

*A conference was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in November 2002 that was entitled "Issues Confronting the Post-European World" and that was dedicated to Jan Patočka (1907-1977). The Organization of Phenomenological Organizations was founded on that occasion. The following essay is published in celebration of that event.*

## Essay 28

# Contributions to the Phenomenology of Dreams



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In the first half of the last century there was a very interesting discussion of dreams between Edmund Husserl,<sup>1</sup> Jean Hering,<sup>2</sup> and later on also with Theodore Conrad. On this occasion, my aim is to take into consideration the positions of these three and also Jean-Paul Sartre and Eugen Fink in order to discuss certain traits of the phenomenon of “dreaming consciousness.”

Let me begin by recalling a type of consciousness that differs from perception and imagination. This is a consciousness inhabited by emotion, a moved consciousness. Sartre analyzes this consciousness in his Sketch of a Theory of Emotions.<sup>3</sup> His position can be summarized as follows: In the first place, the main issue is the consciousness inhabited by emotion that apparently exhibits a certain passivity in its structure. This mode of consciousness produces a magical

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Hans Rainer Sepp, for sending me a chapter of his “Habilitationsschrift” that, as far as I know, has not yet been published; therein he discusses contributions of several phenomenologists concerning dreaming consciousness. The title of the chapter is “Image and Dream” (“Bild und Traum”). In this chapter he quotes Hering’s texts from “La représentation et le rêve,” in *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, 1946, 193-206; “Concerning Image, Idea, and Dream” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 8, 1947, 188-205; “Über Traumerlebnisse,” 1956, unpublished, Bayerische Statsbibliothek München, Sign. Conrad Ana 378 D; “Quelques thèmes d’une Phénoménologie du rêve,” in *For Roman Ingarden. Nine Essays in Phenomenology*, edited by A-T Tymieniecka, ‘S-Gravehage. 1959, 75-89. Passages quoted from Theodore Conrad are “Bemerkungen zu Herings ‘Die Vorstellung und der Traum’”, unpublished, Bayerische Statsbibliothek München, Sign. Conrad Ana 378 A IV 8; *Vom Leben und Erleben, Phaenomenologica*, Volume 27, Den Haag, 1968, and from Conrad-Martius “Traum und Schlafwandeln”, 1940, unpublished, Bayerische Statsbibliothek München, Sign. Conrad-Martius A VIII 3.

<sup>2</sup> E. Husserl. *Briefwechsel*, Vol. III, edited by K. Schuhmann, Dordrecht/Boston/Londres, Kluwer a. P. 1933, p.118.

<sup>3</sup> J.P.Sartre, *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions*, Paris, Ed. Hermann, 1965.

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transformation of the world; it is “magical” because change takes place without mediation. Being moved means that, all of a sudden, the world that is intended by consciousness changes its traits: while grieving, the world turns gray; in extreme joy it becomes a wonderful world; anger produces an abominable situation or world against which anger stands indignantly. Belief in the traits of the world, such as they have been transformed by emotion, supports the truth of the transformation. This movement of consciousness towards the magical attitude is one of its essential features. Sartre says: “Emotion is a mode of existence of consciousness” (62). Emotion is suffered, our conscious spontaneity cannot modify its course; the source of the modification is not alien to us, it is the activity of our consciousness that suppresses itself or disorganizes itself as perceptive consciousness in order to assume the structure of a moved consciousness (33); it builds itself up as a moved consciousness on the basis of an internal meaning (37). Emotion is a non-reflexive consciousness: being afraid is not having consciousness of being afraid just as perceiving is not being conscious of perceiving, but it is all the same consciousness of the world (38). Sartre takes into consideration the behavior of the body that accompanies emotion; it is, says he, “the serious part of the belief” (52), i.e., emotion appears in a moved lived body. If the lived body would keep its perceptual attitude, we would not succeed in being moved. Consciousness is seized by its own belief and “just like in dreams and in hysteria,” Sartre adds. This Sartrian phenomenology of the moved consciousness supports our phenomenological approach to dreams, although we start from the assertion of the difference between moved and dreaming consciousness.

Taking into account views of Freud<sup>4</sup>, Jung<sup>5</sup> and Binswanger<sup>6</sup>, among others, I shall offer an analysis of dreams that is not in accordance with some viewpoints of the above mentioned phenomenologists.

In the first place, it is necessary to state the possibility that dreaming, i.e., the production of dreams, has sense even if most of the times dreams appear to be arbitrary productions. In this sense, we are also guided by Merleau-Ponty’s writing:<sup>7</sup> an I-center is at work in dreams that builds up a dreaming consciousness.

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<sup>4</sup> S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, Frankfurt am main, Fisher Verlag, 1991

<sup>5</sup> C.G. Jung, *Über psychische Energetik und das Wesen der Träume*, Zürich, Rascher Verlag, 1948

<sup>6</sup> L. Binswanger, *Le rêve et l’existence*, with Introduction and notes from Michel Foucault, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1954

<sup>7</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours*, Collège de Cours 1952-1960, Paris, Gallimard, 1968 ; p.68 ff. “[...] it is living a latent content through a manifest content (70) ; [...] a description of oneiric consciousness, -consciousness not knowing the no that only says yes in a tacit way, producing before the analyst the answers that he/she waits from them, unable of words, of calculation, of actual thoughts, reduced to the old elaborations of the subject, [...] - these descriptions mean that the unconscious mind is perceptive consciousness, proceeds as the latter by means of the logic of implications or of promiscuity, it follows each time more than one way, the whole of which it has not shown, it points to object and beings through their negative aspects which suffice to put order in

For one thing this I-center is the same as what is at work in the passive synthesis within other structures of consciousness and, for the other, the I-center has, somehow, a goal that is related to those of the person and its interests. This can be seen in numerous dreams told by mathematicians, dreams that offer them solution for problems they have been dealing with while awake. In them, the common goals and the absence of a split between the awake I and the dreaming one is manifest. On the basis of research by Freud, Jung, and Binswanger, to mention only the most well known psychiatrists, it can be stated that an organizing I-center, related to the preservation of life in all its levels is, *de jure*, permanently at work as long as we are alive. Seen from a psychological point of view, dreaming seems to carry out the function of relating an unconscious but existential problematic to the conscious level. It also seems acceptable to say that, insofar as that center is oriented towards certain sense, it functions teleologically.

In my opinion, Sartre's analysis of emotion is interesting in relation to dreams; inasmuch as it characterizes the moved consciousness through the belief in the magically transformed world it counts on the complicity of the body. This indisputable assertion draws our attention towards the attitude of the body in different modes of consciousness. The hypothesis that this performance suggests is the following: When the process of the passive synthesis is neither oriented towards a perceptual organization and its critical capacity for eventual deception nor oriented towards the related position of imagining, inasmuch as it is free from these operations the I-center of the passive synthesis believes. The modalizing of the positing, i.e., into doubt or questioning, are capacities of perceptual consciousness during the process of perceptual fulfillment while being awake. This critical function is permanently at work in the waking state; on this basis we can imagine objects, i.e., we can posit the thesis of inexistence or of absence of the intended object. This thesis is maintained in relation to the background of our being alert with respect to deception in the process of perceptual fulfillment; the common field is precisely that of alertness.

At this point it is necessary to take into consideration the role played by the body in different consciousnesses. In perceptual consciousness as well as in imagining consciousness, the body is alert and collaborates in bringing forth the thesis of existence while perceiving or of inexistence while imagining. When consciousness is overwhelmed by emotion, it suppresses its critical perceptual effectuations, the body accompanies the process and becomes altered, and consciousness accepts as real those traits through which it has just transformed the

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its accomplishments without putting them in the condition of being named 'by their name'. Delirium as well as dreams is full of eminent truths. [...]" (71). The translation of this fragment is by J.V. Iribarne.

world: this accompaniment by the body is the condition of possibility of being moved. The body stops interfering with information that would be necessary in the case of a perceptual organization of consciousness, it answers to the new phantasmagoric circumstance and thereby it helps the emergence of belief.

The same suppression of perceptual consciousness takes place while dreaming. While sleeping, the bodily organization that accompanies perceptual activity has been suppressed. From my point of view this trait also relates to the belief that takes place in dreaming consciousness. Perceptual information is no longer useful. The hypothesis holds that this is the right moment for the I-center to continue working, messages will be sent in this sense for the well-being of the person. Hence, it is possible to accept that the lived body takes part in the activity of consciousness while dreaming in an even more unaware way than while being awake. The lived body becomes active during dreaming and contributes somehow to dreamt kinesthesia of running and flying, for instance, that accompany the dream dynamics and the sense of the dream.

Would it be so, the duplication of dreaming and a dreamt I affirmed by Husserl and by Conrad would not be necessary. It could only be acceptable in particular cases like the dream told by Hering, a duplicated dream: I dream and I know that I am dreaming. Dreaming would only concern an active I-center at work for the fulfillment of a dream by means of presenting images apt to its purpose through elements decanted in the horizon of experience of the I.

While dreaming, the dreaming I who is an active center of passive synthesis is "awake," awake in a way that is not organized towards the data of the waking world; it is turned towards the state of affairs of consciousness in a non-positional way. Not pretending to exhaust this issue, I affirm that the first thing being manifest is that the dreamer comes back from the absence proper of sleeping without dreams, and now she acts, be it as observer or be it as actor in relation to the circumstances of the configured dream. While dreaming, the I-center picks up the elements with which it constitutes the dream. We can approach dreams like a play written by the I-center where the main character is the I.

By means of exclusion one can think that the source of dreaming is predominantly subjected to affection. I call "subjected to affection" a mode of consciousness that is more primal than the perceptual one that has been organized through our history; it is our personal temporal radical affective consciousness that, in an anonymous way, tends to the preservation of life. It is not a primitive I-center but an evolved one that, being deprived of the resources of reasoning, names its issues in a complex, metaphorical, dramatic way. In as much as the perceptual consciousness disappears while sleeping, the center of passive synthesis works teleologically and produces sense in a way that is different from that of perception. Most probably, it is more adequate to say that the dreaming consciousness

expresses itself, speaks to itself, by means of a code that is not that of the waking state, a code free from the principle of identity logic.

One can describe the experience of dreaming as Conrad did. While he assumes Husserl's description of noetic and noematic poles of experience, he shows an active pole that pro-poses images with a signifying "content." These images are "distinct" in the Cartesian sense, we see them, we feel them as flashes at great speed. From my point of view, images in dreams do not coincide with Sartre's description of images in *L'imaginaire*. They have neither a concrete support in relation to which an analogon is produced nor are they blurry: Sartre's example tells us that if we imagine the Parthenon, we cannot say how many columns it has. However, our experience of dreams tells us that, while dreaming, our images are distinct and even colored. Such images are not chosen by means of a selection in the way it happens with represented images; one can identify them although they do not agree with the logic of the principle of identity that is at work in the vigil state.

These assertions lead us to think that in this peculiar performance of dreaming consciousness, the odd thing is that it faces images while positing a thesis of existence. It takes place by means of an intuitive way of performing, i.e., a direct vision.

One can assert that dreaming consciousness neither remembers nor imagines inasmuch as imagining means positing a thesis of absence or inexistence: one sees, eventually hears, feels, and suffers, and these experiences include a codified text full of truth in relation to the state of affairs of consciousness. This point of view accords with the instance of "presence" that Husserl claimed, for it coincides with the fact that what is represented is an element decanted in the horizon that the center of passive synthesis chooses in a signifying mode; thus the chosen element metaphorically names a second issue (person, situation) partaking in the sense (message of the dream) in which the dreaming consciousness believes and, consequently, posits a thesis of existence.

Words having been employed by phenomenologists, such as immersion, being submerged, and being drowned, are descriptions carried out through an external consideration of the dreaming consciousness; if one takes into account the experience itself, not only immersion could be experienced but also exaltation, contemplation, etc. This brings us back to the issue of emotion: in some dreams the impregnation of emotion is predominant, it does not happen in this way in every dream, but our experience testifies that when we are awake, we frequently feel the remains of emotion in relation to a certain dream.

It is also possible to intend a clarification of the value of "reality" related to the dreamt world. According to what has been said, dreaming is believing in the reality of what is dreamt, and it is correctly believed insofar as the I faces directly,

sees, and hears that in which it believes. The I experiences it (we recall here that while dreaming we not only configure changing situations but also send messages and receive them, we run, we fly, we think, we suffer, we love). Although there is a thesis of existence, the traits of dreamt reality are not those of perceptual reality.

It can be understood in a different way if we seize it as “symbolization” of a—as Husserl says—“irrational” and “dark” state of affairs, an affective fountain-like state of affairs out of which our behavior in the waking world emerges. The activity of the I-consciousness in its dream-world is true inasmuch as it shows its own code, which is usually difficult to understand,<sup>8</sup> feelings, habitualities, attitudes, wishes, suppression of censure in terms of Freud, projects of our vital accordance or discordance at work under the vulnerable order imposed by our perceptive organization.

Before concluding, let us briefly turn back to assertions of the above quoted phenomenologists in order to expose our own position in relation to them.

Husserl<sup>9</sup> definitely established some guidelines for thinking about dreams. First, it is not possible to overlook his stress on the assertions that the dreaming I is awake, the dreaming I perceives. It is our task to show why this is a legitimate assertion.

Second, Husserl says that the I of the dream is a pseudo-I and he clarifies his words by adding, a presentiated I. From our point of view, this assertion can be easily accepted if we take into account what happens in the field of the dream narrator I. While being awake I refer to my dream, I remember it, and somehow I presentiate myself, I remember myself, as being the subject of that dream and, thereby, the presentiated I is, as Husserl says, a pseudo-I. This is the nuance that should be added to Husserl’s assertion. Hering’s double dream, the one he tells Husserl about, has a similar structure.

Consequently, in my view, Fink’s differentiation between dreaming and the dreamt I is not acceptable, because in so doing one would stand on the field of the remembered dream. On the contrary, Fink’s assertion against Husserl, stressing that dreaming is not losing the world but holding it in a different way, is a very supportive affirmation. He says: “While the dreaming ego sleeps, the ego of the dreamt world is always and essentially an awake ego who lives and experiences its real world.”<sup>10</sup> The second part of the proposition hits the mark, but by saying “while the dreaming ego sleeps,” the assertion leads to a possible confusion; there

<sup>8</sup> We are allowed to affirm that dreaming is not an arbitrary or playful activity, and that even in case nobody helps us to understand it, they are beneficial and favorable to vigil life

<sup>9</sup> E. Husserl. *Briefwechsel*, Vol. III, edited by K. Schuhmann, Dordrecht/Boston/Londres, Kluwer a. P. 1933, p.119 f..

<sup>10</sup> E. Fink, *Studien für Phänomenologie*, *Phaenomenologica*, Den Haag, 1966; translated by J.V. Iribarne from the French version: “Re-présentation et image”, in *De la Phénoménologie*, Paris, Éditions De Minuit; p. 79f.

is but one ego that either sleeps or dreams. Sleeping means disconnection, inactivity, even inactivity of passive synthesis; while consciousness dreams, it reorganizes itself and interferes the sleeping inactivity through the activity of the passive synthesis that configures the dream. There is no sleeping I who is simultaneous to a second I who dreams; there is only one I-center who either sleeps or dreams through a different organization of consciousness. The dreaming I-center is “richer” than the merely sleeping one. Sleeping is a step that is previous to dreaming; while sleeping, the structural system of the awake consciousness as well as that of the dreaming consciousness are suppressed and it remains so up to the moment in which sleeping is transformed into dreaming.

We totally agree with Hering’s enunciation of the traits of dreaming that inhibit considering its activity as a representation or a presentiation.

Conrad describes the experience of dreaming correctly, but he tries to hold two paradoxical assertions together that characterize it as a perceiving dream as well as a presentiating dream. In our point of view, this taking of position is not acceptable, nevertheless it would not be wise to characterize thereby the totality of Conrad’s position inasmuch as he has written other texts on dreaming, which I could not reach, that probably show his points of view more broadly. He also has a very clear affirmation that produces a useless duplication when he says that while dreaming a “there” is established that is afterwards transformed in a “here.” In this case, he once more does not point to the activity of an I-center, a proto-I who dreams and who as such is always installed in a “here,” the one who is the null-point of orientation of the world, although such a “here” is movable and changes continuously.

From my view-point, excepting Hering, Husserl’s students rather misunderstood him. The I, the source-I, is, in a way, awake and takes care of the interests of the waking life, such as it is shown in Hering’s dream in which he continues examining his daily problematic while dreaming, as well as in the dreams of mathematicians through which they solve problems they deal with while being awake. The same issue is illustrated in the well known dream of the German chemist F. A. Kekulé von Stradonitz who grasped the structure of the benzol molecule—a problem he had been dealing with for a long time—while dreaming of a snake biting its tail: the structure of the benzol molecule was circular.

The I of the dream is awake in the way of an active center of passive synthesis and it “perceives,” i.e., she sees images. Thereby, the necessity of distinguishing this peculiar type of “perception” emerges, it concerns a perception that is radically different from what we call perceiving while being awake: that this activity is not reduced to seeing images but includes emitting messages, receiving them, riding, flying, thinking, suffering, loving in dreams. Through this configuration consciousness tells to itself something regarding the state of affairs

of its interests, of its vital accordance or discordance; these are the reasons that led as to affirm that dreams have sense.

