

Ropes of sand:
order and imagery in
Aguaruna dreams

MICHAEL F. BROWN

He understood that modelling the incoherent and vertiginous matter of which dreams are composed was the most difficult task that a man could undertake, even though he should penetrate all the enigmas of a superior and inferior order; much more difficult than weaving a rope of sand or coining the faceless wind.

JORGE LUÍS BORGES

Analysis can very easily impoverish the things it sets out to explain, especially when the subject is dreams. How can we hope to make sense of something as complex and alien as another person's dream without trivializing it, without rendering it lifeless? This enterprise, daunting enough when the dreams are recorded in a familiar cultural setting, becomes an order of magnitude more difficult when one crosses into cultural *terra incognita*. Yet it may be more than the very real difficulties of the task that impedes progress in the anthropological interpretation of dreams. Perhaps some favorite assumptions about dreams hinder rather than help the advance of dream theory.

Consider, for example, the question of dream symbolism. In general,

psychological studies of the symbolism of dreams have been informed by the assumption that dreaming is a discrete kind of thinking that operates by rules that are *sui generis* and possibly universal. Thus Freud (1900:506) states that 'dreams are nothing more than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of sleep.' Since dreams take place without the conscious control of the dreamer, this argument goes, they must be an ideal window to the unconscious. Recent experimental evidence, though, reveals how much at variance dream experience, as indicated by measurable neurophysiological events, and 'dream thoughts' or recall may be (Cohen 1979:178–80). The 'primary process' of dreaming appears to be converted into 'secondary process' the instant the dream is recalled, which means that cultural forces are brought to bear at a very early point. Dreams may have a universal neurological substrate, but the dream itself is primarily constituted by a 'symbolic praxis' (Sahlins 1976:196) unique to each society. Dreams must therefore be analyzed with reference to the other symbolic forms in a culture: myth, ritual, art, and so forth (cf. Herdt, Kracke, Tedlock, this volume).

Moreover, the boundaries between dreams and other altered states of consciousness are becoming ever more elusive as scientific research in this field advances. There is mounting evidence that (1) certain kinds of dreams occur in non-REM sleep, thus casting doubt on the supposedly unique physiological correlates of dreaming (Cohen 1979:184); (2) people in our own society regularly experience dream-like states while awake, yet do not acknowledge these as such because of our cultural bias against hallucinations (Davidson 1980:37); and (3) dreams and other altered states of consciousness share common neurophysiological features (Mandell 1980:426). The supposed uniqueness of dreams may thus be an artifact of Western ethnocentrism, a reflection of the fact that the dreams of sleep are the only legitimate, non-pathological hallucinatory experiences permitted by our society. Charles Tart (1980) has noted that all societies attempt to arrive at stable, discrete definitions of altered states of consciousness in order to facilitate communication. We must not assume, however, that our own definitions are necessarily applicable elsewhere, or that 'dreaming' (in the restricted scientific sense of the word) is anything other than an arbitrary unit of analysis (Bourguignon 1972).

Some of these problems can be circumvented by taking advantage of insights provided by cognitive anthropology, especially now that it has earnestly embarked on a rapprochement with symbolic theory (Colby,

Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981). If dreaming is a kind of thinking, then it might profitably be studied in terms of its place in the total knowledge system of a culture. What role do dreams play in the acquisition, validation, modification, and transmission of knowledge? Or, to put it in the terms proposed by Dougherty and Fernandez (1981:416), what can dreams tell us about 'principles that recur in the active processes of sense making?' If dreams are seen as symbolically charged, to what extent does dream symbolism resemble other forms of symbolic production found within the dreamer's society? Finally, what connections are there between the symbolic force of dreams and processes of personal empowerment in the waking world? The following analysis of the uses to which dreams are put by the Aguaruna of the Alto Rio Mayo, Peru, addresses some of these critical issues.¹ My general goal is to define the role of dreams in Aguaruna notions of causality. More specifically, I wish to call attention to certain formal similarities between manipulative dreams and magical utterances in Aguaruna thought.

DREAMS IN JIVAROAN THOUGHT

More than 20,000 Aguaruna inhabit Peru's northern *montaña*, a region where Andean foothills and Amazonian forest effect an uneasy merger. In this rugged terrain the Aguaruna have traditionally supported themselves by a combination of root-crop horticulture, hunting, fishing, and collecting. Like their close relatives the Shuar (or Jívaro proper) of Ecuador, the Aguaruna are known to the outside world chiefly for their belligerence, which in the past took the form of both intertribal and intratribal hostilities as well as vigorous resistance to incursions by foreigners. Today they are shifting their attention from warfare to the only slightly less Hobbesian arenas of commercial agriculture and resource extraction (Brown 1984). This transformation is producing profound changes in Aguaruna culture, among them what appears to be a declining interest in the systematic search for dreams and visions. Although I use the ethnographic present in the following discussion, it should be understood that some of the beliefs and practices I describe – especially those concerned with warfare – have not played a central part in Aguaruna life for a decade or more. They are, however, still fresh in people's minds, and they continue to play a role in the Aguarunas' response to contemporary problems.

Much has been written about the importance that Jivaroan peoples, such as the Aguaruna, attach to dreams and other altered states of consciousness. Half a century ago, Rafael Karsten (1935:444) stated that 'the Jibaros . . . are of the opinion that *only* in dreams is true reality revealed to man,' an assertion that Michael Harner (1972:134) repeats in his ethnography of the Untsuri Shuar. This view of Jivaroan dream theory has even made its way into commercial film: A missionary in Werner Herzog's movie *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) laments that his work among the Jívaro and Campa (who are juxtaposed geographically in the fanciful script) is hindered by the Indians' dogged adherence to the idea that 'their everyday life is only an illusion, behind which lies the reality of dreams.'

Although these statements have a romantic appeal, they vastly oversimplify a complex set of dream concepts. Dreams do indeed figure prominently in day-to-day decision-making, but they have no monopolistic hold on reality. It is more accurate to say that the Aguaruna think of dreams as experiences that reveal emergent possibilities or likelihoods, events that are developing but which are not yet accomplished facts. When, for example, a woman finds a stone that she suspects may have the power to assist the growth of her manioc plants, she searches her dreams for signs that confirm this suspicion. Once the stone's power has received dream confirmation, the woman can complete the procedures that transform it into a usable *nantag*² or growth-promoting charm (Brown 1985). Similarly, a man who dreams that he is embracing an attractive woman believes that the dream portends a successful hunt. After having such a dream (which is called *kuntúknagbau*), he will set off after game at first light. A reverse logic applies to dreams of misfortune; if a man dreams of snakebite, he spends the next day or two at home to prevent this emergent possibility from becoming a real and tragic event.

Precisely how or why dreams offer this glimpse of future possibilities was never made clear to me by my informants in the Alto Mayo. Some people asserted that we dream when our soul (specifically the shadow soul or *iwanch*) travels during sleep, encountering other souls and discovering their intentions. Others vigorously denied this explanation, arguing that soul loss of any kind inevitably results in sickness. The observed lack of consensus about how dreams take place may reflect confusion caused by the recent exposure of the Aguaruna to Christian soul concepts. In any case, people care less about the cause of dream

revelations than they do about their implications. It should also be noted that the Aguaruna construe 'dreaming' in a broader sense than we do. The verb *kajamát*, usually glossed as 'to dream' (Larson 1966), denotes both the dreams of sleep and visions or hallucinations that occur in the somnolent state induced by psychotropic plants. 'Dreaming,' then, is a state in which a drowsy and usually recumbent person experiences events that cannot be seen by others. The role of the dreamer may be one of passivity, or it may encompass the sort of 'active imagining' identified by Douglass Price-Williams (this volume).³ The importance of a given dream depends on the extent to which it falls within the established dream canon and on whether it is spontaneous or intentionally sought, the latter being more significant than the former.

SELFHOOD, INNER EXPERIENCE, AND THE USES OF IMAGERY

Among the Aguaruna, a person is, or strives to be, an autonomous agent who partakes of a unique identity and who compels recognition of that autonomy and unique identity by others.⁴ This fierce and characteristically Jivaroan spirit of independence, an important aspect of the 'complete natural liberty' to which the nineteenth-century Bishop of Cuenca (cited in Stirling 1938:26) found the Shuar so devoted, manifests itself in a thousand ways, great and small. Etiquette requires, for example, that a man taking leave of a social gathering say goodbye to every other adult man, as well as all close female relatives. To do otherwise – to deliver a collective farewell, for instance – would be to insult the others by failing to acknowledge both their unique importance and the dyadic bond that links speaker to hearer. When naming children, people in the Alto Mayo go to great lengths to avoid names currently in use in the village or the immediate network of kin. 'Each person needs his own name,' they say. In the group singing that often occurs during beer-drinking parties, everyone performs his or her own personal song, trying to make it heard above the din. The resulting cacophony prompted one early chronicler of Jivaroan life to wonder 'how they have a head for so much noise, a throat for so much exclamation, and a tooth for so much liquor' (cited in Stirling 1938:45). These examples and the many more that could be adduced suggest that the Aguaruna idea of self has more in common with that of the

industrial West – where, according to Geertz (1976:225), people see themselves as ‘a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe’ – than it does with that of many other Amazonian societies.⁵

To move from these notions of self to theories of how the self acts upon the world is to advance more deeply into what is implicit rather than explicit in Aguaruna thought. It is, of course, obvious that people recognize the importance of physical acts, based on competence in essential crafts, in projecting their wills. Aguaruna child rearing practices, like those of most societies, emphasize the transmission of practical knowledge that allows a child to become a functioning adult. But one cannot live in an Aguaruna village without noticing something else: a marked concern with the ordering of inner experience so as to effect change in the external world. Customarily, young men (and to a lesser extent, young women) are expected to engage in rigorous fasting and sexual abstinence for weeks at a time. The general goal of these practices is to acquire strength through the avoidance of polluting or debilitating contacts, for instance, sweet foods, utensils associated with non-native society, or intimate encounters with the opposite sex. A more immediate goal is to create conditions favorable for the acquisition of life-giving visions. In the following account, here much abridged, a man remembers the privations he suffered during the vision quest:

I took a lot of *datém* [the hallucinogen *Banisteriopsis* sp.] and continually went to a forest shelter. I also took *baikuá* [*Brugmansia* sp.]. My mother served me bland manioc soup because one can't drink much manioc beer. I took more *datém*, one day, then another. And when I felt exhausted, ready to die, I left it for a while.

When looking for a vision, one can't eat chicken with manioc, or boiled peccary or the fish *kagka* and *wakámpi*. Salted fish can't be eaten. Nothing is eaten from metal plates or bowls, nor are spoons used. A young man can't have intercourse or play around with women. I was never interested in women because I lived to take *datém*, *baikuá*, and tobacco water. I took them day after day, for five days. Then I rested for scarcely a month before beginning all over again.

A major purpose of the dietary restrictions is to banish sweetness from the vision-seeker's body, replacing it with the strength-inducing bitterness of hallucinogens. This changes a person's heart from a pale, watery color to a deep red. The transformation of the heart, the organ regarded as the seat of thought, enables a person to think 'straight' or well. High-

quality thought allows one to perform effectively both at the level of physical skills and in ritual operations.

Let me illustrate the links between inner experience and external control by describing how the Aguaruna approach one small area of practical activity, the care of domestic fowl. I choose this as my example neither because of an abiding interest in chickens on my part nor because the Aguaruna themselves direct a great deal of attention to it. It is merely a convenient and relatively simple case that illustrates principles receiving more elaborate treatment in other activities.

Domestic fowl, especially chickens, have an important role in the internal economy of an Aguaruna household because they are a reliable source of meat and are readily converted into cash for emergency purchases. They are generally cared for and owned by women, who see to it that their flocks are fed, attended to when ill, and protected from predatory animals. Most of the techniques used to produce healthy flocks are comfortably accommodated within the Western concept of practical aviculture. Alto Mayo women do, however, make use of special songs, called *anen*,⁶ that further improve their prospects of success in raising chickens. Like other *anen*, these chicken-raising songs are attributed an ancient origin, perhaps going back as far as the time when Nugkui, the powerful woman who introduced manioc and other cultivars to the Aguaruna, freely communicated with the ancestors. Since the power of *anen* comes from ancient sources of wisdom, the songs are learnt and performed by rote. To ensure that her songs will be efficacious, a woman who wishes to perform an *anen* will inhale a small quantity of tobacco water, putting her in a dream-like state of intoxication. She then sings the song aloud or silently in her thoughts alone. *Anen* are usually performed in complete privacy, although in some instances a woman will allow her young daughters to witness the performance.

The following are the words of one chicken-raising *anen*, presented in abridged form:

The chicks of the bird *puush* [*Odontophorus* sp., wood-quail]
 Tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu [sound of many chicks]
 Tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu
 Tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu, tiu
 The blood of the bird *amúnte* [*Anhima cornuta*, horned screamer]
 Is flooding, flooding
 Is flooding, flooding

Ropes of sand

Is flooding, flooding
They do not become ill,
They do not become ill,
The blood of the anaconda
Is flooding, flooding
Is flooding, flooding
Is flooding, flooding.

This small fragment of a single *anen* suggests the density of images characteristic of the genre. Three animal species are mentioned in these stanzas, each of which has a symbolic connection with, or possesses a desirable trait that should be transferred to, the singer's chickens. The wood-quail (*puush*) is noted for its numerous chicks. The connection between the horned screamer (*amúnte*) and chickens was less clear to the people who interpreted the song for me, though it may be significant that this large, pheasant-sized bird lays its eggs in a nest on the ground, as do chickens. The allusion to the anaconda has multiple meanings. The Aguaruna associate the anaconda with Tsugki, the being who rules the aquatic realm and controls shamanistic power. Furthermore, the myth of Tsugki (see, for example, Akuts Nugkai *et al.* 1979:134) explains that the first chickens were obtained from Tsugki's underwater house. The woman who recorded the song remarked that this *anen* would cause the young chicks to become so numerous that they would 'move like a flood across the ground, like the flowing blood of the anaconda.' In a few short lines the song summons a powerful visual image (the flowing blood, the flowing chicks) and an auditory counterpart (the 'tiu tiu tiu' cries of the chicks), establishes a connection between chickens and two wild birds that possess desirable traits, and puts the enterprise in a mythic context by alluding to the primordial source of domestic fowl, Tsugki.

People in the Alto Mayo proved just as reluctant to speculate on how *anen* work as they did to account for why people dream. A few informants spoke of the songs as direct appeals to supernatural beings, although many *anen*, including the example presented here, mention no such beings at all. What all *anen* do share are vivid, densely constructed images that connote the successful completion of the activity to which the songs are directed. The logic implicit in the use of *anen* is that people can, through internal processes of thought, direct events by creating and controlling a more pervasive, multidimensional order than that which would otherwise exist. (Remember that *anen*

work when they are simply *thought*, as well as when they are sung aloud.) The imagery deployed by performers of *anen* – this active structuring of internal experience – is considered to be as important a part of instrumental activity as direct physical intervention.

By now it should be clear that my interpretation of Aguaruna magic departs significantly from the approaches of Tambiah (1968) and Leach (1976), both of whom argue (albeit in slightly different ways) that magic is motivated by an expressive, rather than instrumental, intent. Tambiah (1968:202), for instance, asserts that the ritual acts associated with Trobriand gardening represent only a ‘simulation’ of technology and are not confused with empirically valid, instrumental acts in the minds of their practitioners. The Aguaruna data require a more literal interpretation, however, because people do not consistently distinguish ‘magic’ from ‘technology,’ nor do they deny the possibility that practical activities can be accomplished through magic alone, provided that one has the requisite knowledge.

The instrumental/expressive dichotomy upon which the symbolist interpretation of magic is based is, at best, a dubious one inasmuch as instrumental acts (‘technology,’ etc.) themselves contain an expressive aspect: ‘The cultural order equally informs the technological components of an economic system . . . Tools [are] constituent elements of a meaningful labor practice’ (Chevalier 1982:43). To penetrate Aguaruna magic one must analyze the dialectic between expressive and instrumental components of all acts and utterances, be they technological or ritual in nature.

THE INSTRUMENTAL EFFECT OF DREAMS

‘I took *datém* to find game,’ Kute Jiukám told me one day as we walked along the trail to his village. Kute’s remarks were for me the first hint of the instrumental effect that dreams can have on practical activities. Prompted by my questions, he explained that some years earlier he had been afflicted by *shimpankamu*, a condition that manifests itself as a chronic inability to encounter game animals. After trying several traditional remedies with no success, Kute took the hallucinogen *datém* in the hope that it would help him see the animals that had for so long eluded him. In his *datém*-induced dream, he did see animals – scores of them, he said, of all the desirable species – and shortly thereafter his

hunting ability was restored. He stressed that it was seeing the animals in this dream-like state that effected the cure.

Karsten's (1935) description of Jivaroan culture, more than forty years before my conversation with Kute, provides a nearly identical account of a hunting vision:

When a Jibaro Indian for instance drinks a narcotic at some of the feasts, his visions have special reference to his domestic and economic life. . . . The Indian sees all sorts of game, wild turkeys, toucans, parrots, wild pigs, etc. When the sleeping Indian has such visions, it may happen that he suddenly starts up in excitement, points with his fingers at the birds and animals he fancies he sees, and exclaims: 'Behold, behold! Give me a blowgun, I want a blowgun, I want arrow-poison, I am shooting game to eat it, I am eating pig's flesh, I am eating hen's flesh, I am eating the flesh of the hog [peccary], the flesh of the hare [agouti]' etc. At such moments he must be held down on his bed by his comrades, but the fact that he has experiences of this kind is interpreted as a favorable omen by them. (Karsten 1935:446-7)

Although Karsten calls this dream an 'omen,' the term is altogether inadequate. The Aguaruna regard this dream as a virtual prerequisite for a successful hunting career, and it is periodically renewed by older men when they find that their hunting performance falters. It bears pointing out that the dream, rather than being the spontaneous event implied by the term 'omen,' represents the culmination of an extended process that begins with a period of fasting and sexual abstinence, continues through the consumption of disagreeably bitter hallucinogens, and concludes with an unusual sensory experience: the sight, sound, and smell of numerous game species parading before the dreamer. The experience is thus the endpoint of a cultural recipe, an established set of procedures that are informed by an instrumental purpose. The parallels between this vision and *anen* are striking. In both cases the actor consciously enters a dreaming or dreamlike state and then orders his thoughts so that they consist of highly evocative images favorable to the accomplishment of the task in hand.

The dream experience most highly esteemed by Aguaruna men is the establishment of contact with an ancient warrior soul (*ajútap*). The dream is essential for any warrior who hopes to survive combat. Because of the dream's importance, men are willing to undergo the most extreme hardships – weeks of enduring a restricted diet, lonely vigils deep in the forest, and frequent use of psychotropic plants – to obtain it.

Ajútap dreams typically have two parts: an initial vision of a terrifying

beast or comet-like blast of light that the dreamer must confront and touch, followed by a second dream (sometimes separated from the first by a day or more) in which the *ajútap* presents himself to the dreamer in human form and tells him of his future victory in battle. A man who receives such a vision is called *kajintin*, 'owner of a dream,' or *waimaku*, 'one who has had a vision.' His outward manner becomes forceful and self-assured because he knows that his enemies cannot kill him (cf. Harner 1972:139).⁷

The songs of vision-seekers tend to portray the singer as a pathetic figure who will die if an *ajútap* does not appear soon. 'Grandfather, how can I find you?' goes one song. 'Sadly leaving my little forest shelter, I weep. How will it be done?' (See Pellizzaro 1976:101–60.) It appears that a successful vision depends more on the response of a capricious *ajútap* than on the purposeful acts of the vision-seeker. Yet most men apparently do succeed in their quest, if necessary by taking powerful solanaceous hallucinogens such as *Brugmansia* to speed things along. Aguaruna narratives frequently mention men who, by dint of extraordinary efforts, are able to accumulate ever more powerful visions so that they become renowned warriors and leaders of raiding expeditions. By means of immense personal effort, a warrior establishes control over his dream imagery and thereby increases his ability to structure events in the world.

I have already noted the similarities between magical songs and hunting visions, and there is evidence that *ajútap* visions share many of the same qualities. Men reveal their *ajútap* visions in a formal dream declaration (*kaja tigbau*) that occurs prior to a raid on an enemy house. I have never had an opportunity to record a dream declaration, but fortunately an excellent dream text has been published by Mildred Larson (1978). Below is a free translation of the entire declaration, followed by a brief sample of the original Aguaruna text:

Free translation 1. This is about a vision which was seen while sleeping. 2. Oh, I saw a powerful vision and I felt its greatness. 3. It said, 'Where someone is always killing my relatives, right there I will kill in revenge, wiping out the tracks on his abandoned trail. 4. Perhaps he is my relative. 5. Taking that very one, I will perhaps actually choose a relative. 6. I will change his trail into an abandoned trail. 7. Forming a single file of the children, happily I will lead them to where I will condemn them. 8. Giving each of them a sip of manioc soup, with great joy I will lead them single file, to where I will kill in revenge.' 9. As he was saying this, the wind was blowing, 'Whooooo, whooooo,' over me again and again. 10. He was standing in a whirlpool of dust and leaves, like

Ropes of sand

smoke, over and over again making a sound like a dried skin (being folded back and forth) 'Boom, boom.' (Larson 1978:398–9)

Literal translation, lines 9–10 9. *taku, taku / dase, dase / tupuu, tupuu / awajtakua, awajtakua* 'saying, saying / wind, wind / whoooo, whoooo / doing-over-and-over-to-me, doing-over-and-over-to-me.' 10. *Tsakaipia, tsakaipia / imanun, imanun / bukui, bukui / awajtakua, awajtakua / duwapea, duwapea / imaanaa, imaanaa / kikug, kikug / awa awajtibi, awa awajtibi* 'whirlwind-of-dust-and-leaves, whirlwind-of-dust-and-leaves / like-that, like-that / smoking, smoking / doing-over-and-over-to-me, doing-over-and-over-to-me / skin, skin / equal-to, equal-to / boom, boom / he-did-this-very-much-to-me, he-did-this-very-much-to-me.' (ibid.:397–8)

Although the dream declaration is spoken in a loud, rhythmic style, as opposed to the soft, sinuous quality of a magical song, the two share a similar structure. Both consist of repeated phrases, a highly compressed vocabulary, and a series of evocative images related to the intended goal. In the case of the *ajútap* vision, these images include the metaphors 'wiping out tracks,' and 'abandoned trail,' augmented by the onomatopoeic words *tupuu* and *kikug*, which suggest wind and drum-like percussion respectively.

Any analysis of this dream declaration must take into account the fact that, unlike magical songs, it is presented in a public setting. Unfortunately, detailed information on the social circumstances surrounding Aguaruna dream declarations is not available. Harner (1972:139–40) reports that in the evening prior to a head-taking raid, Shuar warriors reveal their dreams to one another. One may then assume that an important function of the declaration is to enhance a warrior's reputation while at the same time helping other members of the raiding party feel confident about the expedition's ultimate success. That this particular speech act has a persuasive intent need not, in my view, dramatically change our interpretation of it. Indeed, it is the evocativeness of the dream text's imagery that makes it both effective in the practical sense (i.e., by giving the dreamer power to prevail over enemies) and persuasive in the social sense.

I suggest, then, that the most powerful dreams known to the Aguaruna, those concerned with hunting success and warfare, exercise control over the world in much the same way as do magical songs. The efficacy of both is based on the proposition that human beings influence events by creating order and simultaneously avoiding or neutralizing sources of disorder. One creates order by bringing the appropriate

material objects and evocative imagery to bear on the task being undertaken. Dreams are a particularly potent field for the exercising of human control because they take place in an area of direct contact between people and powerful beings such as the *ajútap*. If a person can by force of will structure the events that take place in this arena – in a sense, domesticating the ineffable – then he or she will have succeeded in imposing order in a domain that is critically important to the outcome of an activity. Magical songs, requiring as they do some slight intrusion into the dream-world through the consumption of tobacco water, represent a safe but only moderately effective means of intervening in the dream-world. Intentionally sought dreams and visions, by contrast, require more of a personal sacrifice yet offer greater rewards with respect to their manipulative potential.

CONCLUSIONS

The people of the Alto Mayo often speak of a mythical hero named Bikut, a man who so obsessively consumed hallucinogens that he became both a visionary and a warrior possessed by an insatiable desire to kill (see Chumap and García-Rendueles 1978:297). Bikut and other mythical warriors used their vision-derived power to lay waste to entire tribes. In more recent times, the ability of men to exterminate their foes has declined to more modest proportions, but it is no less dependent upon the power of visions. Warriors will voluntarily participate in raids only when they have succeeded in seeing an *ajútap*; to do battle without such a vision is tantamount to suicide. Men who repeatedly demonstrate an ability to acquire visions and then translate them into successful raids become local war leaders, or *kakájam*.

Dreams and political leadership are similarly linked in many Amazonian societies. Quichua shamans, whose status depends upon the successful integration of practical knowledge and visionary knowledge obtained from dreams, wield considerable influence in local and regional decision-making (Whitten 1978, 1982). Watson's (1981) recent account of Guajiro dreaming notes that political crises are sometimes resolved when someone's dream reveals the proper course of action to be taken. Among the Makiritare, both shamans and chiefs have special expertise in dream interpretation and manipulation (Guss 1980). Many other such examples could be cited. Why is it, we might

ask, that the ability to interpret and control dreams is so commonly linked to power relations in Amazonia?

Richard N. Adams (1975), in an extended meditation on the nature of social power, states that the kind of power characteristic of small-scale, unstratified societies is 'allocated' power, that is, the power which many individuals grant to one. People grant allocated power with the implicit understanding that it may be withdrawn at the grantor's pleasure. Adams further argues that in these small-scale societies (i.e., foraging bands and tribal villages) there is very little power to grant. Domestic units tend to be relatively independent of one another. There are few durable goods that can be accumulated. Exchange relations are too simple to offer much in the way of political leverage. What power there is tends to be based on what Adams calls 'skill authority,' demonstrated ability to perform essential tasks. The Aguaruna *kakájam* is typical of this pattern. His authority comes from known fighting skill and control over visions, often complemented by a developed sense of diplomacy that helps him suppress internal conflicts within a raiding party until the raiding expedition is successfully completed. His formal leadership role lasts only for the duration of the expedition, and his followers are free to withdraw their support if they oppose his decisions.

In these circumstances of power scarcity, the acquisition, interpretation, or control of dreams may be an important means of demonstrating competence beyond that which is required by immediate practical necessity. Through dreams, leaders amplify their skill authority by extending their abilities into the realm of altered states of consciousness. And since dreams are common currency, people in positions of power can accumulate potent dreams without taking from others; they can hoard without being stingy. Dreams are not, I hasten to add, the only source of authority beyond practical competence: rhetorical skill and ritual knowledge are alternative sources that come immediately to mind. But dreams have several qualities that make them likely vehicles for the expression of authority. Their complexity invites interpretation by people who have accumulated experience in this field. Their mysterious nature suggests a link to the numinous; by extension, control of dreams implies control of obscure but powerful forces. Nor can we disregard the possible connection between dreams and the psychological functions of leadership (Kracke 1978:191–205). Through a special sensitivity to the meaning of dreams, a leader may be able to give voice to unconscious concerns that his followers are unable to articulate. This

adeptness ultimately contributes to his ability to mobilize the support of others.

In more complex societies, dreams play a reduced role in power relations. Here power can be exercised by other means: accumulation of durable goods, control over exchange relations or strategic resources, the use of military force, and so on.⁸ People may still turn to dreams for guidance in personal matters, but dreams figure less prominently in the allocation or delegation of power at the highest levels. There may be instances in which rulers consult diviners or priests who derive information from dreams, but the power of the ruling elite exists independently of such functionaries, and the influence of their pronouncements is sharply circumscribed. Indeed, in stratified societies dreams become a subversive force associated with social protest and messianic movements. In such instances dreams empower the weak, not the strong.

The dream concepts that I have described here do not by any means exhaust all Aguaruna thoughts on the subject, and this essay must be considered a preliminary account only. Yet the data do provide a convincing demonstration of what Lévi-Strauss is driving at when he speaks of the 'complete and all embracing determinism' of preliterate thought (Lévi-Strauss 1966:11). Rather than viewing dreams as subjective mental phenomena bearing little relation to events outside of the dreamer's mind, the Aguaruna use dreams and altered states of consciousness as bridges between self and other, as sources of imagery that can be consciously appropriated to alter the dreamer's world. With typical energy, they have learned to shape what Borges (1956) calls the 'incoherent and vertiginous matter of dreams' into a powerful instrument of the human will.

NOTES

1. The field research on which this chapter is based was conducted between December 1976 and September 1978 in several Aguaruna villages in the Department of San Martín, Peru. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Henry L. and Grace Doherty Charitable Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica, Lima. Colleagues who were kind enough to evaluate critically an earlier draft include the participants in the School of American Research Advanced Seminar, as well as Kenneth M.

Kensinger, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, Robert Crépeau, and Howard Norman. Special thanks go to William L. Merrill for his perceptive comments during our many conversations about dreams and visions.

2. The orthography of Aguaruna words cited in the text follows the system now in use among the Aguaruna themselves. All letters are pronounced more or less as in Spanish except *e* (which represents the high central vowel *ɨ*), *g* (pronounced like *ng* in 'ring'), and *b* and *d* (pronounced like *mb* and *nd*, respectively). Accents fall on the first syllable unless otherwise noted; they have not been marked in the Aguaruna passage quoted from Larson 1978.
3. This brief account of Aguaruna concepts of altered states of consciousness cannot do justice to the complexity of the subject, about which there is still much to be learnt. For the people of the Alto Mayo, ASCs seem to be defined in terms of three axes: 'dreams' (*kaja*), 'visions' (at least three specific categories unmarked by a general cover term), and 'intoxication' (*nampét*). Significant visionary or dreamlike experiences may occur when one is sleeping, while one is intoxicated by psychotropic plants, or both; they may also occur spontaneously during an ordinary waking state. How shamanic trance fits into this pattern is still unclear. Shamans definitely seek 'intoxication' to treat patients, but their trance is not thought of as a kind of dreaming. See Kracke (1982) for an illuminating discussion of similar issues among the Kagwahiv of Brazil.
4. Newborn infants represent a notable exception to the idea of a bounded, autonomous self, since they retain an intimate link to their parents for the first months of life. This link is expressed in the belief that a neonate may be adversely affected by contacts between its parents and certain dangerous species of animals and plants. If the father of a newborn child encounters a snake or some other taboo species while walking along in the forest, the infant may contract *tapikbáu*, a potentially fatal condition caused by the snake's attack on the infant's soul. Similarly, parents do not eat varieties of food that may induce *tsuwapágamu*, a severe form of diarrhea, in their baby. Implicit in these beliefs is the notion that a baby's experience is somehow tied to that of its parents until it is old enough to move independently of them, i.e., at about eighteen months.
5. The similarity between Aguaruna and Western ideas of self may be partly responsible for the enthusiasm with which the Alto Mayo Aguaruna have entered into extractive activities, commercial agriculture, and the regional market system in general.
6. The similarity between the word *anen* (*aneg* in Larson's

Aguaruna–Spanish dictionary [1966] and *anentáimat*, ‘to think’/*anentái*, ‘heart,’ suggests that magical songs are closely associated with the basic process of thinking.

7. The Aguaruna description of the effects of an *ajútap* vision differs in certain respects from the Shuar interpretation of *arutam* visions reported in Harner (1972). The Shuar hold that the *arutam* soul actually enters the body of the dreamer, residing there until it is released by the formal dream declaration. The Aguaruna, however, deny that the *ajútap* enters their body. Rather, it is the dream of the *ajútap* that enters them. The dream is, in a sense, reified, and supposedly shamans are able to see it inside a warrior’s chest, ‘shining like a string of white beads.’ Whether the dream exists from the body during the dream declaration is unclear from Alto Mayo accounts. People do say that when a dream-possessor dies, the dream leaves his body with a thunderous roar to become an *ajútap* in its own right.
8. By arguing that control over economic affairs and military force is a more important aspect of political power in state-level societies than are ritual and symbolic activities, I clearly traffic in what Geertz (1980:123) calls the ‘worn coin of European ideological debate’. Although Geertz makes a powerful case for the central importance of liturgy in Balinese state politics, his suggestion that similar conditions obtain in most states needs to be supported by much more evidence than he is in a position to present.