

ON *TJUKURRPA*, PAINTING UP, AND BUILDING THOUGHT

Craig San Roque

Abstract: This article explores the relationship of Central Australian ‘Dreaming’, or *Tjukurrpa*, to symbol and thought formation in Aboriginal culture. Acknowledgment is given to ethnographic and indigenous descriptions of *Tjukurrpa* and to Aboriginal mythopoeia, but the author is primarily concerned with how thoughts are made and what they are made of. Comparisons are drawn to European myths and cults in order to understand how *Tjukurrpa* and myth might influence intercultural transference. The author suggests that through an anthropological and psychoanalytical analysis of intercultural conversations and an understanding of *Tjukurrpa*’s structure and content, non-indigenous people working in health and law might appreciate and comprehend Aboriginal thinking and thus be more effective in various aspects of engagement. In this meditation on thought formation and failure, the author seeks to understand the relationships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, so that those who intend to help do not end up destroying.

Keywords: conversations, cultural matrices, ‘Dreaming’, ethnography, failure, intoxication, mythology, *Tjukurrpa*

Part One: Elegy for Seated Men

Just like a god he seems to me, that man who sits across from you, so closely attentive to your sweet words.

— after Sappho, fragment 31

‘That Man Who Sits Across from You’

Psychoanalysis is mostly about a strange activity that occurs between people, calmly seated, oddly speaking. When two men sat in their conception conversation in Vienna in 1907, the older said to the younger, “And tell me, what do you think



of the transference?" The younger responded, "It is the alpha and the omega of the analytic method." And the older said, "Then you have grasped the main thing" (Jung [1954] 1966: 172).

The capacity of a person to be a psychoanalyst rests upon his or her grasp of theory and aptitude for observational technique in the fieldwork of the psyche, as well as the capability to dwell enough in the "main thing" marked so definitively by Freud as that bittersweet activity generated between persons. The psychoanalyst must be willing to deal with the strange substances that shake one's being when two or three are gathered together in a way that enables matter from that famous 'unconscious' to emerge in bits, groans, and half-formed misunderstandings—to emerge in any shape, from anywhere along the spectrum of love to hate, beauty to terror, self-knowledge to self-delusion.

This matter can be developed further if I slow things down and ask, "Who are these two or three who sit together?" And I am thinking now, remembering occasions sitting in the company of older men—the sort of older men with whom anthropologists often have conversations. Older dark-skinned men who have custodial functions for their specific languages and a cultural obligation. Older men who smell of embedded smoke and kangaroo grease and maybe Log Cabin tobacco.

And the question might be, "What is in our minds as we sit together, you and I?" with the fire simmering, tea stewing, ants busy on the sand, and maybe the heat of coals drifting through the shade of a mulga tree. These settings are fitting for reflective conversations between men of two worlds—indigenous Warlpiri, perhaps, and the traveling Caucasian. Such conversations take place on the edge of campsites, on the edge of settlements, on the edge of and between dreams, between times, between languages, a shimmering, dusty place where nothing much is really what it seems. And nothing spoken is exactly what it might mean and nothing heard is quite what is intended, perhaps. Ambiguous answers and ambiguous tracks of thought are exchanged between persons in exactly the settings where transference phenomena might readily be found, if Freud or Jung had time enough and the chance to sit there long enough—learning, letting go of anticipation, observing the flow of desire and projection. Seated between the eyes of two worlds. This sort of thing.

And thus another question rises about what emerges out of somewhere between a different two men, not an Austrian Jewish doctor speaking German and a Swiss Protestant psychiatrist speaking German words, seeking forms of feeling, edges of image, flurries of body sensation, legs, gut, heart, throat, headache, squinting eyes, nods, moving two minds so differently formed, hunching into conscious enough conversation, seeking to listen. No, not these two but, let us say, a Warlpiri or Pintubi man, speaking Warlpiri, Pintubi languages, and a half-formed English, and maybe a psychiatrist or anthropologist or a lawyer or police prosecutor, the two of them sitting there wondering about a mutual problem: an act of drunken assault, the suicide of a petrol-sniffing boy, the mutilated body of a woman in the creek bed, a traditional man so senseless with sweet white wine that he blurts out age-old secrets in bad company and ought to be speared for it. And if the spear is cast, the men who mete out the

sanctioned, traditional punishment will be imprisoned for assault or maybe manslaughter. And they may deserve to be, if they carried out the penalty while drunk or lost their reason while doing it. Irreconcilable parallel laws, cognitive dissonance, daily bread.

Myself, I have sat in many such conversations, the ants busy, the fire dimmed by psychic pain, on a cold concrete floor, dull with ash and grease, supporting so many suchlike conversations, a hundred times, somewhere between two worlds. In the overlap of intercultural conversation, things arrive, if we take the trouble to create between us a “location for cultural experience” (Winnicott 1971: chap. 7) and accept that what might arrive will be perplexity, compassion, humor, irony, whimsical desire, flights of ideas, confusion, resolution—or nothing much except a sense of nowhere to go, other than a slight action here or there, a hunch of the shoulders or shift of the body.

I have thus experienced the realities of the Australian cultural trauma systems, the inter-racial transference milieu where things emerge and merge and re-form at the mercy of that famous ‘unconscious’, which pushed and pushed the Viennese doctors to discover it and reveal it. And here, in Australia, that ‘unconscious’ is pushing again, maybe not within us but rather between us, black and white. It is within this ‘unconsciousness’ of each other that we act, fitfully, hopelessly, being doctors, social care agents, policemen on the edge, lawyers between two laws that barely, rarely meet, barely hear, barely listen, barely see. But still we do the best of a bad enough job. Such things, such reveries are in the background, always there in these conversations between seated men. Two or three gathered together, the ants busy.

I am thinking of these conversations: the one with the boy sniffing petrol behind the garage in Fregon, or the quietly ceremonial old men’s conversations at Mission Creek about two laws and the origin of the white man’s rights to arrest and sentence a black man, or maybe that muttered laconic exchange in the Toyota Land Cruiser with the man from Finke River (diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia) as to whether the “snake” curled in his head was going to kill him right now in the car, or maybe later. But the one will I tell you, so as to introduce my theme on the *Tjukurrpa*,¹ is this one about the making of a doctor.

This was a long conversation. It rolled in a vehicle from Alice Springs to Yuendumu and thus to Mt. Wedge and farther west. It rolled, as some conversations do, back east to Sydney and Wollongong and back and forth, again and again. And it roamed also internally, through personal dreams and experiences and clinical encounters. And still it roams, presenting a question about the archetypal basis of the healing profession—the experiential qualification that fits one for practice and the precise nature of the *Tjukurrpa* that supports one’s capacity to heal effectively.

The first question put to my psychiatric colleague and myself by the Aboriginal man of whom I am thinking was simply about whether there is any similarity between the way that Aboriginal traditional healers and Western mental health doctors get their skill and recognition. The conversation starter was along the lines of the following: “Psychiatrist, hmmm. Well, you tell me. Do

white doctors have to pass through anything? What gives them the right to work? Do they follow *Tjukurrpa* like the *ngangkari*s [witch doctors] do? Or is it only learning from books?"

Good question. It makes one wonder about the grounded, fundamental basis of one's clinical practice, the thing that motivates one to keep on working and be successful, the position on which one stands, the *telos* of one's psychological work. Through such deftly simple questions, I find myself compelled to contemplate the meaning and significance of *Tjukurrpa* as the basis for practice, as well as the substance of another conversation, set against a longer reverie about sugars and alcohol and who or what is responsible for alcohol-related deaths, berserk assaults, family breakdown, sexual derangement. And suicide.²

There are thousands of similar conversations going on about "who is responsible" for this and that, like background white noise. Such mutterings are heard today like any other day within the vast, vaguely circumscribed one-third of the continent that makes up the Aboriginal lands, the Aboriginal mind. Here such things as lore and sacred geography keep on mattering, and health and life matters. Yet something life-saving never quite gets to the point, as though some obstacle is there, diverting, repressing, preventing clear thoughts from becoming definitive action.

I wonder what an anthropological investigation might reveal about what goes on in 'the conversation'. Not what this 'black man says', so much, and not what this 'white man says' exactly, but what happens *between* 'black and white' as they are speaking. Because then, I think, we will come to understand more accurately what *Tjukurrpa* is, how it sets us up and prescribes perfect solutions to intractable problems, and how we (black and white) have mutual difficulty in comprehending the theories on which are based our variously proposed perfect solutions. Understanding 'the conversation' in these terms will help us recognize how we break down—how we fail repeatedly.

Yes, I think that is it. I am putting forth the case for the anthropological observation and psychoanalysis of the 'intercultural conversation', a study of the phenomena that emerge between persons—people like those two men seated in Vienna and Zurich in 1907–1910, discovering the significance of what is projected and transferred between them. Here in the fly-blown dusts of the Western Desert, questions will be asked about conversations between people seated halfway between times, between the beginning and the end of local civilizations. What is being projected? What is being transferred between us in exact detail? The material substances, the objects, yes; but the mental substances, the mental objects? How do we grasp the form and feeling of mental substances passing between us in a place like this?

This is the kind of place where it matters what sugar really is and what white sugar transfers to your blood, gut, and brain when you have stopped walking miles every day, hunting lizards and kangaroo meat, eating bush food straight from the ground, a hard-edged kind of roughage, unlike jam from the tin with white-flour bread and fried chicken. And where two liters of port wine end the day, with maybe cannabis in the morning to straighten you out.

Sweet Substance

“Dreaming”—you hear them talk about it, this sweet thing. Sometimes they call it “The Dreaming,”³ an approximation for English-language speakers. In Arrernte, they call it *Altjerre*, or in the Western Desert language, *Tjukurrpa*, or the Warlpiri, *Jukurrpa*. What does this really mean, this state of things that brings tears to Paddy Sims’s eyes, seated cross-legged before a canvas, singing quietly, painting “The Milky Way Story”? This thing that women depict and men define in sand drawings, deft fingers moving upon canvasses stretched on the bare ground or smudged on a backyard cement slab near the Todd River? *Tjukurrpa*, land claims, faraway looks, casually marking this rock and that. Reverence, breaking into song in creek beds, shrugging, walking off. *Tjukurrpa*, lightly held, with a gravity so exquisite, so solid, so omnipresent. *Tjukurrpa*, perhaps the most misunderstood, most ignored, most beautiful, most mysterious, most exploited, most obliterated phenomenon in this country. Strangely provocative, *Tjukurrpa* is seamlessly sewn into the Australian landform, sown as seeds in the mind of a country a long time ago, today. What should I attempt in defining it, this all pervading substance that offers no salvation, no redemption?⁴

Three Definitions of Tjukurrpa

First is a straightforward, heartfelt definition offered by Bob Randall, singer-songwriter (e.g., “Brown Skin Baby”), cultural teacher, and Aboriginal health professional at Mutitjulu/Uluru. In an interview with filmmaker David Roberts, Randall describes *Tjukurrpa* as “[t]he belief of the creation period and the laws that were set down from the beginning. These laws and rules were handed down through ceremonies, it was passed down from one generation to another. So I had to take care of that. It was my responsibility. You separate me from that, and already you’ve made me weak ... *Tjukurrpa*, in our words, is the belief of creation; like our law, our religion. You look at the past, it is part of the present, and will still be there in the future. It’s what non-Aboriginal people refer to as ‘the dream time’, but it’s real. This is *Tjukurrpa* [patting and holding a rock embedded in a hillside]. This is not a rock, only a rock, it is my link to *Tjukurrpa*, and all the stories are in this ... you realize [this rock] it’s the *Tjukurrpa*. I have to care for my country, and in caring for my country you have to know its stories and what totemic ancestral beings are associated with that. It’s important. And if anything that happened, that was for you to know, to pass on to your kids” (1999; see also Randall 2003).

A second definition of *Tjukurrpa*, conveyed by an informant of Stanner, is quoted by Sutton (1988: 15): “My father said this. ‘My boy, look! Your Dreaming is there; it is a big thing; you never let it go [pass it by]. All Dreamings [totemic entities] come from there.’ Does the whiteman now understand? The blackfellow, earnest, friendly, makes a last effort. ‘Old man, you listen! Something is there; we do not know what; *something*.’ There is a struggle to find words, and perhaps a lapse into English. ‘Like engine, like power, plenty of power; it does hard work; it *pushes*.’”

A third definition of *Tjukurrpa* was expressed in conversation with Andrew Japaljarri Spencer in April 1990. To set the scene, my colleague Petchkovsky and I are in the back-lane office of the Healthy Aboriginal Life Team (HALT), a petrol-sniffing prevention project based in Alice Springs. We are speaking with Japaljarri Spencer, a Warlpiri member of that innovative social activist team. In the background, going about their work while chatting in several languages, are Christine Spencer, Hinton Lowe, Christine Franks, William Armstrong, and passing family members. We are looking at a painting by Nangala, Andrew's mother. The fine, symmetrical dot painting is about the sugar ant ceremony. The sugar ant belongs in the category of *parma*, or sweet substance. Alcohol also is categorized as *parma*, which in desert life is an essential and sought-after commodity. Desert people need sugar for life-sustaining activities, and in arid lands it is hard to come by. In the liquor shop and the supermarket, however, sugar is cheap and plentiful. And that is a problem.

Andrew says: "This painting is about *parma*, sugar, sugar ant. Different from honey ant. It is like a fly. We have the song for this, for *parma* and for strengthening *parma*. We haven't got the song to send white man's *parma* [sugar] away. We can't get rid of this one. We can only strengthen the good *parma*. The songs for petrol and alcohol must come from the white man; or we must dream new ones. The children [meaning the innocent and uninitiated] can't save the world. You, the white people, have lost your Dreaming. Maybe you don't know the songs for alcohol and petrol. You have to learn [reconnect to] your songs, your whitefella *Tjukurrpa*. To turn to us, to me [i.e., to Aboriginal people] for the [alcohol and petrol dreaming] songs is too much."

Later Andrew asks straight out: "Do *Kardia* [white people] have the *Tjukurrpa* for *parma*?" I exchange glances with Petchkovsky, my companion in this conversation. We nod to each other. I say, "Yes." Andrew says: "Well, maybe you'd better go and get it. That's your responsibility." I nod, "All right, Japaljarri."

The Ordinary Impact of Dreaming

The idea arose in this conversation that since European culture is responsible for the invention of alcohol, it might therefore hold the 'creation story' (or *Tjukurrpa*) for managing intoxication. Such a creation story might be useful as a conceptual tool to help Australian indigenous people control the problem of alcohol-related destruction wreaked on Aboriginal lives and family structures and thus, perhaps, to help secure a cultural future. This is an intriguing idea, and much subsequent work went into researching and elaborating this concept. The reason for reporting this conversation is not to give an account of that project, which drew logically enough upon the mythologem of Dionysus;⁵ rather, the purpose is to note that in this encounter we have a glimpse of the potential of *Tjukurrpa* as a pragmatic force in handling a social problem—alcohol abuse. Bob Randall emphasizes *Tjukurrpa* as creation story, the underpinning of laws of behavior, separation from which makes one weak. Stanner's informant brings out the psychic force, the 'push' in *Tjukurrpa*. And Japaljarri

Spencer suggests that effective control or management of behavior depends upon knowledge of the appropriate *Tjukurrpa*.

The usual reaction of a health-project coordinator might be to counter Japaljarri Spencer's (animistic?) suggestion with a rational, scientifically based response, to produce an 'evidence-based' treatment program adapted to Aboriginal needs, and then to leave it at that. Andrew had suggested that we give serious attention to the 'native solution', and it was this that I set about doing in the development of the Dionysus/Wati *Parma* or Sugarman project. I am reminded of a phrase in Lévi-Strauss's (1977: 239) *Tristes Tropiques*, wherein he is describing some contention over Eskimo methods of dress and their suitability in handling the environmental conditions within which Eskimo dwell. For some reason, this was questioned by some rational Western visitors. As it turned out, says Lévi-Strauss, "The native solution was perfect; we could only realise this once we had grasped the theory on which it was based." My effort to comprehend *Tjukurrpa* is synonymous with an effort to comprehend the indigenous 'theory' upon which indigenous action in health, law, and cultural maintenance is based.

When one works into such ideas as Japaljarri Spencer's from a practiced, psychoanalytic position, the track is a little different from that of the surprisingly prevalent assumption that I/we (i.e., Westerners or non-Aboriginal persons and institutions in general) already have the perfect solution and that the so-called natives have only to accept the obvious. However, after listening consistently to Japaljarri Spencer in context and in his own terrain, I found that I gradually acknowledged that *Tjukurrpa* might, in itself, contain the theory on which Aboriginal solutions are based. If this were so, I thought, then I was ethically bound to come to know and understand that theory. Moreover, in a personal, empathetic, transferential sense, I allowed myself to appreciate how and why *Tjukurrpa* had such a forceful impact upon human beings and why it was so seriously held to by obviously intelligent and active indigenous men and women. This track is close to Jung's position as outlined in his autobiographical chapter, "Confrontations with the Unconscious," in which he records how he, in his own circumstances, began a reorientation of his working method. Jung (1961: 194) writes: "After the parting of the ways with Freud, a period of inner uncertainty began for me ... Above all I found it necessary to develop a new attitude towards my patients. I resolved for the present not to bring any theoretical premises to bear upon them, but to wait and see what they had to tell me of their own accord. My aim became to leave things to chance. The result was that patients would spontaneously report their dreams and fantasies to me, and I would merely ask ... How do you mean that, where does that come from?" I register this point because the conversation with Japaljarri Spencer marked a shift in myself, not only toward taking *Tjukurrpa* seriously but also in defining a method by which I could come to appreciate it and understand why it is that, as Randall says, the absence of connection to *Tjukurrpa* weakens a person.

Traveling in uncertainty within Aboriginal territories invariably leads to something spontaneously evocative, and much could be written about the value and the disorientation of that experience (San Roque 2000, 2004). One has to

allow oneself to cultivate a mode of receptivity to unknown outcomes and a companionship with indigenous associates in an atmosphere of an unpredictable emotional nature. What we find within the Caucasian-Aboriginal Australian relationship is often exceptionally creative yet poignantly destructive, and in an attempt to avoid the latter, my working method developed deliberately along the lines suggested by Jung. This helped, I believe, in the attainment of some relatively successful projects, so long as the partnerships lasted.⁶ And it has led to these reflections upon the power of *Tjukurrpa* as a mental influence and a psychological process.

I am using this article to open up the idea that *Tjukurrpa*, like play, is about symbolic realities mingled with actuality (Winnicott 1971), that play is also a basis for thinking and creativity. I have the idea that symbols are painted on bodies and arranged in ceremonies in very specific formations, possibly so that *Tjukurrpa* stories become real in the mind. Understanding how *Tjukurrpa* is laid out may show something about how Aboriginal thought is put together and how things link from country exterior to country interior and even, perhaps, how things pass from one side of the brain to the other. It may be useful to know how Aboriginal thoughts are built; how 'white' or Caucasian thoughts have built up around specific European/Mediterranean/Middle Eastern mythologies and cultural matrices; and how Asian thoughts are constructed around specific Asian mythologies as matrices. To appreciate how culture and cultural history form thinking has a pragmatic and possibly therapeutic purpose for work between black and white Australians. This is based on the idea that our myths and how we employ the myths to which we cling actually reveal how we think and act. Subliminal mythic dream states probably define who we are as a people and affect how we run our nation-state and our international relations. This idea that myth organizes political relations is a concept out of analytical psychology and the emerging theory on how a nation's thought pattern is formed by "cultural complexes" (Kimbles and Singer 2004).

What shapes thinking? The shapers are many, but I am intrigued, for instance, with the way 'country' forms symbolic imagery in the human mind and how established geographic places and accustomed bodily spaces help form a language. In English there are many words and concepts formed, for example, around a common knowledge of boundaries and fences, of walls and roof, foundations and fortress, etc., all patterned upon long association with specific and constructed human boundaries to space. In such ways, certain forms encode our thinking. And further, there is some kind of evolutionary mystery to be unraveled around the continuum of being, which we, as humans, internalize. I speak of the continuum from site to flora to fauna, in multitude forms and activities, and the way in which this continuum of being suffuses, penetrates, fertilizes, and explores the mind of the human being, and especially of those who live in long association with natural worlds and forms, be they in conversation with arid lands and the long horizons of the desert or the expanses of the sea or the surge of rivers, jungles, mountains, volcanoes. Might not desert dwellers have geographically specific images as the geographically specific creators of their specific thought and language patterns?

Understanding how this works might help one appreciate how *Tjukurrpa* works. The phylogenetic spectrum of being in which humans participate is continuously encountered in conversations in Aboriginal country. Indigenous Australians have, as far as I can tell, a subtle notion of the continuity of being between landform, plant, animal, and human, but this notion is not attentive to that progressive evolution of form and consciousness that the Darwinian eye attends upon. Why mention this difference? Because an understanding of geographical spaces, human relationship with the animal world, human phylogenetic history, and especially how we configure this history has significance for how we configure *Tjukurrpa* and also how we might configure a local psychological therapeutic theory and practice. It has to do with the idea of where humans begin and end, from where the human soul appears and to what purpose, how it tells its story, what troubles the soul, and how psychic energies circulate. *Tjukurrpa* addresses and reveals these matters.

Psychoanalysis is concerned with psychic traveling, circulating with therapeutic purpose along the spectrum of being from the earliest forms of becoming to present becoming. It is concerned with following a person from his or her most simple forms of primal thought/feeling to the most complex and abstract forms of thought/feeling/action. As I consider this while in arid country, I think about these specific landforms, bush foods, fruits, lizards, snakes, mammals, and birds that appear in the mind and, simultaneously, in actuality. As I listen to Aboriginal conversations, I find myself in a reverie, wishing I could report such loosely noticed moments and flickering tales of insight to Jung, in archetypal fishing mood, or to Bion, in his “thoughts looking for a thinker” mood, or to Klein, given her intense study of the earliest forms of interior life and of destructiveness as apprehended by her mind when in proximity to children’s minds (see Klein 1950; Klein et al. 1973).⁷ I am making the point that different things occur in one’s mind depending upon *with whom* one is sitting. And *where*. Different ideas form in the mind of psychoanalysts depending upon where they consistently sit—that is to say, in whose proximity they sit and in whose country. Sit attuned in the company of indigenous Australians and note the senses, images, and experiences that arrive in your mind. They might be different from those that materialize when you sit with people in rooms in Melbourne, Zurich, or London. This may seem a truism, perhaps, but in Bion’s way, I would say that in Central Australia there are specific “thoughts looking for a thinker.” In Japaljarri Spencer’s language, *Tjukurrpa* talks to you. *Tjukurrpa* gets “lonely for people.”

I sit as others do, sometimes in good company, in trucks, by fires, amid dust and plastic bags and dogs, with old men and women, with petrol sniffers and vigorous painters, and in these sittings certain clusters of thought/feeling forgather. As an agent of agencies employed to solve indigenous health problems, I admit that I have not formed the mental container system that allows localized thoughts to be accurately felt and accurately ordered and consistently followed through into accurate action. This is difficult to do. Learning how *Tjukurrpa* works in situ, in its unique structure, in its specific function and specific symbology may be a very pragmatic step toward taking accurate social therapeutic action.

Summation So Far

I introduce an approach to *Tjukurrpa* as a mental or conceptual system. I suggest that a Bion/Jung nexus offers a potential schema by which psychological thinkers, who value poetic sensibility, might come to appreciate the intricate beauty of the structure of the Aboriginal mental world and the significance of *Tjukurrpa* as a matrix for holding and revealing the continual becoming and rebirth of human life. There is value in passing on to ‘the kids’ and to uninitiated Westerners the practice of listening to *Tjukurrpa*. Forgetting it, ignoring the psychological significance of ‘Dreaming’, may be, as Bob Randall suggests, a form of dissociation that mentally weakens us all.

Part Two: Reverie on a Long Road

Kulini

Somewhere between a Stuart Highway roadhouse and the turn-off toward the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, I am thinking about the simplicity of listening. A Pitjantjatjara word cluster, *kulini/kulira/kulilkatinyi* (Goddard 1987) means ‘to listen’ and also ‘to think’. Linguist Ely White has noted that, according to her understanding, “the real business of Aboriginal men is to think; that is to say, to listen—“*Kulini*.”⁸ *Kulini* leads us to the business of ‘attentive listening’ and thus to ‘thinking’. It leads me to consider that just as Aboriginal men, whom I know, have sacred objects to which they listen and speak, we, the Caucasians, also have physically numinous mental objects with which we think. I wonder also what objects we carry around in our mental bodies that persistently manifest themselves in Aboriginal country and destroy our capacity for intelligent forethought and action?

The Wreck of the Batavia

There is a novel, *The Accomplice*, by Kathryn Heyman (2003), which is a narrative of a Protestant Dutch woman caught up in the human disasters following the wreck off the West Australian coast in 1692 of the East India Company sailing ship, the *Batavia*. The numinous objects in this story might be ‘ship’, ‘Holy Book’, ‘money’, and ‘guns’. But the enterprise founders on the Australian coast, and people resort to murder and cannibalism. Heyman begins her account with a quote from Primo Levi: “The harsher the oppression, the more widespread among the oppressed is the willingness to collaborate with the power.” Her story details the effect of collaboration with the prevailing powers (after the wreck). Survival requires that ‘good’ people lose their voice, their presence of mind. The commander is gone. Acts degenerate. The disaster is the incremental loss of an intelligent and humane mind. My point is that an insidious catastrophe that currently prevails in Central Australia is made possible because significant numbers of people lose the command of intelligent mind and collaborate, paradoxically, with a pervasion of powerlessness. It is not that there is a harsh

oppression of native peoples, as such, any more, but perhaps it has something to do with the way certain integrating *Tjukurrpa* of both white and black lose a specific presence in our mind. Heyman, in her account, details in fiction the human wreck of the *Batavia*. The present disaster one might feel around one in Central Australia (and maybe Oceania) should be open not only to fiction (and journalist's fictions) but to precise psycho-anthropological analysis to follow on from the example of Alex Minutjukur and Andrew Japaljarri Spencer and their families, who have consistently attempted a social analysis in their paintings. So too has Tim Leura Japaljarri and the Alice Springs painter, Rod Moss. Their imagery depicts, from inside experience, the wreck of 'culture'.

It might be that a majority of Australians do not know or appreciate just how precisely Rod Moss, Japaljarri Spencer, Minutjukur and company thoughtfully created intimate communications between themselves and those people who also come to dwell in this ancient seabed of desert Australia. Perhaps the name of the ship in which we sail is *Kulini wia*—that is to say, 'No one listens'.

Reverie on a Long Road Again

These things I am thinking, tonight, somewhere in a haze in a yellow truck crossing over the border zone between Pitjantjatjara lands and the South Australian border, leaving behind another futile-feeling conversation with a petrol sniffer and old men who shrug and walk away. Just here, in this brief interstitial 100-kilometer stretch, I think about a place I have pegged in my own mind as the White Noise Café, where we, the white folk, talk in circles, endlessly; and why it is that nothing seems grittily to emerge out of *Tjukurrpa* to save *Anangu* (Aboriginal people) from themselves—and all of us from ourselves. This is a recurrent reverie I know so well. It is like a musical canon, a repeating theme in the 'ethnography of hopelessness and helplessness'. Lévi-Strauss (1977) in his melancholia recognized that prevailing wind of hopelessness among the indigenous Amazonians, just as Theodor Strehlow (1971) did at the end of his *Songs of Central Australia*. These iconic anthropologists were reduced to making half-whispered, existential, diagnostic statements, offered in *tristesse*, offered in response to the mood of a country entering depression. How strangely we fail. Again and again, in country after country.

Part Three: The Undoing of Oneself

Corrupted by Desire

Bion ([1970] 1984: 31–35) advocates that a therapist should come to an analytic engagement with an open mind, uncontaminated with "memory and desire." It could also be advocated that an anthropologist or a therapist ought to be able to come to an intercultural engagement with a mind uncontaminated thus. I doubt very much that this is possible. Or rather, such an openness of mind might be achievable, but how in fact and in detail does one achieve

intercultural creativity? The evidence is more likely to show that almost no one has succeeded in cracking the code of a 'successful outcome' in health or law, in social justice or social reconstruction, or even in colonial administration. Most of us (as professionals of ethnic engagement) might confess to failure, and might, in the twilight hours, confess as well to having contributed to the destruction of those cultures and those specific people whom we desired to assist. Or be assisted by. In the process, as perhaps Lévi-Strauss, Strehlow, and Bardon exemplify, one finds oneself finally 'undone'. This phenomenon, in itself, is worth a sensitive, thoughtful ethnography. An analysis.

I came to my meeting with Japaljarri Spencer full of prejudice, expectation, innocence, memory, and desires—and I came with questions (always there are questions). I came with a goal in mind, a desire to get a grip on how the exponents of European and Aboriginal therapeutic traditions and cultures might beneficially find a way of talking to each other about the practice of their craft. This desire both directed and contaminated the way I listened to what Japaljarri Spencer (and his family) conveyed in the fractal fragment of conversation about *parma* and alcohol *Tjukurrpa* that I described above.

When Japaljarri Spencer raised the matter of concern, he naturally enough couched it in terms that made sense to him. Whether or not I understood his issues and communications is open to question, but it would appear that my mind had been prepared in a certain way to make a particular sense of what he was saying. Because my mind had been prepared in a certain way, I took action in a certain way and gathered action about me accordingly. Analyzing the actual detail of these transactions is what I mean about the need for an 'ethnography of failure', that is to say, a description of our intercultural interacting that constructs systems and an analysis of where they fail in precise detail—not with shame or concealment but rather professionally, astutely, in order to diagnose our joint condition. And maybe solve it. So far as I can see, the construct systems turn around this matter of memories and desires and also around the persistent forces coming from our mythic (unconscious) foundations of thought and perception, that is, the *Tjukurrpa*. It might help to appreciate the place that *Tjukurrpa* occupies within the indigenous mind, and how the force or push of the *Tjukurrpa* influences the day-to-day perceptions of every Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal person involved with each other in health, law, economics, social action, and cultural activities. It seems to be a matter of what is felt as real and what is felt simply as passing illusion. I am at a loss about this. I am trying to describe it.

Unquiet Minds

It is a part of the psychoanalytic discipline to conduct an ongoing analysis of one's counter-transference reactions to the other person, the so-called patient. Such a discipline of reflective self-observation seems as useful in the practice of intercultural communication as it is in therapeutic communication. One's training as a psychotherapist prepares one to attend to

interpersonal communications in a particularly useful way. The emphasis I place is upon the mode of human attention cultivated within the discipline of psychotherapy and not upon the theoretical constructs of the psychotherapeutic profession. The theories we can take or leave. What we have to work with is the acquired discipline of lucid self-perception, a form of apperception whereby one attempts to observe what is going on between oneself and another, most especially when both are cast into difficult situations and into unquiet states of mind.

Some Implications

Throughout Central Australia and perhaps much of the rest of the country, certainly the northern and western sectors, there is a particular creation power associated with water, water sources, water courses, and water holes. It is tempting to emphasize here the association between waters, serpents, healing activities, and initiation into specific states of being on the edge or overlap of 'dying and creating'. These somewhat esoteric/mystical activities tend to capture (Jungian) attention, but I wish to underline the significance of specific sites for the activity of psychologically significant events. These things do not merely happen 'in the mind' or in some metaphysical archetypal reality absent from actual geographical location. Site is significant. When Japaljarri Spencer spoke of a *Tjukurrpa* for alcohol, I took this to imply that such a story, like all *Tjukurrpa*, would need to be rooted in the actuality of site, in geography with traceable travels of creation beings connecting wine and intoxication to specific sites in the regions of origin. The Dionysus myth does just that. As does the Jesus story, which is exquisitely site-specific with archetypal value.

The implication here is that there are elements and patterns in both the desert Aboriginal and Western mythic repertoire that do have kinship. Strehlow thought so. He tried to demonstrate this in the oral and written cultural forms—the songs of Central Australia and sagas of Old Europe, for instance. Elkin ([1945] 1977) suspected that there might be congruences between the practices of indigenous healers (*ngangkari*) and Western psychiatric practitioners (San Roque 1986: 81–107).⁹ I ask myself: Why has it taken so long to be realized and incorporated into psychological practice? What am I missing? What is the secret warfare that goes on between us in Australia that makes such an obvious effort at congruence so difficult to imagine, let alone put into experiential practice?

When I heard a simple outline from Japaljarri Spencer of a specific *Tjukurrpa* as a reference trek for the formation of a *ngangkari* in his own region, with its subject's passage through waterholes, snakes, displacement, rejection, attack, virtual dismemberment, and entry, after perilous journeys, into caves and water, I felt that I was on familiar symbolic territory. Rather than dismissing his iconography for whatever reason, I and my psychiatric colleague committed ourselves to years of gradual engagement with this one story. Much that I have since found in the iconic sequences of

the Dionysian matrix, and also in the Oedipal nine-generational saga, presents a repertoire of incidents that are congruent with incidents, symbolic shapes, and patterns in suchlike indigenous Australian traditional stories with which I have become personally and physically involved. The emphasis here is on direct physical and personal engagement with these stories; and if there were ever to be a helpful study of the impact and usefulness of Australian 'Dreaming', then I would suggest that such a study would have to go a lot further than a catalogue and recording of 'Dreaming' stories as objective narratives. It would have to take into account the effects upon persons who have internalized specific *Tjukurrpa* and specific sites (see Petchkovsky and San Roque 1995: 445–450).

Summation

It does appear that basic patterns of both Aboriginal and Caucasian/European/Middle Eastern foundation/creation stories do reveal a remarkable commonality. Some of the common 'bits' of Caucasian mythic episode and *Tjukurrpa* stories include significant (heroic) beings traveling to specific sites and the effect of those travels and those sites on the visitor. They are marked by the presence of reptilian beings and other numinous proto-human/animal activity; acts of being swallowed and regurgitated by such creatures, or being made small and infantile; beings to whom traumatic events occur; and instances of sexual anarchy, incest, trickery, and deceit by such creatures. There are disappearances into the earth, into landforms, into the sky; appearances out of the sky, out of the earth; travels over ground, underground, in the sky, and among the stars; acts of creation from bodily fluids or functions; losses (and sometimes recovery) of body parts; various tales of male and female supernatural beings in endless gender politics; erotic adventures, comic, tragic, and epic, repeating ad infinitum into endless fights. And always somewhere, there is the presence of good-humored, wily, compassionate beings—sometimes women, sometimes men, sometimes of elder status, sometimes 'innocents'—who advocate cunning, intelligent consciousness, apperception, and the value of wisdom and care gained from experience.

One might note processes within these tales that reflect significant procedures of human inner and outer life. It would take an extensive, locally based study to satisfactorily set out the parallel process between indigenous Australian and indigenous Mediterranean/Caucasian/Northern European mythologies that are central to our contemporary and prevailing cultural matrices. It is probably worth doing if for no other reason than to appreciate each other's idiosyncratic ways of thinking, our cultural anxieties, and our several capacities for self-delusion, in order to provide informed and sophisticated psychological care for indigenous people in distress, especially for those who live in the tensions of parallel or borderline realities/fantasies of the black and the white Australia. Now I want to move on to the intriguing and mysterious matter of how thoughts are made, or what thoughts are made of.

Part Four: Where Thoughts Are Things and Things Are Thoughts

This rock isn't a rock ... only a rock ... it is *Tjukurrpa*.

— Bob Randall

This Rock ...

Bion, in *Elements of Psycho-analysis* ([1963] 1968: 22–27), describes the terms he will use throughout his project on thinking, thought formation and transformation, and the use of mental 'objects' in psychotherapeutic activity. He develops the theme throughout five books. For our purposes here, I deal only with the simplest use of Bion and three of the elements of his system. These are *beta* elements, *alpha* elements, and *alpha* function.

Beta elements refer to "the earliest matrix from which thoughts can be supposed to arise." In this origin state of thought, the proto-elements of the thought domain have the quality of inanimate objects and psychic objects without any distinction being experienced between the two states. In this most primal state of mind, "thoughts are things, things are thoughts and they have personality." "*Beta* elements are not amenable to use in dream thoughts but are suited for use in projective identification. They are influential in producing 'acting out'. They are objects that can be evacuated or used for a kind of thinking that depends on manipulation of what are felt to be things in themselves as if to substitute such manipulation for words or ideas" (Bion [1962] 1984: 6). I was wondering then, and I still wonder, if we could think of *Tjukurrpa* as the "earliest matrix from which thought can be supposed to arise," using Bion's way of thinking about the matter of mental life. Perhaps one might suggest that in the *Tjukurrpa* state of mind, one might be feeling and seeing inanimate objects and psychic objects as one and the same.

In the *Tjukurrpa* state of mind, it would seem that thoughts are things and things are thoughts. Mountains are snakes, snakes are mountains, rocks are bits of people, bits of people are rocks, and they have personality. These 'things' project themselves into the minds and lives of people, and they act out stories in the topography of the country, rather than in the topography of the interior mind, where mind is considered conventionally as an 'internal' domain. I have been with Aboriginal people whose minds dwell in and roam among snakes as mountains, mountains as snakes—the rocks are people, people are rocks, living, breathing, doing things in the world, not in the mind, as such. The mind is in the country, or the country is acting in the mind. The question, what is going on in the mind? can be rephrased as, what is going on in the country?

At some point in time, or in human mental evolution, people let their minds play, and *alpha* function, as Bion formulates it, begins to operate on *beta* elements, that is, those concrete, primal, pre-mental things. When this happens, some kind of psychic work is done, and mental transformations take place. This process reflects a fundamental capacity for sustaining human life. The primal *beta* elements become *alpha* elements. That is to say, bits of primal experience

acquire a psychic reality, and bits of experience somehow begin to enter into human experience as 'dream thoughts'. As Bion ([1962] 1984: 7) explains it: "Beta elements ... differ from *alpha* elements in that they are not so much memories as undigested facts, whereas the *alpha* elements have been digested by *alpha* function and thus made available for thought. It is important to distinguish between memories and undigested facts ... If the patient cannot transform his emotional experience into *alpha* elements, he cannot dream. *Alpha* function transforms sense impressions into *alpha* elements, which resemble, and may be identical with, the visual images with which we are familiar in dreams, namely, the elements that Freud regards as yielding their latent content when the analyst has interpreted them ... Failure of *alpha* function means that the patient cannot dream and therefore cannot sleep."

The Place in the Brain Where Thoughts Assemble

So many times, sitting on bare sand, watching the relaxed yet concentrated seriousness of the way men (or women) painted up their bodies and prepared for a *Tjukurrpa* enactment, I found myself wondering if ceremony might be the communal milieu, the communal container wherein these subtle psychological transformations take place, the place where thoughts are assembled, somehow inside and outside the human mind at the same time. Perhaps ceremony can be understood as a humanly constructed domain where evolutions of consciousness take place and thinking as a mental condition begins, simply by the manipulation of internal/external objects, painted and changed into a kind of numinosity and then carried out in a mental/physical place—a psychosomatic or 'psychoid' event (to use Jung's term), which, by virtue of being shown on 'sacred ground', is somehow also located inside the mental world. There is no Cartesian split within such people, as far as I can tell. Inside matters happen outside. Mental events happen in the body moving. The body moving is an idea. I guess that is not so strange really. It is just that I am used to seeing ideas moving as words on a page rather than as bodies on a ceremony ground.

If this is so, and I am coming to the conclusion that it is, then this conception further justifies the decision to present the Sugarman cycle within the format and psychic (trance) space of a ceremony/performance, rather than, for instance, as health-promotion material, video clips, or academic reports. Such complex and abstract mental constructions are too far along the continuum, too far from the *Tjukurrpa* state of mind, where rocks are thoughts and thoughts are rocks.

In the *Tjukurrpa* 'state of mind', if you want to move ideas, you have to paint bodies and move objects as actual things and as psychically charged representations of things/places/beings/rocks. A ceremonial enactment in song and dance is where, collectively, individual and group *beta* elements are worked on and transformed into *alpha* elements, into dream elements and meanings. The ceremonial enactments present simple things as simple moving thoughts. They move, through the container of the ceremony, from a location

in the country into a place in someone's mind and thus into everyone's mind. As a result, land forms and mind are fused consciously.¹⁰

I suggest that as psychic work (*alpha* function) is being done through the singing of a story line, for example, the 'mountains as snakes' become 'snakes as dream', then 'snakes' as dream images assume meanings for men and women, then thoughts, then strings of thoughts and strings of songs, and then fragments of ceremonial action, which are dreams in action. Thus, as psychic work is done, new members (those still out of their mind), the young or uninitiated in the family, are brought into conscious containment by the communal thought systems. Participation in ceremony is participation in the container of shared and developing thinking. Ceremony is, I think, in Bion's terms, *alpha* function in collective action, psychic work in collective operation.

With this possible procedure in mind, perhaps one can understand the significance of what Japaljarri Spencer and others are saying about the need for something to cover or fill the absence of a necessary *Tjukurrpa* in order to hold the space for thinking about something as perplexing in its effect as alcohol is seen to be. When he searched the earliest matrix of Aboriginal experience, Japaljarri could not find psychically significant objects that are imbued with the spirit of intoxication. He could not find, or could not recognize, an element or object that could be used to do psychic work upon, to convert into dream imagery and then thoughts. He needed dream thoughts located in the *Tjukurrpa* before he could authoritatively and passionately form mental conceptions about the behaviors of intoxication. Even if there were to be a container made for a ceremony, Japaljarri and his companions did not know exactly what ceremonial thought-objects had to be brought out from the earliest matrix and then placed into collective view for conscious attention by gathered potential thinkers. The Warlpiri man did not know (I conjecture) the shapes of the animals or plants, the painted designs for the body, the physical or mimetic actions, the words or rhythms of the songs that could be authoritatively sung. Such things have to be sung to give shape to mental concepts and to present conscious prescriptions for action in response to intoxicated behaviors. My friend, literally, concretely, did not know what to think.

Taking it further, if he wanted to send the spirit of alcohol away—that is, become dispossessed of intoxication—he could find no psychic objects in the earliest matrix of thought that he could manipulate physically or mentally in order to use psychic authority over the substance and the behavior. If he wanted to become a healer of alcohol-induced sickness, he could find no dream thoughts and no sustaining psychic or physical objects in the earliest matrix of local *Tjukurrpa* that could form the basis of procedures, ceremonies, songs, or psychic manipulations that would have an effect in the mental domain of his own family. No one listened because there was nothing to sing, except country music, Western rock, or *wama wanti* (give up the grog) songs. There was no deeply structured *Tjukurrpa* music.

Alcohol and intoxication therefore remain as undigested psychic facts for which no one has responsibility, other than to attempt to 'excrete' them. Intoxicated behaviors persist as human objects in chaos in the landscape of the dreaming but are unrelated to or dissociated from the dreaming, with a life of their own, recognized but not internalized, remembered but barely owned as

real memories, hardly even dream fragments. Intoxication becomes something that one cannot wake up from and that one cannot go to sleep from—something that exists outside the reach of thought, yet is ever present as psychotic fact. As Bion ([1962] 1984: 7) says: “The patient who cannot dream cannot go to sleep and cannot wake up, hence the peculiar condition when the psychotic patient behaves as if he were precisely in this state.” In my understanding, Japaljarri Spencer, as a cultural *ngangkari*, could not (at that time) find or see the psychic objects to extract from the spirit/dreaming body of his community/patients, nor could he find or see the psychic empowerment objects (*maban*) that he could use to insert into the disbanding communal bodies of his kin and bring about the restoration of their sanity. This is why indigenous healers say they have trouble dealing with alcohol ‘sickness’.

Restatement: No Tjukurrpa, No Theory

Let me restate this complex, subtle, and probably abstruse theme. When faced with a request to fix a drunk, the indigenous healer, surveying his or her repertoire to handle spiritual, bodily sickness, could find none of the necessary ‘thoughts as things, things as thoughts’ to manipulate shamanically. There are no empowered story lines to hold or direct the traveling reverie of the healer’s mind or hands. No ‘snakes as mountains, mountains as snakes’ to use to orient a patient’s thought lines or recovery lines. No ‘rocks as people, people as rocks’ to insert into the mind country. No ‘objects as power or powers as objects’ to inject into the alcohol-dismembered joints. No ‘words of power, or powers as words’ to whisper into confused ears. No theory. No *Tjukurrpa*.

In short, the potential healer could find no *ngangkari* sequence of psychically effective operations. None of the usual natural objects, geographical locations, or activities at sites could be brought to bear to transform the minds of drunks, who are, literally, out of their indigenous mind and thus in limbo, lost in a country of intoxication. There is no reference point in the topographical dimensions of Aboriginal being or psyche. No place (in mind). No story (in mind). No way of empowering action. The *alpha* function proves impotent. The consequence of this void is that a collective psychosis as a cultural plague occupies the void. In Bion’s way of thinking, no one is dreaming these things. No one is waking up, and no one is sleeping the sleep of healthy restoration, so the intoxication events remain as undigested, dissociated *beta* elements. When dreaming, waking, and sleep become disturbed and their realities confused with one another, a person begins to inhabit a psychotic state. In a psychotic state, personal relationships disintegrate. Obligations and the reciprocity of kinship disintegrate. Attention to country disperses and dissociates. Depression results.

Catastrophe, Breakdown, and Story

Meltzer (1978: 62), in his series of lectures on trying to understand Bion, describes Bion’s formulations on “Catastrophic Change” as including the search for a “container” to relieve the stress of fragmentation and the hopelessness of ever

attaining an integration. The catastrophic nature of the Aboriginal breakdown is almost “unthinkable.” It is too emotionally disturbing for most people to comprehend, and that “unthinkability” is the therapeutic problem to be investigated and solved. The instinctive attempt at self-organized healing, which Andrew Japaljarri Spencer and his associates generated through HALT’s (1991) work with petrol sniffers and intoxication, also presented itself as a request for an ‘object’ of therapeutic power. It was not a request for a tranquillizer. The request was for a narrative with substance with which to make sense of a senseless and unimaginably psychotic existential condition.

In Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, the issue was the plague and the undisclosed family crime: the killing of an old man, the incest between son and mother, and the consequences of transgenerational traumas. In Australia, the issue is the existential catastrophe, undisclosed family crimes, and an invasion of mind that this particular *ngangkari* has articulated on behalf of his family, culture, and country. Japaljarri Spencer and his kin have articulated their concerns clearly, through succinct, compacted, and complex paintings and through the discourse unfolded from those images in the (now almost forgotten) HALT work. In the course of his many conversations, Japaljarri has plainly said that if the white doctors want to help, there are two necessary steps. First, the white doctors must be cured of their own illnesses (of perception). Second, the white doctors must be incorporated into the family system and have explained to them their family obligations and responsibilities to a specific country/*Tjukurrpa*. That is to say, the solution must involve inclusion.

A mode of operation familiar to analysts is the long, discursive rambling circumambulation of a matter at hand that does not yield to concise, penetrative interpretation. Sometimes for months this circuitous reverie may play like a base theme, just out of consciousness, until one day the matter clarifies into solution. Sometimes deep within the concentration of an analytic session, the therapist realizes that a moment has arrived wherein the patient’s most hidden self-recognition has become tangible. This moment of painful self-revelation requires a response from the therapist that calls on all of his or her available experience, understanding, and eloquence. These moments are rare but totally demanding. At such times of intense relational connection, it is as though all of one’s life, and the patient’s life, passes before one. Such a moment may not last long, but much is packed into it. Something like this has been going on in the long session between myself and Japaljarri Spencer. We are both patient and doctor to each other. The Sugarman events, *Tjukurrpa* ceremonies, and mythic performances are really nothing more than illusions, enactments, hypotheses, experiments in mirroring, attempts at communication. Might this be how you too see these things? Do you understand me? Are we listening properly? Do I understand you? Is it like this?

On Dionysus and Derangement

While Japaljarri Spencer used snake stories and various *Tjukurrpa* idioms to speak with, I began to use Dionysus’s character and his activities for intercultural communication. I was happy with the way this character represents

a complex, fragmented interlacing of provocatively irrational, amoral, and contradictory adventures, easily matching the snakes and eagles and lizards of Warlpiri and Pintubi country. The god's name changes, his face changes, he carries out acts of apparently mindless violence, disordering the settled world, provoking rage and eroticism. He travels, he appears, he mysteriously disappears. He journeys across countries to the sites of significance. He marries a rejected woman and, paradoxically, holds together a stable marriage. He institutes mysteries of death and renewal, he initiates ceremonial dramas and acts as guardian of theatrical endeavor. He is a spirit of natural fertility and indestructible life, of fluent vegetation, the power of fermentation, and the essence of alcohol. He is attributed with being the quintessence of the human soul, the avatar of intoxication—a creation being who spits grapes and death. He is a narrated container, therefore, wherein it is possible to see *beta* elements and *alpha* elements tangling together. Dionysus presents us with the domain where thoughts are in flux, where bodily emotional processes are fluid, and where the reality of derangement is the fact of life. If 'thoughts are people' and 'people are thoughts', then in Dionysus's ceremony/symbolic drama, most concisely presented in Euripides' the *Bacchae*, we see and feel mad people, and mad thoughts manifest as gods.

In the sleepless dream states of Dionysus/Zagreus actions, mad things travel, dream passions arise ungoverned, mythic acts take precedence over individual wishes, delusions abound, thought disorder reigns—and yet there is a peculiarly liberating logic at work. Despite the chaotic derangement of isolated acts, the whole network of the Dionysus legend hangs together in a loosely knit container of fragmentation and integration that somehow holds sanity, pleasure, ease, and vitality. As far as I can tell, ceremonial theater is not about art; it is all about family obligations and maintaining cultural blood lines. And somehow or other it is about thinking as a communal activity. In my experience, it is within well-organized and well-performed ceremonies that moments of clarity arrive. The rehearsals and preparations are like the long, meandering reverie of analytic work. Japaljarri Spencer insisted that in order to become effective, a *Tjukurrpa* from the European repertoire must also be performed in the manner that Aboriginal *Tjukurrpa* is performed. Hence resulted our several experimental enactments at Intjartnama Outstation in community spectacle, objects swirling through smoke and fire beneath the canopy of wind and stars, with the character of Kronos/Crow cheerfully spearing his father, gleefully swallowing children, resolutely accompanying Captain Cook, dragging a boat up onto the beach, unloading laws. Images from the spectacles, including split brains, broken families, fences, holes in the mind, bottles of rum, bladders of piss, are those of the "greedy *beta* elements" of Western civilization, arriving on the fatal shore "full of a sense of catastrophe, searching wildly for a saturating realisation in the absence of the container (breast)" (Meltzer 1978: 62).

The invasion of the domain of the *Tjukurrpa* by Crow/Kronos (us) and his desperate cohort (us) is "hair raisingly psychotic" (Meltzer 1978: 62). We, the Caucasians, are the bringers of a frenzy, and the substances we bring generate physical and mental breakdown. Searching for a response to this

‘unthinkable catastrophe’, in which I too participate, Japaljarri Spencer had tentatively, modestly inquired if there might be held somewhere a mental map (a story) that could help him to hold in mind an explanation for the pattern of madness he was witnessing, as he and his family came under the spell of alcoholic intoxication. Probably, there is no story that offers the adequately healing breast. But when Crow steps onto the ceremonial ground, displaying the beginning of white man’s madness by swallowing children, when Captain Cook puts on the mask of Dionysus, promising joy but dealing in mayhem, and when socially upright Pentheus paints up his face to quell the manic entourage and ends up dead himself, perhaps then those who sit to watch will find some of the contradictory images they need with which to think about contradictory things. We Europeans have known for a long time that theatrical images can become ‘objects’ with which to aid clarity of thought. Indigenous people have known the same thing for twice as long.

A Conclusion of Sorts

Talking about the intoxication problem, Bob Randall says, “We see the problem, we really do, but you know, no one knows what to do about it, whose responsibility [it is] ... it’s a mystery thing.” That is the ‘mystery thing’—that nothing ever quite works or is sustained long enough to be allowed to work, that health gets worse and many cowboys walk away. There is no grand heroic narrative of Central Australia to write; rather, there is an ethnography of failure. And if such an ethnography of failure were astutely written with a deeply concentrated and applied psychoanalytic eye, perhaps those of us who work in these borderline zones might comprehend where we have all gone wrong or how it is that the destructive and creative elements of human beings turn so precisely and voraciously upon each other in the midst of our own country. I suspect that part of the failure in our black-white relationship is the failure to appreciate the psychological significance of the *Tjukurrpa*.

You will have noted the mood that pervades much of my reflection, and the reflections of others who spend time psychically attentive to the existential realities of life and death in these borderline zones of Australia and southwestern Oceania. It is the mood of a *Tristes Tropiques*, the melancholy of the *Songs of Central Australia*, Strehlow’s ‘last post’. It is reflected in Geoffrey Bardon’s eulogy for the Pintubi painters in his accounts of the Western Desert Art Movement, Tim Leura Japaljarri’s bushfire skeleton painting made for Bardon, or Alex Minutjukur and Andrew Japaljarri Spencer’s cultural reflection works under HALT’s banner. You too may have felt the sense of final, elegiac resignation among the men and women who come and go. This pervasion of feeling is such a significant mood to catch, to psychoanalyze in the truest sense. These works and these moods are a part of Central Australia’s ‘country’ music.

Acknowledgments

This article is dedicated to Andrew Japaljarri Spencer and family, Marlene Nampijimpa Ross and family, Berthe Nakamarra Dixon and family, Larry Jungarai Spencer (deceased), Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Jilly Nakamarra Nelson (deceased), and Wally Jungarai Morris (deceased). Acknowledgment is due to Jude Prichard of Tangentyerre Council Land Care; Barry Cook (deceased); Elva Cook and family from Injartnama, Ntaria; members of the Northern Territory Government Drug and Alcohol Services and NT Correctional Services, 1991–1996; and HALT, Alice Springs, 1988–1992. Thanks are also extended to the Sugarman production members, David Roberts, and the Antipodes Productions film crew, 1996–1999; and to Rod Moss, artist, and his collaborators, Arrenye Johnson and family from Deep Well and White Gate, Alice Springs region. All of whom are more qualified than I to speak on these things.

Craig San Roque is a practicing psychotherapist, qualified from the Society of Analytical Psychology, London; co-founder of the Squiggle Foundation; and a member of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Jungian Analysts. He lectures in a unique Masters Project in Analytical Psychology at the University of Western Sydney, with special interest in the application of psychoanalytic experience to community affairs and cultural anxiety. For many years he has conducted research in cultural psychology, group process, and the interface between therapy and theater. Since 1992, he has been involved with the Aboriginal people of Central Australia, contributing to Aboriginal innovative activities and intercultural dynamics. His most recent publication is “A Long Weekend, Alice Springs, Central Australia” (2004).

Notes

1. The term *Tjukurrpa* and the spelling as used in this article conform to a version of Luritja/Pintupi usage (Hansen and Hansen 1991). It also appears as *Tjukurpa* in Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara style (Goddard 1987), and as *Jukurpa* or *Jukurpa* in Warlpiri/Amatjerre language group regions. In Arrernte, one will see variations written as *Altjerre*, *Alchira*, or *Alcheringa*. Fundamentally, the concept is the same, but indigenous language terms vary throughout Australia. [Editor's note: This cosmo-ontological matrix of Aboriginal existence first became known—after Spencer and Gillen's 1904 *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*—in its Aranda (Arrernte) version of *Alcheringa*. In the course of the long twentieth century, it became generalized for and extended, under both various localized vernacular (*Tjukurrpa*, *Wangar*, *mardayin*, etc.) and pan-Australian English glosses ('The Dream-Time', 'The Dreaming', 'The Law'), to virtually all Aboriginal life-worlds that inhabited this continent. Because Carl Strehlow's appraisal of Spencer and Gillen's wording is seldom quoted in literature, I give it here in Obershaidt's translation: “Spencer and Gillen's claim (*Northern Tribes*, p. 745) that 'the word *alcheri* means dream' is incorrect. *Altjirerama* means 'to dream', and it is derived from *altjira* (god) [i.e., ancestral being] and *rama* (to see), in other words, 'to see god'. The same holds true for the Loritja language. *Tukura nangani* = 'to dream', from *tukura* = 'god' and *nangani* = 'to see'. It will be demonstrated later that *altjira* and *tukura* in this context do not refer to the highest God in the sky but merely to a totem god which the native believes to have seen in a

dream. The Aranda language does not render the word 'dream' with *alcheri* but rather with *altjirerinja*, though this word is rarely used. The normal expression of the blacks is, 'ta altjireraka' = 'I have dreamed'. The word *alcheringa*, which according to Spencer and Gillen is supposed to mean 'dreamtime', is obviously a corruption of *altjirerinja*. The native knows nothing of a 'dreamtime' as a designation of a certain period in their history. What this expression refers to is the time when the *Altjiranga mitjina* [sic] traversed this earth" (C. Strehlow [1907] 1991: 1:2).]

2. See HALT's Alice Springs archives, paintings, and publications circa 1987–1992; see also HALT (1991).
3. The invention of this term is often attributed to Stanner. See Stanner (1966, 1979) and Swain (1993: chap. 1).
4. There are varied and rich definitions of Central Australian 'Dreaming'/Tjukurrpa by English-speaking writers with a high degree of experience of Aboriginal life and a grasp of how Aboriginal language and metaphysics can be translated into Western concepts. Definitions publicly available through writings and exhibition notes on Western Desert art are most comprehensively treated in, for instance, Sutton (1988), Bardon and Bardon (2004), and Perkins and Fink's (2000) monumental collections. It is not my purpose comprehensively to define and describe Tjukurrpa, although some grasp of it is necessary in order to make sense of the arguments and flow of thoughts, especially in the later section of this article. For reliable and available evocations and descriptions extracted through direct immersion, the reader might be referred to Bardon and Bardon (2004), Berndt (1970), Berndt and Berndt (1988), Kimber (2000), Langton (2000), Latz (1995), and Swain (1993); the works of linguists such as the Hansens; and also the fictionalized conversation with Arkady on the theme of the musicality of the Tjukurrpa in Bruce Chatwin's (1987) evocative novel, *The Song Lines*. Also included, of course, are the foundation works of formative Australian anthropologists: Mountford (1976), Stanner (1966, 1979), T. Strehlow (1971), Munn (1970, 1973), Myers (1991), and Morton (1985, 1987, 1989).
5. The Sugarman Project (1993–2000) involved the preparation and production of a series of intercultural community performance events, a rewriting of Greek mythology into a central desert context, an exhibition on the history and origins of alcohol, a doctoral thesis, several multi-media events, and a video documentary by David Roberts. The project, an effort to take Tjukurrpa seriously as a basis for therapeutic action, also revealed the kinship between Tjukurrpa and European mythological narratives, and thus became an interactive, bicultural story-telling device.
6. Those endeavors included Petrol Link-Up, Intjartnama Rehabilitation Projects, the paintings, Thinking about Young People, Road Story, The Brain Story, Two Laws Story, and the Sugarman Project cultural events.
7. In this article I am approaching only the periphery of the ideas developed by Klein and by Jung. In another setting it might be possible to present the matter in more concise detail. The reader may wish to recall Klein's notions of how human behavior is determined and influenced by "unconscious phantasy," specific symbol formation procedures in the inner world, and the infantile play of desires, conflict, anxieties, defenses, separations, and reconstructions amid the "internal objects" of inner or phantasized life and death (outlined, for instance, in Riviere's introduction in Klein et al. [1973] and subsequent chapters). Jung et al. approach the same zone, I believe, with an archetypal twist that brings infantile phantasy toward connection with adult, culturally specific, and collective expressions of symbol formed around instinctively charged bodily elements. Their perspective also turns around the interplay of destruction, creation, and containment (i.e., Freud's life and death instincts), and all are concerned with the interplay of sexuality, instinctuality, eros, and mourning, and love's destruction by various psychic instruments of schism, hatred, and neglect.
8. HALT, personal communication.
9. At the end of *Aboriginal Men of High Degree* ([1945] 1977), Elkin proposes that a conference be held forthwith to provide a forum within which matters of concern to European and indigenous therapeutic practitioners could be discussed and compared and a working

partnership could be consolidated. Elkin marshaled what evidence he could and presented it formally, requesting that some kind of bicultural exchange occur, which could give an opportunity for practitioners to meet, evaluate, and even validate each other's methodology. In 1986, I attempted to reintroduce the notion of collaborative exchange on matters of practice and training in the field of mental health. I took up Elkin's accounts of the training of a Central Australian traditional healer in the South Australian Ooldea region, comparing it to the stages of a typical psychoanalytical training process. Awareness of the experiential requirements of these two training procedures was a part of my experience when Japaljarri Spencer made his point about the absence of a *Tjukurrpa* to address the abuse of intoxication and later outlined his own story about how traditional healers are 'trained'—or rather, what the *Tjukurrpa* is that underpins the formation of a healer subjected to a traditional procedure within his own group. In November 1986, I presented a paper at the UWS Nepean College conference on Aboriginal studies (San Roque 1986). It was an attempt to foreshadow a way of communicating across the black-white divide by looking for similarities in the respective psychological constructions of reality and by noting the way in which therapeutic training was conducted by indigenous healers and by psychoanalytic therapists. I drew substantially upon Elkin's ethnography. A fuller analysis of initiation experiences (of death and rebirth) whereby a man becomes transformed into a healer is attempted in my unpublished paper "On Babies, Snakes and Water," which was presented at the 1996 Perth ANZSJA Congress.

10. The 'someones' who facilitate this process are the owners of the ceremony, the *Kirda* in Warlpiri, who are bound in reciprocal relationship with the *Kurdungulu*, or 'policemen'. In the non-Aboriginal world, the facilitators of psychic and spiritual transformation are sometimes priests/priestesses as poets of ceremony and sometimes dramatic poets as the creators of theater.

References

- Bardon, G., and R. Bardon. 2004. *Papunya Tula: A Place Made after the Story. The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*. Melbourne: Miegunyah Press/Melbourne University Publishing.
- Berndt, R. M., ed. 1970. *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.
- Berndt, R. M., and C. H. Berndt, eds. 1988. *The Speaking Land*. Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books.
- Bion, W. [1962] 1984. *Learning from Experience*. London: Karnac.
- _____. [1963] 1968. *Elements of Psycho-analysis*. London: Karnac.
- _____. [1970] 1984. *Attention and Interpretation*. London: Karnac.
- Chatwin, B. 1987. *The Song Lines*. London: Cape.
- Elkin, A. P. [1945] 1977. *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*. 2nd ed. St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Goddard, C. 1987. *Basic Pitjarjatjara/Yankunytjatara English Dictionary*. Alice Springs, Australia: Institute for Aboriginal Development.
- HALT (Healthy Aboriginal Life Team). 1991. *Anangu Way*. Alice Springs, Australia: Nganampa Health Council.
- Hansen, K. C., and L. E. Hansen. 1991. *Pintupi/Luritja Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Alice Springs, Australia: Institute for Aboriginal Development.
- Heyman, K. 2003. *The Accomplice*. London: Hodder Headline.
- Jung, C. G. [1954] 1966. *The Psychology of the Transference. Collected Works*. Vol. 16: *The Practice of Psychotherapy*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge Kegan Paul and Bollingen USA.
- _____. (with A. Jaffe). 1961. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Random House.
- Kimber, R. G. 2000. "Tjukurrpa Trails: A Cultural Topography of the Western Desert." Pp. 269–273 in Perkins and Fink 2000.

- Kimbles, S., and T. Singer, eds. 2004. *The Cultural Complex: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives on Psyche and Society*. London and New York: Brunner and Routledge.
- Klein, M. 1950. "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego." Pp. 235–250 in *Contributions to Psycho-analysis: 1921–1945*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Klein, M., P. Heimann, S. Isaacs, and J. Riviere, eds. 1973. *Developments in Psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Langton, M. 2000. "Sacred Geography: Western Desert Traditions of Landscape Art." Pp. 259–267 in Perkins and Fink 2000.
- Latz, P. 1995. *Bushfires and Bushtucker*. Alice Springs, Australia: IAD Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1977. *Tristes Tropiques*. Trans. J. and D. Weightman. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Meltzer, D. 1978. *The Kleinian Development*. Part 3: *The Clinical Significance of the Work of Bion*. Perthshire, Scotland: Clunie Press.
- Morton, J. 1985. "Sustaining Desire: A Structuralist Interpretation of Myth and Male Cult in Central Australia." PhD diss., Australian National University.
- . 1987. "Singing Subjects and Sacred Objects: More on Munn's 'Transformation of Subjects into Objects' in Central Australian Myth." *Oceania* 58, no. 2: 100–118.
- . 1989. "Mama, Papa, and the Space Between: Children, Sacred Objects, and Transitional Phenomena in Aboriginal Central Australia." *Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 14: 191–225.
- Mountford, C. P. 1976. *Nomads of the Australian Desert*. Adelaide: Rigby.
- Munn, N. 1970. "The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Walbiri and Pitjantjara Myth." Pp. 141–163 in Berndt 1970.
- . 1973. *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Myers F. 1991. *Pintubi Country, Pintubi Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Perkins, H., and H. Fink., eds. 2000. *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- Petchkovsky, L., and C. San Roque. 1995. "Wana Tjukurpa." Pp. 445–450 in *Open Questions in Analytical Psychology. Proceedings of the 13th International Congress for Analytical Psychology*. Zurich: Daimon.
- Randall, R. 1999. Quoted in *Sugarman* (the documentary film account of the project). Directed by D. Roberts. Sydney: Antipodes Productions (with assistance from Australian Film Finance Corporation).
- . 2003. *Song Man: The Story of an Aboriginal Elder of Uluru*. Sydney: ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
- San Roque, C. 1986. "Psychoanalysis Black and White." Pp. 81–107 in *Proceedings of Nepean College (UWS) Conference on Contemporary Issues in Aboriginal Studies*, ed. B. Wright, L. Petchkovsky et al. Nepean: University of Western Sydney, Fire Bird Press.
- . 2000. "Coming to Terms with the Country." Pp. 27–52 in *Landmarks: Papers by Jungian Analysts from Australia and New Zealand*, compiled by F. H. Formaini. Manuka, ACT: ANZSJA Publication.
- . 2004. "A Long Weekend: Alice Springs, Central Australia." Chap. 3 in Kimbles and Singer 2004.
- Stanner, W. 1966 *On Aboriginal Religion*. Oceania Monograph 11. Sydney: University of Sydney Press.
- . 1979. *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Strehlow, C. [1907] 1991. *The Arand and Loritja Tribes of Central Australia*. Ed. M. F. von Leonhardi. Unpub. trans. by H. D. Oberscheidt. Hermannsburg, Central Australia. (Originally published by Baer & Co., Frankfurt am Main.)
- Strehlow, T. G. H. 1971. *Songs of Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Sutton, P., ed. 1988. *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*. New York: Viking.
- Swain, T. 1993. *A Place for Strangers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. 1971. *Playing and Reality*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.