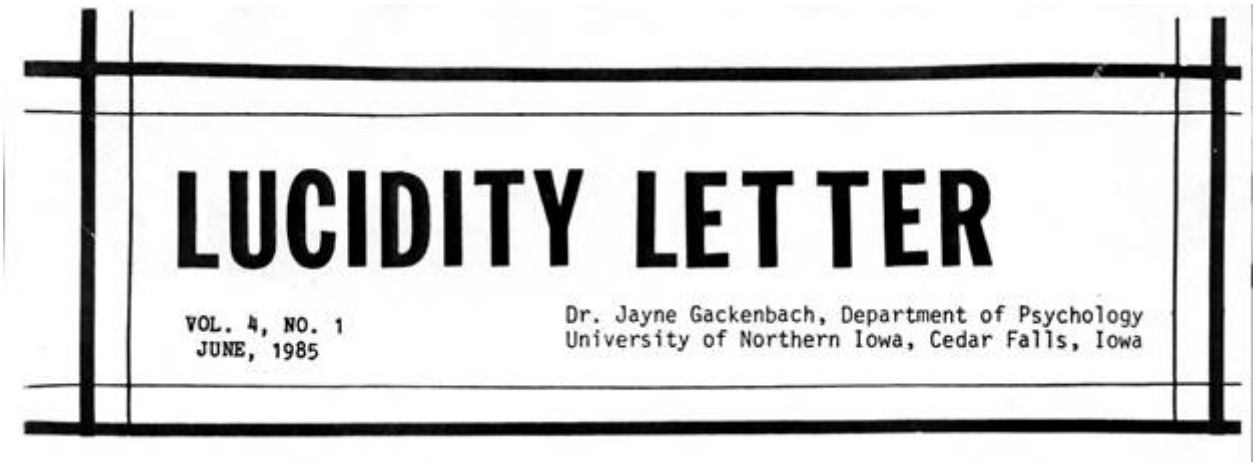

A Comparative Psychology of Lucid Dreams

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A problem with much of the literature on lucid dreaming has been its theoretical and empirical insularity-a lucid dream, apparently, is a lucid dream, is a lucid dream. Certainly there are important correlations with incidence of out-of-body experience, hypnagogic reports, and waking visual-spatial abilities (Gackenbach et al., 1983), but there seems to have been little effort so far to place lucid dreaming with its "kin and kindred" and thence to draw conclusions concerning the basic cognitive processes involved-to place lucidity in relation to a general cognitive psychology (and vice versa).

Lucid dreams need to be considered with out-of-body experience and insight or mindfulness meditation. All three settings involve the appearance and gradual stabilization of a capacity for an inclusive, observational attitude (broadened sense of perspective) in the midst of ongoing involvements. (Whether these are real or dreamt is less important than the unusual integration of observation and participation itself.) Lucidity and OBE are the more or less spontaneous appearance of that attitude sought within the meditative traditions-with the same sense of release, clarity, and "I am" realization. Their relation is more than correlational, it is one of essential identity of cognitive process across different settings. (See Chang [1963] for the identification of lucidity as the form of meditation available in dreams for Tibetan Buddhism.)

It is hard to see how we could approach these phenomena in cognitive terms other than as a specially developed form of the "reflexivity" or "taking the role of the other" that Mead (1934) makes criterial, to the human symbolic capacity. This is most clear with respect to the structure of OBE, where visual imaginative schemata are reorganized so as to

constitute an "image" of how one would look from a "decentered" physical perspective. However, something further must distinguish the lucidity attitude from more typical manifestations of abstract symbolism.

First, we can make a distinction between reflexivity subordinated to active, pragmatic intelligence (what Mead had in mind) and reflexivity for its own sake (contemplative, observational). Although language, mathematics, and painting are necessarily based on an ongoing self-referential sensitivity (a causally transforming monitoring of the "message" in terms of how it might be received by the "other"). There will also be a necessary, but typically subordinated phase in which passive, detached observation predominates. The lucid/meditative attitude is in the first instance an exaggerated form of such reflexivity for its own sake-a receptivity completely emancipated from the attitude of pragmatic "doing." Second, we can make a distinction (also neglected within "cognitive science") between symbolic activity that is predominantly representational or predominantly presentational. In everyday representational language the connection between vehicle and referent is more or less arbitrary (making some allowance for the importance of expressive physiognomy). Whereas in the presentational forms of the arts, the meaning is inherent in its manner and mode of expression-to the point where its "evoked" significance may resist discursive formulation.

Accordingly we can see that the lucid/meditative attitude is an imaginative "taking the role of the other" 1) for its own sake, independent of pragmatic usage, 2) in immediately felt, presentational form. Applying this perspective to dream psychology, lucidity shows the preponderance of a broadened perspective in presentational form, while dream bizarreness (traditional indicators of dream symbolism) constitutes a visual—presentational expression of the active, sending role. Indeed, evidence comparing the dreams of meditators with those of more typical lucid dreamers suggests that in the development of presentational dream symbolism, these two attitudes-reflexivity per se or subordinated to more specific meanings-alternate like a conversation between two partners, as a developing spiral between "listening" and "speaking." Initial levels of dream lucidity seem to compete with dream bizarreness and vice versa, but with progressive stabilization of the lucid attitude, dream bizarreness appears on a level rarely seen in more normative non-lucid dream samples.

Holistic-organismic cognitive psychology--as articulated by G. H. Mead and Werner and Kaplan (1963)--offers the major conceptual key to lucid dreaming--allowing us to see it in relation to both normal symbolic cognition and recent developments in the psychology of meditation. I would argue that it is the only available theoretical framework truly relevant to the phenomena.

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Original source: *Lucidity Letter Back Issues*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June, 1985, page 117.