ordinary and dream consciousness—“mental life.” However, the relationship between “atmospherics” and psychological and physiological processes has been scientifically studied (Conesa, 2000; Dvorak, 1978; Schory, Pecznik, Nar, and El-Mallakh, 2003). More specifically, alterations of sleep patterns with concomitant changing barometric pressure

have also been reported in the literature (Web and Ades, 1964).

Finally, it is important to note that the most recent episode (Jan. 5, 2016) of infra-dreaming, if that is the term that shall endure, occurring after teaching the first university course of the calendar year where some expectations are higher, after a teaching hiatus and holiday break of roughly a month, might have been precipitated by longer lasting and intermingled creative and social processes unusual in their intensity and duration. When environmental and intrapersonal circumstances change, the brain might adaptively “prime-up” to new sets of standards and expectations, with dreaming and dreaming functional remnants “tagging along.”

However, if this is an as yet undiagnosed form of REM dysfunction, enduring post-awakening, then a medical approach to its amelioration might be in order.

CONCLUSION

If observed in other subjects and/or described by others, the integrated and liminal zone “awake—dreaming,” here described as infra-dreaming, can be taken to be another example of the great fluidity of consciousness states blending, interchanging or swapping “data” while in the service of interpretative modalities and while under, admittedly, cognitive and social duress— affective as well. To wit, for a complex mind evolutionarily honed to “problem solving” approaches across many dimensions of human social and personally insular cognitive situations (social as well as intrapersonal), it matters more that more solutions rather than fewer are produced, that they are longer-lasting and effecting, creative rather than dull, frequent and speedy rather than slow-coming, that multi-pronged creative approaches be deployed to answer shifting, uncertain, and demanding circumstances. A mind interested in, forced to, and/or preoccupied with intricate problem solving will find a way to meet these challenges from several cognitive (consciousness) platforms, states, and/or perspectives.

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