Chapter 67
Breaking the Frame of Digital, Dream, and Waking Realities

Jayne I. Gackenbach
MacEwan University, Canada

Sarkis Hakopdjanian
MacEwan University, Canada

ABSTRACT

Just as our dreaming reality is constructed, our waking reality may also be constructed. While our waking reality influences our lives the most, other constructed realities also have impact. Yet, never before has such a large part of the population been so widely affected by another constructed reality beyond dreaming; specifically, our technologically constructed digital reality through video game play. One potential consequence of video game play is breaking the illusion or 'frame' of our dreams as reality through various dream experiences. Many of the world's wisdom traditions believe that waking reality is an illusion, and now this idea is supported by modern digital physics. While being aware of the illusory nature of waking reality is difficult, it may be easier to break the framework of perception or 'wake up' to the true nature of reality in alternative realities, such as digital and dreaming. This chapter will review the evidence collected in the video game and dream laboratory to explore how video game play is breaking the frame within dreaming realities.

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about happily enjoying himself. He did not know that he was Zhou. Suddenly he awoke, and was palpably Zhou. He did not know whether he was Zhou, who had dreamed of being a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhou. (Zhuangzi, as cited in Mair, 1998)

Our experience of life is subjective and may be a constructed reality (Blackmore, 2012). Within this experience, there exist various other constructed realities or states of consciousness. One such state is experienced by everyone while we sleep: our constructed dreaming reality. Dreams may have been

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one of the first realizations of an alternative reality by our early ancestors. Zhuang Zhou's parable is over 2,000 years old, and it is one of the earliest instances in recorded history where we question the boundaries of reality through dreams. These boundaries can be broken or transcended through various techniques, which can result in altered, and perhaps even higher states of consciousness. In traditional, indigenous societies, psychoactive plants and fungi, as well as drumming, vision quests, and sweat lodges were used by our early ancestors to alter their consciousness and access states of non-physical reality (Schultes, Hofmann, & Rätsch, 2001). In modern, industrialized societies, digital technology is used to access various constructions of reality. These digital technologies are not only interacting with people and societies but are also influencing ideas and philosophies. As a result, our theories of mind and reality are being informed by these technologies and evolving into various theories on mind/machine relationships, digital philosophy, digital physics, and simulated reality.

Our intention in this chapter is to explore the relationship between various constructions of reality, focusing on our biologically constructed dreaming reality and our technologically constructed digital reality. These realities exist within a framework of perception and this frame can be broken in various ways, which may result in a phenomenon often called "waking up" in the transpersonal literature. For instance, in a lucid dream the dreamer is aware that they are in a dream. This awareness breaks the frame of the dreaming reality by allowing the dreamer to become simultaneously aware of the true nature of their dreamt reality as well as their waking reality. Thus, the dreamer is "waking up" in their dream while still remaining asleep. In this chapter, we investigate ways in which the frame can be broken in dreaming realities, but also in digital realities, and perhaps even in waking reality. Some of the newest theories in physics, while long espoused in the wisdom traditions, have philosophical implications on the nature of our waking reality as perhaps a simulated construction within a framework of perception. Ultimately, we are exploring how breaking the frame, within these constructions of reality, affects the nature of consciousness itself.

MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION

We have been creating, interacting with, and influencing technology since the beginning of our existence. In turn, these technologies have been influencing us biologically, psychologically, culturally, socially, and even philosophically, by informing our ontological theories of mind and reality. Theories of mind that consider the relationship between the human mind and machines have a long history. Sternberg and Preiss (2005) argue that mediated communication, whether it is through modern electronic technologies or through simple lines on a cave wall, has long affected how we think. They broadly conceptualize the development of technology as "the building of artifacts or procedures—tools—to help people accomplish their goals" (p. xvii) and thus note technology's longstanding influence on human development.

Sternberg and Preiss (2005) present two dimensions of technological influence: frequency of use and degree of dissemination. High and low classification along each of these two dimensions yields a four–part taxonomy. The degree of influence on the human mind by mediated communication ranges from the rarely used, but nonetheless widely influential (e.g. aptitude tests), to the widely used and widely influential (e.g. alphabets). In this taxonomy, digital worlds in computers, the Internet, and video gaming are moving from the very rare, if influential (e.g. early computer use by mainframe computers), to the widely used and widely disseminated (e.g. today's use of the Internet as a mass medium or the wide