

DREAMS AND VISIONS IN INDIGENOUS LIFEWORLDS: AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

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Abstract/Résumé

Experiences of dreams or visions and accounts of them clearly inform social interactions in non-western societies in which the world of spirits is as real as that of work, though real in different qualitative ways. The ethnographic record shows that western anthropologists who enter such worlds, and suspend as far as possible their own social conditioning, consistently report dreams or visions that are consistent with the ones described by the people they “study.” Based on experience while conducting fieldwork among the Guajiro of Columbia, South America, and among the Dene Tha of northwestern Alberta, the author suggests steps that may be taken in dealing with such experiences—those of the anthropologist and of the “Native”—without relegating them to “merely anecdotal” or “unsubstantiated.”

Les expériences des rêves ou des visions et leurs exposés renseignent manifestement les interactions sociales dans les sociétés non-occidentales où le monde des fantômes est aussi réel que le monde du travail, bien qu'il soit réel en divers moyens qualitatifs. Le rapport ethnographique indique que les anthropologues occidentaux qui entrent dans ces mondes et qui suspendent aussi loin que possible leur propre réflexe conditionné social, rendent compte régulièrement des rêves et des visions qui sont compatibles avec ceux qui sont décrits par les gens qu'ils “étudient.” L'auteur suggère une démarche qu'on puisse suivre pour intégrer ces expériences. Cette suggestion repose sur des expériences en ses recherches sur le terrain chez les Guajiros de Colombie en Amérique du sud et chez les Dene Tha de l'Alberta du nord-ouest—celles de l'anthropologue et de l'autochtone—sans les reléguer au statut de simples “anecdotes” ni au statut de propositions “non-conformées.”

Introduction

Ethnographers have often found themselves immersed in societies in which people talk about their dreams and in which other people readily interpret them, societies in which “the world of ghosts and spirits is as real as that of markets, though real in different qualitative ways than can be ethnographically described” (Obeyesekere, 1990:66). This paper argues that in the process of anthropological fieldwork it is possible, and even useful, for the ethnographer to experience this qualitatively different world of ghosts and spirits, and to incorporate such experiences in ethnographic accounts. The paper illustrates the manner in which this can be done and discusses some of the issues that arise from the inclusion of the anthropologist's experiences in an ethnographic account of the society of others, a society in which ghosts and spirits are as “real” as merchants and clients, a society in which accounts of dreams and their interpretation are a normal process of interaction and decision-making.

A good ethnographic description of such social experiences does not come easily. Ethnographers constantly remind themselves—lest they be reminded by their colleagues—never to “go native,” never to become one of “them,” lest the resulting ethnography become a naïve espousal of another people's worldview and ethos, thus losing all objective and scientific value. The challenge is “to be one with them yet not one of them” (Obeyesekere, 1990:11). Geertz (1986:373), who reminds us that “we cannot live other people's lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try,” insists that as ethnographers we “can but listen to what, in works, in images, in actions, [others] say about their lives.” In his view whatever sense is made of “how things stand with someone else's inner life, we gain it through their expression, not through some magical intrusion into their consciousness” (Geertz, 1986:373). Accordingly the fieldworker is expected to focus exclusively on the public system of symbols—speech, art, actions, artifacts, etc.—in terms of which individuals interact, order their subjective experiences, and speak about them.

I agree with Geertz that we cannot live other people's lives nor magically intrude into their consciousness, be they members of our culture or of another culture. But to see the task of the ethnographer as Geertz portrays it precludes the reporting and analysis of the kind of nocturnal and waking dreams documented in this paper. His views cannot accommodate all that we can do and learn in the field, not only about others, but also about ourselves in interaction with them. Ethnographic work can—but does not necessarily need to—go hand in hand with inner experiences, dreams and visions, on the part of the anthropologist that can become part of normal

interactions with others. Anthropologists may then do more than listen to what others say about their lives. Anthropologists may pay attention to their own lives, including their inner lives, and listen to other peoples' response to their accounts of their dreams and/or visions experienced while living among them. To do so is not an impediment to the empirical task of anthropologists to describe "the way in which religious beliefs [among others] appear to the believer" (Geertz, 1971:99). Rather the presentation of such data on the part of ethnographers is crucial to the presentation of evidence "that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another truly 'been there'" (Geertz, 1988:4-5).

It is generally true that as an ethnographer "I begin to understand the other culture, not on the basis of accumulated data (that are by themselves empty of understanding) but when I can relate to my informants dialogically, such that their actions make reasonable sense to me, as mine to them" (Obeyesekere, 1990:226). This is also true of accounts of dreams and visions. I understand a people among whom dreams are readily talked about and interpreted when I can relate to them in such a way that their dreams make reasonable sense to me, as mine to them, precisely because they exhibit similar content or images, are amenable to similar kinds of interpretations, or are seen locally as consistent with the expected consequences of ritual actions. Having had dreams and visions in the lifeworld of others that appear to flow into one's own stream of consciousness from one's immersion in that lifeworld, and having entered into meaningful conversations and interactions with others on the basis of such accounts of dreams, the anthropologist can simply ignore them in the presentation of one's work, or can attempt to incorporate these dreams and visions in one's ethnography. To choose the second alternative is to range beyond Geertz' admonition.

To be one with them in a society in which "the world of ghosts and spirits is as real as that of markets, though real in different qualitative ways," the ethnographer—and the reader—first have to contend with the fact that in these societies the distinctions familiar to the Western mind between the world of everyday life and the world of dreams are simply not drawn. Moreover, in such societies one often finds well-developed traditions for inducing visions and/or lucid dreaming, traditions that are available to individuals as part of their social development.¹ Such traditions seem incompatible with the ethnographer's own society's low tolerance of fantasies and of the primary thought processes in general. Hence the reticence of ethnographers to cross over to others and "enter with them into dreamland, for to do so is to venture beyond the confines of civilized man," into

a realm of experiences “which white men tend to hide in asylums” (Burridge, 1960:251). As Rappaport (1979:130) notes, “the empirical and logical rationality that defines knowledge as knowledge of fact” is a rationality that is not hospitable to “the insights of art, religion, fantasy, or dream.”²

Nonetheless, this paper argues that an interpretive synthesis of data pertaining to another society and culture may fruitfully include the anthropologist's accounts of his/her own dreams and visions as they inform his or her interaction with others in their lifeworld. This argument is made despite the fact that ethnographers' experiences of dreams and visions were, and still are, most often suppressed in ethnographies (Stoller and Olkes, 1987:ix-xii; Tedlock 1991a:71-72). To do otherwise was, and still is, to open oneself to the charge of having “gone native,” or, worse, of harboring in one's mind superstitious beliefs that ought to be superseded by reason and scientific knowledge. “The kind of thinking that leads to paranormal beliefs is all too common outside anthropology;” writes Lett (1991:325), “we need less of it within our own ranks.”³

The inclusion of material drawn from one's own subjective life while in the field runs counter to the non-Native anthropological practice of distancing oneself from those about whose institutions, beliefs, and experiences one is writing. True, some anthropologists have published accounts of their dreams first noted down in their journals (Malinowski, 1967:66-82; Nader, 1970:111-112; Caesara, 1982:22); “others have also told their dreams to members of the society in which they were working for the purpose of having them interpreted [Bruce, 1975; Jackson, 1978; Tedlock, 1981; Stephen, 1989]” (Tedlock, 1991b:165). Nonetheless, personal narratives generally—not only those of dreams and visions—tend not to count as “professional capital” as they “are often deemed self-indulgent, trivial, or heretical in other ways” (Pratt, 1986:31). Many years ago Burridge (1960:1) noted “it is a shame that this should be so,” but so it is. As a result anthropologists inevitably provide descriptions and analyses of what others do, think, dream, see, and feel, without ever portraying themselves as doing, thinking, dreaming, seeing, and feeling in similar ways. The classic ethnography is by definition an account of the “other,” of “his”—and very seldom “her”—vision of his or her world.

Contemporary challenges to this classic view of ethnographic work are many. It is now more generally accepted that others should be seen not “as ontologically given but as historically constituted” (Said, 1989:225), that is to say that the representation and perception of the other is a derivative of the anthropologist's interpretive assumptions rather than of a substantive, external reality (Combs-Schelling, 1989:13). It is more clearly recognized than ever that all ethnographic data are produced or created in the

context of social, dialogical interactions between ethnographer and informant (Ruby, 1982; Marcus and Fisher, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Foster, 1990). At its 1989 annual conference, the Association of Social Anthropologists recognized that “the extent to which autobiography can be written into ethnography is a matter for creative experimentation” appropriate for the anthropological endeavour (Okely, 1992:24). Indeed, because “the experience of fieldwork is totalising and draws on the whole being” of the ethnographer, it cannot be “trivialised as the ‘collection of data’ by a dehumanized machine” (Okely, 1992:3).

This being the case, the ethnographer's experiences of interaction in another lifeworld ought to be viewed for what they are, namely viable tools of research (Peters, 1981:39; Myerhoff and Ruby, 1982). The pursuit of engagement in a qualitatively different lifeworld ought to go hand in hand with the observation of participation. Such an approach leads to a narrative ethnography, one that focuses not on the ethnographer himself or herself “but rather on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue or encounter” as the context in which experiences arise and data are generated (Tedlock, 1991a:78).

To be one with others in their society, in an ethnographic dialogue, one must become, at least to some extent, a competent member of their society. This competency, as will be illustrated in this paper, may extend to the realm of the imagination. For although “there is no known device that measures the degree of penetration into an alien culture” one may assume that the deeper the participation in the new culture, the more one would expect changes at a “psychic level in the patterns of cognitive and emotional response and in the unconscious manifestations through dreams and visions” (Kimball, 1972:191). This is especially so, I believe, when anthropologists “render themselves vulnerable to the total impact not just of the other culture but of the intricate human existences of those they are ‘hired’ to ‘study’ ” (Turner, 1985:205). When this occurs, accounts of dreams and visions on the part of ethnographers may enter into the construction of meaningful social interactions in the lifeworld of the people they find themselves with, as did, for instance, Myerhoff with her vision of herself impaled on the Maya tree of life after having ingested the Huichol peyote (1972); Grindal with his vision of the dancing corpse of a deceased Sisala in the midst of a funeral (1983); and Lederman with her experience of the “Inner Wind” when in trance as an apprentice to a Malay shaman (1988).

The kind of experiences referred to here often evoke a sense of shock and disbelief. Moreover the report of such experiences on the part of ethnographers immediately brings to mind Castaneda's work which is seen as “parables posing as ethnography” (Geertz, 1983:20) or as an “elaborate

hoax, a brilliant effort to make a lot of money as best-selling author" (Stoller and Olkes, 1987:25). The highly questionable authenticity of Castaneda's work makes any report of "extraordinary" experiences risky in the profession (de Mille, 1981). This however should not rule out their presentation altogether. Such accounts can fall under the rubric of "good ethnography," which "must disturb, shock, or jolt us into an awareness we did not have before" (Obeyesekere, 1990:224). Good ethnographic reports, whatever their subject matter, jolt us into new awareness, for they are derived from lived experiences that challenge one's own conventions and assumptions in life. Good ethnographic reports evoke a realm of human experience and, in the process, lay the groundwork for its explanation within anthropology.

Dreaming in the Guajiro World

The following account of preparing for and then engaging in fieldwork among the Guajiro of South America illustrates how the progressive immersion into another lifeworld may become the medium through which "bits and pieces of incoherent and technical knowledge," including knowledge about dreams, suddenly "acquire an organic unity and meaning it did not previously possess" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963:373). In 1975, as I prepared to leave for South America for fieldwork, I read many ethnographies. Among them, a narrative of James Bay Cree dreaming patterns impressed me particularly. It described a Cree stepping out of his house in the morning and telling his neighbours he had awakened from a dream of an Eskimo woman. The man then walked back into his house, came out with a gun and headed for the bush. Immediately, his neighbours began to prepare for an evening feast of moose meat. In the afternoon, the successful hunter returned to the village, and the feast was held as expected. A few words, the mention of a dream, and the agenda was set for the day. Why? Because among the Cree, it is commonly understood that "dreaming of an opposite sex person, especially of foreigners, *must be taken as an indication of game close at hand*" (Tanner, 1976:220-221, my emphasis).

In 1975, as I read this account, I wondered about the story of the Cree hunter. It seemed strange to me that a dream had to be taken as an indication of the presence of game in the area, and that an account of that dream could in effect be taken as a communication that one is going to hunt moose. I wondered at the notion that Cree individuals shared a symbolic system of representation and communication informed by images remembered from dreams. As I had never experienced such a manner of attending to dreams and accounts of dream, it remained, in my mind, closer to the realm of fiction than to social processes of day-to-day communication and

decision-making in the lives of ordinary human beings.

This kind of communication through accounts of dreams was to become an important feature of my field experience among the Guajiro. My initial contact with the Guajiro was in the context of a boarding school where I began to learn their language from Guajiro students who spoke both Spanish and their mother tongue. In the course of time, I befriended the family of my favourite instructor in the Guajiro language. I told them I wanted to live among the Guajiro to learn their way of life, and specified that I wanted to reside where I would never hear a word of Spanish. The family arranged for relatives in the Guajiro hinterland to take me in as a household member. It was agreed that my instructor would spend ten days with me and serve as an interpreter, after which he would return to school. I would then live for over ten months among a population of monolingual Guajiro speakers, herders of sheep, goats, and cattle in the semi-desert environment of the Guajira peninsula in Columbia (Goulet, 1978; 1980; Saler, 1987). I was on my own among the Guajiro for the purpose of understanding their point of view, their vision of their world.

When we arrived at the place I was to live, we were welcomed by the Elders of the household. After we exchanged the traditional Guajiro greeting they immediately proceeded to ask my instructor whether I knew how to dream. I answered in the affirmative, which, my instructor later told me, was a necessary condition for my acceptance into the family and locality. I was surprised at such a condition and, at the time, could not appreciate its significance. In the course of time, I became aware of, and came to participate in, a complex system of dreaming and dream telling that is at the very core of the Guajiro way of life, a system in which animals dreamt of represent human beings, and vice versa (Goulet, 1978; Watson-Franke, 1981; Perrin, 1987a, 1987b). This feature of Guajiro dream interpretation was similar to the one reported for the Cree.

In the interest of brevity, I will focus on the highlights of a process that extended over nearly a year. Each morning, soon after sunrise, I joined the extended family members—fourteen in all—in the kitchen area to drink a small cup of strong, dark coffee. An adult would invariably ask “*jamüsü pūlapūin, ?*” “how were your dreams?” The round of dream telling would begin, different individuals telling his or her dream in turn. Comments from the grandmother or another adult usually followed, after which everyone left for their chores. Although I understood the initial invitation to tell dreams, it is only gradually that I gathered an understanding of what was being told.

Interestingly enough the first dreams the family members insisted that I understand were ones concerning my beard. They began to report seeing me in dreams with a shaved face. On the second such report within a week

I sensed they would prefer I shave my beard but I did not make too much of it until neighbours also reported having had dreams of me with a shaved face. Although I did not know if they really had such dreams—Guajiro themselves recognize that individuals may make up stories about what they supposedly dreamt—it became clear that my beard was an issue of some importance to the local community. I therefore asked them what would happen if I was to keep my beard. The answer was that if I did not shed my facial hair, sheep they were herding would become ill, shed their hair and die as a result. In Guajiro dream symbolism White men are represented as sheep. It appeared to me that family members and neighbours were saying “Either you or your counterpart in the animal world will lose hair. If you insist on keeping your facial hair and an animal later dies you will be responsible for that animal's death.” I knew enough about the allocation of responsibility for occurrences of misfortune in small-scale societies to appreciate that it was just a matter of time before an animal in the locality would become sick, lose hair, and die, making me liable to accusations from the owner that I was responsible for the loss, and hence liable to pursuit for compensation. I therefore chose to shave, to everyone's satisfaction. I had been persuaded to change my appearance through their communication of wishes in the idiom of information received in dreams. I had demonstrated that I was prepared to take accounts of dreams seriously and to act upon them as a reasonable person. Thus in the eyes of the Guajiro I was acting as a member of their moral community.

In the course of time I too began to share Guajiro-like dreams, dreams that contained elements of the Guajiro world (i.e., sheep and bull) that are recurrent symbols in their own dreams. As such dreams emerged in the context of fieldwork they became amenable to meaningful narration and interpretation in dialogical interaction. For instance, on September 16, 1976, I had the following “Guajiro” dream, in the context of a burial ceremony. In the dream, I looked at a man attempting to kill a large bull. The bull was tied to a tree. The man, holding the bull by a horn, tried in vain to push the blade of a long knife through the backbone to the heart. The bull would tense up, shift position, and the knife would inevitably slide to the left or the right of the strong head and neck. The image was still vivid in my mind when I woke up. When I shared the dream, someone immediately asked if I could describe the mark on the bull's hind leg. Among the Guajiro, names and associated designs used in branding are transmitted matrilineally. Thus, the brand reveals the owner's matrilineal identity. In the dream I remembered seeing a brand on the animal, but not having paid attention to it I could not identify it for my auditors. To them, this detail was of utmost importance. The bull clearly represented a man, and the brand

on the animal would have pointed to his identity. A week later, on September 23, news came that a man had survived an ambush and had killed his two aggressors. Members of the family immediately commented that my dream had pointed to this event. To the Guajiro, the man—represented as a bull in my dream—had escaped being murdered.⁴

The Guajiros would not agree with Geertz's view that as an ethnographer I could but listen to what they had to say about their lives. Rather they expected me to dream and to pay attention to my dreams as indeed they would do. They invited me to join with them in the interpretation of dreams. To report my dreams and to engage with them in their interpretation was again to demonstrate that I was prepared to take accounts of dreams seriously and to act upon them as a *reasonable person*. What the Guajiro code of interpretation of selected dream images did was to direct our thinking: when reporting a sheep, think of a Whiteman; when reporting a bull, think of a male Guajiro; and so on. Invariably specific individuals and events were found to match the dream's predictions. Guajiros then tell each other, as indeed they told me: "yes, your dream is true!" In the light of these experiences among the Guajiro, the account of the James Bay Cree preparing for a feast of moose meat following a man's dream of an Eskimo woman became highly plausible. Following an account of a dream, the Guajiro of Columbia and Venezuela, like the Cree of subarctic Canada, is led to think about typical events that are retrospectively seen as predicted by the dream.

The experience among the Guajiro clearly established in my mind that an ethnographer can not only learn the language of the people he lives among but can also, to some degree, experience in dreams symbols that inform their lifeworld, and engage with them in their interpretation. I learned from firsthand experience that such dreams were readily interpreted as foretelling events in the Guajiro environment. Of course, no dream interpretation is ever free of interpretive assumptions. Tedlock, (1987b:105-131) for example demonstrates how a dream by her husband was subject to two radically different interpretations in the context of Hopi and Quiche epistemological and ontological assumptions. Dialogues with people other than Guajiro would have led to other interpretations of my dreams.

The experience of fieldwork, writes Lévi-Strauss (1963:373), represents for the anthropologist "not the goal of his profession, or a completion of his schooling, or yet a technical apprenticeship—but a crucial stage of his education, prior to which he may possess miscellaneous knowledge that will never form a whole." "Where relations between individuals and the system of social relationships combine to form a whole," the anthropologist, continues Lévi-Strauss, "must not merely analyze their elements, but

apprehend them as a whole in the form of a personal experience—his own” (my emphasis). Indeed it is only through successful fieldwork that the anthropologist's knowledge “will acquire an organic unity and meaning it did not previously possess” (1963:372-373). The personal experiences of Guajiro-like dreams did precisely that; they gave me an apprehension as a whole of what Guajiro were talking about amongst themselves, and at times with me. My experience and accounts of my own dreams made accounts and interpretations on the part of Guajiro of their dreams all the more intelligible in the context of their lives and culture. Without this personal experience the bits and pieces of exotic and technical knowledge accumulated about the Guajiro would have lacked unity and coherence.

Dreams and Visions in the Dene Tha World

Participation in Guajiro interpretations of dreams—however limited—jolted me into an awareness I did not have before. Unbeknownst to me at the time, meaningful interaction on the basis of accounts of personal dreams and visions would also prove possible with the Dene Tha of Chateh in northwestern Alberta, among whom I was to undertake long-term fieldwork beginning in January 1980. My interest was in the Dene Tha version of the Prophet Dance complex, a major vehicle through which an Aboriginal world view is expressed, transformed and conveyed among Northern Athapaskans (Spier, 1935; Ridington, 1990; Goulet, 1982; 1992). In Chateh the Prophet Dance is officiated over by the Dene Tha Elders known in the local dialect as *ndatin*, from the verb *ndate*, “he/she dreamed.” When speaking in English, Dene Tha refer to such an Elder as dreamer, prophet, or preacher. Prophets who claim knowledge on the basis of dreams and visions say that they know because their mind is powerful.⁵

As I prepared to study the Prophet Dance I was particularly impressed by Turner's work on understanding rituals and their “creative function” in creating and re-creating “the categories through which men perceive reality” (1968:7). I was therefore prepared to follow Turner's counsel to investigators of ritual processes “to learn them in the first place ‘on their pulses,’ in coactivity with their enactors, having beforehand shared for a considerable time of the people's daily life and gotten to know them not only as players of social roles, but as unique individuals, each with a style and a personality of his or her own” (Turner, 1975:28). It was Turner's view that through learning rituals “on their pulses,” “in coactivity with their enactors,” investigators could make themselves “vulnerable to the total impact not just of the other culture but of the intricate human existences of those they are ‘hired’ to ‘study’ ” (Turner 1985:205). By these means,

suspending as far as possible their own social conditioning, investigators could “have sensory and mental knowledge of what is really happening around and to them” (1985:205), effectively transcending their own ethnocentrism and culturally derived notions of what is real and rational.

The conditions described by Turner were largely achieved in the course of my fieldwork among the Dene Tha. The first two periods of fieldwork were spent learning the local dialect. As I did so Dene Tha Elders encouraged me to speak Dene in public on the premise that some would understand me, some would not understand me, but that I would surely improve. They also continually called upon me to translate for them on and off the Reserve in their dealings with police officers, nurses, teachers, store managers, car dealers, insurance agents and government officials. The Elders would most often have a bilingual grandchild with them, as a witness—and precaution—to my efforts and growing skills. Each successive period of fieldwork led to greater involvement in the daily lives of the Dene Tha, and greater ease in understanding and speaking the tongue in normal, day to day circumstances, even though I never approached in the local dialect the degree of fluency I enjoy in French and in English.

I was also able to learn Dene Tha ritual processes “in coactivity with their enactors” because I was invited to do so. Indeed the Dene Tha held that it was only in coactivity with them in their rituals that I would gradually develop an appreciation for their inner dynamics and their many levels of meanings. Thus, consistent with their view of knowledge as firsthand experience they offered me little in the way of instructions or a body of visions that the Dene Tha interpreted as ways of “knowing with the mind” (see Goulet, forthcoming, for a detailed discussion of interaction with Dene Tha Elders in ritual settings).

From the onset of fieldwork among the Dene Tha I knew that they communicated in ways which appear to Euro-Canadians as indirect and restrained. These ways had first come to my attention in the late 1970s in a story told by Rene Fumoleau who arrived in 1953 as a missionary in Fort Good Hope, and who has since assimilated Dene values to a rare degree for a non-Dene (Fumoleau, 1981). The story begins with Fumoleau attending a conference in Yellowknife, along with numerous Dene leaders and community members from across the Northwest Territories. In the course of the conference Fumoleau expressed to a Dene friend his wish for an opportunity to spend time in the bush. Proceeding with typical Dene sensitivity not to impose oneself on others, Fumoleau did not expect an immediate response to his statement of interest. Fumoleau was conducting himself as a Dene would have conducted himself. Hence at the end of the conference Fumoleau did not know what would come out of the communi-

cation of his desire to spend time in the bush. Fumoleau and his friend were soon hundreds of kilometers apart, he in Yellowknife, north of the Great Slave Lake, and his friend in Fort Good Hope, on the Mackenzie River.

A few weeks after the conference, a Fort Good Hope resident stopped by Fumoleau's house to visit and have tea. In the course of their conversation the visitor mentioned that Fumoleau's friend was to spend a few weeks in the bush in the fall. No more was said on the topic, but Fumoleau understood that he was being told that the opportunity was there for him to soon join his friend. A few more weeks went by and another visitor from Fort Good Hope stopped by Fumoleau's house, one who would mention in passing the exact date on which Fumoleau's friend had chartered a small plane to be flown with his family to their trapline in the bush. Here was the invitation to go along. Fumoleau simply packed what he needed to spend a few weeks in the bush, and boarded a plane that flew him to Fort Good Hope. There, his friends simply took him aboard their chartered plane and left for the bush.

On the strength of this story, and on the basis of many similar ones heard over the years, I proceeded to communicate in this fashion with the Dene Tha. In the course of my second period of fieldwork, when I sought to establish a relationship with Alexis Seniantha, the leading Dene Tha prophet, I decided to visit his son and daughter-in-law. During the visit I mentioned once to Alexis' son that I wondered if his dad knew that I was interested in learning from the Dene Tha prophets. The remainder of the visit was spent talking of local events, trapping, education, and so on. A few days later Alexis himself stopped for tea at my place, while on his way to the Band Office for business. We conversed for more than two hours, speaking in the local dialect the entire time. In the course of our conversation Alexis twice mentioned that he prayed in the Dene Tha way in his home on Sunday, around 10:00 o'clock in the morning. Hearing this I said nothing to the effect that I would be pleased to join him, nor did I offer any comment on the information.

This was however the first time that I interacted with the Dene Tha in this manner on such important issues. I went to other Dene Tha friends to explain what I had done, beginning with my visit to Alexis' son and daughter-in-law, and ending with Alexis' visit to my place. I asked them what would happen if I would not show up on Sunday at Alexis' place. They immediately answered that he would conclude that I had no ears. To them I had been told in unambiguous terms to come to the Elder's home. Among the Dene one offers information in an apparently restrained manner; others respond in an apparently equally restrained manner. The appearance of restraint exists, however, only in the eyes of non-Dene. From the perspective of the

Dene Tha, their style of communication is clear and unambiguous. Once the differences in the pattern of interaction and the built-in assumptions are identified, these examples of communication become perfectly understandable.

Proceeding in the culturally appropriate manner I therefore proceeded to join Alexis in his house every Sunday morning for many months to come. And so began a long series of meetings that included accounts of dreams and visions Alexis had experienced in his life, accompanied by numerous performances of drumming and singing. Sessions with Alexis soon led to similar ones with other Dene Tha prophets. As I spent more and more time learning thus about the Dene Tha ways I came to the point of offering gifts to two Dene Tha prophets, asking for their help, on the occasion of important meetings I was about to have in Ottawa. Like Barbara Myerhoff, who had wanted to experience the peyote so important to the Huichol she was studying, I similarly wanted to experience the intercession of the Elders so often sought by Dene Tha and other Natives from Western Canada. I proceeded in the culturally appropriate manner and bought the gifts one normally brings to these Elders. Gifts, usually in the form of tobacco and objects such as shirts, moccasins, a piece of tanned moose hide, gloves, knives, etc., are said to be for the animal-spirit helpers upon which the Elders call to cure or assist the one who brings the gifts.

When I presented the gifts to two Elders in their homes, independently of each other, they each took the gifts and told me that they were quite happy that I was finally taking this step. Each went to his bedroom to get his drum and begin a session of instruction and intercession for me. A few days later I travelled the more than eight hundred kilometers to Edmonton where I stayed over at my brother's house before taking the plane the next morning. When we went to bed in the early hours of the morning, my sister-in-law said not to worry, for she would wake us in time to get to the airport. In the morning, to my surprise, I awoke to the sound of drums. My eyes still closed, I paid attention to what was happening and saw the two Elders to whom I had brought gifts. They were drumming, and smiling at me, one of them saying, "Remember the gifts were to get you to Ottawa." I opened my eyes, looked at my watch and realized it was 6:45 a.m. Somehow my brother's alarm clock had not functioned and everyone in the house was sound asleep. I woke my brother and, forty-five minutes later, we were at the airport, in time for the 8:00 a.m. flight.

Clearly this dream would not have occurred had I not been deeply involved with Dene Tha Elders, in their lifeworld. To the Elders to whom I later reported the experience this was a simple case of "knowing with the mind," a normal and recurring feature of nonverbal communication in their

lives, particularly in the context of ritual activities. Dene Tha speak of the Elders' ability to travel long distances in spirit, with their animal spirit helpers, to help the spirit of the individual who has asked for their help. In their view this is how I was helped. I doubt that it can be established scientifically whether or not these animal spiritual helpers really exist, or whether Dene Tha Elders really travel in spirit to assist others, near and far. I am satisfied with the notion that this is the particular idiom Dene Tha use to think and talk about such experiences, thus making them meaningful and intelligible. At times Dene Tha themselves may be more or less dissatisfied with this idiom, and ask how such experiences really come about. Analytically we can and ought to distinguish between the experience itself and the idiom in which the experience is talked about. I think that the appearance of the two Dene Tha Elders in a waking dream was a product of my mind somehow keeping up with the passage of time and in effect creating a dream that would effectively pull me out of sleep. As the Dene Tha would say, "I knew with my mind." In other words the dream happened at the most propitious time. How it may be accounted for is another question altogether, one that cannot be dealt with within the limitations of this paper (see Goulet and Young, 1994:298-335).

Consider the following case illustrating what the Dene Tha take as a case of knowing with the mind in the context of a ritual process. In July 1984 I joined the Elders who were sitting around a fire in a teepee discussing the preparation of ceremonies. As we progressed in the round of talk, smoke gradually filled the teepee. Annoyed by the smoke, which hurt my eyes, I wondered what could be done about it. I suddenly realized that I was looking at a detailed life-size image of myself. Here was my double before my very eyes, wearing the same clothes I was then wearing, kneeling by the fire, fanning the flames with my hat. I kept looking at the image, aware, all the while, of the smoke in the teepee and wondering who would do something about it.

Then someone—a non-Native—got up, went to the fire, knelt down and started blowing on it. Immediately, with a loud voice, an Elder told him not to blow on the fire, and instructed him to fan the fire with his hat or some other object. The rationale for not blowing on the fire was that such an action would offend spiritual entities and induce a violent wind storm in the camp. Listening to the Elder, I realized that I had actually foreseen the proper way of fanning a fire. Up to that time, I knew neither the right nor wrong way of fanning a fire, nor the rationale behind the prohibition against blowing on a fire. Neither did I know that one could see so vividly, in image form, what the proper action should be in a given situation. From the Dene Tha point of view I had experienced a form of teaching and communication that occurs

not through the medium of words, but through the medium of images. Conversations with Dene Tha about this range of phenomena gave new meaning to Turner's invitation to fieldworkers to "suspend as far as possible their own social conditioning in order to have sensory and mental knowledge of what is really happening around and to them" (1985:205).

Accounts of normal human interaction in everyday life between the Natives of a society and ethnographers are not surprising, and most readers will find them quite acceptable. Do we not say, "in Rome do as the Romans do?" Becoming familiar with local norms of conduct and interpretation, indeed in patterning his or her own behaviour according to these local norms, the anthropologist becomes intelligible to others and they to the anthropologist. Only then does the ethnographer reach the point when he/she ceases to be puzzled by them and they cease to laugh at the ethnographer's blunders (Obeyesekere, 1990:226). These are essential steps towards an ethnography that effectively captures a local worldview and ethos.

In the cases at hand, to choose to go through a third party, rather than directly to the individual to whom one wants access, is correct and rational in the Dene way. To offer Dene Tha prophets the appropriate gifts accompanied with tobacco to indicate a request for their assistance is also correct and rational in the Dene way. Can we also say that it is effective? What validity is there in the Dene Tha view—and indeed of many other people's view—that ritual processes generate in the participants certain kinds of subjective experiences uniquely appropriate to the circumstances? Did the images of the Dene Tha Elders appear in my consciousness at the appropriate time to wake me up and remind me that the gifts were to get me to Ottawa because of our preceding ritual interaction? Did the image of myself fanning the fire in the appropriate manner appear as it were before my eyes because I was engaged in a ritual performance in coactivity with others who expect, and often report, such experiences?

Images experienced as autonomous, unexpectedly appearing before one's eyes, is what I experienced while with the Dene Tha in their lifeworld. This was the case when I first heard and then saw, my eyes still closed, the two Dene Tha Elders drumming to wake me in time to board the plane. This was also the case when I sat by the fire and saw myself fanning it in the appropriate way, and equally the case when I attended a conference and suddenly saw a recently deceased Dene Tha appear before my eyes (see Watson and Goulet, 1992:219-220, for a discussion of that experience). Following Price-Williams'(1987) suggestion, experiences of the world of images reported in this paper can be referred to as waking dreams rather than as apparitions or hallucinations, the terms that would immedi-

ately come to the mind of the religionist, the student of the paranormal, and the psychiatrist.

In a waking dream “the imaginative world is experienced as autonomous,” that is to say “the imager does not have the sense that he is making up these productions, but feels that he is getting involved in an already created process” (Price-Williams, 1987:8). Greeks clearly had such experiences. Parman (1991:18) notes that in Homer’s time “one did not have a dream, one ‘saw’ a dream figure (*oneiros*).” Plato discussed the phenomenon of images that enter the stream of consciousness of individuals “no longer in control of their own imagination,” in a state of enthousiasmos, or ecstasy (*ek-stasis*) (Kearney, 1988:102-105). Closer to us, repeated psychic experiences such as these led Jung (1965:183) to the crucial insight that “there are things in the psyche” which we do not produce, but “which produce themselves and have their own life.”

The people among whom fieldworkers live offer their own models of such experiences. They often mention that they first hear a voice telling them “Look! Over there!” The Dene Tha say of such experiences that they are “like a movie being shown before your eyes.” Referring to similar experiences, an Oglala Sioux told Powers (1977:137) “it’s like looking out in space and suddenly somebody shows you a picture.” In the Native view the metaphor of the movie projector suggests a source located outside of themselves. Although one sees with one’s mind, the source of the projection is in deceased human beings or in spiritual entities living in the “other world.”

This is precisely the view that 19th century European authors, the majority of them male physicians, tried to dispel from the public mind. They also drew on the image of a projector, that of the magical lantern by which spectres were made to appear before the very eyes of spectators. But they used this image not to affirm, but to dispel the notion of a spirit world. When these authors drew upon the metaphor of the phantasmagoria—a name, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, invented for an exhibit of optical illusions produced chiefly by means of the magic lantern, first exhibited in London in 1902—they saw in the magical lantern “the obvious mechanical analogue for the human brain.” Their analogy served to relocate “the world of ghosts in the closed space of the imagination” (Castle, 1988:58).

“*Siindit’ah edawohdi* (with my mind I know),” say the Dene Tha.⁶ “With your mind you hallucinate,” respond the physicians. Faced with these opposing views, what are the options? On the one hand, one may agree with Stoller and Olkes (1987:229) who, at the end of an experiential journey into the world of Songhay sorcerers, declared that respect for the culture of others means “accepting fully beliefs and phenomena which our own

system of knowledge often holds preposterous.” To hold such a view is, in effect, to become one of them. On the other hand, one may agree with the interpretive anthropologist and ethnomethodologist to suspend belief and disbelief about what other people say about their reality, and describe the procedures through which they constitute their social reality as Watson and Goulet (1992), and Watson (1992), for instance, do with ethnographic data from the Dene Tha. The first point of view fails to distinguish analytically between the experience itself and the interpretive framework within which the experience has meaning. I am not prepared as Stoller and Olkes suggest, to accept fully the Dene Tha beliefs. Merely replacing my Euro-Canadian interpretive framework with a Dene Tha one would not necessarily allow me to understand the experience in a more profound way. I am not prepared however to deny or ignore a range of phenomena they and I have experienced but that often is seen as preposterous in the light of Western systems of knowledge. I therefore cannot accept fully the perspective of the interpretive anthropologist or ethnomethodologist as it involves distancing oneself from the people with whom one is working to such a degree that important experiential qualities of dreams and visions are lost.

In my experience of waking dreams the autonomous quality of images which appear unexpectedly before one's eyes cannot be denied. This kind of experience is reported again and again by individuals in all walks of life—including anthropologists—in many societies, including our own (Tedlock, 1991b:162-164). True, an introspective investigation of such experiences of extraordinary perception are impossible. However, this is also the case of ordinary perception of smells, sounds, images of objects and people in our environment. In their case, write Bateson and Bateson (1987:92), “I know which way I aim my eyes and I am conscious of the *product* of perception but I know nothing of the middle process by which the images are formed” (emphasis in text). Thus we must recognize that in the world of every day life, as in the world of dreams, we look at the products of cognitive processes without any awareness of these processes by which images and perceptions are produced.

What I am advocating is a middle way which involves accepting the reality of extraordinary experiences but which leaves open to investigation the issues of how such experiences originate. Extraordinary experiences and accounts of them clearly inform social interaction in societies in which “the world of ghosts and spirits is as real as that of markets, though real in different qualitative ways” (Obeyesekere, 1990:66). Anthropologists who enter such worlds, and suspend as far as possible their own social conditioning, consistently report extraordinary experiences that are consistent with the ones described by the people they “study.” This essay as well as

the work of Tedlock and Tedlock (1975); Favret-Saada (1980); Peters (1981); Stoller and Olkes (1987); Jackson (1989); E. Turner *et al.*, (1992), Young and Goulet (1994), among others, represents steps toward dealing with accounts of such experiences—those of the anthropologist and of the “Native”—taking into full consideration the personal and social significance of such accounts in contextualized, meaningful social interaction.

Conclusion

I began with the generalization that “individuals dream in the symbols of their society, as they think in the categories of their own language” (Wilson, 1971:57) and went on to suggest that fieldworkers immersed in a society and language other than their own may also come to dream and think in the symbols and categories of their fieldwork environment, although they do this only to some degree *like* a Native, but never *as* a Native. As the ethnographer progressively becomes immersed into a lifeworld that is eminently real to the Natives who construct and inhabit that world, his/her accounts of dreams and visions become more readily understood by the Natives. This provides the ethnographer with increasing credibility and allows him/her to communicate at ever deeper levels about matters of great importance to the Natives. In other words, a growing proficiency in dreaming, remembering one's dreams, and interpreting one's dreams according to local rules of interpretation allows the fieldworker to do better ethnography. This is of course possible only if ethnographers pay attention to their own inner lives and share their dreams and visions with others accustomed to talking about and interpreting such phenomena.

In a sense, fieldwork is an experience in socialization: one withdraws from one's usual social environment and draws near to “others” to learn how they think, feel and behave. To gain entry into the lifeworld of others, fieldworkers leave a society whose conventions they have mastered and enter the society of others who become their teachers. Over time they experience normal human interaction in a new locality, leading to a deeper and deeper understanding not only of another people and culture, but indeed of themselves as human beings. This process of immersion in another lifeworld may well lead fieldworkers, unwillingly at times, and at a level of consciousness they may not have anticipated, to enjoy glimpses of what it is to interact with them in the context of information derived from accounts of dreams and visions.

Anthropological convention required fieldworkers to relegate “the personal to the periphery and to the ‘merely anecdotal’: pejoratively contrasted in positivist social science with generalisable truth” (Okely, 1992:9), and

thus to “leave behind them” the kind of experiences that form the substance of this paper. Traditional anthropological conventions are giving way to creative experimentation. As more and more anthropologists bring “extraordinary” material to the fore, we not only make ourselves more hospitable to the processes and products of ritual, imagination, and dream, we also have the opportunity to develop within anthropology a greater sophistication in dealing with an essential aspect of the human experience—the social life as revealed in accounts of dreams and visions interpreted in coactivity with others in their lifeworlds.

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Notes

1. Relevant literature on the vision quest among North American Indians can be found in Benedict, 1923; Devereux, 1951; Hallowell, 1966:267-292; 1992:80-92; Ridington, 1990; and Kehoe, 1992. Useful case material from many other cultural areas, and reviews of methodological and theoretical issues involved in the study of accounts of dreams and/or visions are found in Bourguignon, 1972; D'Andrade, 1961; Dentan, 1986; Dugan, 1985; Eggan, 1949; Gackenbach, 1987; Grunebaum and Caillois, 1966; Tedlock, 1987a; and Perrin, 1990.

2. The historical processes leading to this Western inhospitality are well documented by Keith Thomas in his *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), which offers an excellent description of the secularization of European thought with the concomitant decline of ghost beliefs in the 1600s and 1700s. Castle (1988:52-56) reviews the many polemical treatises published in England, France, and Germany, beginning around 1800, all dedicated to the eradication of the belief in ghosts. "In the very act of denying the spirit-world of our ancestors," notes Castle (1988:30), "we have been forced to relocate it in our theory of the imagination," a fact with far-reaching implications.
3. Lett (1991:307) is particularly critical of Long for displaying "flagrant gullibility and egregious irrationality in his edited volume entitled *Extrasensory Ecology: Parapsychology and Anthropology* (Long, 1977) and of Margaret Mead who throughout her career "did little to disguise her unwavering sympathy for paranormal claims." Lett (1991:319) who faults Jackson (1989) and Luhrman (1989) for their assumption that the scientific method cannot be applied to magic and other paranormal claims, similarly criticizes Stoller and Olkes (1987) for their deliberate setting aside of the scientific approach to the production of verifiable and replicable knowledge in his study of Songhay sorcery, thus leading himself to be duped by a standard series of illusionist's tricks that include misdirection, sleight of hand, and after-the-fact interpretation.
4. The usual Guajiro pattern in butchering a cow or bull is to first knock the animal unconscious with a blow on the forehead using the blunt side of an axe, and then to bleed the animal to death. The only time I observed a different pattern of butchering among the Guajiro was on the morning following this dream. On that day, to my surprise, I saw a cow being slaughtered as I had seen in my dream: the animal's head tied close to a tree, a man holding the animal by the horn and plunging a knife through the back to the heart. It is possible that the account of my dream went beyond the circle of the family members with whom I shared it, and had somehow influenced the Guajiro to modify their usual behaviour that day. Perhaps what I had dreamt simply coincided with the manner in which slaughtering would proceed on this day. This dream is also consistent with the view that contents of dreams in the early stages of fieldwork often reflect the process of accommodation to a new social identity as one lives and participates in a new society (Anderson, 1971).

5. For presentations of Dene Tha worldview and religion see Goulet, 1982; 1988; 1992; and Watson and Goulet, 1992. In the anthropological literature people of this community are referred to either as Slavey (Asch, 1981:348) or as "the Dene-tha branch of the Beaver Indians" (Smith, 1987:444). The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (1987:91) lists the Reservation as Hay Lake with a population of 809 in December 1986.
6. To translate *sindi* as my mind is to follow the practice of the Dene Tha, which is not to say that they understand by that word what English speakers do. Indeed Wierzbicka (1989:46) has shown that the English concept "mind," "is a concept specific to Anglo culture, which has no exact semantic equivalents in other European languages, let alone in other, geographically and culturally more distant, languages of the world."

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