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Dreaming and Narrative Theory

Richard Walsh

If it is a matter of common experience that there is something uncanny about dreams, this is more than usually true for narratologists. From a narrative point of view, dreaming in itself is both familiar and alien: on the one hand the virtuality of dream experience has long been invoked as the archetypal instance of immersion in a fiction; on the other hand, this same sense of dreaming as hallucinatory experience would seem to disqualify it from consideration as narrative at all. The ambiguous status of dreaming, as experience or as narrative, is the starting point for the argument of this essay, which has two stages. The first is to make the case for viewing dreams as narrative; the second is to show that if you accept the narrative view of dreams, there are far-reaching consequences for narrative theory. Of course the need to confront these consequences does not arise if you are unpersuaded by the first stage of the argument, and my fear is that the narrative view of dreams may encounter resistance on the grounds, precisely, that the consequences are unacceptable. But it is a tautological way of thinking that defines its theoretical objects as only those things that fit the theory. I have sought to overcome this resistance (this dream censorship, if you like) by considering the merit of a narrative view of dreams, in the first instance, without regard to consequences.

Daniel Dennett has made a provocative case against the "received view" that dreams are experiences that occur during sleep, from the perspective of an intentional theory of mind; but his argument ultimately focuses upon the hazy boundaries of what

counts as experience rather than any sense that dreams are narrative representations. Dennett distinguishes three components of dreaming implied by an experiential model: a (normally unconscious) process of composition; the presentation of the dream (to the experiencing mind); and its recording (in memory, for possible later recollection). The first and third of these, he suggests, may sufficiently account for dreaming without the second, in which case the sense of dream experience is not in fact primary but the retrospective product of a memory trace. That is to say, though he doesn't do so explicitly, the sense of dream experience is a product of narrative representation (1981: 132-7). Dennett's approach conflates an argument against the idea of dreams as (hallucinatory) experience with one against there being any such thing as experiencing a dream. The latter argument seems unwarranted, and indeed disconfirmed by more recent dream research, most obviously by research on lucid (self-aware) dreaming. Dennett accommodates lucid dreams as follows: "although the composition and recording processes are entirely unconscious, on occasion the composition process inserts traces of itself into the recording via the literary conceit of a dream within a dream" (138). On the face of it this is a plausible move, but in fact it doesn't capture the specific quality of lucid dreams at all: it says, in effect, that you weren't really aware that you were dreaming—you just dreamt that you were. I shall return to lucid dreams, and some of the research results that conflict with Dennett's account, later in this essay; but for now I want to suggest that a modified version of his argument remains useful for the purpose in hand. Rather than treating the memory trace of a dream globally, as a narrative product only experienced retrospectively (on waking), we can conceive of it as a narrative

process, the experience of which is ongoing and recursive for the dreamer. Experiencing a dream, in that case, is experiencing a narrative process: a reciprocal process of creation and reception.

The narrative view of dreams requires a representational discourse: Manfred Jahn, reviewing the status of dreams in response to a question raised by Gerald Prince, comments that "hallucinatory perception, like real perception, cannot be (a) narrative. However, if Freud is right and dreams are the product of a fiction-creating 'dreamwork' device, then they are based on a multimedial mode of composition much like that of film" (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005: 126). The appeal to Freud here is perhaps unnecessary, the notion of a dreamwork being the least specifically Freudian element of his theory of dreams; and if we confine ourselves to the aspect of the dreamwork he labels "secondary revision" (that is to say the effort to impose order and coherence upon the dream materials) then it doesn't even presuppose the necessary existence of unconscious "dream thoughts" as the obliquely articulated content of the dream (Freud 1976: 628-51). The narrative view of dreams I want to present is broadly based, and while it can accommodate a Freudian interpretation of the source of dream materials, it does not depend upon any such interpretation. The notion of the dreamwork is helpful, and I shall return to it; but the narrative approach is better founded upon an appeal to the work being done on dreams within the context of the cognitive sciences.

The main lines of debate in dream research over the last few decades have been structured around a confrontation between psychological accounts grounded upon mental functions and physiological accounts grounded upon brain chemistry. The debate has

been as much about the questions worth asking (and the research worth funding) as the nature of dreaming itself; many points of apparently intractable difference might equally be regarded as complementary, and indeed there has been a significant convergence of views on several key issues in recent years. Representative of the psychological perspective is David Foulkes, for whom dreaming is the operation of reflective consciousness in sleep; a champion of the physiological perspective is J. Allan Hobson, for whom dreaming is best referred, on an activation-synthesis model, to sleeping brain states (Foulkes 1999; Hobson 2002). For the purposes of my argument here, it is worth noting that dreaming according to Foulkes is definitionally representational and narrative rather than experiential, because it corresponds to our waking consciousness of our experience, not to that experience itself (1999: 3). Dreaming is not reducible to stimulus-response because it is creative; it is an aspect of our "reflective ability to think in images" (15). He argues accordingly for a cognitive equivalence between dreams and memories—or, more specifically, "conscious episodic recollection" (145).

Hobson, on the other hand, places much more emphasis upon the dissociation of dreaming from waking consciousness, and particularly the cognitive deficiencies associated with dreaming: "diminished self-awareness, diminished reality testing, poor memory, defective logic … inability to maintain directed thought" (2002: 111). These features, he argues, correlate with distinctive states of various regions of the brain during REM and non-REM sleep, as revealed by brain imaging (108-15). Hobson's emphasis upon the chemically distinct conditions of dream consciousness supports his analogy between dreaming and delirium (101), but the analogy does not ultimately resolve into a

theory of dreaming as hallucinated experience. This is because the brain activation element of the theory is necessarily complemented by an element of synthesis, which explains how the hallucinatory and emotional effects of brain activation are integrated in a more or less coherent, novel, and personally meaningful way (47). Hobson is cautious about using the word "narration" because he equates it with language and therefore with dream reports, whereas "dreams themselves are experienced more like films. They are multimedia events, including fictitious movement…. Thus, we use the term 'narration' advisedly to signal the coherence of dream experience, which is all the more remarkable given the apparent chaos of REM sleep dreaming" (146-7). This is indeed (multimedia) narration, however, and the usage is supported by another descriptive term that Hobson offers as central to the dream-delirium analogy, which is "confabulation"—the psychiatric term for the fabrication of imaginary events as compensation for a loss of memory (101).

Both Foulkes and Hobson define their object of study in terms of the formal features of the process, dreaming, rather than the content analysis of the product, dreams. Both are careful to disentangle the features of dreaming from those of sleep, and REM sleep in particular, and in considering the evolutionary role of dreams both allow that they may be merely epiphenomenal. REM sleep itself is evidently essential to life in mammals, but for Foulkes dreaming emerges too late, phylogenetically and ontogenetically, to be integral to the basic adaptive functions of sleep, and is probably an incidental by-product of the intersection of two phenomena which are themselves clearly adaptive, consciousness and internally generated cortical activation in sleep (1999:

137-41). For Hobson the brain activity associated with dreaming is adaptive, serving to reorder and update our memory systems, irrespective of dream recall, which may simply result from the circumstantial intrusion of this process into consciousness (2002: 87-8). These considerations do not exclude the possibility that there are cognitive benefits to dreaming, or indeed that any such benefits may be closely related to narrative competence (I'll return to this idea later). Without prejudice to such possibilities, though, the narrative view of dreams can be further consolidated by noting that both Foulkes and Hobson introduce the role of cognitive processing rather late in their accounts. They appear to confine the cognitive dimension of dreaming to reflective consciousness about dream phenomena, or to a synthetic role in the integration of such phenomena. Yet inasmuch as a dream element is recognisable at all (a cigar, say, rather than just a pattern of light) it is not merely phenomenal but perceptual, and already a cognitive product. This is true of all percepts, of course, whatever the phenomenal stimulus, so it doesn't in itself mark any departure from the realm of experience. The essential difference arises with the possibility that the perceptual apparatus may function semiotically, as a representational medium.

I take my semiotic frame of reference from C. S. Peirce, although there is some ambiguity as to whether Peirce himself regarded percepts as fully semiotic, partly because there is a discernible change in his thinking on this point between earlier and later writings, and partly because his usage of the term "percept" appears to be inconsistent (Bergman). He distinguishes the percept from, on the one hand, the "phaneron" or sensory phenomenon, and on the other, the perceptual judgment; the

percept as interpreted in perceptual judgment he designates as the "percipuum." However the percept is known *only* as mediated by perceptual judgment, and Peirce seems sometimes to use the term "percept" to refer to the complex as a whole (Bergman 17-18). In this broader sense the percept is fully semiotic: representational, intentional and communicative (to the future self). It has been argued that even in the narrow sense the percept should be understood as an iconic sign (Ransdell 1986), but that is incidental here because the internally generated percepts of dreams are necessarily percepts under the interpretation of perceptual judgment, which is in effect the base level of the process Freud called "secondary revision."

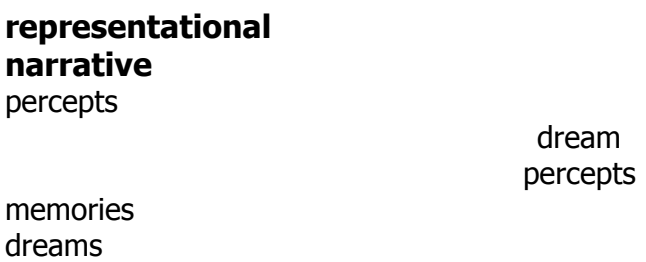
One aspect of the iconicity of percepts that merits further comment, though, is their place within the evolutionary hierarchy of signs favoured by (for example) Terrence Deacon. In the evolutionary model, the *icon* (of which the percept is the paradigm) is the most primitive kind of sign, characterised by a present relation of similarity to its referent; the *index* still involves a present relation, but is merely associative, as in a conditioned response; whereas only the *symbol* proper, product of a sign system, functions in an absent relation to its referent (Deacon 1997). The hallucinatory percepts of dreams, however, do indeed function in the absence of their referents: they are generated, once we get beyond the initial stimulus of unspecified brain activity, out of the cognitive repertoire of mental imagery upon which the dreamer draws in the sense-making effort Freud called secondary revision, which is—to reiterate—an integral part of the dream formation. The "secondariness" of secondary revision is relative to a Freudian primary process of "dream thought" representation; the distinction is muddied

somewhat, though, by Freud's occasional application of the term to a further stage of revision at the point of reporting the dream (1976: 658-9). Similarly, the narrative status of dreams is obscured in much psychological writing on the subject by the standard methodological distinction between the dream experience and the retrospective, narrative dream report (cf. Hobson's reservations above). Nonetheless, all dreams are post-cognitive productions: that is to say, all dreams we are in principle capable of recalling, granted that this is not the sum of measurable brain activity during sleep—but that means all dreams, in the generally accepted sense of the word. In this respect, as Foulkes argues, they are directly comparable to memories, which draw upon the same resources of mental imagery. The apparently qualitative difference in the experiential characteristics of the two—the evanescence of memory versus the perceptual intensity of dreams—can be seen as a difference of degree, not kind: the mental imagery of most dreams is more vivid than that of most memories because any inhibiting awareness of our actual somatic sensory environment is radically attenuated in sleep. As cognitive applications of mental imagery, dreams and memories are discourse; and most of the dreams of most dreamers are narrative, just as episodic memories are narrative, by which I mean simply that they represent discrete temporal experiences: they articulate human time. Accordingly, the element of dream formation that I have until now referred to using Freud's term, "secondary revision," can be redescribed, if with some avowed over-generality, as the process of narration.

The salient difference in kind between a memory and a dream is not that one is true and the other is false: there is such a thing as false memory, and dreams may

represent actual experiences, without detracting from the integrity of either mental activity. The difference is that the generative principles of each are antithetical in a crucial respect: the dominant cognitive imperative of memory is its adequacy to prior experiential fact, however much that imperative may be co-opted by subjective interests in the particular case; whereas the dominant cognitive imperative of dreaming, however much it takes account of adequacy to prior experience, is the satisfaction of present mental needs (some very obvious and general, such as the expression of desires or the management of anxieties, others rather more obscure or circumstantial). These cognitive drivers, I suggest, are of complementary rhetorical kinds: that is to say, the fundamental distinction between dreams and memories is not between falsehood and truth, still less between illusion and experience, but between fiction and non-fiction.

Perception is a representation of the world: that is experience, but it is also the foundation of the cognitive narrative faculty, the products of which are available to (episodic) memory. The salient feature of dream percepts is that they are *fictive* representations, and that of dreams is that they are fictive *narratives*. These four concepts and three qualities intersect as in figure 1: percepts are representational but not fictive and not narrative; memories are representational and narrative but not fictive; dream percepts are representational and fictive but not narrative; dreams are representational, fictive, and narrative.



fictive

Figure 1

Where is the self in this narrative view of dreaming? There appears to be a tension between the "I" who experiences and participates in dream events and the "I" who produces the dream. But it is important to recognise, first of all, that the experiential "I" of dreams, whether as agent or witness, is itself part of the dream, a product of the process of dream formation or narration, and a contingent part at that, since there are dreams that include no self-representation. Secondly, and in general, the self is the subject as object: there is a reflexiveness inherent in the concept that explains why it is impossible for the subject to be entirely present to itself, for that would exclude any position from which, and to which, to present itself. Even a minimal sense of self involves reflective consciousness, which involves some displacement of the subject. Dreams are by the subject and for the subject, with the same ongoing reciprocity as waking thought; and they are of course always in some sense about or of the subject, if not always representationally of the self. The perceptual rather than conceptual nature of self-representation in dreams does not amount to the primacy of experience, therefore: it is simply inherent in the fact that the medium of dreams is the perceptual system itself.

There is another sense in which reflective consciousness is at play in dreams, which is that normally associated with lucid dreaming. The essence of a lucid dream is the dreamer's *awareness* that it is a dream, a representational use of the perceptual system rather than an attempt to assimilate primary phenomenal data. It may follow from

such awareness that it becomes possible to consciously direct the course of the dream, and so lucid dreaming is often understood to include this feature as well. The ability to recognise that one is dreaming can be cultivated, and this has made possible extensive long term studies of lucid dream experience under laboratory conditions (LaBerge and DeGracia 2000). This research confirms that "lucidity in dreams is not a discrete phenomenon, but that reflective consciousness exists in all dreams and can be measured on a continuum with 'lucidity' and 'non-lucidity' representing two ends of the spectrum" (2000: 269-70). Three components of the lucid dream context may be distinguished, as follows: a metacognitive context, which is reflective consciousness itself; a semantic context, which is the framework of knowledge and belief within which the dream experience is understood; and a goal-option framework within which intentional action becomes possible. Metacognition can occur in all dreams, but whereas in most dreams it is articulated with reference to the dream context itself, in lucid dreams proper it includes waking contexts as well, providing for an awareness of contrasts between the two (274-75). Even the latter form of metacognition is not wholly exclusive to lucid dreams, however: a tacit awareness of such contrasts is a general feature of dream experience, being latent, for example, in the sense of strangeness that accompanies many dreams.

The semantic context of lucid dreaming determines the scope of response on the dreamer's part. Straightforwardly, this amounts to the generic expectations invoked by the recognition, "this is a dream," though it may be assimilated within different generic frames of reference, such as "out-of-body experience" or "astral projection" (275). Such alternative ways of conceptualising the experience bring with them different

expectations, and so tend to inhibit or privilege different kinds of represented action. But this is also true, of course, for different senses of what "this is a dream" might imply. Most narratologists, I'm sure, are aware that they tend to have narratologists' dreams; and lucid dream researchers are similarly influenced by their own preconceptions. The kinds of intentional action emphasised in lucid dream research are clearly oriented towards the context of the laboratory based study of lucid dreams: they frame the general goal-option context in terms of voluntary choices of action within the dream environment, with particular emphasis upon deliberate metacognitive checking of state of consciousness (i.e. techniques for consolidating and sustaining lucidity), and the recall and performance of pre-planned actions in order to further experimental objectives (276, 282). These latter actions include, for example, making emphatic upward glances, a signal designed to exploit the laboratory apparatus for monitoring REM sleep as a channel of communication; and counting to ten between upward glances, in order to make a verifiable estimate of the passage of time within the dream. (The effectiveness of these strategies is unclear: certainly the eye movements during REM sleep do not generally map well onto dream content).

It might seem that, in principle, the onset of lucidity in a dream should make anything possible. In fact it has proved far easier, at least within the context of these experimental assumptions, to exercise control over the represented self—even beyond the limitations of natural laws—than to consciously affect the dream environment. It is perhaps unsurprising that the creative freedom of the lucid dreamer should be so circumscribed, however, for several reasons. The first, as I have already suggested, is that

the semantic context within which dreaming is conceptualised has parameters of its own—for example, a tendency to discriminate sharply between the experiential self of the dream and the dream environment. The second (which is in part a pragmatic justification for the first) is that the precondition of lucidity is reflexivity, and it is therefore best sustained by focussing upon the dream self as the representational embodiment of that reflexivity. Thirdly, the precondition of any narrative dream whatever is some degree of coherence and continuity, a cognitive effort which necessarily draws upon the cognitive contexts of waking life. And finally, there is a curious double relation between lucidity and immersion which is worth closer consideration.

Metacognitive awareness of the dream state is justifiably associated with a degree of detachment from the perceptual-cognitive experience. Indeed, the need to control and contain overwhelming experiences of fear or anxiety, for example, is one of the commonest reasons for the onset of lucidity: it's all right, it's only a dream. And although lucid dream experiments have proved that "some sensory experiences are well modelled by the brain in the absence of primary sensory input" and can be voluntarily induced, the sensation of pain in particular is much less accessible (296). In this respect, lucidity appears to be a defence against the risks of immersion in a dream, allowing the dreamer to hold it at arm's length and keep out of harm's way. On the other hand, lucidity strongly correlates with immersion in the sense of a participatory involvement in the dream environment, rather than detached observation of it—or in narratological terms, homodiegesis rather than heterodiegesis. Similarly, the perceptual environment of dreams

in general may range from minimal realisation, in which sensory qualities are mostly absent or attenuated, up to typical sensory perception and even beyond, to vibrantly psychedelic experiences: lucid dreams are typically at the higher end of the scale, appearing more perceptually vivid than other dreams, and accompanied correspondingly by relatively intense brain activation. A reasonable inference from the association between lucidity and psychedelic dreams would be that lucid dreams, far from being more superficial and detached, often bring to perception deeper neurological processes than usual (285-6). These conflicting views of the relation between lucidity and immersion suggest that the latter is a rather catch-all concept, and that it is important to distinguish between different senses of the term.

Immersion within a simulation, whether a physical environment, a technologically virtual analogue, or a mental model (a thought experiment, say), is an experiential matter in the sense that it provides for agency, action and reaction, within the limits defined by the parameters of the simulation. Specifically narrative immersion is generally understood as a special case of mental simulation, provided for by mimetic representation and necessarily constrained to a passive, receptive stance by the determinate nature of narrative. Note that this account of narrative immersion concerns the consumption of narrative: narrative creativity, on the same basis, is understood as a prior, authorial run through the simulation, of which the narrative itself is the product or trace (see Ryan 2001: 110-14). Dreams, it is worth insisting, are creative: but it is not plausible to define that creativity as the tracing of a path through the preconceived parameters of a simulation. Dreams necessarily unfold within the terms of some situational premises,

without which they would have no coherence or stability at all, but they are remarkable precisely for the fluidity with which these parameters can change in the course of the ongoing dreamwork, and in accordance with ideas emergent out of the representational particulars of that activity. Simulations and narratives are in a crucial sense antithetical, as ludologists insist: simulation is a top-down concept, a modelling of the logic and general laws defining an environment, whereas narrative representation unfolds as a bottom-up process, via particulars. Because dreams use the perceptual system as their medium of articulation, they lend themselves to the assumption that they conform to, or even are paradigmatic of, an experiential concept of immersion in a virtual environment. But the perceptual system in this context is discursive and generative—its semiotic capacity harnessed creatively—so that the sense of immersion here is not experiential, but itself a semiotic product, and therefore in no way incompatible with the foregrounded awareness of artifice that constitutes lucidity in dreams.

If there are good grounds for regarding dreams as narrative fictions, however, the implications of doing so are far-reaching for narrative theory. Dreams elude many basic narratological assumptions, perhaps because of the peculiarity of their circumstances, or perhaps because these very circumstances bring them closer to the nub of the matter than other kinds of narrative. At the very least, narrative theory should be able to accommodate dreams; and it might do well to learn from them.

Fictionality

The fictionality of dreams in itself resists explanation in conventional narratological

terms. Fictionality is treated, by both the pretence model of fictive discourse in speech act theory and the fictional worlds model of fictive reference, as fundamentally a problem of truthfulness. In the first case fiction is distinguished from seriously asserted narrative; in the second, it is distinguished from reference to the actual world. Yet it seems bizarre, on the one hand, to conceive of a dreamer pretending the dreamwork, or of dreaming as pretending to remember; and on the other hand the contingency of dream representations—their ad hoc fluidity in response to the demands of the moment, however those may be understood—exposes rather starkly the cumbersome redundancy of a fictional worlds account of fictive reference. Dreams suggest a view of fictive communication that is not subordinate to directly assertive communication at all, nor anchored by the assumption of a global referential ground, but rather accountable to generative principles of relevance or salience. I have characterized the difference between dreams and memories in terms of rhetorical orientation: while memories spring from and are accountable to a criterion of representational adequacy to experiential fact, dreams have the same recursive relationship to the representation of subjective significance—to desires, anxieties, values; in short, to the realm of meaning. In the dream case then, the generative principle of relevance is a criterion of accountability within the sphere of discourse; accountability to the expressive and cognitive needs of the dreamer as they emerge and evolve in terms of the narrative process in train. The dream case is the fictive case: with the appropriate substitution of terms the principle of relevance operates in the same way for fictive communication in general, just as it encompasses, via the rhetorical antithesis I have outlined, the non-fictive, assertive communication against which fiction

is commonly defined. In the non-fictive case, the theoretical framework for such a rhetorical, pragmatic model of communication has been extensively elaborated in terms of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Its implications for fiction, though, have not been widely recognized. A serious consideration of dreaming forces this theoretical issue, I think, because it insists upon a direct relation between narrative fictionality and imagination, and the elemental status of the latter as a mental faculty.

Narrativity

It will be clear that while a narrative view of dreams provides for a principled account of the (rhetorical) distinctiveness of their fictionality, it also insists upon the pervasiveness of narrativity as a feature of cognitive sense making. In particular, dreams foreground the sense of narrative representation as a process, and lend themselves to description in terms of, for example, Paul Ricoeur's concept of mimesis as configuration, a model which does indeed tend to encourage the equation of narrativity with panfictionality, as Ricoeur himself acknowledges (1984-8: 1:267n1). But the ubiquity of narrative artifice is a consideration of a different order from the distinct pragmatic features of fictionality. Dreams exemplify most emphatically the way in which the general configuring activity of mimesis in Ricoeur's sense is performed, in the fictive case, only upon what the creative mind proposes to itself. It is not so much the application of a cognitive narrative faculty in order to make sense of certain particulars, as it is the conjuring of such particulars in the exercise of such a faculty. The raw improvisatory quality of dreams strongly suggests a view of fictionality as characterised by just such a reciprocal interplay

of narrative particulars and general narrative competence: as the serious-playful exercise of the narrative faculty, which is to say both its use and its development. Indeed such a notion of fiction as a kind of cognitive exercise also has the merit of offering, without assuming, a broadly plausible adaptive rationale for the phenomenon of dreaming: narrative creativity in the absence of empirical constraints enhances our capacity to assimilate novel phenomena.

Story and Discourse

The distinction between story and discourse, or fabula and sjuzet, commonly rests upon a view of story as event-sequence, despite the fact that there is nothing storylike about events in themselves. If story cannot be any kind of (narrative) representation, which is discourse, neither can it be something intrinsic in the phenomenal world. This has been pointed out by Marie-Laure Ryan, who offers instead a view of story as a mental image, a cognitive construct (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005: 347). The distinction between story and discourse, then, rests only upon a distinction between material and mental representations. But as the case of dreams makes forcefully apparent, the media of mental representations, whether perceptual or linguistic, are as semiotic as material signs, and the representations themselves are as specific. Mental representation is indeed discourse, and entirely compatible with the narratological sense of the term. To insist upon a story-discourse distinction on such a basis, then, is to make it something quite other than the distinction we were taught to think of in terms of the "what" and "how" of narrative representation. Dreaming, as an irreducibly cognitive instance of the fictive paradigm,

insists that narrative discourse cannot be referred to an underlying, conceptually prior story or fabula. The recursive nature of the dreamwork as a creative process, on the narrative view, suggests a better concept of story as a product of the generative-interpretative feedback loop, as something contingent and progressive, at close range to the process itself. On such an account, story does not ground discourse, but arises from it, as an ongoing narrative interpretant.

The Narrator

The concept of the narrator as a distinct narrative agent is also undermined by a narrative view of dreams. It is perhaps plausible to understand some dreams as homodiegetic narration, that is to say as narrated by a self within the dream, but any such self is necessarily a representational product of dreaming consciousness like any other. Narration thus conceived, then, is subordinate to representation, and in no way constitutes a separate element of narrative transmission. More fundamentally, for those dreams without self representation, there is no case for arguing that the dreamer makes sense of the dream (either in process or retrospectively) as the report of a distinct heterodiegetic narrator. Dreams are directly fictive and experienced directly, not framed as the discourse of a distinct agent for whom the events are known rather than imagined. Imagination, indeed, is precisely the relevant concept: it does not need to be redeemed by a dissociative framework providing for suspension of disbelief, willing or otherwise. Issues of belief and disbelief are not germane to the mind's capacity for narrative elaboration in itself, and of limited importance to the affective salience of such narratives. The fact that

dreams may be lucid in varying degrees, and still be dreams, requires us to think of fictive narration as an act that can be directly owned by the creative imagination without being conflated with delusion or (self) deception. Dream lucidity is not an elaborately contrived metafictional game, but a possibility latent in the ordinary conditions of dream consciousness; not a reflexive framing of the dreamwork (as a dream within a dream), but simply one of the available cognitive contexts within which it takes place.

Voice

Pursuing the communicative framework of dreams a little further, there is much to be gained from reflecting upon the concept of voice in this context—both because the perceptual medium of dreams helps to offset the linguistic bias of the term "voice," and because the interiority of dreams helps tease apart entangled senses of agency and selfhood in the concept. The dreaming subject is the agent of a narrative act that may itself include representation of the self as agent, and as a discursive agent (in the broadest sense), as well as representation of the discursive agency of others. Retroactively, the dream discourse also implies and constructs selfhood around the subject position being established in the act of narration, the dream situating the dreamer in the process of its own construction and reception—because dreams can change you. The dreamer's internally dialogic relation to the dream, as both its producer and its consumer, foregrounds the dialogism of narrative discourse in general, but it also draws attention to the insufficiently recognized fact that such discourse does not only involve multiple voices, it involves multiple senses of voice. Voice, in narrative theory, may refer to a

representational act (a narrative instance—the Genettian sense), a (discursive) object of representation (a represented idiom), or a representational subject position (in the perspectival or ideological sense the term acquires in, for example, feminist or Bakhtinian theory). The interplay between these crucially distinct features of narrative representation accounts for many of its subtlest effects, and theoretical discussion of such issues as free indirect discourse and focalization is much impaired by their conflation under a single term.

Medium

The medium of dream narrative is the cognitive-perceptual apparatus itself; narrative, on this view, is a cognitive sense-making faculty that proceeds from the outset in representational terms. Accordingly, there is no meaningful sense in which narrative can be thought of as medium-independent: no event, however minimal, is structured as such except in cognitive terms, and the same applies a fortiori for sequences of events. The possibility of remediation, or the transposition of narratives between media, is no grounds for attributing any abstract deep structure to narrative, since the sense of narrative sameness upon which that possibility depends requires cognitive articulation, and so is itself within the domain of mediation. The base level of mediation, then, is not the transmission of some already otherwise encoded meaning, but the inaugural articulation of meaning that is semiosis itself. Moreover, the semiotic nature of mental imagery carries inherent within it the possibility of metacognitive awareness, just as lucidity is latent in all dreams: the implication would seem to be that recursiveness is integral to

sense making, and therefore that the formulaic reciprocity between the two views of narrative cognition formulated by David Herman—making sense of stories and stories as sense making (2003: 12-14)—is in fact irreducible to a hierarchical relation. Neither view can provide for a foundational concept of narrative within a cognitive paradigm. If the cognitive-perceptual apparatus itself is representational, narrative cognition is always the medium-bound articulation of meaning (that is to say, concurrently the creation and expression of structures of meaning), the only ground for which must be pragmatic efficacy within a given context. In the fictive case for which dreams stand as exemplar, then, the rhetorical direction of fit between meaning and ground is reversed: such contextual criteria of accountability are no longer the final court of narrative, but its occasion, subject to the possibilities of imaginative elaboration and exploration, and qualified or refigured by that process.

Narrative Creativity

In dreams, narrative creativity and reception go hand in hand: "authorship" and "readership" are symbiotic. The narration proceeds in a continuously reciprocal relation with the dreamer's own evaluative response to it, because this response is the only constraint upon it, and entirely defines the parameters of its accountability. The specific line of narrative development is a reflexive negotiation between the current dream state at any given moment and the cognitive context of the dreamer's narrative competence. But isn't this the case for all fictions? Dreams present in naked form the interplay of the particular and the general that supplies the fundamental logic of all narrative creativity,

and not just in an external global sense, but intimately throughout the creative process. Authorship is itself a kind of readership, a process of discovery, in the particulars of a conceit, of the "right" narrative development, step by step, in the context of a general framework of narrative understanding. Such authorial discernment is successful to the extent that the narrative understanding it draws upon is collective; to the extent that the author belongs to a community of readership. The communication model of narrative transmission, on this view, is seriously misleading: the meaning of a story is not conceived by the author, ab initio, to be transmitted in narrative form to a reader who attempts to decode it. Author and reader approach the emergent possibilities of a narrative from the same side—the author a little in advance—and share in the achievement of an understanding that is itself, from start to finish, narrative in form.

Affective Response

Our understanding of affective response or emotional involvement with fictions is also called to account by a consideration of the directly fictive nature of dream narration, together with the reciprocity of creation and reception exemplified by dreams. The affective power of dreams is not consequent upon an illusion of reality, nor upon an assumption of discursive truth, because it is an integral quality of the unfolding fictive representation itself as it is assimilated and generated by the dreamer. One phenomenon supporting this view is the persistence of immersion within lucid dreams, and the fact that lucidity, whilst certainly constituting a redirection of the dreamer's cognitive attention, by no means vitiates the emotional valency of dream representations. Or again, the

discursive rather than experiential nature of the affective quality of dreams can be inferred from the common circumstance of a dream in which the mood is incongruous with the apparent narrative content. This discrepancy is highlighted whenever a dream report—a summary of the events of the dream narrative—does not satisfy the dreamer's own sense of its emotional force. It suggests that such affective qualities are not products of a discrete stage in the dreamer's reception of the dream, but integral to the representational qualities of the dream discourse itself, and the feedback loop of narrative creativity and reception sustaining that discourse. In other words, emotional valency, or affective value in general, is inherent in the process of (narrative) representation, rather than a secondary response to the products of representation. If this is so, the various ways in which narrative theorists and philosophers have sought to reconcile emotional involvement with fictionality are misconceived and redundant. Affective response does not depend upon suspension of disbelief or any equivalent framing of our engagement with fictions because it is inherent in, and continuous with, the semiotic process of representation, and need not wait upon an assessment of the reality or truth of its products.

It is hard to see how dreaming can be understood as anything other than a narrative process; but if this is so, dreams present a challenge to narrative theory on several fronts. I don't think this challenge can be minimized by regarding dreams as marginal phenomena, not only because they are a near universal feature of human consciousness and intimately tied up with our common intuitions about the narrative imagination, but also because they are inescapably key instances of (fictive) narrative

cognition. The main thrust of my argument here has been to bring that cognitive frame of reference to bear upon narrative theory, but I hope it's clear that there is also a great deal to be gained from orienting our attention the other way. Narrative theory can bring a great deal to our understanding of cognition, provided only that it opens itself to the questions posed by that still enigmatic domain of inquiry.

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