

## Phenomenology Lab 6.

### *Meaning-making in the Twilight State.*

Spontaneous thoughts ... effort-free states.

We are going back to Chapter 4 in the textbook this week, to pick up some important ideas.

In P-Lab 6 we would like to encourage you to listen to the audio sitting in a comfortable chair, and gently explore your own "twilight" state. We will use the P-lab to ask you to freely associate to some everyday words we will say. You can do this without an audio source, of course, but it might be easier to use the audio to present some words for you to think about. What we are all interested in is your visual associations --- the images that might come to mind spontaneously when we pose a question or say a word. It's just an opportunity to let your imaginative flow emerge naturally and safely, without too much self-judgment. If you wish, you can take a few notes on your experiences and share them with us during our Discussions for the week. But you can use this any way you like...

The ability to guide and select our own experience is increased when we feel alert and ready to do effortful thinking. It is *decreased* when we allow the flow of thoughts to happen spontaneously. In *\*absorbed states,\** sometimes called *\*the experience of Flow\** we feel alert, but our conscious contents are deeply involved in making music, dancing, running, or playing. Creative activities often take place in such a "flow" state. In Flow states we usually do not feel conflicts about our goals, or whether to pay attention to this or that. We do not worry about things that are not relevant to our current conscious experiences. We are capable of more "imaginative involvement," in the words of

Jerome Singer, one of the pioneers in this area. Absorption has a small but reliable correlation with suggestibility, which can be considered to be a state in which we don't bother to self-monitor --- so we are not constantly examining our own conscious experiences in a self-judging way. Meditation-related states can have this quality of being absorbing.

All this relates to selective attention, which is our ability to be conscious of *\*this\** rather than *\*that.\** But there are at least two different poles of selective attention: There is *voluntary* selective attention, which can be effortful, as when you are staying up at night trying to cram for that test, but you keep feeling the urge to go to sleep. The effort there is to stay awake and focus on the exam. At the other pole is "*effort-less*" selective attention, when our consciousness is drawn to some subject in an easy way, with no attempt to make it one thing or another.

In REM dreams (with rapid eye movements) we usually follow an inner movie --- a narrative flow of visual and meaningful but surreal events. In other sleep states there are now believed to be other kinds of mentation, including a kind of very literal flow of inner speech. During "lucid dreaming" we experience both an inner movie and also maintain the knowledge that we are dreaming. So that is a kind of "metacognition during dreaming," implying more frontal lobe activity.

In the P-Lab this week, we would like to encourage you to listen to the audio either lying in bed, or sitting in a comfortable chair, and gently explore a "Twilight" state.

Please download the audio file from the Contents page, called:

*Week 6: Meaning-making in the twilight state.*

There is a very nice report from 1901 from someone named Herbert Silberer, who discovered in a drowsy “twilight” state, that questions he posed to himself often seemed to result in visual symbols that represented the problem. It is the only best way we know to study the very interesting domain of spontaneous symbolism. So it’s a fun and interesting thing to try.

When you feel ready, you can start the next part of the audio.

When you feel drowsy, just start this recording. I am going to read some words, and then wait ten seconds. Then I will read some more words, and again wait for ten seconds. You can stop the audio any time you like, if you need more time.

We would like you to just allow your mind to drift and notice whatever words or visual images come up in your mind. If you can write them down, or tape record them, that might be helpful for later. But write down the details when you feel more alert, after the P-Lab is over.

We will play some background sounds of ocean waves and birds, which are just for the purpose of relaxation.

So here is the first set of three words, and again, just allow your mind to drift easily and simply notice whatever associations come up for you.

After about eight sets of words, we will give a brief explanation, and follow up in our weekly Discussions.

Dr B