

WILLFUL SOULS

Dreaming and the Dialectics of Self-Experience Among the Tzotzil Maya of Highland Chiapas, Mexico *Kevin P. Groark*

Obviously one must hold oneself responsible for the . . .
impulses of one's dreams. What else is one to do with them?
Unless the content of the dream . . . is inspired by alien spir-
its, it is a part of my own being.

Sigmund Freud (1925)

AS THE EPIGRAPH SUGGESTS, IN WEST-
ern ethnopsychology the ultimate responsibility for the
dream is understood to lie within the mind of the dreamer. Despite the ap-
parent alterity of dream experience, it is seen as an expression of the indi-
vidual's unconscious desires and drives. For Freud, this assumption opened
the door to the study of the dreamwork and a focus on mechanisms of
dream formation: condensation, displacement, symbolism, secondary elabo-
ration, and so on (Freud 1900). But what happens when local theories posit
more than one self (or rather, an extension of one's self) as the subject of the
dream? And what is the relation of these models of self to the exercise and
experience of will?

In this chapter I discuss the link between dreaming and “disavowed vo-
lition” among the Tzotzil Maya of highland Chiapas, Mexico.¹ Through a
close examination of the psychological and social dynamics of “dream inves-

titure” (in which individuals are divinely appointed to specialized vocational and religious responsibilities), I illustrate the ways in which basic epistemological and ontological assumptions toward dream experience yield a culturally distinct approach to willfulness and self-assertion; one in which the most experientially “willful” component of the person—the waking self of daily life—is also viewed as only partially agentic, subject to the intentions, desires, and wills of other agents, located both internally and externally. Among the highland Maya, dreaming facilitates a form of action and experience that shifts agentic responsibility away from the waking self, recentering it in the essential soul—the experiential self of the dream. In the case of investiture dreams, the resulting social and psychological transformations are not seen as mediated by individual desire or will; rather, they represent submission to a divine mandate communicated in dreams. Such dreams are understood to reveal both the will of the deities as well as the previously unknown potencies of the dreamer’s essential self. They are, in short, disclosures of the dreamer’s fate.

Owing to its unique phenomenal properties, dreaming offers a special vantage point for addressing shifting modes of self-experience and their relation to willful social action (see Kracke 1991). I propose that this particular form of self-transformational dreaming opens up an experiential space allowing the individual to pursue highly valued personal and social goals (such as becoming a curer) while simultaneously disavowing any agentic responsibility for choosing to pursue those goals and vocational aspirations.²

In developing my argument, I juxtapose highland Maya ethnotheories with contemporary psychoanalytic understandings of self, experience, and personal agency. The chapter opens with an introduction to highland Maya investiture dreams and local models of self and dreamspace. I then move on to an exploration of the psychoanalytic notion of “intermediate areas of experiencing” (as exemplified in the work of D. W. Winnicott, Christopher Bollas, and Thomas Ogden) in order to explore the unique experiential qualities of dreaming and the complex dialectical relationship of the dreaming self to the waking self. These analytic models provide a framework for thinking about the psychic displacements engendered by the movement from one experiential mode to another, and the ways in which local Mayan ethnotheories condition both the experience and social uses of dreaming (in

this case, in the service of negotiating complex questions of personal agency or willfulness). In support of this argument, I briefly discuss Tzotzil dream talk, in which this experiential split between the waking self and the dream self is explicitly indexed, giving rise to a decentered narrative frame in which it is understood that the dreamer is not responsible for the narrated content. I close with a discussion of the complex relationship between the exercise of “mitigated agency” in investiture dreams and local notions of fate or destiny, particularly as these bear on the pursuit and assumption of high-status vocations in a strongly egalitarian—yet deeply stratified—social setting.

HIGHLAND MAYA INVESTITURE DREAMS

The highland Maya recognize a special class of investiture dreams in which a Catholic saint appears, asking for assistance (which is usually interpreted as a request for the dreamer to assume some religious office) or informing the dreamer that he or she has been “named” or “chosen” for a specialized or high-status vocation (such as a curer, midwife, bonesetter, or ritual musician). To a significant extent, these visitational dreams are culturally stereotyped—in the case of shamanic investiture, the person is “visited” three times and presented with the insignia and tools of his office. During these visits, the curer is often given specialized knowledge of prayers, remedies, and curing ceremonies (see also Fabrega and Silver 1973; Page Pliego 2005). These dreams may emerge spontaneously, taking the person by surprise, or they may come as the result of a more-or-less conscious (but secretly held) desire to attain the new role. This process of investiture is explicitly theorized as taking place in the realm of souls; it represents divine recognition of the essential nature of the dreamer. In “seeing” and “respecting” these dreams, the individual subordinates himself to the will of the deities, accepting the divine burden of office in the service of community.

The saints who choose the dreamer are felt to possess penetrating insight and an ability to see the true nature, abilities, and motivations of each person. They perceive individuals as others cannot, discerning hidden qualities and aptitudes that have heretofore gone unnoticed. When a saint appears in a dream to “show someone his work,” this nomination reflects a divine assessment of integrity and calling—official recognition that one is, indeed, not

like other people. For many, the very fact that the person sees these dreams is evidence that his soul is indeed “clever” (*bij*), and was chosen for that very trait. When one of my informants told his wife about a dream in which he had been presented with curing paraphernalia, she exclaimed, “Ah, your soul is really clever! As for me, I’ve never seen [dreamt] like that. But you, you see everything that’s given to you. . . . This is because your soul is very clever!” However, not everyone sees clearly in dreams; in fact, curers are virtually the only people to whom clever souls are attributed. Perhaps this is why the local name for curer (*j’ilol*) translates literally as “the one who sees.” Despite small variations in the process of dream investiture, the key element is the personally and socially transformative quality of divine election and the importance of the quality of the person’s soul in this process. Such visitation dreams form part of the “phenomenological armoury” of the individual (Ray 1992, 68), simultaneously authorizing and legitimizing their new social role to both self and society through the idiom of soul-based encounters with powerful others. If the person recognizes the dream as one of investiture (and does not resist the call), he or she may begin a regimen of fasting, prayer, and petition in order to be “given more power.” During this extended process, which can span several years, the dreamer quietly puzzles through the possible meanings of the dreams, often with the help of his or her spouse. The initial sessions of dream sharing allow the aspirant to test social opinion, gauging reactions among family members to these reports of divine election. Often, the aspiring curer begins to test his diagnostic and curative powers by surreptitiously curing family members.³

This early period in the curer’s career is a time “characterized by concern, anxiety, preoccupation, and social withdrawal . . . a critical and stormy period in the life of the individual” (Fabrega and Silver 1973, 33). The principal questions with which the nascent curer wrestles relate to the social and political implications of shamanic election, professional competence, and public opinion. Many worry about being forced to publicly acknowledge their status before feeling prepared to assume the responsibilities of curing community members for payment—should they fail in their cures, they run the risk of public humiliation, being labeled a fraud, or worse yet, being accused of witchcraft. Once a curer has debuted (and is accepted as legitimate), he cannot decline his services without a very good reason—he is obligated to

use his gifts of curing power and divine access in the service of his community. Moreover, he cannot resist the appointment of the deities—illness, injury, and death are sent as punishments for failing to subordinate one's self to divine will.

VISIONS OF THE SOUL: HIGHLAND MAYA
THEORIES ON SELVES, SOULS, AND DREAMS

In order to provide a cultural grounding for the following discussion, I present a thumbnail sketch of Tzotzil views on the self, the dream, and the social world. Three broad ontological and epistemological premises underlie the Maya approach to dreams: 1) a tripartite model of the self; 2) an objectivist construction of dream experience; and 3) a cultural emphasis on destiny or fatedness.

In a classic statement on highland Maya models of personhood, Peter Manning and Horacio Fabrega (1973) claim that the Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya “seem to lack a conception of the self which is internally located, autonomous, and separate from that of other ‘objects’” with a corresponding lack of a theory of mind or person as possessing volitional efficacy for “ordering, monitoring, and controlling human actions” (1973, 266). Based on these questionable assertions, they conclude that, for the highland Maya, “body and self do not possess logically independent status” (ibid., 267). While it is true that the Maya configure the self and theorize experience in a culturally distinct manner, they are clearly aware of an authorizing subjective core that overlaps comfortably with a more-or-less monadic sense of “self,” but which is not co-extensive with the physical body.

Tripartite Model of Self

Highland Maya metaphysics posits a conjunctive self consisting of three components: the waking self, the essential soul (or dream self), and a co-natal animal companion.⁴ In my analysis, this tripartite conception of the individual articulates three distinct forms of self-organization and experience. These local aspects of self (and their relationship to varying forms of self experience and volition) constitute a distinctly Maya construction of subjectivity, in which some components of self are internal, while others are characterized

by varying degrees of externality and independence (see Pitarch Ramón 2003 for similar observations among the Tzeltal Maya). Moreover, these constituent elements of self are theorized as possessing very different volitional or agentic potentials.

First, there is the self of waking life, psychically complex and self-reflective. This is the unmarked seat of “me-ness,” indexed by the first person pronoun “I” (*vo'on*). The waking self is closely identified with the physical body (*bek'talil*), an otherwise inert form animated by the essential soul (*ch'ulel*) and its attendant warmth (*k'ixnal*), as well as the emotive and intellectual contributions of the head (*jolal*) and heart (*o'ntonal*), which work together in the production of both feeling and thought. This body-based social self is characterized by a sort of “mundane” or everyday volition. Through deliberative or emotionally motivated choice and action, the person charts a course through daily life and is generally held accountable for the outcomes of their actions.

This corporeal self is clearly distinguished from a radically simplified “essential soul” (*ch'ulel*), the experiential self of the dream. During the day, the soul resides in the heart, animating the body of its bearer with consciousness, character, personality, and vitality. While inside the body, the impulses and desires of the soul are modulated and tempered by the dictates of sociality, propriety, and reason (all of which are seated in the head). At night, the soul quits the body in search of adventures, yielding dreams. Wandering disincarnate, its actions and encounters take place outside of the volitional control of the waking self. Indeed, the soul is characterized by an unpredictable willfulness of its own, an oneiric volitional potential that often takes the dreamer by surprise. Freed from its social fetters, the soul’s “essential nature” is made manifest in interaction with others.

Finally, we have the co-natal “animal companion” (*chon, vayijel*). This extracorporeal alter, linked to the individual from birth, resides on the sacred mountain of Tzontevitz, and its identity is thought to determine social dominance and power, serving to naturalize the unequal distribution of skills among supposed equals. Powerful people are said to have large carnivores (jaguars, coyotes, etc.) as animal companions, while humble or “poor” people have smaller animals such as rabbits, squirrels, opossums, or skunks as companions (see Gossen 1975, 1976, 1999). In addition to its role

in naturalizing social inequality, this animal co-essence is thought to be the primary target of supernatural attack for witches and demons. In this context, it functions as an extrasomatic locus of vulnerability, playing a key explanatory role in many forms of illness. Like the essential soul, the co-natal animal companion lies outside of the volitional control of the person, and like any wild animal, its actions are unpredictable. Should the animal soul be injured or killed during its adventures, its human companion would soon sicken and die; their fates are inextricably linked. However, unlike the essential soul—which is, above all, an experientially based alter—the experiences and vicissitudes of the animal co-essence remain generally unknown to, and uncontrollable by, its human counterpart; it does not provide a vehicle for any form of direct experience, although it is sometimes encountered by the dreamer's essential soul in dreams.

The Nature of Dream Experience

In the Chamula dialect of Tzotzil, the word for “dream” is *vayichil*, a noun derived from the verb “to sleep” (*-vay*). As Robert Laughlin (1976) points out, dreams are—quite literally—derivatives of sleep. The verb “to dream” occurs in intransitive (*vaychinaj*) and transitive (*vaychinta*) forms, suggesting both active and passive accents on the nature of dream experience. Laughlin (1975, 139) provides several Zinacantec Tzotzil terms meaning “to dream” which derive from the noun *ch'ulel* (“essential soul”). Among these are *ch'ulel* (“soul/dream”), *ch'ulelaj* (“to dream”), and *ch'ulelta* (“to dream about”).

Although the latter are not common in Chamula, they precisely parallel the aforementioned cognate terms derived from (*-vay*) “to sleep” and serve to underscore the intimate connection between the soul and dreaming. Sleep (or loss of consciousness in general) occurs when the soul leaves the body. Although people are uncertain as to where the soul goes, most agree that it leaves “the earth's surface” (*sba banamil*) and travels to “the other earth” (*yan banamil*), or “the other heaven” (*yan vinajel*)—the realm of souls or essences (Arias 1975, 53). The consciousness of the dreamer is carried in the vehicle of the soul to this numinous realm, yielding dreams.

The transition from sleep to waking represents a literal “return of consciousness,” a movement of the soul from outside the body, back to its home in the dreamer's head or heart. This newly returned component or extension

of self carries with it the memory of its experience, which (at least in the telling) has a quality of revelation, of just-arrived news. These dream memories are then actively reflected upon by the waking self in an attempt to understand where he has been, what he has seen, what he has done, and what it all means.⁵

For the highland Maya, dream experience is generally conceptualized as continuous with mundane daily experience—however, this does not imply that they fail to distinguish the two, that they confuse dreams with waking experience, or that they consider the two to be phenomenologically equivalent. In emphasizing this continuity, I want to highlight the fact that the social relations and motives for action that characterize waking life “on the earth’s surface” are thought to seamlessly transition from the realm of physical bodies to the realm of souls (and vice versa).

Seen through the eyes of the soul, the dreamspace offers a crucial “glimpse behind the curtain,” allowing direct access to the normally hidden webs of individual motive and feeling underlying everyday waking life. Through correct interpretation of the dream (which, as Laughlin [1976] points out, is not such a simple matter) the dreamer gains valuable information about the true qualities of others—and often of themselves. Given that events on the earth’s surface are inextricably rooted in the realm of the essential—a nocturnal domain accessed every night, by every person—dream experience provides an experiential (and evidential) basis for both interpreting events and framing action in the waking world.

Fate, Destiny, and Personal Agency

Gary Gossen (1975, 1999) ties Tzotzil soul beliefs into a broad argument about the role of fate and destiny in the Tzotzil worldview. According to his analysis, highland Maya soul beliefs constitute a “native metaphysics of personhood,” which acts as an “extrasomatic, coessential, nonlocal nexus of causality and destiny” (1999, 244). The waking self of everyday life is, therefore, little more than “the passive bearer of forces over which it really has no control” a self which is, moreover, “subject to the agency and will of others, both human and supernatural” (ibid., 240). Since individual destiny is always linked to extrasomatic forces that are outside of one’s direct control, Gossen concludes that “the exercise of free will and acting only in one’s own self-interest [is] probably doomed to failure” (ibid., 260).

While Gossen's characterization captures something fundamental about the highland Maya outlook on fate, it fails to recognize the complex ways in which individuals do indeed exercise volition and take action in their everyday lives—and the importance of dreaming in this process. For our purposes, the question is not whether the highland Maya possess or lack “agency.” Rather, we are interested in the ways in which a sense of personal agency or volition is either brought to the fore and emphasized or shifted to the background where it fades from view. Far from reflecting a simple fatalism, Maya soul beliefs serve to maintain a dynamic tension between fatalism and volition, often mediated through dreams.

I suggest that the distanced and decentered action of the dream is experienced by the dreamer as mediated by a quasi-autonomous agent within the self, a sort of sub-ego. In an ironic twist, the most experientially “willful” component of the person—the body-based self of waking life—is also viewed as the most constrained, subject to the intentions, desires, and wills of other agents, located both internally and externally. Indeed, in many contexts the culturally preferred location of transformative agentic potential is situated beyond the confines of the physical body in the quasi-autonomous essential soul; a component of self that is only ever partially and provisionally known to the dreamer, but whose actions reflect back onto the self in sometimes profound ways.

Paradoxically, the “fatalism” that Gossen identifies as stemming from these soul beliefs can actually *facilitate* individual choice, volition, and willful action by framing it in terms of the culturally acceptable idiom of “success-dreaming” (Ray 1992, 68). In the highland Maya model of a tripartite self, we find an explanatory construct that allows the experience of willfulness to be decentered away from the waking self of everyday social life and located in one of several extensions of self, all understood—somewhat paradoxically—as lying outside of the volitional control of the waking self to which they are connected. Further distancing is achieved through the radical objectification of dream objects, which in the case of visiting saints, can also bear aspects of the individual's willful desires. When taken together, these ontological models of self and dream experience lay the foundation for a phenomenologically grounded approach to the experience of willfulness within its cultural matrix. By removing the question of individual desire and will from the pursuit of certain high-status social roles, both the individual and the larger

social group can enjoy the security—the fatedness—of knowing that dream nomination represents the discovery of the true nature of the dreamer in the realm of the essential. Turning Freud on his head, the highland Maya dress waking life in the fabric of their dreams.

In the following sections, I provide a psychoanalytic approach to the phenomenology of highland Maya dream experience, emphasizing the ways in which local ontological assumptions serve to open up the dreamspace for use as a unique experience structure in which the locus of responsibility shifts from the consciously organized self of waking life to the quasi-autonomous essential soul. I will argue that this experiential shift plays a key role in allowing for a sort of mitigated or displaced agency in which a secondary or ancillary will—that of the soul—becomes foregrounded in its interactions with agentially powerful deities in the dreamspace.

ESSENTIAL SOUL, TRANSITIONAL SELF: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF THE HIGHLAND MAYA DREAMSPACE

In recent years, much of contemporary psychoanalysis has shifted from a focus on conflict-based psychopathology to an emphasis on the constitution of personal meaning and the problem of “disordered subjectivities”—difficulties in rendering a subjective life that feels rich, vital, and authentic (Mitchell 1993, 21–25). The most interesting development has been a sustained attention to the nature, texture, and elaboration of subjective experience, and the processes through which this is accomplished. Perhaps the earliest and most influential analytic thinker concerned with these questions was D. W. Winnicott, who focused attention precisely on the complexities of subjectivity and the problematic epistemological status of subject and object in psychoanalytic theories of experience (see Winnicott 1951 [1958], 1959 [1989], 1971). In recent years, Winnicott’s foundational insights have been extended and more fully developed in the work of Christopher Bollas and Thomas Ogden, both of whom focus on the complex relationship between subjectivity and objectivity as constitutive poles of experience. In particular, these theorists are concerned with the potentially transformative dialectic underlying dream experience and the mediating role of the dream as a *particular kind of experience structure* that exists in dialectical relation to waking life, both

facilitating and foreclosing certain forms of self experience, understanding, and knowledge.

Winnicott's Transitional Phenomena

D. W. Winnicott is perhaps best known for his work on “transitional phenomena,” particularly his characterization of the familiar transitional object (Winnicott 1951 [1958], 1959 [1989], 1971). For Winnicott, transitional objects are “the first not-me possessions,” physical objects that are not clearly experienced as either subject or object, straddling the permeable boundary between “me” and “not-me.” While “objectively” external to (and ontologically independent of) the subject, at the experiential level the transitional object begins life as an extension of the subject. Over time, the integrity of the object asserts itself, and it is gradually understood to exist independently of the self. Despite the name, it is not the object that is transitional, it is the subject—the infant—who is transitioning from a state of *merger with*, to a state of *relation to* (Winnicott 1971, 14).

While Winnicott is most closely associated with the concept of the transitional object, his conceptualization of the “transitional area” or the “intermediate area of experiencing” (Winnicott [1951] 1958)—the space between subject and object, the space of subjective objects—provides a particularly useful heuristic model for understanding Maya soul beliefs and the dream-space. Winnicott postulates the existence of three metaphorical “areas” of experience—the first and second areas correspond to the inner psychic world of the subject and the external “reality” of the object, respectively. But in between these extremes lies the “third area,” a porous zone in which subject and object merge in the immediacy of experience. The mental space occupied by the transitional object is precisely this intermediate area, a space that is neither subjective nor objective, inner nor outer, illusory nor real. For Winnicott, this third area lies “intermediate between the dream and reality” (1965, 150), on “the knife-edge between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived” ([1968] 1989, 206).

Although initially introduced as an account of infant development, in his later papers Winnicott emphasizes the role of transitional processes in inaugurating the development of two different modes of organizing experience (1971, 95–103). At one pole, the space between subject and object disap-

pears—the object is an extension of the self. At the other pole, the separation between the subject and object is complete—the object is seen as independent, though in relation to the self. In health, the transitional area of experiencing remains alive and freely accessible throughout the lifespan, producing a “potential space” Winnicott closely associates with the “cultural” life of symbolism, creativity, illusion, imagination, play, and dreaming (1971, 100). One mode does not replace the other—rather, they exist in a dialectic, as poles of experience between which we oscillate throughout our lives. Drawing on these later developments, M. Masud Khan explicitly links the dream to the third area and to transitional experiencing, arguing that “the dream-space is the internal psychic equivalent of what Winnicott has conceptualized as the [physical] transitional space which a child establishes to discover self and external reality” (1974, 314).

Dreaming and the Dialectics of Self-Experiencing

In a series of provocative monographs, Christopher Bollas (1992, 1995) puts forward a model of the subjective elaboration of experience based on the claim that *all* experience represents this mutual interpenetration of subject and object—the creation of subjectified objects. A basic component of Bollas’s vision of human subjectivity and meaning-making is his bifurcation of the subject into two complementary selves: the “complex reflective self” (CRS) of waking life and the “simple experiential self” (SES) of immersive experience (1992, 17):

The simple experiencing self and the complex reflecting self enable the person to process life according to *different yet interdependent modes of engagement: one immersive, the other reflective*. When I am “in” the dream, although as a simple self I perceive dream objects, even more importantly I endure deep experiences there. Recollection and interpretation of the dream’s meaning do not necessarily address the essence of self experience gained by the simple self’s movement through the events of the dream, but the complex self possesses a different psychic agenda: the aim of this position is to *objectify* as best as possible where one has been or what is meant by one’s actions. (Bollas 1992, 15; emphasis added)

In essence, Bollas replaces Winnicott’s spatial model of movement between “areas”—the subjective, objective, and the transitional—with a model

of temporal cycling between these two distinct experiential selves. Everyday life represents a continual shifting between these two self states, one characterized by “psychic density and thoughtfulness,” the other by “a suspension of such complexity in the service of simple immersive participation in experience” (Bollas 1992, 15).

Experiences in the “third” or “intermediate area” occupy a key position in Bollas’s “dialectics of self experiencing”—an oscillation between subjectification and subsequent objectification (1992, 31). When the simple experiential self is lost in self experiencing—whether in waking life or in the dream—“the distinction between *the subject who uses the object* to fulfill his desire and the *subject who is played upon* by the action of the object is no longer possible. The subject is inside the third area of self-experiencing. His prior state and the object’s simple integrity are both ‘destroyed’ in the experiential synthesis of mutual effect” (ibid.). Emerging from such immersive experiences, the complex reflective self takes himself as an object of reflection, considering where he has been, and objectifying these experiences in terms of more-or-less consciously articulated theories of self and other.

Also working within a Winnicottian framework, Thomas Ogden (1986) proposes a similar model of dream experience. For Ogden, the ability to dream is crucially mediated by the ability to maintain a “psychological dialectic process” in which the dream experienced as *thing presentation* in one experiential mode is processed and symbolized as *word-presentation* in another mode. For our purposes, thing-presentation can be understood as referring primarily to unconscious eidetic internal sensory material (e.g., a mnemonic representation of an external object), while word-presentation refers to the language-based meanings that become attached to these internal object representations in the process of becoming conscious (“The conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone” [Freud 1915, 201]). Through this linking process, otherwise unconscious thing-presentations are linked into a conscious or preconscious language-based network of associative meaning, thereby entering more fully into a system of cultural meanings and becoming both individually and culturally inflected representations. In other words, the *dream as thing* is only transformed into the *dream as experience* when it is drawn

into a dialectical process of language-based differentiation and distancing. By means of this process, the wild night-dream of the immersed self is *objectified and interpreted* according to local ethnotheories of experience, yielding the domesticated daydream of the waking self.

In both Ogden's and Bollas's model, the dreamer who generates and experiences the dream might, for analytic purposes, be understood as distinct from the dreamer who understands and interprets the dream. The former represents the self given over to primary process mentation based in fantasy and imagination, while the latter represent a secondary-process thinker whose mental operations are governed by a culturally informed, reality-oriented, logical mode of understanding that is oriented toward objectifying the dream as a *certain kind of experience with a certain kind of relation to actuality*. Bollas stresses the potentially transformative effects of this oscillation between the complex and simple selves—when we shift from one mode to the other, “we change the nature of perception . . . subjectivity is scattered and disseminated into the object world, transformed by that encounter, then returned to itself after the dialectic, changed in its inner contents by the history of that moment” (1992, 18). These selves—the complex reflective self and the simple experiential self—should therefore be understood as reifications of two very different modes of processing experience that exist in a dialectical and mutually transformative relation.

In this dialectical model, health is conceptualized as a free movement or oscillation between these poles of subjectification and objectification, a process that allows some regulated overflow and interpenetration between these artificially segregated domains. Indeed, Winnicott (1971, 2) conceptualized the segregation between these experiential “areas” in terms of a semi-permeable membrane, a sort of skin that connects as it divides, allowing measured diffusion from one area into another. If one pole of experience comes to predominate, however, this porous membrane becomes a solid barrier, and experience ossifies into either the hallucinatory realism of the psychotic or the reality-based disenchantment of the normotic.⁶ In such cases, the connection between the dreaming and waking self is severed: The dream becomes either a concrete reality that is interchangeable with waking experience, or conversely, it degenerates into a sterile and denatured fantasy bearing no relationship to waking life.

In many ways, the highland Maya essential soul is the structural opposite of Winnicott's transitional object: Instead of being an external object that is not perceived as wholly external, dream objects (including the dream self) are internal objects that are not perceived as internal. Moreover, in Winnicott's model we see a self moving from a state of undifferentiation toward one of "reality-based" differentiation through the use of the transitional object. For the highland Maya, the transitional quality of the semi-autonomous essential soul functions in the opposite direction, moving the subject back toward unity by incorporating more "primary process" dimensions of experience (imagination, fantasy, etc.) within the boundaries of everyday consensual reality.

The Dream as Processive Experience Structure

When viewed in light of this oscillatory model of dream experience, the dreamspace can more readily be understood as a "potential space" or "intermediate area of experiencing," a liminal experience structure through which we move on a nightly basis; one that processes us according to a dialectical logic based on the experiential shift from the simple experiential self of the dream to the complex reflective self of waking life. In the dream, we become a simple experiential self, return to a state of unintegration, ". . . loosening [the] self into an archipelago of many beings, acting various roles scripted by the ego in the theatre of the night. Waking, we rise from these regressed states . . . from the plenitude of selves to the discerning 'I' who reflects on his odd subjects" (Bollas 1992, 15).

Seen from this perspective, dreams reclaim a protosymbolic integrity as "real" experiences through which the dreamer is "gathered and processed" as he "wanders amidst the seemingly objective dream objects through which he thinks himself" (Bollas 1992, 14):

In the dream we are immersed in our own selves. Freud rightly saw the dream as a condensed event with suggestive force disseminating in a thousand directions, leading to an infinite reading of its meaning. His admonition that we must not regard the manifest text as the meaning of the dream unfortunately led to a crucial failure to see in just what ways the dream also had an integrity of its own: after all, the subject is living his own ego organization! As such, each person is graced by the

visitation of the dream, which brings him into his self, right into the structure of his being, taking him through its processional logic and character. . . . [The dream] has an integrity unto itself, and when this integrity is allowed to stand, the dream can also be seen as the only uncontested moment in which one experiences the self that one is as one lives *through* one's psychic structure. (1995, 178; emphasis in original)

As this quote suggests, the dream functions as an experience-structure with its own particular "processive effects" on the subjectivity of the dreamer; the dream proprioceptively engages the dreamer with the dream object on all levels (Bollas 1995, 43). In fact, dream objects derive a special processional potential precisely because they have been *experienced* in the "real" of the dream. They are thereby endowed with a singular uniqueness and importance deriving both from their integrity of form and their seeming independence from the dreamer.

Within this generative "potential space," subjectified dream objects arrive as though by chance. Coming unbidden as they do, these dream objects have the potential to sponsor and elicit units of self experience that may be novel but feel deeply responsive to the wishes, worries, fears, and fantasies of the dreaming self. Such objects represent the metamorphosing of a "latent deep structure into a surface expression" that is often puzzling precisely because of its seeming "itness" and externality (Bollas 1992, 54). Such "transitional" dream objects cannot be neatly assigned to either "the real" or the illusory—they partake of both. Yet for the highland Maya, they represent the hyper-real, the essential. This, then, is the paradox of dream object arrival, "the double experiencing of [dream] objects as [simultaneously] vehicles of wish and spontaneous elicitors of inner experiences," a process in which we are both "the initiators of our own existence as well as the initiated" (Bollas 1992, 27–28).

As Bollas points out, this variable "placing" of the self in relation to dream experience is the work of the complex reflective self of waking life, and as such, it is a process that depends crucially on local ontological and epistemological propositions. Among the highland Maya, the essential soul (*ch'ulel*) is, in many ways, an objectification of this simple experiential self—a nonreflective, radically stripped down "particle participant" in dream experience. It mediates encounters with dream objects locally understood to be

essentially real and unquestionably objective to the dreamer, bringing their influences and effects back into the physical body of the dreamer here “on the earth’s surface.” Moreover, the essential soul has marked “transitional” qualities—it is an intermediate construct that is simultaneously “me” and “not-me,” subject and object, manifesting qualities of both internality and externality—allowing for varying degrees of estrangement from, and rapprochement with, the consciously organized self of waking life.

In the following section, I explore a set of domain-specific lexical, discursive, and pragmatic features of Tzotzil dream narrative. I suggest that these linguistic devices serve to decenter the speaking self as the primary author of oneiric actions, reflecting instead a focus on the soul-based agentic self of the dream. This variable “placing” of self through the establishment of a distanced and decentered narrative frame serves to mitigate questions of dream authorship, sidestepping questions of responsibility for the narrated dream experiences. As philosopher Edward Casey has argued, personal agency is not a dichotomous “thing” that one either has or lacks; rather, it reflects “a broad spectrum of ways in which the [individual] becomes implicated via self-projection or by proxy in his own imaginative presentation” (1976, 45). Thus, the narrative and conceptual positioning of the self in relation to its own experience becomes a critical datum for any discussion of agency or will (see Schafer 1973, 1976).⁷

PLACING THE SELF: THE NARRATIVE NEGOTIATION OF AGENCY IN TZOTZIL DREAM TALK

At the moment of waking, a fascinating experiential shift occurs. For the first time, the person reflects on his dream experiences from the perspective of the waking self. He has gone from deeply immersive, embodied, disseminative first-person experiences in the dreamspace, to a wakened state in which he “realizes” that these were the experiences of his soul, not himself. As discussed, this simple self exists in dialectic relation to the complex reflective self of waking life, who both bears the soul and interprets the meaning and significance of its wanderings. It is at this point, in the transformation from the *dream as dreamt* to the *dream as understood*, that the articulation of the simple experiential self and the complex reflective self can be most clearly

seen. Through this dialectical process, the wild nightdream translated into a language of action and experience that is both personally and culturally intelligible. Highland Maya dream narratives explicitly reference this split subjectivity, drawing it into discourse where it can be used as a domain-specific language for framing action and making claims (and in many cases, for disavowing any meaningful volitional role in having chosen to do so).

The perspectival tension between the first-person immediacy of the dream and its reframing as a quasi-third-person experience of the soul finds expression in dream narrative, where it is indexed in a number of ways—all of which serve to shift the speaker from a central experiential position to one of distance and marginality. This indexical shift is accomplished through a variety of lexical and discursive devices, including opening and closing codas that employ deictic adverbs to mark the departure and subsequent return of the experiencing self (the quasi-autonomous essential soul); the liberal use of evidential particles that mark dream experience as epistemologically distinct from waking experience; as well as a marked preference for heteroglossic quoted speech that maximizes the distance between the narrator and his or her “quoted voices” (see Groark 2009 for a detailed discussion of the lexical, discursive, and pragmatic features of Tzotzil dream narrative and their psychological implications).

I suggest that these devices shift the focus from the corporeal presence of the waking, speaking self to the essential body of the dream self or soul—a “self” which is marked as clearly “mine,” but also “not quite mine”—or better yet, a “me” experienced under the distinct phenomenal conditions of the dream, with all the epistemological and ontological entailments that such an identification suggests. This narrative framing serves not only to mark dream experience as pertaining to a distinct phenomenal order, but also to position the self in relation to these experiences.

By locating experience at a distance from the speaker (or perhaps as originating in a separate narrated subjectivity) this “cross-world identification” (Langacker 1985) or “decentered framing” (Hanks 1990) provides a narrative resource for managing—mitigating, diffusing, or even disclaiming—a sense of agentic responsibility for described events or experiences on the part of the speaker. By drawing attention to the dream’s twilight valence (as both fundamentally “mine” and “not quite mine”) the focus tacks between the here-

and-now narrator and the implicitly or explicitly referenced soul. Through these shifting frames, the speaker is subtly relocated from the center of the dream to the margin, *from experiencer to observer*.

This framing of the dream as relatively distant and differentiated from the waking self as organizing agent, gives rise to a potentially generative “duality of consciousness” (Ray 1992, 64), allowing both dreamer interlocutor to locate responsibility and ownership of the dream (especially those with implications for self-definition) in the quasi-autonomous “essential soul.” By dampening the illocutionary force of the narrative, these discursive devices promote the appearance of independence and distance from the speaker. The narrated dream thus becomes a discursive frame in which it is understood that the speaker does not bear authorial responsibility for the actions and experiences described. Somewhat paradoxically, by shifting the indexical ground to the realm of the dream and the dream self, the speaker can actually claim greater significance for the narrated content. By grounding the experience in the realm of soul or “essence,” dream events and interpersonal transactions take on a heightened actuality. This augmented significance derives precisely from the fact that the experience took place in a dream—a space of a different phenomenal order.

I suggest that the imaginal distance created between the waking self and the dream self opens up a sort of Winnicottian “intermediate area of experiencing.” Indeed, the Maya soul has strikingly transitional qualities. It is both essentially “me,” yet in some ways strikingly “not me”—a flexible continuum along which self experience can be placed. Just as the infant moves through varying stages of merger and differentiation with the transitional object of childhood, so too the dreamer can occupy variable subjective positioning in relation to his transitional self, the essential soul.

At one extreme, the dream experiences and actions of the soul can be appropriated and incorporated as isomorphic with the waking self (emphasizing connection and identificatory merger). Ego syntonic experiences—those in line with the values, wishes, and phantasies of the waking self—can be drawn closer, gradually folding into the very fabric of self through identification with the soul as the manifestation of one’s true nature. At the other end of the continuum, dream experience can be clearly differentiated from the waking self (emphasizing detachment, disavowal, and projection). Ego

dystonic experiences—those at odds with the person’s consciously organized theory of themselves—can be externalized and objectified as uncontrolled and unbidden actions of the soul framed as relatively distant from, and uncontrolled by, the waking self. And of course, much dream experience falls somewhere in between; in uncertain relation to the dreamer. It is precisely this variable positioning of the transitional self along a “me”–“not-me” continuum that potentiates the use of dreams as vehicles for identifying (and, perhaps, for identifying *with*) alternative or future self-states—states conceived of not as potential, but as essential, reflecting the most basic nature of the dreamer.

SOULS, DREAMS, AND MITIGATED AGENCY:
SOCIAL USES OF INVESTITURE DREAMS

In this final section I explore the social uses of this distanced and decentered construction of dream experience, emphasizing its utility for context-specific negotiations of volitional responsibility and willfulness. Returning to the phenomenon of investiture dreams, with which I opened the chapter, I argue that this particular dream genre provides a cultural affordance allowing for the exercise of a sort of “disavowed volition.” Drawing on the cultural models and expressive resources described earlier, the investiture dream becomes a vehicle through which highly motivated individuals can pursue prestigious vocations while, simultaneously, sidestepping any sense of direct volitional responsibility for having chosen to pursue them (see also Ray 1992).

The Chamula Tzotzil have been accurately characterized as possessing a “deep skepticism about individual autonomy and the very idea of the ‘self-made’ individual who is guided only by pragmatic self-interest” (Gossen 1999, 242). This conviction leads to anxiety about being seen as overly self-assertive, resulting in an “unwillingness to undertake new endeavors,” a “reluctance to act publicly in ways that might be perceived by others as overtly self-serving,” as well as a “reluctance to engage in instrumental acts that suggest individual volition and exercise of power over others”—unless somehow legitimized in the eyes of the community (Gossen 1992, 240). As we have seen, soul beliefs (and related ideas of soul-based ascription) provide one such resource for legitimizing certain high-status pursuits and undertakings. The

otherwise divisive effects of social inequality resulting from such actions are neutralized—paradoxically—by highlighting and essentializing the individual’s difference; by locating it in the very fabric of the self, the soul.

As discussed, this ambivalence toward striving and self-promotion is especially clear in the domains of curing and religious service. Within these realms, evidence of divine dream election is part of the authorizing discourse that both signals selection and legitimizes the person’s emerging status. For the call to be viewed as authentic, the complex reflective self of waking life—the seat of everyday volition and striving—cannot be seen to have chosen the path (see Ray 1992). The individual must be chosen by the saints; an election experienced in dreams, by the “soul.” Since this dream self is understood to be outside of the volitional control of the individual, questions of choice, ambition, and strategy are (at least theoretically) precluded.⁸ Tzotzil dream talk subtly draws attention to these disjunctive self states, emphasizing the soul-based locus of dream experience and vocational election.

Dreams are valuable resources for the highland Maya. Through them, one can account for and legitimize willful acts—to both self and society. Drawing on these experiences, the individual can articulate and pursue deeply desired goals, while paradoxically experiencing this as compliance, obedience, and subordination to divine authority in the service of community. Volitional responsibility is placed in the deity or saint, the exceptional qualities of the self are placed in the soul, and the self is recast as a passive object of these essential forces. This constitutes what M. C. Jedrej and Rosalind Shaw (1992b, 11) refer to as the “duality of agency in dreaming” in which the actions of the self are experienced as subsumed within the agency of another, an experience of being acted upon even as one acts.

CONCLUSION

In a short addendum to his general theory of dream interpretation, Freud writes, “Obviously one must hold oneself responsible for the . . . impulses of one’s dreams. What else is one to do with them? Unless the content of the dream . . . is inspired by alien spirits, it is a part of my own being.” (1925, 133) We have seen how Mayan ontological premises yield a very different theory of the dream—one characterized by objectivity, externality, and the involve-

ment of a semi-autonomous essential self. The Maya do not, as Freud suggests, hold “one self” responsible for the content of the dream—rather, they postulate a radically simplified essential self as the subject of the dream. And the content of the dream is not to be found inside of the dreamer, but in “the other earth, the other sky,” a numinous realm of souls, all of whom act as agents in the theatre of the dream.

From the perspective of Western scientific psychology, Highland Maya dream metaphysics transform the dream from an intrapsychic experience (in which one encounters eidetically rendered internal objects) to an extrasomatic, non-psychological experience (in which one is in direct interpersonal exchange with real others).⁹ From the Tzotzil perspective, the dream-space could more accurately be described as an intersubjective relational field in which one comes into contact with the true nature of self and others. Yet the dream remains the creation of the dreamer. Despite elaborate cultural theories of the self and the dream, the complex reflective self of waking life and the simple experiential self of the dream are, in truth, two facets of one self—a single self experienced under the very different phenomenal conditions of waking life and the dream. We have seen how this experiential split is theorized at the local level, how it is mobilized in discourse, and how it functions as a resource for both self-elaboration and social legitimization, allowing individuals to sidestep troublesome questions bearing on the assertion of ambition, desire, and willfulness in a social setting that discourages these qualities in favor of an ethos of homogeneity and equality.

As this chapter illustrates, a fine-grained ethnographic focus on the socially and individually preferred location of the subject in relation to his own experience—in this case, in relation to the experience of volitional efficacy and willful action—is a basic element in the development of a truly “cultural psychodynamic” approach.¹⁰ Such a focus bridges the often disparate worldviews of anthropology and psychoanalysis, yielding a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which human subjectivity is shaped—and is, in turn, shaped by—the cultural world in which it is always embedded.

CHAPTER 3

I would like to thank members (past and present) of the “Boundary Crossing” research team: Erica Angert, Nancy Bagatell, Jeanine Blanchard, Jeannie Adams, Lanita Jacobs-Huey, Teresa Kuan, Stephanie Mielke, Ann Neville-Jan, Melissa Park, and Kim Wilkinson. I want to especially acknowledge Teresa Kuan for all her help in the preparation of this chapter. Particular heart-felt thanks goes to my long-time research partner, Mary Lawlor. Thanks also to the Narrative Study Group for comments on earlier versions of this chapter: Linda Garro, Elinor Ochs, Janet Hoskins, Marjorie Goodwin, Gelya Frank, Nancy Lutkehaus, and again, Mary Lawlor. I gratefully acknowledge support by the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research, The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institutes of Health (no. 1R01HD38878).

1. The argument presented here connects to my larger project of constructing a narrative theory of practice, and here my inspiration also comes from phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical traditions, literary theory, and cultural psychology—as well as anthropological theories of practice, performance, and experience. The narrative theory I propose is both practice-oriented and phenomenological. It highlights the activities and experiences of particular agents in particular historical situations as these illuminate and help to construct complex social spaces and reveal the exigencies of practical reasoning and practical experience.

2. Charles Taylor argues that the link between will and morality (especially morality defined as transformation of the will) was introduced into western thought primarily through Christianity, but that this connection has gone through various secularizing transitions, and, in its secular guises, remains one of the most powerful ethical precepts in western thought (1989, 22).

3. MacIntyre gives the following example. “In answer to the question, ‘What is he doing?’ the answers may, with equal truth and appropriateness, be ‘Digging’, ‘Gardening’, ‘Taking exercise’, ‘Preparing for winter’ or ‘Pleasing his wife’. Some of these answers will characterize the agent’s intentions, others unintended consequences of his actions, and of these unintended consequences some may be such that the agent is aware of them and others not” (1981, 192). Some of these answers situate the episode within a narrative history of the cycle of domestic activities in a particular social place—gardening in Northern England, let’s say. Others point toward a history of one marriage, and perhaps marriage as a social institution in some social place. To make it even more complicated, histories of domestic activities and histories of marriage are, obviously, interrelated.

4. Taylor builds from Heidegger’s discussion of the temporal structure of being—especially Heidegger’s essential argument that we know who we are as beings who become—to make a strong case for narrative identity that is, at base, a moral identity. “From my sense of where I am relative to [the good], and among different possibilities, I project the direction of my life in relation to it. My life always has this degree of narrative understanding, that I understand my present action in the form of an ‘and then’: there was A (what I am), and then I do B (what I project to become)” (1989, 47).

5. This case is based on interview data, fieldnotes, and videotapes of home and hospital interactions. However, for the sake of brevity, I rely heavily on several years of interviews with the mother, Sonya.

CHAPTER 4

I thank the volume editors, two anonymous reviewers, and Robert Whitmore for constructive feedback on earlier versions of this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

1. The fieldwork upon which this chapter is based took place between August 2002 and September 2003 in the Tzotzil township of San Juan Chamula, as well as the regional center of San

Cristóbal de Las Casas. Fieldwork was supported the National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation-ISOP, the Center for Latin American Studies at UCLA, and the Department of Anthropology, UCLA.

2. See Jedrej and Shaw (1992a) and Ray (1992) on strikingly similar personal and social uses of “success-dreaming” in Africa.

3. Among the highland Maya, there is no system of shamanic apprenticeship—all curing knowledge is purportedly gained directly from dream experience. However, as Fabrega and Silver (1973) have pointed out, shamanic vocation tends to run in families, providing ample opportunities for indirect tuition.

4. The description I present here is based on extensive interviewing with Chamula informants. The present description should be understood as a sort of minimal model with which most Mayan Catholic “traditionalist” Chamulas would agree. For more detailed ethnographic treatments of highland Maya soul beliefs, see Vogt (1965, 1970), Gossen (1975, 1999a, b), Rachun Linn (1989) and Page Pliego (2005) on the Tzotzil, and Pitarch Ramón (1996, 2003) and Pitt-Rivers (1970) on the Tzeltal.

5. See Lohmann (2003) for an extended discussion of the ubiquity of the “dream as soul travel” trope throughout the Pacific. Although this framing of dreaming as soul-based travel is quite common (see the essays in Tedlock [1992] and Mageo [2003] for similar dream beliefs in diverse cultural settings), it can also occur alongside more complex constructions, in which certain kinds of dreams are understood *not as travel to* another realm, but as *visitations from* this realm (see Mittermaier 2006, 81).

6. Bollas (1987, 135–56) introduced the notion of the “normotic” as a counterbalance to the psychotic. The normotic personality highlights the potentially pathological effects of an excessive emphasis on secondary-process mentation, concerned primarily with reality-testing and adherence to consensual reality. In the spirit of Winnicott, both the psychotic and normotic character organizations represent a failure of the dialectical movement between primary and secondary process mentation, a process through which fantasy and imagination come to infuse everyday life (while simultaneously reflecting and being tempered by actuality).

7. American relational psychoanalyst Stephen Mitchell has provided what is perhaps the most thoughtful discussion of this topic (1988). He argues that the problem of will has been incorrectly framed—rather than providing alternative explanations, “both agency and unconscious motivation must be regarded as simultaneous properties of all mental events” (*ibid.*, 248). The subjective experience of will or agency is always constrained and conditioned by deep intrapsychic and relational commitments—usually unconscious—the violation of which threatens to disrupt the individual’s familiar experiential world, giving rise to anxiety. This conceptualization of the mutually determining co-presence of willfulness and unconscious determinism encourages a focus on how, why, and in what contexts the individual either foregrounds a sense of “ownness” and authorship (emphasizing the self as a choosing and acting subject), or backgrounds this sense of volition or agency (emphasizing the self as passive object, as one who is acted upon) (see Throop, this volume).

8. Many highland Maya are quite conscious of the legitimizing role of dreams, as well as the potential for strategic manipulation through dream telling. There is a clear awareness that some individuals falsify “election” dreams in an attempt to legitimize their status as a curer. In such cases, the skepticism is not about the validity of dream election as mode of experience—rather, it centers on the truth of the call of any particular individual.

9. When viewed cross-culturally, the Western “scientific” or etic psychological models of dream experience described here appears somewhat anomalous. The implicit folk models of dreaming and dream experience attested to by many Westerners—particularly among ethnic or racial

subgroups such as African Americans (see Shafton 2002)—are quite variable, and tend toward an “objectivist” framing quite like that of the Maya (although usually lacking the armature of supporting ethnotheories).

10. I owe the phrase “cultural psychodynamics” to April Leininger (2002), who coined it while participating in a psychoanalytic reading group at UCLA. I thank her for permission to use the term and elaborate it according to my own sensibilities.

CHAPTER 6

I thank the volume editors and Stanley P. Smith for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

1. Articles about Dr. Kelly can be found on the Internet at media.guardian.co.uk and www.cnn.com.

CHAPTER 8

I express particular appreciation to Michelle Levine for help searching out relevant literature and assembling it as I was initially preparing the work in this chapter. I thank the volume editors and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. And I dedicate it to the memory of Robert Barrett, whose writings on schizophrenia first introduced me to the link between theories of degeneracy and continued pessimism about the possibilities for recovery from schizophrenia.

1. See also Kraepelin’s “self assessment,” where he describes similar views (Kraepelin 2002). Compare Engstrom, Burmair and Weber (2002) with Shepherd (1995) for competing interpretations of how to read Kraepelin’s obvious anti-semitism.

2. Michael Shepherd describes the apparent contradictions between Kraepelin’s scientific accomplishments and his political views, calling them the “two faces of Emil Kraepelin” (Shepherd 1995). Engstrom questions this view, suggesting that Kraepelin had more than two “faces” and that understood in the Lamarckian context of his time, these are not as contradictory as they seem (Engstrom 2007; Engstrom, Burgmair and Weber 2002).

AFTERWORD

1. Compare this image of a passenger occasionally grabbing the steering wheel to Freud’s (1923) characterization of the relationship between ego and id in which the ego is like a rider who tries to control and direct the energy and direction of the vastly larger and more powerful “horse” of the id.

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