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The Dreamtime and Dreams of Northern Australian Aboriginal Artists

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Source: *Ethos*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sep., 1994), pp. 373-388

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of the [American Anthropological Association](#)

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# *The Dreamtime and Dreams of Northern Australian Aboriginal Artists*

DOUGLASS PRICE-WILLIAMS and ROSSLYN GAINES

The concept of The Dreaming is to be found in several parts of Australia and has been studied by scholars for many years. Its exact meaning has always been difficult to formulate, and the relationship of The Dreaming to ordinary dreaming as we understand it, is not fully clear. It has seemed apparent to most scholars that The Dreaming and night dreaming are not identical, but others maintain that there is a connection. (In this article, in order to avoid confusion, we will use the term "night dreaming" to indicate a sleeping person's experience, as compared to the capitalized "Dreaming" or "Dreamtime," which indicates the belief system).

## CONCEPTS OF THE DREAMING

One of the first references to The Dreaming was that of the early Australian anthropologists, Spencer and Gillen. In their earlier book (1899:199), they noted that the term *Alcheringa* was used by Australian aborigines to refer to mythical ancestors who were invoked in contemporary totemic ceremonies. In their later book (1927:306), they recorded that the Arunta people used the term *Alchera* to denote their personal totem, but also used that term to mean night dream. In a later passage, Spencer and Gillen

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*Ethos* 22(3):373-388. Copyright © 1994, American Anthropological Association.

said: “ ‘*Alcherama*’ means ‘to [night] dream’ and, as ‘-ringa’ means ‘belonging to’, they define ‘*alcheringa*’ as ‘belonging to the dream-time’ ” (1927:592).

The etymology and translation of the terms have continually caused a quandary among anthropological scholars. Roheim (1971[1945]:210) found the word *Altjeringa* was used by the Arunta, Kaitish, and Unmatjera tribes for the far past or Dream Times in which their mythical ancestors lived. He took issue with the Australian scholar Strehlow whom, Roheim claimed, had thought that *Altjira* meant god or ancestor. Roheim pointed out that the term was used to describe a folktale, usually with a happy ending. More elaborately, Roheim maintained that *Altjira* had several meanings: a night dream, beings who appeared in the dream, and a narrative. “*Altjira* means *Dream* (i.e. a night dream); *Altjirarama* means *To Dream* (or have a night dream); *To see a [night] Dream* would be *Altjirarama*, although it might be changed to *Altjirerama*.”

*Altjira* itself is an Arunta word, but the same concept is found elsewhere. Again Roheim (1971[1945]:211) noted that the term *Tukurpa*, from the Luritja group of languages, has the various meanings of night dream and story and also can refer to an oracle game. The Jumu and Oindupi people use the phrase *Tukurpa Nanganyi*: to have a night dream.

The strategy of defining The Dreaming as having multiple meanings was taken up by Stanner (1972[1956]:270), who saw that it was, as he put it, “many things in one.” Specifically, Stanner maintained, The Dreaming referred to “a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of *Logos* or principle of order transcending everything significant for aboriginal man.” Stanner was puzzled, however, as to why the aborigines used the English word “dreaming” as the nearest equivalent to their terms.

Berndt and Berndt (1984:187) drew attention to the fact that across Aboriginal Australia there were many terms that have been variously translated as the “Creative period,” “Ancestral times,” “Dreaming,” “Dreamtime,” “Eternal Dreamtime,” and so forth. The Berndts saw that our word “eternal” has the same connotation that was given to all these aboriginal words. The belief is that the beings who were present at the beginning, at creation, were still present now. In the Great Victoria Desert, the native term is “*Djuguba* or *Djugurba* (*Tjukubi*). In the Rawlinson Range, *Duma*; in the Balgo area, *Djumanggani*; in the eastern Kimberleys, *Ngarung-*

*gani*; *bugari* around La Grange and Broome." As they go on to specify, in other groups, the terms for the creation beings also vary: *Ungud* is also used by the Aranda; the Dieri have the term *Mura*; the Wuradjeri have two alternative terms, *Maradal* or *Galwagi*; the Juraldi, *Gulala*, and in northeast Arnhem Land, where we interviewed artists, there is the term *Wongar*.

However, the Berndts worried about the English term "Dreaming" being considered equivalent to these native terms. They called it "an unfortunate choice." It is true, they pointed out, that the English word is a correct translation of one of the relevant native words, but what in English is thought of as "night dreaming" is not what the Aborigines conceive of in the context of Dreamtime.

Nevertheless, several writers of the Aboriginal scene have concluded that there is *some* connection between the Dreamtime and what we would call "night dreaming." Nancy Munn (1971), for example, in her study of Walbiri myth, found the belief that Walbiri ancestors first dreamed their objectifications while sleeping; they visualized their travels and the country and the songs before they were externalized. Anderson and Dussart (1988:19), while finding that the Dreamtime refers to the ancestral past, to the Ancestral Beings and their actions and travels in this Primordial Past, also noted that it can refer to night dreams themselves *in which sequences of the ancestral past are revealed* (our emphasis). Glowczewski (1989:184) reported the dream of a Warlpiri woman of the Western desert in which this woman plainly saw Dreamtime figures ("Je vis tous the héros des Rêves de la région"). Tonkinson (1978:16), in his investigations of the Mardudjara Aborigines of the Western Desert, likewise connected the two: "Although the principal Mardudjara word for Dreamtime is *manguny*, almost as common is the term *djugur*, which can also be translated as 'dream'. The analogy goes deeper, however, because during dreams Aborigines sometimes communicate with spiritual powers." Francoise Dussart (1988:35), in her study of Warlpiri women, carefully analyzed the term *Jukurrpa*, and detected five meanings. The first referred to the Ancestral period, which although indicating a mythical past, also has a real temporal dimension in the present. The second meaning is a designation of the whole category of Ancestral Beings. Third, *Jukurrpa* is used to refer to specific myths or Dreaming stories. The fourth meaning concerns the specific actions of an Ancestral Being, which Dussart translates as "Dreaming segment." And the

fifth meaning is about “[night] dreams that individuals have during their sleep *which are later associated with a specific Dreaming, in which the dreamers say that they ‘saw’ given Ancestral Beings acting, dancing, singing and eventually talking to them. It is through such dreams that Warlpiri people and their ancestors have learned about the Jukurrpa.*” In a later passage, Dussart (1988:223–224) provides the link between the Dreamtime and night dreaming even more succinctly. She enumerated several categories of night dreams, and the fourth type included night dream experiences over a period of two to three months, which have as their theme a specific Dreaming (i.e., a story). Songs are revealed in such night dreams, she continues, and “such [night] dreams are considered the most important kind of dream and are interpreted as part of the Dreaming. When a dreamer ‘sees’ body designs, painted artifacts, dances, *and* ‘hears’ songs, the [night] dream is generally interpreted as part of a Dreaming-segment within a specific Dreaming itinerary. The songs sung in [night dreams] are a warrant of the [night] dream being part of the Dreaming” (emphasis in original). In our experience, we have found that this warrant is sometimes modified by the community status of the dreamer.

Lastly, Myers (1986:51), noting that Stanner had considered the experience of dreams, made them a good metaphor for The Dreaming, added the statement “The relationship is more than metaphorical and, consequently, more complex.” This complexity is the subject with which this article is concerned.

## PROJECT AND METHODOLOGY

During a three-month project in 1990, we interviewed and videotaped 37 aboriginal artists in the Northern Territories of Australia. The artists were mainly painters and carvers, and included both men and women. Our interviews focused on their art and its composition and meaning, but we also sought information about the socialization of these artists, their attitudes and values, and included questions on what role, if any, dreams played in their creativity. There were three geographical areas where we visited. Our first visit was to Bathurst Island, the home of the Tiwi, then to Central and Eastern Arnhem Land, and lastly, to Western Arnhem Land. More specifically, we visited and interviewed artists at Bathurst Island: Ramingining and Yirrkala in Central and East

Arnhem Land respectively; then Cooinda, the Oenpelli outpost store, Beswick, Kalano, and Katherine in West Arnhem Land. We traveled by bush plane to Bathurst Island, Ramingining, and Yirrkala, and by road to the places in West Arnhem Land. All communities visited were with permission of the community council representing the people living there. Our primary contact was usually with the resident arts advisor, who organized introductions to the aboriginal artists. The one exception to this procedure was during the visit to Ramingining, which will be described later. In addition to the artist interviews, we engaged in many other formal and informal activities with community members.

For the interviews, our usual procedure, after proper introductions, was for one of us to hold the microphone and interview the artist, while the other was behind the video camera. Sometimes we switched, and almost always the camera person asked some questions at the end of the interview. Keeping gender sensitivities in mind, we tried to maintain the practice of using a similar sex interviewer for the respondent.

The subject of dreams was not initiated until the artist had described and explained the theme of his or her painting or carving (which we asked the artist to display for the camera) and after a considerable amount of life history was disclosed. Sometimes the subject of dreams was spontaneously raised by the artist, without any elicitation by us. For example, when we asked one male artist in Yirrkala where his ideas for his art came from, he answered, "Sometimes I dream" and, thus, he opened up the subject. More generally, we approached the subject tangentially, by saying, as we did with another male carver at Yirrkala, "Some people were saying that at nighttime, when they go to sleep, they dream about their paintings. Do you do that?" At other times, we approached the subject with reference to imagery. We asked respondents whether, when closing their eyes, they could see her or his painting or carving clearly. From this, we led them into the subject of dreams. For example, a male artist in Kalano, told us that he could see his painting just like our video (pointing to the camera) when he closed his eyes. So we then asked him, "So it's just like this video when you think like that? When you go to bed at night, when you go to sleep, do you see pictures?" It may be important to emphasize that the subject of dreams was never front stage in these interviews.

## DREAM DATA

The remarks of our respondents on dreams can be grouped under five headings: (1) dreams and art, (2) quality of the dream, (3) frequency and reporting of special dreams, (4) specific beliefs about special dreams, and (5) status of the dreamer and negative cases.

## DREAMS AND ART

It was clear from our first respondents on Bathurst Island that there was an interaction between their art and their night dreams. A young painter put it clearly: "If I had a dream: for example, women and men dancing, I would get up in the morning and start working. As I go along [i.e., working on the painting],<sup>1</sup> the dream comes back to my head, and I paint and design." Another young male carver similarly acted on his dream upon awakening: "Dream in the head and carve straightaway." Many of the artists on Bathurst Island dreamed specifically of their totem. One of them actually told us about this when he was carving it (a somewhat unusual occurrence, as we learned later that it was generally the custom not to tell others that an art work was based on a night dream until the carving or painting was finished). He told us: "I had [a] dream of [an] owl [that] I'm doing [i.e., carving] now. Just came to me in dream last night." After he finished the carving, he then told us the details of the night dream.

Although we were told by men that women did not use their dreams to carve or paint, of the three women artists we interviewed in Bathurst, two admitted to carving or painting what they had dreamed. One of them said: "[I] have dreams with birds. Birds [stay] still and [I] talk to them. Bird makes noise, like hearing now. Walks, flies." Her own totem was a jungle fowl. "[It] comes directly to me sometimes" [that is, in her night dreams].

When we interviewed artists in Yirrkala, we met a number of men, young and old, who dreamed their paintings. One artist, for example, recounted how he would actually see a painting in his dream, and that he would "walk through" (as he put it) "all parts of his painting." When he woke up, he would remember the walking and "the picture is there with all the colors and patterns." Most artists, when they had a dream of ceremonies or totems, felt an obligation to translate it into an actual piece of work. Another Yirrkala male

artist felt strongly that he was required to paint it. Similarly, yet another carver and painter in Yirrkala always worked on his dream images. At the time we interviewed him, he was carving a statue, and we understood that this was the product of a dream. In West Arnhem land, in the three areas of Beswick, Katherine, and Kakadu, the majority of the artists indicated that much of their work emanated from dreams.

### QUALITY OF THE DREAM

Our respondents tended to separate those dreams that they later translated into an artwork from ordinary night dreams. We found that they did not seem to have any interest in dream images that did not revolve around their mythic past. A Yirrkala painter said that they used the aboriginal term *mawa* for dreams, in general, but he distinguished firmly between ordinary and special dreams. "We know the difference between them," he said, "[we] do not tell anyone about the special dreams, except [the] old men." These "special" dreams, as many other of our respondents and we ourselves talked about them, had several characteristics. First, they were highly salient and realistic, and many senses were involved. One old man in Yirrkala had special *mawa* about Thunderman, a mythical figure associated with rain, which he regularly painted. "Can see, hear, and feel the rain [i.e. in night dreams]," he said. Another Yirrkala artist said that he saw paintings and people in his night dreams as "Very real. See and hear and feel and touch. When *very* real, it is a special dream. Difficult to tell the difference between [what is happening] now [i.e., the interview in which we were engaged] and special dreams" (emphasis in original). He continued: "When I paint sacred persons, I see them real. When asleep I hear them talking to me." Some respondents actually invoked the video camera as a metaphor for the quality of these special dreams. A young dancer and painter in Ramingining put it this way: "I see story in pictures in brain by imagination. Like video. Paint in [i.e., from] video in head. Picture moves." The same Yirrkala painter who introduced us to the term *mawa* said: "Painting just reflects the picture in my mind—like computer or video."

Several respondents spontaneously remarked that they were quite aware that they were dreaming when they had these special dreams, suggesting that we were dealing, at least sometimes, with lucid dreaming (LaBerge 1986). One of the first to tell us this was



an old man in Bathurst who was an important figure in the community and to whom special dreaming was attributed frequently. "While I dream," he said, "sometimes I wake up [i.e., in the dream] and think about the dream." A younger artist on the island pointed to a carving he was working on at the moment and told us that he had a dream in which he "saw [a] man dancing." Then he added, "Thought to myself [i.e., still in the dream] make carving out of this." A young painter from Katherine, who dreamed much about turtles said explicitly: "You know you are dreaming. [The dream] just leads you. Relaxing. Dreaming of turtles gives energy and confidence." A man we interviewed at the Oenpelli border store in the Kakadu region and who declined to be videoed, only audio taped, laconically mentioned that "you might see paintings and carvings in dreams, and pick which one you paint, which figure you're going to do." It was plain that he meant that this decision occurs while dreaming, as he continued, "Wake up next morning and will do paintings." A final possible reference to lucid dreaming was made by an older man whom we interviewed in the hotel grounds at Cooida, also in the Kakadu region: "[I] awake at night with eyes open or closed. [I see] paintings of old figures. Can see with my eyes." He added that he needed to look quickly, suggesting that these images could suddenly evaporate. This observation about lucidity has been noticed previously by Petchovsky and Cawte (1986:374) from dreams collected by them in Arnhem Land in 1982, and those reported previously by a previous investigator.

#### FREQUENCY AND REPORTING OF SPECIAL DREAMS

It appeared from the statements by our respondents that these special dreams were not common occurrences, although the frequency range was wide. Some artists reported having these special dreams once a week, others as infrequently as every five to six months. One artist in the Katherine area merely said, "infrequently." Some reported having them since the age of 9 or 10; others said "since initiation," which would be approximately about the same age. One elderly artist in Yirrkala reported that when he was younger and still learning to paint, he used to have these special dreams every two weeks. Now that he was old, he experienced them at only special times during the year. This same painter seemed to suggest that dreaming these kind of dreams depended not only on age, but also upon community status. He noted that his son (who

was there during part of the interview, and whose age was 23) did not yet have such dreams. It could be that community recognition of the dream is a function of the status of the dreamer since at this point, the son spoke up to say that he must be careful what he said, and that he was told by the old men what to say. And the father himself mentioned that he had a younger son, who was capable of having special dreams but showed no interest in their meaning and import. We will discuss the status of the dreamer later.

### SPECIFIC BELIEFS ABOUT SPECIAL DREAMS

While all our respondents clearly identified these special dreams as being important for their creative work, a few of them went further than this assumption and theorized about them. Five of our artists, in one form or another, actually equated their dreams with the Dreamtime. A patriarch of Bathurst Island, an artist who carved spears and Pukamani funeral poles and who was greatly respected for his dreaming, was one of those who carved from night dream images. "See something good [i.e., in a night dream]," he said, "I carve." Then he added the important comment, "That's why we call it the Dreamtime." It should be made clear that this man was the only person we talked with on Bathurst that made this comment, but it was noteworthy as he was an important community leader and an authority on dreams. Second, a Yirrkala painter, in talking about night dreaming, made a remark about "going back into Dreamtime." He added quickly that only a few can "go back into Dreamtime." Third, a Beswick artist, from whom we bought a carving and a bark painting, unequivocally equated his night dreams with the Dreamtime: "Paint story from Dreamtime," he said clearly. Fourth, another artist at Katherine made a distinction between the Dreamtime and night dreams, but then admitted that he dreamed about the Dreamtime figures. Finally, the old man at the hotel in Cooina talked about the influence of night dreams on his art and then said, "Dreamtime story is leading me." He further made the important statement that he reaches "dreamtime through special [night] dreaming." This seems to suggest that a special type of night dreaming occurs, which enables the dreamer to reach a place and time called The Dreamtime. This place is always there and is, as it were, distinct from the subjective mind. No Aborigine we met actually put it this way, of course, but this

mode of description is consistent with what was actually said to us by these artists.

Another prominent artist on Bathurst Island articulated a whole belief system, which, while we never heard it from anyone else, is quite consistent with the Dreamtime philosophy. First, he laid out the general belief system about the Dreamtime, "All animals used to be human. All Australian aboriginals have the same stories. All dream the same way." Then he added the following remarks: "When [night] dream of owl, the owl is reborn in me." In this way, it seemed, the ancestor is supported from generation to generation. In this artist's own words again, "Dreaming is continuing the ancestors. If I don't dream of them, they will die. Lives with you." By carving one's night dream, it further maintains the identity of the ancestor. In his own words once more, "carve from dream is another way of continuing."

#### STATUS OF THE DREAMER AND NEGATIVE CASES

The position of women dreamers raises the question of status in the reporting of these special dreams. We were told straightaway by a male artist in Bathurst that "women do not want to talk [about dreams]. [They] just keep it to self." He specified two women artists, whom we later interviewed, who dreamed their carvings, and he was not sure about a third woman whom we also interviewed. When we did interview these women artists, the first absolutely denied that she carved from dreams. She admitted to having what she called "family" and "spirit" dreams, but she did not elaborate on these. (Interestingly enough, she did feel free to tell us of an apparition that she saw at a funeral, which we also attended). The second woman artist did admit that she dreamed about the objects of her art, indeed in reference to a bird carving she flatly said that she "made [this] thinner because of dream." Nevertheless, this woman clearly did not want to talk any further about her dreaming. The third woman artist on Bathurst, about whom the male artist was not sure used dreams, turned out to be very informative about her dreaming. Her own special totem was a jungle fowl, and she saw and talked with these birds in her dreams. She said nothing about not being supposed to report such dreams, and that could have been because she was considerably older, 64 years, than the two other middle-aged women artists.

All the same, when we arrived in Yirrkala and talked to women artists, we clearly encountered an ambivalence concerning talking about dreams. The curator at the museum in Yirrkala did very briefly admit that she had dreams about her art. She even elaborated a little about it: "Yeah. Dreaming. When you dream, you dream something, and it shows you a part of your own land. Then that shows you, how from the beginning, how ancestors travel; how they owned their land—and that comes out on a piece of bark like this." We asked her how she differentiated ordinary night dreams from these kind of dreams, and she said that first they had to be explained to an elder. Then she added the remark "It's gotta to be sung," which we had only heard from one other person. At this point in the conversation, the curator clearly became worried, and she seemed to retreat from her previous statements, saying outright that her paintings did *not* come from dreams. And she started to make a distinction between night dreams and The Dreaming. "Dreamings are ancestral things" she began, and then interrupted herself to say that she wished to change the topic of our conversation as she "didn't want to talk about dreams." Later in the interview, she stated that it was only elders who had these special kind of dreams and that, as she emphasized, "I don't do that stuff."

Two other woman painters whom we interviewed in Yirrkala denied that they used dreams for their work. One of them was a daughter of the old man who had told us about his dreams. The daughter, who worked on details of her father's paintings (because he was going blind), admitted that she saw her father's paintings in dreams, but then immediately said that "I forget about everything until he does his painting." Then she emphatically declared that she never used dreams for her own work. When we had interviewed her father earlier, he had told us that this same daughter dreamed in color and had painted a section of the painting that was there in front of us, from her very own dreams.

Another indication that there was some ambivalence about women reporting such dreams came from a woman artist in Yirrkala, the wife of a carver whose night dreams we discussed previously. She joined the interview with her husband halfway through, and when we asked her about her dreams, she admitted that she "got pictures while sleeping." These pictures, she said, moved, and she received what she called "living pictures" of the shark, a totem creature that she painted, along with crocodiles. "It

seems very real, moving in the water," was how she described it. We then asked her whether she heard voices also, in her dreams. "No, ladies don't. Only the men. I can see, but no hear," were her exact words. She continued to say that she also could see a crocodile in her dreams coming out of the water. At this point in the conversation, the wife paused a long time, appeared nervous, and looked sideways at her husband as if he might interrupt her. Then she continued, somewhat slyly and nervously, "I can feel in my dreams; I can hear songs, the talking of my dad." This impulse to amplify her dream experience contradicted what she had said only a few moments before, but we think it was a clear indication that it is not considered correct for women to talk about such matters.

Actually, the whole matter of dreaming art was a sensitive issue, and not just for the women. Most of our respondents declared that they kept their night dreams of Dreamtime and totem figures private, telling them only to their closest kin or community elders, and would not speak of the dream before its product of carving or painting was finished. Then, when we interviewed the leader of the Yirrkala community, declaring our interest in dreams, this man, who was not particularly sympathetic to anthropologists, firmly stated that aborigines did not have such dreams. We then went straight from that interview to one of the male artists who told us precisely how he painted from his dreams. An even more outright negative experience was at Ramingining. Due to a failure of communication, we arrived at this community when the art advisor, who had invited us, was absent and had failed to tell his chief assistant that we were his guests. There was no available accommodation for us, and it was clear that we were a nuisance. Further, we sensed some apprehension, if not outright suspicion, about our intentions. Indeed, we found that the chief assistant was extremely guarded and accompanied us to all but a few interviews and then monitored what he allowed other artists to tell us. When we asked our usual questions about night dreams, the universal response in this community was that they painted or carved copies of what they had learned from their fathers. Dreams were denied explicitly. We were just not certain, therefore, whether this was a truly regional difference, or whether the artists did not want to talk about it to us. Two days before our visit in Ramingining was to end, a young painter and dancer spontaneously came to us and said that we were not being told the truth. He declared that he had these "videos" in

his head when he produced art works. Like the woman we interviewed later in Yirrkala, this young artist linked this dreaming with songs and dancing. "Can't just have painting without all the songs, dance," he said. When we complained to him about the responses from other artists in the community, he did indeed distinguish those artists who painted from their dreams from those who just copied old paintings. However, he maintained that this special night dreaming *was* definitely experienced by the people we had talked with; they just were not telling us. All the other sites we visited we had the support of the arts counselor and, subsequently, the community. This seems to have made the difference in the openness of communication in this one community.

## CONCLUSION

The Dreamtime obviously can be understood in contexts quite other than the content and type of dreaming. Even if the dream of an Aborigine includes totemic symbols, or involves a Dreamtime myth and ritual, as was the case in Yirrkala according to Ronald Berndt's researches there (R. M. Berndt 1952:xxi-xxii), these dreams could be subsumed under the concept of dream-totemism (Elkin 1948[1938]:145-146); thereby distinguishing them from ordinary dreams on the one hand and from the Dreamtime philosophy or outlook on the other. At the same time, as we have noted, many authorities have commented on a more intimate relation between The Dreamtime with dreaming (Elkin himself saw dream-totemism as a link with The Dreamtime). If we wish to inquire further into the processual and psychological nature of this special dreaming, we need to better define its characteristics. Our own study, which has significance in that dream reports were elicited in the context of Dreamtime products depicted on bark or wood carvings, reinforced the earlier observation of dream lucidity as a characteristic of special dreams related to the Dreamtime. Earlier than that, from dreams collected over fifty years ago, Pentony (1961:149) had concluded that the dream was regarded by Aborigines as "being both continuous with the waking life, and yet in certain respects distinct from it." Another factor includes the presence of Dreamtime figures. These are probably necessary to qualify special dreaming. There may well be other additional factors, such as the social status of the dreamer, the circumstances

in which the dream was experienced, and the degree of reality of the dream. Myers made an important point when he stressed that dream reports are a product of negotiation and not a given: "Even if one believes one has come into contact with ancestral beings, to validate this precisely one must be able to persuade others to accept the claim" (1986:52).

For a better understanding of the linkage between dreaming and The Dreamtime, one needs to step outside the regional context of Australia and explore the wider arena of religious imagination on the one hand and the expression of art on the other. Taking off from an exposition of waking dreams in anthropological perspective (Price-Williams 1987:246–262), Stephen (1989:53–61) has formulated the idea of autonomous imagination, preferring this term to the "mythopoeic function" suggested by Price-Williams (1987:246) and applied it particularly to New Guinean religious phenomena. Such an autonomous imagination takes place outside conscious awareness and "may arise spontaneously into awareness (taking the form of dreams, waking visions, and similar experiences); or they may be brought into conscious awareness deliberately (as in hypnosis, or induced possession and shamanic ecstasy)" (Stephen 1989:54). We further suggest that waking dreams and lucid dreams may be the same phenomena experienced in different contexts: the first when a person is awake and the second when he is asleep. A very good example of a waking dream by an Australian Aborigine was provided by Elkin (1977:56), who called it meditation. At any rate, we maintain that the special dreams of the Australian Aborigines, discussed in this article, fall into this category of autonomous imagination. The Dreamtime itself may still be retained as an expression for a philosophical outlook; there should be no equivocation in recognizing that there is a psychological linkage to it through dreams of a certain nature.

As so much of the Dreamtime is connected to the expression of art, which would include performative art, we need to pursue this aspect of the problem further. We reported earlier that artists in our own and other societies use their dream material to assist them in the production of artwork. Our first study in Southern California (Gaines and Price-Williams 1990a) found that artists appeared to dream in very vivid images and, indeed, sometimes complete paintings that were later re-constituted into final art products. Again, in Bali where art production has two distinct levels, one religious and



the other economic, the artists at first minimized the importance of dreams in their art work (Gaines and Price-Williams 1990b). However, on a later visit, some of the same artists told us that dreams were very important in creating new works of art. Thus, it appears that the dream experience is an art tool that could be general to many societies and not only to that of Australian Aborigines. However, the latter do seem to be highly sensitized to the dream experience.

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## NOTES

1. The word(s) in square brackets are insertions to the original transcripts for reasons of clarity.

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