In 1835, the German dramatist Georg Büchner gave his charac-
ter Robespierre (in _Danton’s Death_) the following thought: “And isn’t
out walking a more solid dream, aren’t we sleepwalking, aren’t our con-
scious actions dreamlike, only clearer, more precise, more complete?”
(1972, 40). More than a century and a half later, two psychologists from
New York University, Rodolfo Llinás and D. Bark, wrote in the journal
Neuroscience: “Let us formally propose then that wakefulness is noth-
ing other than a dreamlike state modulated by the constraints produced
by specific sensory inputs. Findings in support of this rather outrageous
statement come from morphological and electrophysiological studies.”

The first of these statements is not expected to be taken as anything
more than the opinion of a character in a fiction, although Büchner him-
self may have believed it, and he was not only a poet but also a professor
of medicine at Zurich. Indeed, it is an opinion that can be traced back
to antiquity through Shakespeare and Calvino (who wrote a play en-
titled _Life Is a Dream_). The second statement comes from the world of
hard science and is backed by graphs, statistics, and charts, and more
than one hundred bibliographical references from similarly erudite jour-
nals, most of which are beyond my reach. I bring them together, in par-
t, because they represent what we might call the checkpoints of dream
study and its relation to waking life: one based on feeling and intuition,
one on experimental evidence. These two approaches, I might add, are
together to be found in each other’s company. Moreover, the two quotations also
illustrate how one can arrive at similar conclusions by almost opposite
methods. Of course, I am not sure that the two statements are referring
to the same thing, in the purely technical sense. But I wonder if Llinás
and Bark haven’t offered the “morphological” proof for what Büchner
was expressing as a personal feeling—that waking experience is simply a
“more precise, more complete” version of the dream state, this pre-
ciseness coming from the constraints that “modulate” waking life—
the constant need to feel where you’re going, to be attentive to what you
say and to whom you say it, and in general to think more like 1/2 and 3/4
in order to survive.
Another interesting question is, what might be the implications of this "outrageous" idea for the relationship of dreams to the waking fictions we write and tell one another? The two most obvious links between dreams and fictions are that both are processes for connecting previously unconnected aspects of experience and that both recreate human experience in story form, using what I have called here chain thinking. Moreover, they differ from the writing of history and autobiography, their near neighbors in this latter regard, in that they deal only with hypothetical or imaginary events. Dreams, Jean-Paul Richer once said, are "involuntary poetry" (1973, 13). How far in a morphological direction, then, can one press the idea that poetry is voluntary dreaming?

Like Bühner I am proceeding intuitively, more or less as a student of my own dream life. One of my continuing interests is the problem of how dreams manage to achieve a narrative structure. That is, how does a dream plot a sequence of events that never occurred but is simultaneously experienced as reality? What is intriguing about any dream is how the brain can design and maintain an environment, a series of events, and a cast of people, about half of whom you've never seen before, and who came to you so vividly, right down to the pores on their faces, the manner of speaking and moving, that you might recognize them on the street the next day. Moreover, how do those events, no matter how incredible by waking standards, unfold according to a causal logic that is as unimpeachable to the dreamer as the logic of waking causality? To me this is one of the deepest enigmas of dreaming: how is it that one can be within a dream, as one is within waking reality, and simultaneously produce the world one is in—rather like the mollusk that secretes its own shell and then lives in it. In short: how in the world does the dream know how to dream? We have looked at this problem from the standpoint of the image, but there are other aspects of dream authorship to examine that will take us beyond using the tri-temporal understanding of images developed in chapter 4.

The same problem of pinning down the author occurs when we look at fictions written by authors while wide awake. At first glance, fictions don't seem as enigmatic as dreams in this respect. An author sits at a desk thinking up imaginary events that form a story, revising here, adding there, until it is coherent and complete with beginning, middle, and end. Some people (called writers or poets) are better at this than others, but it's all as natural and unremarkable as telling a bedtime story. What I find encouraging about Linard and Pard's theory is that they add scientific support to my purely intuitive feeling that storytelling—what we all know it in the waking state—springs from the same "skill" that allows us to dream, and vice versa. Moreover, waking storytelling is simply "modulated by different constraints" on the imagination (including responsibility to a reader who expects coherence, tension, and crisis in a story), and while creating the story the storyteller is, in a manner of speaking, actually dreaming under different, if more leisurely, constraints.

This is easy enough to say, in a weak metaphorical sense (poets, after all, have always been called dreamers). But what if it were true in a more physiological sense? Perhaps we have too quickly drawn a distinction between the waking and sleeping states on the basis of physical differences. Waking, to come back to Büchner, may be like "a more lucid dream" (ein bellerer Traum) than we tend to think, and nowhere more dreamlike than when one engages in the mental production called storytelling—the mode in which Büchner wrote Rüberpier's speech. Storytelling, then, might be thought of as an altered state of waking consciousness. It is to waking consciousness, perhaps, what lucid dreaming (as I understand what that term implies) is to normal dreaming. In both cases, there is a certain sense of out-of-bodiness or transcendence, and a certain godlike power to be both inside and outside the fiction at the same time. Writers commonly report two things that occur in the composition process: first, that the story, when it is going well, "writes itself"—meaning, I gather, that the writer becomes more like a secretary than an author. In this happy state, the story unfolds as fast as one can write it down, and the awareness of being the author of these events is
mixed with a sense of watching them taking place while creating them; writing and experiencing interpenetrate each other, as in a dream.

The second thing that writers often say (and this would apply as well to painters, composers, daydreamers, and scientists) is that in this bracketed state of focused attentiveness, or "once-upon-a-time-ness," one's consciousness of immediate time and space is dramatically altered. In short, one is isolated in a zone of consciousness that is very like the state that dream psychologists refer to as "single-mindedness" (see Rechtschaffen, 1975). It is all a matter of the degree of fusion of the imaginative and the empirical modes of authoring and experiencing.

I make the analogy with the lucid dreamer as a kind of intermediary position because, just as the lucid dreamer is slightly awake, or slightly outside the dream while being largely inside it, so the waking author is slightly asleep, or slightly inside the fiction while being largely outside it. And I take this hybrid zone of lucidity as being a kind of "sliding" common denominator binding the two operations on a continuum that works much like a rheostat. Among other things, it produces interesting hybridizations in literary quality as well. For example, one would think that writing fictions produced while the story is "writing itself" in this state of involuntary lucidity would be better than those produced in the more voluntary or deliberate phase of creation, and this is true some of the time.

But not always in this wonderful mesmeric mood, I have sometimes written what I thought were brilliant scenes, until I looked at them next day and found they were poor in motivations, character consistency, or narrative probability. What happened, I think, is that I had fallen into a mode of thought in which I had emotionally written the story but had failed to provide what T. S. Eliot would call its objective correlatives—that is, a reader-oriented text that becomes the equivalent of my emotional logic. What this suggests is that one can go "over the line" and lose contact with the requirements of waking fiction. In other words, the constraints of waking life are momentaneously invaded by the associational liberties most readily available in the dream state, even though one is certifiably awake during the process. In descriptions of how they work, some writers say they write best when they allow their imagination to dictate the flow, but that the results must often be edited, or rethought, so waking standards of intelligibility. In this regard, we might recall here the old argument that dreams inadvertently undergo such revision when they are written down or reported to other people. In other words, they are submitted to the constraints of grammar, public speech, and understanding, and in the process become bizarre, like my brilliant scenes.

But one might still ask: how does a dream "write itself"? We are immediately caught in a Scylla-Charybdis situation between whose extremes it is difficult to steer a straight course. If we assume that a dream is, on one hand, made by an agency exterior to the dream itself in some other part of the neuronal works, we inherit the Little Author, a real Scylla of a solution that simply evades the problem by blaming the dream on something prior to or simultaneous with it. If, on the other hand, we say that the dream dreams itself, our craft is shipwrecked on the Charybdis of tautology. Still, despite the risks, I think it is safer to steer a course on the Charybdis side of the channel. I suggest that the dreamer does compose the dream as it unfolds. I am not implying any conscious composition process, but rather this somewhat quirkily posulate: the dream happens to me but I also happen to the dream. This means, simply, that in one sense I experience the dream in roughly the way I experience the waking world. I am in it, but not of it. I am awake and conscious during the dream; I can think, assess what is happening, make intelligent (or not so intelligent) decisions, even solve (or think I solve) problems. In short, the dream happens to me. Yet beneath this "everyday" awareness the same brain/mind is evolving the dream events at an unconscious level. This is the level of "mindlessness" discussed in chapter 5 (the level at which we connect Uncle Harry and the moorcum pipe without thinking about it). But this mindless process does not occur independent of my everyday consciousness during the dream; hence the second part of my posulate—I also happen to the dream—that is, I unconsciously influence the course of the dream. And
here we arrive at something like Freud’s notion of wish-fulfillment, the
difference being that the wishes the dream fulfills are not only those of
desire but also those relating to one’s worst fears. An illustration will
show how this works.

In a recent dream I found myself locked in a small room (which was
perhaps the size of an elevator) by a menacing man who was clearly not
above killing me. Then suddenly he was in the room and the door was
shut and locked. Now we were in the same situation. Strangely
enough, he immediately lost his menacing aspect, perhaps because we were both
trapped. He asked me, “Is there a way out?” I thought, “Maybe there’s
an exit in the ceiling,” and, lo and behold, in the ceiling I saw a re-
moveable panel almost exactly like the panel in my own hallway ceiling
that leads to the attic. The problem was that I couldn’t lift my body
through the hole because I had no ladder. Immediately I saw on the
wall of the room an exposed two-by-four joint which served as a rung,
and presently I was able to lift the panel and climb through the hole
into what turned out to be a near replica of my own attic.

I have observed this phenomenon of the dream coming true or
obeying my thoughts hundreds of times, and I believe that it must be
something of a paradigm of dream composition. It does not imply a
conscious intentionality on the part of the dreamer, that the dream did
what I, in participant-dreamer, wanted it to do, that dream composi-
tion is a simple matter of wish-and-ye-shall-receive. Rather, it suggests
that when a possibility occurs to the dreamer it does so in a field of
associations evolving in the dream itself—room, exit, ceiling, and lad-
der all forming a common set—again, a metonymic network of things
that “belong” together. These are the plot tools the dream has to work
with. Indeed, the size of the room probably reminded me of an eleva-
tor, though the analogy did not occur to me until this present moment.

But elevators, like my attic, have ceiling exits; in fact, Hannibal Lecter,
in one of my favorite horror movies, escaped the police in ‘The Silence of the Lambs’ through just such an exit, and it is quite likely that Han-
nibal Lecter was wandering in the same field as the menacing killer

in my dream. Moreover, Hannibal Lecter is also a killer toward whom the
audience has an ambivalent feeling (for example, he kills the right
people and befriends the heroine, Clarice). I’m not building my ex-
planation of the dream on this idea because I’ve already cast suspicion
on this business of reading things into dreams after the fact. I’m only
illuminating the possible depth of any given metonymic field, which is
never exhausted by what the dreamer may have consciously in mind. In
other words, if this isn’t the right explanation, there are plenty of others
available, given the complex holdings of an average memory.

So my locked room comes to have an exit, not because I had willed
a happy ending to the dream, but because conditions within the dream
in progress allowed that possibility. In another dream, guided by dif-
ferent emotional incentives, it is equally possible that no exit would be
available and that I would suffer the consequences. There is clearly no
way to account for a particular emotional incentive in a dream; that
would be like trying to account for why one feels happy, depressed,
elated, or gloomy during any particular waking moment. A dream in-
centive, which is tantamount to dream intentionality, is a global state of
mind; that is as much as one can say except that there is good neuro-
logical evidence that the brain’s limbic system, thought to be the seat
of emotional experience, seems to have a strong influence on memory
recall and dream construction (Rosenfeld, 1986, 164–65; Wilson, 1985,
31–32). At any rate, a dream “writes itself” through the collaboration of
the dreaming consciousness (normal or participant or observer in the
dream) and the emerging materials at hand. There is, in other words,
subliminal collisions between dreamer and dreamwork. It all depends
not upon what the dreamer wanted or upon any long-range goal estab-
lished in advance of the dream, but upon what the interaction of emo-
tional incentive, an emergent field of objects, people, and events (pos-
sibly drawn from the day residue) dictated in terms of “what” proba-
bility. Further, the conduct of the dream is also subject to collisions of
imagery (ling effects, and the like) and such outside influences as room
temperature, household noises, leg cramps, knee-jerking cuts, and far-off
sirens. So, between collision and collation, there is no telling what will happen in a dream.

I don't believe this explanation poses a split between the mind of the dreamer and a "mind" in the dreamwork itself. The dreamer "wrote" the dream as it comes within a field of limited possibilities but does not realize that he or she is doing the writing. Indeed, in his exploration of hallucinations, Daniel Dennett refers to such narratives as "stories without authors," a "process that weaves back and forth between centrally generated expectations, on the one hand, and confirmations (and disconfirmations) rising from the periphery on the other hand" (1994, 12). The story develops in a sort of systolic-diastolic rhythm whereby a certain level of emotional expectation in the dreaming "victim" is converted into confirmations—or disconfirmations—of events. One never knows what these events may be, but they arrive by virtue of the constant "generate-and-test" behavior of the perceptual system. The dream is a cumulative process whose developments are not controlled by the dreamer but originate in the dreamer's thoughts about the experience in progress. It is a matter of thought, occurring at any level, being converted to imagery and thereafter constituting a point of "ori-

1. To be more scientific about this matter, the same point has been made by biologists Skarda and Freeman, who offer a new view of the perceptual process. Perception is not "the sum of responses to stimuli... like a reflex, in which whatever hits the receptors is registered inside the brain." Rather, "it begins within the organism with internally generated self-organized neural activity that, by re-afference, lays the ground for processing of future receptor input... It is the brain itself that creates the conditions for perceptual processing by generating activity patterns that determine what receptor activity will be accepted and processed. Perception is a self-organized dynamic process of interchange integrated by the brain in which the brain fails to respond to irrelevant input, opens itself to the input it accepts, recognizes itself, and then reaches out to change its input... Perception does not just "copy" objects, it creates their meaning for the organism" (1990, 179-80). Skarda and Freeman are dealing strictly with the visual perception of environmental stimuli. In the dream there is no such thing, only the mistaken sensation that one is experiencing an environment. I don't know how relevant a consideration this is, but it seems unlikely that the perceptual apparatus would undergo a radical change during the conditions of sleep.

2. Imagine living in a waking world that obeyed your private thoughts as to the letter. Everything would "come true," or come about, as soon as your mind thought it. This might happen in a dream, depending on the weight of the probabilities at play at the moment. In waking reality, of course, you would catch on very quickly that you were somehow the cause of these events and you would think twice about thinking at all. In a dream, our single-mindedness departs us of any such awareness, and we unknowingly create the experience that we seem to be only experiencing.

The word feelings, as I am using it, is not as vague as it may sound—as in our term gut feeling, which scarcely pith things down to a clear point of oc-
I suspect that much the same process occurs in the writing of fiction. To come back to Linnaeus and Paré, however, I should point out that they are not favoring the dream state over the waking state; they are suggesting that cognitive abilities are the same in dream and waking states and that differences in the two kinds of experience have to do with the nature of the input and how the brain processes it. In the waking state this input would be our sensory experience coming from without; in the dream state it would be the experience already stored in memory. Attention is presumably equal in both directions; attentiveness is simply a matter of adaptation to what is being allowed to pass through the gate. And I suppose we could hypothesize that intense imaginative activity (such as we find in waking artistic composition, daydreaming, children’s play, or deep meditation) could be considered as a modified attentive state of a similar kind, and that perhaps one would find a comparable degree of intrinsically generated brain activity in such states. Isn’t my territory, by any means, but it might be interesting to see the electrophysiological records if you wired up John Updike or Doris Lessing’s brain while they were writing. What kinds of correlations might there be with their known thoughts? And would measurements be different when given—at least in normal usage. It turns out, however, that gay feeling may be the best term after all—if one uses it, as I do, in Antonio Damasio’s sense of feelings being “the sensors for the match or lack thereof between nature and circumstance,” or between one’s genetic makeup and social interaction, on one hand, and one’s situation, on the other. Feelings serve as internal guides. . . . They are neither intangible nor elusive (but) are just as cognitive as other percepts. They are the result of a most curious physiological arrangement that has turned the brain into the body’s captive audience” (1994, xv). Feelings, then, are our means of allowing us to sense “body states” (pleasure, pain, terror, etc.), and Damasio argues that one cannot separate the body systems from the brain’s cognitive systems or think of the body as the brain’s “host.” It is the body—the “host,” if you will—that “provides a basic topic for brain representations” (200, including those of our dreams).

I also concur with Paul Herfind’s notion of feeling having an “objective” as well as a “subjective” dimension: that is, feeling, in contradistinction to knowing (cognition) and willing (volition), “objectives—rises to a single target of attention—the organism’s initially innate response to its environment” (1999, 118).
perfectly able to 'find' a face you can't see. The explanation is that the face grid is an elementary construction consisting of three or four marks or dark spots (eyes, nose, mouth), and depending on the angle (skeletal, profile, upfield) even these don't have to be in a normal arrangement. Remarkably little in the way of visual configuration is needed to create a face. All you have to do, then, is to employ your eye as a sort of face-seeking missile and it will find a face somewhere in the infinity of facial possibilities in the tree. I've found that there is a special way of doing this, however. It isn't so much a matter of looking for faces, as if they were already there to be found, like the faces that have deliberately been put into drawings in children's books. You have to let your vision fall into a glared or abstract "scanning" mode, and then think of noses, or eyes, or chins. And, finding a nose-like shape, you concentrate intensely on it and think, "That's its nose," and with luck you will subliminally edit out inappropriate or nond facial shapes and a face will appear. It's very much like birders calling warblers out of trees with the "pishing" sound. They don't find the birds; they ask the birds to find them. In any event, having "built" such a face you can find other faces with which it can be made to overlap. Moreover, the face seems to be filled with character and nuance. You can even endow it with an attitude and, with a little imagination, a history. And if there's a little breeze the face will even laugh or cry or the jaw will move and it will talk to you. And if you're really successful you can hear what it is saying.

But the most miraculous thing of all is that, having found a face of some sort, you can "think" it into resembling specific faces you already know. In my experiments with this exercise, I have said to myself, "This is the face of Clint Eastwood," and Clint appears, or a reasonable facsimile of Clint; then I think, "Now do Bill Clinton," or Barbara Streisand or Herman Shrock (my high school chemistry teacher). And they all appear on command—half of the time, anyway. What can be going on here that this accidental combination of shadow and shape can be so versatile? It has to do, I suspect, with the Rorschach quality of the configuration. I'm not looking at a face, but a meaningless shape that allows me to ignore some parts of it and emphasize others, depending on what my eye is looking for. You could probably just as easily look for feet or animals or foot-long hot dogs. On the other hand, if you looked at an actual photo of Clint Eastwood you would have no luck getting him to become Barbra Streisand or your chemistry teacher because his facial features would be too finely resolved. But foliage, like a Rorschach blot, will become whatever you want to see in it—within reasonable limits.

There has to be just enough "facial" information there from which your memory of faces can draw. And then you fill in the blanks by a process neuroscientists call vector completion, which means just that: filling in the blanks of a degraded (or incomplete) vector according to a known prototype (see Churchland, 1995, 48-60).

I should confess that this exercise isn't always successful. Sometimes it is hard to project a specific face onto the foliage or to move from Clint Eastwood to, say, Ted Kennedy, and there are probably various reasons that might account for such failure. But it happens often enough to prove the point that the only face that is there, in the thicket, is the one you've put there from your memory's storehouse, and that's why your friend can't see the face you see (and why you can't easily communicate to a fellow birder where the bird you see is located in the tree). As an overall rule, I would say that all perception is strongly influenced by expectation. If you go looking deliberately for Clint Eastwood in a tree or a cloud, you are more likely to find him than John Wayne or Julius Caesar, whom you weren't looking for.

And this, I presume, is more or less the frame of mind in which artists paint pictures and writers write stories. Creativity, according to Paul Churchland, may be defined as "the capacity to see or interpret a problematic phenomenon as an unexpected or unusual instance of a prototypical pattern already in one's conceptual repertoire" (1995, 278). If this is too uternurously stated, try the art historian E. H. Gombrich's version, that the artist is someone who doesn't paint what he sees but what he already knows how to paint (1965, 86-90). In any case, one thing leads automatically to another; or, more correctly, what is already there
leads to the kinds of next things that are most likely to constitute the pattern of likeness the artist has in mind. Moreover, there is no reason to think that this same process of visual deception doesn’t operate in the dream state, where there is even less constraint on the power of imagination to realize its prodigies. In a dream, if something in a face should remind you of Clint Eastwood, the complete Clint is likely to show up, even though he may be wearing Indiana Jones’s hat.

So the brain obviously has the capacity to call forth its pictorial holdings—in reaction to slight structures of resemblance it finds in reality. And these holdings seem to be attached to, or at least to summon, still larger frames of reference that follow them like a comet’s tail. Thus the brain seems categorically unable to consider any of its productions in pure isolation, as a figure without a ground, or an object without a history; almost automatically the brain is drawn to narrative structures which may be thought of as ways of motivating the image, or giving it some sort of context (“This face has just experienced something painful. Perhaps someone it loved has died”?). But note also that this act of perception is as much a form of reading as it is a form of authorship for the tree or cloud is, in this instance, an unintentional text which calls forth, in my reading of it, the “message” of a face. It doesn’t make any difference whether the text is intentional (a novel or poem) or unintentional (a tree or cloud); the act of interpretation is the same whether you’re reading Updike’s Rabbit, Run, an X ray, or a Rorschach blot; we always bring to the text a set of signs—or what in this connection I prefer to call memories—even if the “text” happens to be a chaos of leaves and branches. We call this creativity, but as a mental process it is better called an act of involuntary memory, wherein something new is brought forth from something old through an act of revision that completes the imaginative or creative act. That is why we can say that creation is an act of remembering—or, to put it another way, an act of recombining memories. Moreover, it is an act of involuntary remembering. Indeed, if you go looking for a metaphor in an analytical or conceptual mode of thinking, you are likely to come up dry. You can’t go to the metaphor; it must come to you via a memory circuit you have inadvertently opened.

A good empirical analogy might be that of an electrical storm building to the point of discharge in the form of lightning, which takes the path of least resistance to the earth. The ground, in the case of the dream, would be the topography of memory in which certain associations might stand out like tall trees in relation to the charge. This excitation or feeling thus becomes itself the cause of an imaginary cause and by this means the cause-effect sequence, as we normally understand it, is inverted. The formation of a dream image, which is always dynamically changing, requires nothing more than the impetus of an association—the cause or effect—that is imponderably complex and therefore requires a story of its own. And at some point along the line, when the charge becomes strong enough perhaps, the process begins to accumulate the lineaments of a story. That is, it accumulates a quotient of emotional energy, a feeling, so to speak, in search of a conceptual framework, or a kind of prepositional as to what kinds of things can happen to such an energy in its further evolution, on the basis of our personal memory of the waking world. All in all, a narrative would be an exercise in a force following the line of least resistance, somewhat like a slow bolt of lightning—or, once again, like natural selection.

As we all know, dreams cannot be explained this simply. Sometimes dream images seem jammed together, producing bizarre constructions, and sometimes not. Sometimes the plots don’t seem all that relevant in their continuations, though who can say what is or isn’t relevant in a dream? Perhaps there are purely physiological reasons for this (such as a rush of acetylcholine, in Allan Hobson’s theory, or a fever, or a strong Hungarian goulash), but there are good poetic reasons as well, or at least these image productions can be explained on the same grounds that we explain the images of waking authors. For example, William Empson, in Seven Types of Ambiguity (1947), discusses images that move from simple ambiguities to highly complex ones. There are images in poetry that seem to be the result of meanings that don’t agree with each other (type 4), or images that lie halfway between one aspect of an idea and another—as it were, an image in transition, not yet clear in the author’s mind (type 5), and finally (type 7) images that express a fundamental
division in the author's mind when the author is "of two minds." And the consequent image, Empson says, "is at once an indecision and a structure" (191). Such an image, I gather, would be tantamount to what in psychiatric terms would be called ambivalence, in which one might hold opposing attitudes toward someone at the same time (like love and hate). At any rate, I see no reason why Empson's poetic categories would not figure in the dreamwork as well as they do in poetry, as dreams have even less time to resolve any ambiguities they cast up as a consequence of "indecisions," multiple associations, or ambivalent feelings.

Coming back to Linnés and Paré, if both the waking and the dream states share common cognitive processes, there is no reason to assume that the dreaming brain is any more sure of where it is going than the waking brain is. And in dreams, of course, ambiguity would assert itself primarily as visual bizarreness, or a jarring of images that on empirical grounds don't quite form a unity. One could argue for dreams what we commonly assume about literary works: they aren't in the business of resolving ambiguities but of simply displaying them. No one has ever definitively explained what makes Hamlet tick, and that's primarily because no single thing makes him tick: he is structured like a contradiction, though a very coherent one to be sure. He is, as Empson would say, at once an indecision and a structure. Anyway, there seems to be no reason for claiming that dreams can't create doubts and indecisions as much as they dream about outright fears or desires. We spend a good deal of our time in doubt and indecision, and the dream's job is to cast up images that imitate these states of mind, not to make sense where none is to be found.

Let me apply the principle to a recent dream. Bigelow, a friend of mine from New York City, was visiting me in a dream that took place in a field where carnival or theater apparatus was being set up. He appeared rather suddenly in the plot. In the dream I looked at him and was suddenly reminded of my colleague Peter, who now struck me as being about the same height as Bigelow and having the same general facial structure. I noticed this, even remarked it to myself in the dream, and Bigelow suddenly became Peter, and the two kept changing places as it occurred to me that one had somehow become the other. While I had no control over the process, it was later clear to me that it was I who was provoking the shifts, not the dreamwork willfully encouraging me on the Peter/Bigelow figure. In other words, I thought, "Bigelow looks like Peter," and the dream would echo my thought by producing Peter, and then I'd think, "Peter and Bigelow do look alike," and Bigelow would reappear, or there would be a composite figure that would pass as both. Of course these changes didn't occur quite so abruptly, but they did occur and it seems inescapable that the changes corresponded to my thoughts about who reminded me of whom. It's very much like the parapsychological principle of influencing objects at a distance through strong mental concentration, though of course it happens automatically in the dream. The only difference was that in this dream I was experiencing the power of changing identities in an unusually aware state, as though my thoughts were a magic wand that could bestow new identities on the figures of the dream. I'm not sure how it finally turned out (you rarely are, in these transformations), but it seemed to me pretty clear evidence that the dream works coresponsively with the thoughts you are having about it, and that the dream, in a manner of speaking, is a visualization of your thought, most of which is occurring beneath awareness.

To make this the single rule of dreaming would be going much too far. If this were always the case, imagine what dangers you would expose yourself to when you even thought about danger; or, on the brighter side, imagine what sexual success you could have in dreams at the very sight of an attractive woman or man coming your way. But it doesn't work like this. The most you can say is that sometimes, where dream characters or animals or things like houses, cars, and machinery are concerned, the dream begins to follow mysterious codes of resemblance in which identities become unstable and things oscillate with their similarity to other such things. My own tentative explanation for all this is that plotlines in dreams, as in waking fictions, are already unstable; whereas characters, places, and objects are, as in daily life, gen-
eraly more stable. But stability, in any form, is antithetical to dreaming. Dreams are not paintings, least of all still life. They are in continual motion. Thus all identity is subject to instant revision and expansion in a dream. You just don’t notice it because that is a condition of dream perception that is normal as room temperature. This is the best in the way of a rule that i have been able to find.

However, there is more to be said about the Peter-Bigelow dream. When I thought about this dream the next morning, I decided that Peter and Bigelow don’t really look alike, after all. The dream was wrong, or at least proceeding on very slim circumstantial evidence. I suspect that anyone seeing them side by side would find no resemblance. It certainly had never occurred to me, but then I never had cause to think of them in the same thought frame. Now that it comes to my attention, there is a slight categorical resemblance in the sense that they do have similar, squinty faces and high cheekbones and are roughly the same height, but this seems a remote basis for a correlation (scurvy I know other people who look more like Bigelow than Peter: for instance, I’ve always thought Bigelow looks like Richard Dreyfuss). I think the match required a second-level correlation that has to do with what was happening in the dream at the moment. I recall that there was some sort of series of high platforms being set up in a field that may have indicated a theater performance about to be held, and I had some part in it. I was apparently a stagehand, just doing what I was told. And it happens that both Peter and Bigelow are associated with the theater, Bigelow in my past at Yale Drama School, Peter in my present department. So there was a double association at work. Physical resemblance, by itself, would not be sufficient, but if it is abetted by the accident of a theater event in the offing and the need for me to have instructions on what to do, whatever it may have been, Peter and Bigelow begin to resemble each other. Thus one line of connection bleeds over into another. So a refinement of the rule might read: a weak resemblance of type A (facial structure) may be strengthened by a secondary common denominator of type B (occupation, environment, etc.). Or, in another variation: given

an additional incentive to see resemblance, a dream will modify its qualifications for resemblance. An instant’s thought will tell you how this rule applies to waking life, as when A hits B for a position over C, D, and E (who are better qualified) because B is also A’s brother-in-law.

So, to come back to my dream, Bigelow and Peter looked alike (were interchangeable) primarily because of the theater context. Had the dream put me, say, an athletic context (tennis), Bigelow probably would not have been in the dream and my tennis partner Paul would have. And now, wide awake and scrutinizing the details, I can even see a resemblance between Paul and my old roommate Bob, with whom I played tennis on a recent visit.

All in all, with regard to choices of this sort, dreaming is similar to drawing a doodle on a napkin. You begin by making a circle, to which you append a second interlocking circle or a square, then you put a small circle inside the square, a triangle inside that, shade the area outside the triangle to the circular border; then you notice the whole thing is getting bop-arted, or unpleasantly asymmetrical, so you add a window looking past the whole affair into an abstract landscape, and before long your original circle is buried in whimsical geometry. You have a pleasing structure, perhaps, because the whole process has been brought about by the spatial “needs” of the drawing at each point (balance, symmetry, interest), but you couldn’t have guessed it would turn out as it does, nor could you tell (unless by memory) which figure had been the parent of all the others. And so a dream is a kind of time-space doodle that uses the remembered forms of waking experience as its circles, squares, and triangles. The function of any single element in a dream, one might say, is to belong to what is already there, and to this end anything that appears in a dream cases in its discrete identity at the gate in exchange for a provisional identity that becomes the toy of an evolving contextual environment.

Thus what we commonly call plots (in literary fiction) are nothing more or less than continually evolving patterns of imagery and events. As a simple example: I am driving a car at high speed on a two-way
country road. At the top of a hill I see ahead of me a hay rake traveling extremely slowly. These are two events, one caused by the other (it is likely that one might see hay rakes on country roads). The next event, in all likelihood, will have something to do with the encroaching closure of my car and the hay rake. I try to pass, yet a car is coming from the other direction; I can’t slow down in time; I barely avoid the hay rake by driving off the road. And so it is with images and characters in a dream. Each episode, each “frame” of the dream narrows the possibilities of the ensuing episodes within certain limits of expectation. I shall return to this theme in my discussion of scripts and dream plots in the next chapter. Here, I need only say that it is no great miracle of compositional skill that dreams stick to the point as well as they do; for the most part, they follow a logic of resemblance drawn directly from the dreamer’s complete fund of experience in the waking world. But this overall reliability is what gives us the erroneous idea that when dreams “fail” to make sense something is wrong with them. It isn’t a matter of failure or making sense at all; the term failure can be applied only to something with a deliberate or intentional origin and purpose. The explanation lies, rather, in the nature of dreaming, which is not to make sense but to make images that belong to each other at some level of personal association, usually beneath the scrutiny of the dreamer.

In this regard, I am puzzled by Allan Hobson’s discussion of the incoherence of dreams in *The Chemistry of Conscious States* (1994a). Hobson argues that “One of the most precious myths about dreams . . . is that, in spite of their microscopic chaos, their overall plot design is unified” (122). Not so, he says, and as proof he offers an exercise conducted in his dream seminar called dream splicing. He took twenty random dream reports, each of which contained one scene shift. Then he cut ten of the reports in half with a scissors at the point where the scene shifted. Finally, the pieces were transposed, “heads on tails, heads on heads, tails on heads, tails on tails.” Then all twenty dreams were passed out to the seminar and each person was asked to distinguish the spliced dreams from the unspliced. No one had more than “better than chance” success. From this Hobson reports that “Dream coherence may be in the eye of the beholder, but it is not in the text of the report” (123). Thus dream plots, he concludes, are not unified.

It strikes me there is something self-fulfilling about this experiment, and I suspect it has to do with the standard of coherence being tested.

“The significance of [the exercise],” Hobson says, “is that, although each subplot may be a storylike unit, there is no story line connecting one subplot to the next” (123). First, much the same thing might be said, within limits, of certain novels and plays that explore the vicissitudes of several families (Teasby and Shakespeare come to mind). It is true that in the end coherence is usually established in such cases, and that the various subplots in some way usually, but not always, interweave (Jacobian subplots are notoriously unintegrated into the main plot). So if you spliced scenes in a different order from, say, different Shakespearean history plays, you couldn’t tell if something was unusual until it became clear that two different stories were being told. I mention this only to establish that shifts and re-beginnings are common technical features of waking fictions and that the relation of one plot to another has very little to do with causal logic. However, this aside, there is another problem with the integrity test.

What disappears from all dream reports is something that couldn’t possibly survive the dream, and that is what we might call a psychological coherence, or a coherence established by likeness of effect. A recall of dream events, in other words, couldn’t capture the subliminal ways in which one dream sequence might bring on another, even though the new dream sequence involved an entirely new set of characters and a new locale. But who is to say that segment A didn’t contain the seeds of segment B, or that both A and B weren’t variations on a theme that had no particular identifying marks from the waking standpoint? Who is to say that some overall quality—like aggression, fear, joy, frustration, or even something less definable like Einstein’s self-contradicting ambiguities—ain’t coming into play? I’m not arguing for the coherence of dreams, at least not in all cases. But I wonder whether one can judge the
coherence or incoherence of something as relentlessly hypersuggestive as a dream, or a dream series, from the waking standpoint, and apart from the psychic environment in which it was born. Hobson might find these remarks an example of what he refers to as the predilection of "the integrated brain-mind... to discern integrity, unity, and singleness of purpose in any text that appears to be integral. And when integrity does not reside in the text, we implore it" (1994, 112). But I'm not implying integrity, far from it. I'm questioning whether integrity, as we know and admire it, has anything to do with dreaming. I'm also suggesting that it is possible to impune nonintegrity on the same unjustified grounds. This is our old verificationist problem from chapter 3, and we will confront it again in the next chapter. Its primary limitation is that it sees everything through analytic glasses, and there are certain kinds of experience that cannot be seen by the analytical eye.

No, there is a lot of "incoherence" in dreams. It's just that we have no way of making sense where it begins and ends or what causes it. Much of the commentary on dreams assumes that all dream events are intentional at some level: that is, if you dream of playing cards with a dog, the dog can be explained as a symbol standing for something else, since it makes no sense in the realm of coherence. But such a theory ignores the

3. Melanie Lamke, in her essay on the dream as an investigative tool, mentions a number of studies that have failed to distinguish dreams of schizophrenia from the dreams of nonpsychotics on the basis of "manifest content alone" (1991, 460). One of the explanations might be that the quality of "schizophrenia" does not manifest itself at the manifest level. Except for odd descriptive qualities ("the room was forbidding and eerie") dream reports virtually leave behind the real dream, not only in its overall atmosphere but in the inseparable coalition of feeling and image that characterizes dreams. It is one thing to say "he was branching and eerie," quite another to be in the room suffering, say, the terror of self-dissolution. In one way, dream events and people are already schizophreniaically inclined to a nosophatological sense. That is, everything in a dream is a part of what R. D. Laing would call a false self-system, in which the dreamer is parceled out to the images he or she imagines in the dream. At the very least, all dream characters and objects are bathed in the peculiar aura of the dreamer's consciousness, much as the characters in a Shakespearean play are all little Shakespeares pretending to be Rosalinds, Mercutios, and Hamlets.

It is possible that the connection between dog and card playing is simply submerged in the dreamer's experience. The connection may not involve meaning at all but simply metonymic proximity, whereby dogs and cards belong in the same category for a particular dreamer. Or, to refine the idea a bit further: dog and cards might, in this particular instance, be part of a double metaphor in which both refer to a common tense. I'm thinking of cases, some personal, in which an author might be thinking with two different ways of saying the same thing and arrive finally at a mixed metaphor or a catachresis—that is, a combination that seems incoherent because the common denominator is missing—something like Milton's "blind mouths" or Hamlet's "to take arms against a sea of troubles."

I can illustrate this point by turning to one of my most indelible memories of youthful embarrassment. In 1947 at the DalBois Undergraduate Center in Pennsylvania, as a freshman reporter on the school magazine, I was assigned to interview a town downer about the town's early lumbering industry. The interview was conducted in an elegant sitting room in her house, just off campus. In the course of the interview she mentioned that one of the pioneers in DalBois lumbering had been the Post family. Wanting to show some knowledge of the world (at seventeen) and being journalistically aggressive, I interrupted politely and asked if they were related to the Saturday Evening Posts. With a graciousness for which I am forever thankful, my hostess overlooked the blunder (perhaps even taking it as a joke) and with a gentle smile said, "No, not those Posts." On the level of walking logic I had committed the terrible mistake of confusing basic categories. But on another level, my thinking (thinking now more coherently about it) had been quite astute. Poor perhaps by practical standards and purposes, but aesthetically speaking I was right in the right mode: it is thanks to such false connections that poets produce rhymes and puns, and (if I try again) that dreams, like morning fences, are inclined to take the shortest distance between two posts.