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Paranthropology

Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

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& More



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Welcome to Vol. 3 No. 1, the first issue of *Paranthropology* for 2012. This issue features an eclectic range of articles which I'm sure readers will find fascinating and informative. In "The Sublime and the Profane" Patricia Tolana considers the connections between psychometric and religious experience, with a particular emphasis on Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and Rupert Sheldrake's concept of the morphogenetic field. In "Money God Cults in Taiwan" Fabian Graham takes a paranthropological approach to the interpretation of a new social phenomenon in Taiwan. In "Proceeding With Caution," Charles Tart, an early pioneer of Transpersonal Psychology, gives an overview of the development of what he terms "essential science." In "Transpersonal Anthropology: What is it, and What are the Problems we Face Doing it?" Charles Laughlin gives an introduction to the development of the theoretical approaches and methodologies of transpersonal anthropology. In "Contemporary Physical Mediumship: Is it Part of a Continuous Tradition?" I explore the alleged phenomena of contemporary physical mediums and compare them to the phenomena documented in the classic literature of psychical research. Robert McLuhan's article "Charles Richet at the Villa Carmen" examines one of the strangest cases from the annals of psychical research, again dealing with physical mediumship. William Rowlandson's article "Nourished by Dreams, Visions and William James" highlights similarities in the philosophies of the psychedelic guru Terence McKenna and the author Jose Luis Borges. In "An Inner Curriculum Vitae" Paul Devereux gives a sneak preview of an article set to appear in the first Ecology, Cosmos and Consciousness anthology, edited by David Luke and published by Strange Attractor Press. And finally, in the "Reviews and Overviews" section Charles Laughlin gives a summary of his new book on dreaming "Communing With the Gods," published by the Daily Grail, and Guy Lyon Playfair discusses a few of the fascinating experiences documented in his newly reissued book "The Flying Cow," published by White Crow Books. I hope you enjoy. **Jack Hunter**

The Sublime and the Profane: A Theological Account of Psychometric Experiences Within a Sacred Space

Patricia 'Iolana

There is a growing shift in Western consciousness towards a Divine Feminine. This shift is documented in a myriad of mediums by the women and men who are experiencing it. Contemporary spiritual memoirs provide a rich *locus theologicus* (or place for thealogy, a complementary field to theology that is focused on, but not exclusive to, the Divine Feminine). Based on a selection of memoirs and reflexive recollection, this paper will examine opposing psychometric (also known as divination) experiences within a sacred space – three connected by dreams; one not – in an attempt to find one unifying lens of understanding. It is important for the confines of this essay to bear in mind that these dreams are interpreted from a psycho-religious perspective, and those dreams which precipitate or even instigate an act of faith are understood, as Carl Jung first envisioned them, as ‘the voice of God’; in other words, they are understood as Divine revelations. We shall begin by briefly considering two disparate psychometric experiences within a sacred space: the sublime and the profane.

Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen is a Jungian analyst, activist and author of the widely acclaimed *Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984). In May of 1986, finding herself at a significant crossroads in her life and responding to a unique personal invitation, Bolen embarked upon a spiritual pilgrimage to a number of sacred sites in Europe: Chartres Cathedral, Glastonbury, Findhorn and the Holy Isle of Iona. This journey is the subject of Bolen’s 1994 spiritual memoir *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman’s Midlife Pilgrimage*.

She had numerous deeply religious experiences with the Divine along her journey, but I will focus on her encounter at Glastonbury Abbey. The Abby and its surroundings have long been known as ‘the holiest erthe in England’ (Bolen, 1994: 120). It held a special place for Bolen also; she writes that for her, Glastonbury ‘was a place that had been alive in my imagination for years, ever since I had a dream through which I made a connection with this site.’ (Bolen, 1994: 2) This dream calling would lead her to a personal experience with the Divine of immense theological significance. Bolen describes her sublime experience in detail:

With an attitude of reverence, Freya and I stepped onto the grassy rectangular site where the High Altar once had been. Ann told us that two ley lines crossed at the High Altar, making this the power point of the abbey. / Rituals take place within sacred time and space. This is certainly what it felt like, as I stood with my bare feet on a rectangle of Mother Earth that was simultaneously the High Altar...I entered a deeply receptive state of consciousness ... I once again felt my Christian spirituality: Christ, Holy Spirit, God the Father were with me once more. And I felt the presence of a Mother God, the Goddess, as well. Standing on the High Altar, listening to a contemporary priestess, I could feel energy from Mother Earth coming up through my feet into my body, while the Spirit descended from above through my head. Both came together and met in my heart. It felt as if a large chalice, glowing with light, filled my entire chest / This coming together of God and Goddess healed a split in me.... The two spheres, Christian and Goddess, Father and Mother God, archetypal and ordinary, intersected in me. As I stood there, I was in that moment >the rod= that connected the two worlds as well. Surrounded by the greenness of the setting, I was the recipient of grace, which made me feel whole. This all came together in my heart, in a profound inner spiritual sacramental moment. (Bolen, 1994: 121-124)

Standing atop this holy ground, Bolen felt unity between the Great Mother and the Father God of Christianity. She experienced the divine union of opposites in an encounter that, theologically, is religiously pluralistic and syncretistic. She speaks of two traditions—often in opposition of each other—transformed by a harmonious blending of Christian and Pagan beliefs and healing an ancient schism. On a psychological level, Bolen’s journey was inspired and guided by her Anima archetype, her immanent Feminine Divine and culminated in a psycho-religious union (or act of spiritual alchemy) integral to self-Individuation. From a theological perspective, Bolen encountered the ineffable Numinous; however, not all Divine experiences are sublime.

Bolen's transpersonal experience at Glastonbury sharply contrasts what transpired while I was in another sacred space in Britain – the Avebury Circle. Construction on the various sacred sites found in Avebury began in the Neolithic period as early as 3000 BCE. The surrounding henge and stone circle dates back to 2600 BCE and is the largest stone circle in the world encompassing 28 acres with a diameter of 335 meters. The Society of Ley Hunters has mapped a significant amount of verifiable ley lines throughout Britain. According to Paul Devereux (1996: 1), 'various prehistoric places, such as standing stones, earthen burial mounds, prehistoric earthworked hills, and other such features fell into straight lines for miles across country.' A number of ley lines run through the neighbouring Wiltshire area and two lines run through the Avebury Henge; the Henge is also connected to Stonehenge through a ley line. (ley.hunter.com). It was a warm autumn morning in 2006 when I visited Avebury for the first time.

I had been on a spiritual pilgrimage as well, and I, too, was at a crossroads in my life. Like Bolen, I am also a post-Christian, but I have been in the folds of the Goddess for decades. Unlike Bolen, I knew nothing of my destination prior to arriving, and I do not dream. A visit to the sacred spaces of the West Kennet Long Barrow, Silbury Hill and the Avebury Henge were the first stops along my pilgrimage to Stonehenge, but it was this unknown place called Avebury that shook the very foundation of my soul. From the moment I stepped out of the van at the Henge, I felt the heavy weight of sacrality and experienced an instantaneous reverence for this site. I did something I had never done before: I covered my hair in respect of and submission to the awesome power and presence. I entered the stone circle slowly--receptive to the immense energy present as I walked on what felt like familiar land.

The group gathered around one of the enormous sarsen stones that comprise the outer circle as our tour guide began to explain the history of the space we held. As I listened, her voice grew fainter even though she was still within arms' reach. I had done nothing to consciously enter a trance, yet I was drawn into a semi-conscious, dream-like state; I closed my eyes and reached out to touch the monolithic sarsen that stood next to me; my peace and tranquillity was instantly shattered by a sound that can only be described as a cacophony of keening. I withdrew my hand and glanced around to see if anyone else was reacting to the sound. They all listened to the tour guide drone on, so I turned my attention back to the

stone, closed my eyes, and reached out my hand. Again, the death wail overtook me, and I felt as if the very centre of my being was being torn in two tearing my soul in half. I was overwhelmed by the feeling of great loss and suffering – my hand and arm began to throb and ache. The pain moved down my arm and into my body, and I felt as if what had once been whole and divine had been destroyed by the shadows of malice and hate. My touch had somehow connected with the shadow present in the Henge – a collective shadow, the dissociative split of sacred unity – a rupture of the Numinous. I felt ill and lost, and my hand slipped from the stone. The keening stopped, but the pain and despair stayed within me, and I was overcome by the feeling that what once had been Divine, pure and whole had been lost forever.

Bolen writes: 'It is believed that the divine spirit is incarnate at sacred places, both in the sense that the Deity is present there and in that these are places where the divinity penetrates matter, impregnating or quickening the divine in the pilgrim.' (Bolen, 1994: 29) Bolen visited a sacred site and indeed experienced a 'quickenings' of the divine in her sublime union with the numinous. I, on the other hand, experienced a 'quickenings' of the profanity of the divine union that emanated through this space, and I felt nothing but despair and horror. It was much later that I learned that the stone circle at Avebury Henge had been decimated on three different occasions: the first being the Fourteenth Century and then again in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries as well. There were separate attacks on the circle itself in an attempt to destroy the Neolithic structure. I wondered if I was feeling the pain of someone from a distant past who was there at the circle's destruction. Or was I tapping into the death wail of the circle itself? Perhaps I was filled with the anguish and keening of the Numinous at the single-minded destruction of such a holy and sacred place.

Bolen and I both attempt to understand what transpired during our encounters with the Numinous from the understandings of our respective disciplines. As Jungians, the archetypes (especially the Anima archetype of the Great Mother) and the collective unconscious play an integral part in both our concepts of the Divine; however Jung, limiting his psycho-religious exploration to the individual psyche, refrained from examining the wider implications of the autonomous archetypes of the collective unconscious. Therefore, as a Jungian, another model of understanding is required. Bolen attempts to explain her psychometric experiences in the sacred

space utilising Rupert Sheldrake's morphic resonance theory, which is similar to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, as a method of understanding. She writes that 'On this pilgrimage I first heard of telluric currents and first experienced for myself this energy that is present at places where humans have worshiped for thousands of years.' (Bolen, 1994: 31) In the way Bolen describes Sheldrake's theory, it appears that it would be a useful model in understanding my own psychometric experience. She states:

Psychometry and the possibility that there are morphic fields, as theoretical biologist Rupert Sheldrake has proposed, account for and explain how it might be possible for us to go to an archaeological, historic, or sacred site and get a true impression of what happened there in the past. Sheldrake describes morphic fields as a source of cumulative memory based on experiences of a species in the past. The human morphic field is what we tap into and are resonating with and influenced by when we respond as members of the human race, doing what humans have done. (Bolen, 1994: 95-96)

While there are similarities in Sheldrake's and Jung's models, Sheldrake's theory is more useful in this case as it specifically addresses the resonant morphic energy field (perhaps compounded by Devereux's energetic ley lines) that inhabit the physical and external sacred space—elements Jung never addressed directly as he focused on the internal landscape of the psyche. Ultimately, this web of energy or consciousness raises an important theological question: If we can connect to the morphic and ley line energies within a sacred space and draw knowledge from them, and if these pilgrimages are inspired by dreams of Divine revelation, is this new knowledge emanating from a Divine source? If so, then interaction with the Numinous cannot only be sublime filling one with the Divine spark, but also profane imbuing one with the dark aspect of the Divine – the profane – the shadow.

The dichotomies of personal experiences with the Numinous within a sacred space are echoed by others as well and serve to reinforce the ancient Gnostic idea that the Divine contains and embodies both the sublime and the profane. In my doctoral research I am validating Jung's 'good theory' about the immanent Feminine Divine; I am conducting a phenomenological psychodynamic study of five modern-day women who have published spiritual

memoirs. For the women in my study, their journeys were precipitated by a significant dream or series of prophetic dreams. As they followed the 'voice of God,' these women discovered and embraced the sublime and profane aspects of the Numinous within a sacred space.

Sue Monk Kidd, herself a post-Christian devotee of the Goddess also had a personal pilgrimage sparked by a Divine dream. She found two sacred spaces in which she had a personal experience with the Numinous whom she imaged as the Great Mother. Her first meeting upon sacred ground took place at the Springbank Retreat Centre, a Catholic Centre in the low country of South Carolina. While wandering the 58 acre grounds of the Centre, Kidd and her companion stumbled upon a clearing and found themselves standing within a sacred circle of trees. She states:

The circle was formed by pine, dogwood, magnolia, small oaks, and scrubs...I walked around the circle, touching the tree trunks as the circle and the Great Lap became one and the same. Far from the churches, prayer books, sermons, and theological propositions, I felt intimately embraced by nature. (Kidd, 2002: 104)

Within this circle, Kidd felt the presence of and embraced by the Great Mother, the Numinous in feminine form, sometimes referred to as Mother Nature. This was a sublime experience for Kidd and one that strengthened her in her pilgrimage and quest. Kidd's journey continued and she felt compelled to visit yet another sacred circle at Avebury. Kidd's experience within the sacred space at Avebury in some ways mirror my own. She writes:

Now here in the stone circle I felt it even more, like a sad, sad sweetness, like a sorrow and a hope melded into one....I walked through the field with a weight of longing and love lodged in my chest, like a cumulus cloud ready to burst into rain and thunder after a long drought. / I moved from one stone to another placing my hand flat against their surfaces, the same way I had moved around the circle of trees....Divine Feminine love came, wiping out all my puny ideas about love in one driving sweep. / Today I remember that event for the radiant mystery it was, and how I felt myself embraced by Goddess, how I felt myself in touch with the deepest thing I am....I knew only that in some deep way I had encountered her. (Kidd, 2002: 135-36)

She too felt the deep sorrow and loss present in the enormous circle of stones at Avebury Henge. How is it that both Kidd and I felt the same energy and had the same emotional response within this sacred space? From a theological perspective, one could easily argue that Kidd and I both experienced the same face of the Divine in that circle. From a psychic perspective, Sheldrake's morphic resonance theory and Devereux's ley lines would seem to carry the same energy and information.

Phyllis Curott, another author in my study, is different from the three women discussed here in that she is not a post-Christian. Curott was raised by humanists and had no previous ideas, images, or relationship with the Numinous in any form. But her insistent dreams led her too on a sacred pilgrimage in search of the Divine. Curott's journey took her to a sacred space in the Appalachian Mountains boarding New Jersey and Pennsylvania. She writes:

I decided to go in pursuit of it in the world, to travel to an old cave I knew in the little hills of the Delaware Water Gap. I would enter the belly of the mother, just as the ancestors had, to seek a vision....a chill of thin fear and unexpected claustrophobia encircled me, smothering my courage. I ran my hand alongside the cavern wall, to steady my nerves as much as my descent, but it was deathly damp and cold...The ground was slippery and wet, and suddenly my right foot slid drastically out from under me. I crashed into the unforgiving stone, plunging into absolute darkness. The flashlight rolled away from my fingers and I lay unconscious, in darkness within darkness...when I finally came to.../I crouched in the absolute blackness, panic strangling me. I'm blind, I thought in terror. And deaf, for there wasn't a sound. Oh Goddess, maybe I'm dead. And then it came to me. . . Proserpina, Proserpina, Proserpina . . . called three times by an odd, faraway voice. (Curott, 1998: 271 emphasis in the original)

The experiences of Kidd and Curott further validate Jung's psycho-religious theories as they share their individual stories about hearing the 'voice of God' in their dreams. Bolen, Kidd, and Curott all document similar experiences (using both Jung's name and many of his theories and models to understand their encounters) from the dreams that prompted their pilgrimages leading to what these women refer to as the 'web' they feel connected to and with (which resembles Jung's collective

unconscious, Devereux's ley lines, and Sheldrake's morphic field). Some radical theologians like Abraham Heschel (2010 [1959]) David L. Miller, (1974 and 2006) or Carol P. Christ (1980, 1987 and 2003) may agree with my assertion that all four of us engaged in religious experiences with the Numinous despite the still precarious relationship between science and religion; while traditional theologians might repudiate these experiences altogether as heterodoxical to traditional Western theology. Psychometry, however, is only concerned with the act itself devoid of the surroundings and faith tradition; morphic resonance and ley line energy could explain these experiences from a psychometric perspective, but it is far from a theologically holistic model. Jungians might posit that all four experiences were a matter of connecting with the Numinous through the Great Mother archetype from the collective unconscious, and by extension the collective shadow, but Jungian theory, however, cannot account for the psychic-nature connection inherent in this web of connectivity. It leaps beyond Jung's psychic concept of the collective unconscious.

A burgeoning new model however, depth theology, as a Jungian-influenced psycho-religious discipline, accepts that all of the above are happening, creating a union between science and religion—as the psychological and the religious are intricately connected within the individual. A byproduct of my study, depth theology is the psychodynamic and theological phenomenological analysis of religious experience and praxis; it is firmly rooted in personal Divine experience and based on the adherent's understanding of the Numinous' immanent and transcendent nature. (Proudfoot, 1985) It is an appropriate and useful unifying model for understanding the current Western paradigmatic shift. Within the realm of depth theology and the shifting Western paradigm, the religious, the psychometric and the psychological combine into a unifying personal religion seeking direct connection with a Numinous that is both immanent and transcendent, both sublime and profane – both present within--and part of--the sacred spaces that inhabit our Earth.

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Boundaries: Self, Faith, Interpretation, and Changing Trends in Religious Studies (2011) and *Literature of the Sacred Feminine: Great Mother Archetypes and the Re-emergence of the Goddess in Western Traditions* (2009).

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Money God Cults in Taiwan: A Paranthropological Approach Fabian Graham

In the economic climate that has prevailed since the end of Taiwan's economic boom, epitomizing what Weller (2000) described as 'temples for profit.' Money God temples have rapidly multiplied throughout Taiwan. In these temples, devotees petition the deities asking to borrow Taiwan dollars, the money symbolizing the intentionality of the deity to positively intervene in their lives, and the devotee returns the money with interest to the temple at a later date. The temple therefore acts as a banking intermediary between deities and devotees. Based on interviews with temple owners, staff, and devotees, this paper will present an ethnographic study of two such temples followed by an analysis of the exchange between devotees and deities. The research for this paper was started in 2009 and completed in January 2011, and involved multiple visits to two temples; She Liao Village Zi Nan Gong in Zhu Shan township, Nantou County, and Shi Ding Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao in Taipei County. Adopting a participatory approach and following the correct ritual procedure, 'fortune money' was borrowed from these temples and returned a year later with interest.

The ethnography illustrates that in the material world, the ritual exchange in Money God temples requires reciprocation and monetary interest. It should not be misconstrued that the money God temples themselves are intentionally offering a free gift or that a free gift is actually given by the temples. The temples researched are clearly interested in profit for the benefit of either charity or self-enrichment, and these social interactions lie firmly within the scope of the anthropology of religion and will be detailed in the case studies section. However, when viewed from the perspective of the recipient of fortune money and the bestowing deity, the transaction enters the arena of paranthropology as the deity exists as a discarnate entity in the spiritual realms. Therefore, in the discussion that follows the ethnography, a paranthropological stance will be taken, and by deconstructing the exchange using Derrida's 'free' gift (1992) as a baseline of analysis, a case will be made for Money God transactions presenting on a transcendent level an exchange which approaches Derrida's free gift aporia. The significance of this paper therefore lies both in recording a new and evolving tradition, and in

applying paranthropology as an analytical tool to examine the gift from the suppositional perspective of deity-devotee interactions.

The Anthropology of Religion Versus a Paranthropological Approach

This dual approach of a traditional ethnography coupled with paranthropological discourse raises the issue of delineating paranthropology from the anthropology of religion. This may be achieved by isolating and highlighting the different preconceptions adopted by each approach. At a fundamental level, while both may work with the same research material, the anthropology of religion typically adopts an etic approach. However, in terms of the paranormal, this approach is perhaps flawed, "In the study of religion, however, the decision to ignore, discount or explain (away) insider or emic explanations and understandings, imposes a severe limitation on the possibility of adequate comprehension" (Bowie 2010: 2). In contrast, paranthropology adopts an emic methodology, accepting the explanations provided by research subjects as to the nature of their own spiritual reality. While the anthropology of religion treats paranormal entities as social constructs and focuses on human interactions and structures within society, often considering "the beliefs of the "other" from a distanced perspective as if to suggest that their beliefs could not possibly possess any form of ontological validity" (Hunter 2010: 3), paranthropology admits these entities may exist, accepts the local interpretation of related phenomena, and may also recognize the entities as having an independent existence.

Defining the scope of paranthropology is also problematic. In the broadest sense, paranthropology may encompass a vast spectrum, "from belief in and experiences of ghosts, magic, haunted houses and mediumship, to experiences of telepathic communication, alien abductions and out-of-body experiences" (Hunter 2011: 14). However, in response to this, I rejected the use of the word 'belief' as it implies a human construct, and suggested that "by removing the term 'belief' and assuming that the paranormal phenomena exist as realities irrelevant of chemicals or constructed belief systems, the field of paranthropology begins to define itself in relation to

the phenomena themselves, and not (in relation) to the belief systems, scientific or religious, that have evolved to support the phenomena” (Graham 2011: 21).

Inevitably the scope and approaches of these related disciplines will form an ongoing discourse as no definition will be comprehensive as additional classifications will inevitably be required to account for circumstances that do not correspond to the boundaries of prior definitions. Any definition will also be subjective as “what constitutes the natural, normal or supernatural and paranormal is also a matter of perspective” (Bowie 2010a: 5). However, as the primary focus of the paper is related to communication with and favors granted by discarnate entities, for the sake of clarity I will adopt a definition originally offered to define afterlife research, and further propose it as a working approach for ethnographic research into similar paranormal phenomena, namely “conceptions, descriptions and analyses of discarnate existence based on the premise that consciousness exists in an immaterial form, and that some aspect of conscious

personhood (soul, spirit, energy) continues after the death of the physical organism. These conscious discarnate energies are frequently located within a parallel „world” (Bowie 2010: 4). The overall aim of this paper in correlating Money God transactions with Derrida’s free gift from the perspective of deity-human interactions is to contribute to the growing body of paranthropological discourse.

Life After Death and the Emic Interpretation of the Afterlife

Central to the Chinese belief system is the concept of souls surviving death and subsequently being worshipped as deities, either as anthropomorphic images or manifested as deities incarnate through spirit mediums. The earliest archaeological evidence of this religion is from the Shang dynasty (1766 - 1122 BC) when the distinction between earthly po and spiritual hun components of the soul were first conceptualized (Thompson: 12). Male (yang) attributes were associated with the hun portion of the soul, and female (yin) attributes were allotted to the po section of the soul. The spiritual hun component of the soul would ascend to the spirit world, the dwelling place of the gods, and if sacrificed to correctly, there it would remain, sending down blessings and acting as an intermediary between its descendants and higher deities. The spiritual hun soul of an individual was of the same nature as the deities (shen), and the worship of gods by a family was almost indistinguishable in nature from the worship of its ancestors. Thus a belief in life after death and a concept allowing for deification of humans and subsequent promotion from ancestral spirit to deity had been established from the beginnings of folk religion in the Shang dynasty.

An elaborate system of sacrificial offerings developed alongside divination as a means of communication between the material and the spiritual realms where ancestors were believed to dwell. Acting as intermediaries between the emperor and Shang Di, his ancestors were therefore attributed with powers to send down blessings or calamities upon their descendants, and thus influence the fates of the living. Therefore, inherent to the belief system developed by the Shang was a mutual dependence between the living and the dead, the first requiring blessings and divine assistance and the latter requiring sacrifices for their welfare in the afterlife. The deceased thereby acquired more powers in ancestral form than they had possessed in life, ritualistic sacrifices were offered to them, and



Zi Nan Gong also has an animistic deity called Shi Tou Gong - literally 'Respected Rock'. It was discovered 250 years ago after a devastating flood when they dug up a stone shaped like a human. It was assumed to possess a spirit, was robed and has been worshipped as a Money God ever since.

henceforth, ancestors, who had the power to influence the lives of their descendants, were thus attributed with powers similar to, but lesser than, deities (Thompson: 46-47). The system that evolved was therefore fluid in nature, whereby, the soul of an ancestor could become a deity or a ghost, and a ghost if sacrificed to and worshiped consistently could become an ancestor or deity. This interdependence between the human and spiritual realms is the foundation of deity worship, which, rather than being based on supplication, is contractual. "Offerings are made for favours ... Gods are dependent on people to give their spirits materiality through the making of anthropomorphic images, and gods gain power only if their images are worshipped" (Chan 2009: 4). The distinctive difference between ancestors and deities is that the latter have more spiritual power (ling), and while ancestors may affect the lives of their descendants, deities can affect the lives of individuals, communities, states or empires.

There are three main classes of deities involved in Money God exchanges, the first being those deified from historic characters, the Money God Zhao Gongming at Shi Ding Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao being one such example. The second class are manifestations of inanimate objects, from the big, i.e., stars and constellations, to the very small i.e., single rocks or trees, and are often anthropomorphized into human form. Chan (2008) argues that anthropomorphized spirits are 'Double nature-beings', i.e. human in form but spirit in essence, and their icons "are sacral portals that permit spirits access into the mortal world" (Chan 2008: 1). It is these spirits that people actually appeal to and bargain with as if dealing with humans, and this relationship acted as a catalyst for the creation of a pantheon of anthropomorphic deities. Shi Tou Gong at She Liao Village Zi Nan Gong provides an example of this class of deity. A third variety of deities are mythologized characters from oral folklore, later immortalized in popular novels before becoming anthropomorphized and worshipped as deities. Four of the five Money Gods of the Five directions found at Shi Ding Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao fit into this category, and this third category raises an exciting spiritual supposition, namely, that a discarnate entity can be created through the accumulation of directed spiritual energy (ling) manifested through worship and offerings under circumstances where there was no original living being or nature spirit relating to an inanimate object. This inverts the equation of God creating humans to humans, through their

concentrated efforts, projecting ling from their own internal spiritual reserve and creating deities, conscious beings which are capable of conversing with devotees through divination blocks, and bestowing them with good fortune. Conversely, when deities cease to be worshiped, their ling runs out, eventually expiring, and the mass of deities previously found in temples but now absent from the religious landscape attest to this theory.

As each class of deity is represented in Money God temples, the link between Money God exchanges, life after death research, discarnate entities and paranthropology is evident.

Returning then to interactions with Money Gods, the emic interpretation of events is that it is possible to communicate directly with discarnate spirits, whether animistic, of historic characters or mythological deities empowered through worship, and strike bargains with them on a contractual basis through direct communication using divination blocks which are commonly referred to by their Hokkien name 'bue.' Incense is used to open communication as it is believed that the rising smoke attracts the attention of the deity, and bues are then employed as a direct means of two-way communication with the spirit entities. Thus, in the process of transactions, a social relationship is created between the devotee and the deity through two-way communication with bues.

Divination Blocks (bue)

Bues are two crescent shaped wooden blocks and are the most common method to communicate with deities in Taiwan (Adler 2002). Although their origins are obscure, bues have played a major role in divination and communication with the 'other' since the Tang dynasty (618-906 C.E.).

One side of the bues is flat and the other convex. For the purpose of communication, the questioner first selects a deity to pose a question to, and then introduces themselves, including name, date of birth and address. The bues are then raised above the forehead as the devotee formulates a request to a specific deity, and then drops the bues to the ground.

There are three possible outcomes. Both blocks may land either flat side down or convex side down, essentially both meaning "no," but with different connotations. Two flat sides down indicates that the deity is angry, while two convex sides down suggests that the deity is laughing, maybe because the question is inappropriate. In either case, the questioner is at liberty to rephrase the question and



Yes



No (Angry)



No (Laughling)

ask again. If they land with one convex and one flat side down, the answer is yes, and a deal has been struck.

Luck, Fortune and Fate in Chinese Cosmology

Luck is integral to the Chinese concept of time. Since the Han dynasty, beginning with the Year of the Rat in 4 C.E., a sixty-year cycle was introduced based on five twelve year cycles, with each year associated with a specific animal. Year one is represented by the rat, year two by the ox, followed by the tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. At the end of the sixty years, the cycle repeats itself, so year 61 is the year of the rat and the first year of a new cycle. It is upon these signs that auspicious days for marriage, opening businesses, buying property, having medical operations and so forth are based, and the dates for many religious rituals are determined in the same fashion. This sixty-year cycle was based on observations of the planet Jupiter that orbits the sun once every twelve years (Koln 2001: 47 – 48). Every year there are one 'lucky' and two 'unlucky' animals, and it is customary for individuals born in a year represented by the 'unlucky' animals to donate money to a temple to bring about good fortune for themselves. Being one of the unlucky animals is known as 'offending the Tai Sui,' the Tai Sui being a stellar deity associated with that year, and donations or ritual are employed to avert misfortune. From interviews and surveys with temple visitors, it is evident that while luck and fiscal fortune are clearly connected in the collective consciousness, luck and good fortune are also associated with a broader sense of good fortune in all areas of life including health, relationships, education, family and work.

The Chinese almanac details the fortuitous days throughout the year which will bring luck and following success. From choosing a fortuitous date for a marriage or opening a business to performing rituals, correct timing will help determine a successful outcome, i.e., influence one's fate. Other ways to

change one's luck and therefore the outcome of actions is by burning joss money or leaving other offerings to deities, having Buddhist monks or Taoist priests chant scriptures, or through a diverse set of luck changing rituals performed by spirit mediums.

Due to the syncretic nature of Chinese religion, having borrowed contradicting concepts of fate from both Chinese Buddhism and Taoism, there is no absolute definition of the role of luck in relation to fate, or whether fate is changeable or not in the popular Chinese belief system. On one hand, from Chinese Buddhism, it is commonly believed that past life karma will predetermine ones situation in one's present incarnation, thus suggesting a predetermined fate, while Taoism teaches that ill luck is caused by misalignment with astronomical configurations and celestial alignments due to internal mental confusion or external metaphysical forces. Contrary to both is the predominant folk belief that by making offerings to, or deals with deities, that the deity can change your luck and thus your fate.

The Chinese word for luck is xing yun (幸運), xing meaning 'fortunate' and yun meaning 'to become,' so luck may be interpreted as becoming fortunate. Both words have secondary meanings, xing meaning 'fate' and yun 'to move' or 'to change', so luck implies a changing of fate. Xing also has a third meaning in xing fu (幸福), xing being 'fortunate' and 'fu' being luck, the combination meaning 'happiness'. The relationship between wealth and happiness is emphasized at Chinese New Year when the most common greeting is gong xi gong xi fa cai literally meaning 'congratulations congratulations get rich' but functionally meaning 'happy New Year' with the 'fa cai' having broader connotations of prosperity encompassing health, wealth, family togetherness, success and happiness. It was this broader meaning that interviewees at the case study temples associated with the benefits of 'fortune money,' each



Laio Zong-dong is a 23rd generation Taoist master in the Longmen lineage of the Quan Zhen sect of Taoism. His teacher Wang Li Sheng is the Taoist master who was asked to reintroduce Taoism to China by

emphasizing different elements of good fortune and luck depending on their circumstances. For instance, one student interviewed said they were borrowing fortune money to help them pass their university entrance exams explaining that if they went to a better university they would be more likely to be successful in the future, and a newlywed replied that she wanted fortune money to help her have a son, the association being a family is lucky if they have male offspring to continue the family name and burn offerings of incense and joss money to the family ancestors. The emic interpretation of 'fortune money' in casual conversation from the perspective of devotees was clearly dependent on a value system based on what the individual most wanted, desiring the intervention of a deity to bring them closer to achieving their goals. Interviews revealed that the key element for recipients was not the actual amount of money lent, but that the money was symbolic of the agreement between the devotee and the Money God for deific intervention in their lives with beneficial effects.

The Case Study Temples

She Liao Village Zi Nan Gong

Zhe Nan Gong is the elder of the two case study temples (1697), the original temple housing only one deity, Tudi Gong, adding his wife, Tudi Po in 1730. They have an animistic deity called Shi Tou Gong (Honorable Stone), a rock with human characteristics dressed in a yellow robe which was unearthed in the 1750s. Due to its human shape it was assumed to possess a powerful spirit and has been worshipped alongside Tudi Gong and Tudi Po as a Money God on the main altar ever since.

This was the first temple in Taiwan to give fortune money. At that time, the village comprised of several local landlords who had ambitions to make money in Taipei, and a small agricultural community. Although the exact date has been forgotten, the vice manager of the temple Mr. Chen recollects the first occasion on which fortune money was given in the late 1930s. The landlords had been to Taipei, but found no success in business, and returned to the village to ask for the assistance of the temple deities. The temple committee of 12 met, and a decision was reached that lucky money could be given, so long as the temple deities agreed. The agreement was



The main deities at Zi Nan Gong are Tudi Gong and his wife Tudi Po. It is believed that if Tudi Gong does not answer one's prayers, one should complain to his wife who will then nag him to do so.

attained from the deities by casting bue, and the landlords returned to Taipei where their businesses were successful. The temple stipulated that the money had to be returned within one year.

When the landlords returned from Taipei as wealthy men, it inspired the temple to give lucky money to other members of the village. These villages also became more prosperous, and before long the news spread, especially among Hakka communities, and people from Miaoli and Xinzhu came to ask for money. Initially, when the temple was only lending to local villagers, no interest was charged on the loan. However, as the practice became more widespread, on returning the fortune money, interest was paid.

Since the 1950s, the process has become ritualized. The contemporary practice is as follows. First, the devotee worships (bai bai) the three main deities, and addressing all three, then bue are thrown to ask for permission to borrow money. If the bue give a positive answer the first time they are cast, then the devotee claims 600 NT dollars. If the devotee receives a negative answer, and then a positive answer on the second cast, they received NT\$500. The process continues through to NT\$100, and it is assumed that if the deities have not agreed to lend

the devotee money by then, that this is an unlucky period in the person's life. However, as the following chart shows, the probability of six consecutive negative answers is statistically unlikely; the probability of not receiving money being 1.5625% or 1 in 64.

600NT: 50% 1/2

500NT: 75% 3/4

400NT: 87.5% 7/8

300NT: 93.75% 15/16

200NT: 96.875% 31/32

100NT: 98.4375% 63/64

Next to the main temple there is an administrative building where money is given and returned. The devotee fills out an application form, shows formal ID, and leaves with the understanding that the money will be returned within one year. The money is received in a red envelope, and the devotee takes it to the main censer and moves it in a clockwise direction through the incense smoke three times. According to the temple, the money is then supposed to be used for business or investments, and like the root of a tree, it will branch out and grow. However, interviews showed that this was seldom the case as the money was invested in what was most desired, from boyfriends and girlfriends to cars and homes. It is then up to the individual to decide the rate of interest paid, but generally speaking it is double.

The dual enforcers of the agreement are self-imposed morality, and the fear of practical retribution by a spiritual being. It was however pointed out by the vice manager that Tudi Gong is not a vindictive deity and notions of vindictive retribution exist only in the minds of the devotees. If there is a contractual agreement, this raises the question of who the contract is between; the devotee and the deity with the temple as a banking intermediary, or between the devotee and the temple with the deity as a spiritual intermediary? In either case, these social relations fall into the field of the anthropology of religion.

The increase in the number of visits by members of the public has increased rapidly over the years. Generally in Taiwan, it is common for temple visits to rise incrementally with the size, state and condition of the roads and transport availability. When the temple first lent money to local villagers, there was only a dirt road which had been constructed by the Japanese. By the 1960s there was a tarmac road, and now access to the village is on a four lane road with

parking facilities for several hundred cars and coaches.

Between 1940 and 1950, the number of visitors lent money rose from approximately 20 to 200. Coinciding with better transportation and a higher level of mobility, the number of visitors increased to an estimated 500,000 by 1960. According to Mr Chen, there were over 1 million visits in 1990 and around 6,000,000 visits a year by 2000. He estimates that last year there were 10,000,000 visits, but as many people pay multiple visits, it is impossible to state an accurate number. With more certainty, he added that last year the temple earned approximately NT\$200,000,000 profit, i.e., interest paid on the initial amounts lent (£4.23 million).

Shi Ding Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao

At Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao, one of the two founders is a 23rd generation Taoist master in the Longmen lineage of the Quan Zhen sect of Taoism. He has two names, his birth name, Liao Yao-dong, and Taoist name, Laio Zong-dong. He was born in 1955 in Taichung, and in 1979 he went to PRC and stayed there until 1987 when China opened its borders and he could return to Taiwan. He met an old priest in China who told him that young men should get married, but after reflection, he followed the old priest to Xian and became his student. His teacher Wang Li Sheng is the Taoist master who was asked to reintroduce Taoism to China by Deng Xiao Ping.

The temple is located outside of a small Township called Shi Ding in Taipei County, and I found it curious that he should leave a famous teacher to relocate there. However, he is sure that it was fated, and claims an affinity with the area. He returned to Taiwan dressed as a simple priest, and his partner, Mr Xu, who worked in another Taoist temple asked to be introduced to him as the Money Gods of the Five Directions had visited him in a dream, and he sought interpretation. This dream led to the construction of the temple its present location, as the location's characteristics matched those of the dream: "behind lies a mountain in the shape of a chair, and opposite a mountain resembling the shape of traditional Chinese money." The original shrine was built in 1995, and became immediately successful, and a new temple was begun in 1996. The current incarnation is palatial and still being enlarged. According to Laio Zong-dong, as so much money had been donated in such a short time, they decided it would be a good idea to give money back to the people who prayed there. This practice, however, almost immediately became ritualized.

The process involves bai bai and then casting bue to ascertain that the deity is willing to help. The temple brochure includes a chart based on the 12 Chinese Zodiac signs, the five elements and the 60 Tai Sui, and from this chart a visitor can calculate which deity should be approached to ask for fortune money. The five deities found in this temple are the Money Gods of the North, South, East and West, and their commander the Money God of Centre, Zhao Gongming. However, in practice, the devotee has five deities they can petition with bue, so that if the first deity gives a negative answer, the devotee simply moves on to the next. If bue are cast five times, the probability of receiving an affirmative answer is 96.875% or 31 in 32.

If the bue produce a positive answer, the devotee is entitled to take a box containing NT\$20. As bue are employed to negotiate the agreement directly with the deity, once again, there is an ambiguous contractual agreement between the devotee and the deity. After taking the money, the recipient writes their name, birthday and address in a book provided so that the temple can inform the deities who has taken the money home, and further request divine assistance. The money is then circled above the main censer 3 times. The money then has to be kept at home for one week, preferably on a family shrine, in an office desk, or in a purse, allowing the recipient to spiritually interact with it. The money should then be used on the thing the recipient wants luck with. After they feel that the deity has helped them, they should return the money with interest so that "it is easy to borrow again." Most recipients repay NT\$100 or 200, some NT\$1000 or 2000. If the recipient pays back NT\$100 or more, they receive a certificate from the temple thanking them, which includes their name, address, the amount donated and is sanctified with the temple's stamp.

I asked Laio Zong-dong whether the casting of bue creates a contractual agreement between the petitioner and the deity or whether NT\$20 is a free gift from the temple or from the deity? He replied that it is a contract agreed in the silence of your heart because you have communicated with the god. It is also a gift from the Money God, because there is no penalty for not returning the money. In essence, he claimed, for people it is a sacred contract, but from the perspective of the deity, it is a gift, but then conceded that generally speaking, in peoples own minds, it is superstition. I suggested that superstitious people would return the fortune money even if they have bad luck as they are afraid of getting worse luck,



and to my surprise, Laio Zong-dong agreed; “Yes, it is because people are born good ... For the devotees, it is like an exchange or trade. For gods it is a very natural thing (to help) ... For Money God temples, the idea is that it is a free gift.”

Once again, the contract, if such exists, is self-managing, and is based on honesty and the fear of supernatural intervention in one’s own fate. According to Laio Zong-dong, from the deity’s perspective, if it is your fate to be lucky, then they should help you. If your luck is not due, then they will not help you. He claimed that in these cases, the gods will help the petitioner decrease their bad luck so that future help will be possible. “Yes, it changes your whole life. When you hit rock bottom with your luck, when you get this tiny thing (20NT), it is like a key to open the door. So, that will change your fate – your fate will start changing once you take the money.” Similarly, from the perspective of the recipient, there is an expectation that the money will bring material rewards. The expectation is legitimized by the ritual use of bue and the certificate provided by the temple when returning to pay

interest on the loan. The nature of the exchange is therefore open to analysis and the interpretation depends from whose perspective it is appraised from. In terms of visitors and profit, the number has increased steadily with an estimated 20% increase every year since 1996. The record number of visitors for a day was at Chinese New Year in 2010, when approximately 30,000 people came. In 1996 the temple received around 10,000 visits, by 2000 between 50 and 60,000 visits, and last year approaching 400,000 visits. Many of these were recipients returning to pay interest and borrow money for a second or third time, with many people coming back multiple times in a year. Laio Zong-dong claims that this is because the gods really are efficacious.

Derrida: The Paradox of the Free Gift

Derrida questioned whether giving is possible by asking if it possible to give without immediately entering into a circle of exchange that converts the gift into a debt to be repaid. This possible-impossible aporia leads Derrida through a process of deconstruction to construct a seemingly irresolvable paradox, the aporia itself at the most fundamental level of a gift’s meaning, namely, for

the gift to be accepted as a gift, it must not appear as a gift, as its mere presence as gift places it in a cycle of repayment and debt.

The aporia of the gift revolves around the paradoxical construct that a genuine gift cannot be understood to be a gift by either the giver or recipient, as once this occurs, the cycle of reciprocity and exchange begins. In the text, *Given Time* (1992), Derrida suggests that a genuine gift must reside outside of the oppositional demands of giving and taking, and as such, may not even appear to be a gift. Subsequently there must be no thanks involved, as the thanks itself is a reciprocation and will nullify the gift as a gift. According to Derrida, for a gift to exist (which by his own definition is a paradoxical impossibility), there must be no accrued benefit in giving, therefore an authentic gift requires the anonymity of the giver. There must be no reciprocity as this would establish an exchange cycle. If the giver recognizes that they are giving, that would be self-congratulatory in nature, representing a return in itself, therefore, the recipient must not perceive the gift as a gift, themselves as a recipient of a gift, or the gift giver as a giver of gifts. Therefore, whatever is given cannot in itself constitute a gift. These criteria seem to render the actuality of any pure gift impossible. Even though Derrida was addressing the sociological phenomena of the gift between persons rather than an intangible kind bestowed by spiritual beings, his gift aporia provides a constructive basis from which to analyze the exchange between the devotee and the deity.

Discussion

On the material level there is clearly no gift but a financial transaction between the temple and the devotee. However, when the role of the deity in the transaction and the intangible nature of the gifts exchanged are taken into consideration, there is clearly another level of interpretation to be explored between the mundane human world and a discarnate paranormal phenomena.

Both temples have instituted systems of exchange where a small amount of local currency sanctified by agreement with a deity is lent with the expectation of receiving a larger amount of unsanctified local currency in the future. These exchanges and social structures are firmly posited in the field of the anthropology of religion. However, New Taiwan dollars are not thought to be legal tender in the spirit world, and the idea that the devotee is simply purchasing luck from a deity with New Taiwan dollars is nonsensical in context of the prevailing

belief system. Furthermore, the amount of money is so small, that beyond purchasing a winning lottery ticket with it, there is no expectation that investing it will lead to riches.

Nonetheless, when the devotee leaves with New Taiwan dollars in their hand, the money carries the power of symbolism, representing the promise of a deity to manifest its efficacy for the benefit of the recipient. Literature provided by the temples claims that the exchange will change the recipients luck. Even where fate would have otherwise, acceptance of the fortune money was claimed to be a catalyst for better luck in the future. Interviews showed that each recipient had their own agenda and hoped that the money would help bring them luck 'xing yun' resulting in a greater degree of happiness 'xing fu' in various spheres of their lives.

In the ritual process of communicating with the deity through bue, a negotiation occurs between the two parties in the casting or recasting of the bue. The object negotiated for is the promise of 'luck' in the sense of material reality being altered by a discarnate entity, a Money God, to the extent that positive events will occur that would not have otherwise occurred, or, negative events that would have occurred are prevented from happening, both of which will change the state of the recipients wellbeing.

Luck however is a theoretical construct and beyond the subjective interpretation of events by the receiver, luck cannot be proven to have been given or received, rendering the gift intangible, invisible and immaterial. As is impossible for an individual recipient to know the alternative events which might have happened to them in event of not having been the recipient of money, it is impossible to tell if the gift of luck has materialized, i.e., if a positive event occurs after having taken the money, outside of the subjective interpretation of the recipient, it cannot be proven to have been caused by being the recipient of the gift. This renders the gift of 'luck' unrecognizable and un-differentiable from other fortunate or unfortunate events in the recipient's life, or in Derrida's terms, it is impossible for the recipient of the gift to recognize the gift as a gift.

Bue represent a means of two way communication with the spirit world, so as the devotee uses them to negotiate, adopting an emic perspective, it is reasonable to assume that the deity is also communicating through manipulation of the bue. This raises the question from the perspective of the deity of what is actually being exchanged in the

negotiation process. Although the deity is assumed to be benevolent, it is accepted that deities, like humans, have needs and desires.

As noted previously, deities can be created by the transference of ling through worship, and Laio Zong-dong echoed this concept claiming "we make the gods because we need them." Also, the classes of deities featuring in Money God exchanges increase their ling only if their images are worshipped, and as such, are reliant on human worship for their very survival. In the process of worship, recognition of a specific deity is also needed on the part of the devotee in order to send their ling and requests to the correct deity as there are always many deities present on the altars of Taiwan's temples. The silent dialogue of bai bai not only includes telling the deity one's own details, but also naming or focusing on the deity that the bai bai is intended for, thus giving the deity recognition.

From the perspective of the deity, there may be two methods of gaining greater recognition. One method is by having their statues replicated and placed in other temples thereby expanding their worship circles. On a more immediate basis, by manipulating the bue to give a large number of negative responses, a deity can increase the amount of times they are worshipped by any one devotee. Each time the devotee recasts the bue accompanied by the required bai bai, the more recognition the deity receives. A question was therefore included in the survey which asked how many times the individual had thrown the bue before gaining a positive response, and against all odds, the number averaged out at 3.8, far more than would be statistically likely. Furthermore, due perhaps to either their perceived or actual efficacy, with the exception of the very unique and local rock deity Shi Tou Gong, all the remaining Money Gods can be found in numerous temples. On the paranormal level then, the actual exchange negotiated through bue may be expressed as one of 'luck' in return for 'recognition.' However, through the process of bai bai and in giving recognition, the anonymity of both parties is lost, preventing the exchange from fulfilling all of the requirements of Derrida's 'free' gift.

Returning then to Derrida, a genuine gift cannot be understood to be a gift by either the giver or recipient. In the Money God scenario, recognition is inherent in the act of bai bai and not recognized by devotees as a gift. Moreover, Derrida claims that no thanks can be given as this is a form of reciprocity in itself. Unlike orthodox Taoism and Buddhism, the

syncretic folk religion to which these exchanges belong is not liturgical. There are no established prayers or thanks giving rituals associated with Money God temples. While bai bai is a form of worship, it is not in itself associated with thanks, and nothing in the emic exegesis of deity worship suggests that deities give thanks to their devotees for acts of worship.

A gift may not even appear to be a gift; the recipient must not perceive the gift as a gift, the gift giver as a giver of gifts, or themselves as a recipient of a gift. The secondary transaction, the physical exchange of Taiwan Dollars between the devotee and the temple performs the function of disguising the actual gifts of luck for reciprocity behind a facade of New Taiwan dollars. As a result, the actual gift no longer appears as a gift, instead being perceived as a small monetary loan to be returned with interest. The giver of the gift is not perceived as the deity but as the temple who handles the money, and the devotee perceives themselves as the recipient of a loan rather than as a recipient of a gift.

Lastly, whatever is given cannot in itself constitute a gift. By definition, the very act of giving accrues some personal loss. However, in the act of giving recognition, according to interviewees, there is no recognition of personal loss. Neither can it be shown that there is any personal loss on the part of the deity in giving luck, so if no personal loss is derived, it is 'as if' nothing has been given.

In terms of the gift exchange, the commodity luck is a subjective construct based on unknown possibilities of alternate future events that never happen, and the other commodity, recognition, is an inherent component in the act of worship with no conscious intentionality. When analysed from a paranthropological perspective, on the transcendent level associated with paranormal phenomena, the exchange consequently approaches a close approximation of Derrida's 'free' gift.

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Personal Interviews

Mr. Chen, vice manager of She Liao Village Zi Nan Gong

Laio Zong-dong, co-founder of Shi Ding Wu Lu Cai Shen Miao

Twenty interviews with accompanying surveys at each temple with devotees either borrowing or returning lucky money



Fabian Graham has travelled to more than fifty countries and learned about their traditions, and where possible, participated in local culture. In 2005 he re-entered academia, and studied for an MA in Taiwan and wrote a thesis 'Faith and Temple Tradition.

Researching the Utilitarian Nature of Popular Religion in Taiwan. He then studied for a second master's degree in Social Anthropology at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, where he continued to research Chinese religion. His thesis 'An Interpretation of Popular Chinese Religion in

Taiwan' reexamined the previous academic literature on Chinese popular religion and spirit medium practices in Taiwan. At present, he is undertaking ethnographic research for his PhD in Social Anthropology at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS). His thesis is a comparison of spirit medium practices in Singapore and Taiwan focusing on conversations with deities tranced through spirit mediums, rituals performed by them and related paranormal phenomena.



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Proceeding With Caution: What Went Wrong? The Death and Rebirth of Essential Science¹

Charles T. Tart

A number of things went wrong during the formation of the modern worldview that is now referred to as the scientific revolution.² First of all, science had to work very hard to allow itself to come into existence against the power of the Church. The Church was a highly authoritarian system that did not want people thinking on their own. Science on the other hand had to separate itself from the agenda of the Church by saying that it was not going to deal with anything spiritual—they were just going to look at the physical facts that can be observed and measured in terms of quantitative analysis. The Church was not invested in this way of approaching understanding, which helped to provide science with an opportunity to pursue its questions about the physical world. But then science became attached to perceiving reality as nothing more than this physical world.

Second, science has been very successful in creating the applied technology that we have used to construct our modern world. The third thing that helped science gain a foothold is that we [worked toward the development of] a psychology that dealt with the human mind. In the early days people tried to do this; in the 1800s people tried to develop a science of mind, and it did not work.

One laboratory could not observe the same thing as another; people got into terrible quarrels over whether the smell of ammonia had a brownish tinge or a reddish visual tinge to it. Early scientists did not understand the importance of individual differences, about the way people become biased to prove their own theories, and people involved in these early efforts to create the academic investigation of psychology also wanted to win status as a real science.

Even today it has not been more than 150 years since psychology has become a separate discipline from philosophy, and many psychologists are afraid this trend will reverse itself. Consequently, psychologists often overcompensate in trying to appear like a real science. I too have found myself doing this. When I used to have camera crews come into my lab; I would stand in front of my machinery with the lights on and wear a white lab coat if I had to. *This is part of the politics of science.* So we ended up with a science that got married to a philosophy of materialism, that says only what is physical is real,

therefore these spiritual experiences that we sometimes hear about are nonsense; these are merely neural-chemical patterns in the brain.

Thus, or consequently, if any of us has an ecopsychological unitary mystical experience where you feel that you are at one with all life on this planet, and then naturally want to treat it decently, this kind of experience can be reduced to a malfunction of our brain chemistry. This is the way that scientism distinguishes it, or reinterprets the experience, to fit into its mechanistic paradigm.

In addition, because science has been so successful, a lot of arrogance has developed. Not that arrogance is in any way unique to science, but it has its special form of it. Well, maybe this is not even special, maybe whatever field that someone is in you feel superior to everyone else that is not a specialist in whatever field you have become established.

So we got this arrogance that the physical world is the only thing that is worth studying, that this is what a real scientific explanation is, and the result is *scientism*. A slight caveat on this discussion. I was recently credited with coining the word *scientism*, but this is not true. Back in the early 19th century, sociologists were talking about *scientism* when they recognized that for a lot of scientists, the practice of science was no longer a method for trying to refine our knowledge about reality. It became an arrogant agenda where we basically figured out everything important, and we could ignore all of the worldviews that did not fit. It had become an *ism*; it had become a religion.³ In terms of working with transpersonal psychology, with ecopsychology, and the like, essential science is not the enemy; arrogant scientism is the enemy. This is the thing that invalidates people, and that stimulates just our physical needs, and so on.

Four Ways of Knowing: Toward an Outline of Essential Science⁴

When I think about ways of understanding more about the world, for simplicity I have divided them into four major ways to do it. *The first is the way of direct experience.* There is the old saying, “he who tastes knows.” This is not a bad aphorism, except did you ever know anyone that had lots of relevant experiences and did

not learn a damn thing from them? I will not ask for any hands or testimonials of personal experience. So it is really like direct experience is pretty good, and it gives us an opportunity to learn, but learning is not guaranteed. Another traditional method of learning, or of science, is what I call *the way of authority*. If you want to know why things are the way they are you ask an authority, and the authority tells you. Anyone ever been disappointed in what authorities have told you? Yeah, no point in raising all the hands. Authority is useful. If I want to fix my plumbing and I do not know what to do, I am happy to read a book by a plumbing authority, or ask a plumber. I do not want to have to invent the wheel from scratch every time. Still on the other hand, we cannot always rely totally on authority.

A third major way of learning, or genuine science, is *the way of reason*. We will take the situation that puzzles us, and we will think about it logically, and we will figure out the way things really are. Not bad, and a very useful method in a variety of ways, but has any one ever found that our perfectly clear logical reasoning has sort of lead you astray in certain ways? Okay, again we all seem to be in agreement. Now, of course, reasoning is one of the highest gifts of humankind and it is almost never used. What is usually done is *rationalization*; nevertheless even pure reason has its limitations.

There is then a fourth way of genuine science or learning that really appeals to us that I refer to as *the way of revelation*. This method of knowing requires us to get into some kind of altered state of consciousness and bingo, you have the truth. God tells you directly, or the cosmos reveals it, and there is no doubt whatsoever that this is the truth. It feels wonderful. Anyone ever had an experience like this and later found out that the information was wrong? Yeah, this is a true sign of personal growth. I mean the feeling of revelation is extraordinary, but just because we feel something is true is no guarantee that it is going to work to solve our problems all of the time.

These four aspects of genuine science, or learning, are all in their various ways useful and each has its drawbacks. So science was a wonderful attempt to combine the best of each of these ways of knowing and compensate for the drawbacks. Again, we start with the motivation of curiosity, we would like more control over life, but you had better add a little character trait of humility. Of not being too charmed with how smart you are if you really want to combine these four ways of knowing. The result is that we come up with a process I like to refer to as *essential science*, a process that constitutes these four

ways of knowing which represents “the social nature of knowledge refinement” (Tart 2009: 49).

Spirituality Needs Science

Therefore, the last point I want to make is that *spirituality needs science*, it needs it badly: it needs essential science. Now, it is nice to say that if you have a unitive mystical experience and really feel at one with the cosmos, this will make you a much better citizen of this planet. But how many people have these kind of experiences? Or, if we try to teach this kind of experience, what percentage are going to succeed? One percent, or less than one percent? I mean how many people have pursued enlightenment since the very beginning of humankind with great spiritual masters? Thousands, perhaps millions, so the planet must be overflowing with enlightened people. The teaching of mystical transpersonal experience has not been very efficient. We still do not know what to do to help people experience life in this way. But there are things that we can research.

As I mentioned briefly in my presentation yesterday on enlightenment, meditation is not learned very effectively (Tart 2004). A meditation friend of mine, Shin Zing Young, points out that if a hundred people say they have learned something about meditation, and are going to make it a part of their life, this is what often happens. If you come back a year later to see what these people are doing, and 5% of them are still meditating, you are doing well by the standards of meditation teachers. Well, I am sorry, but this is not acceptable. A school with a 95% flunk out rate does not have an efficient method of teaching its knowledge and practices. We can research how to become more effective in teaching this kind of so-called spiritual training. Most spiritual teachers teach the way they were taught by their teacher, which was the way they were taught by their teacher, and so forth. We are a global culture now; we need to find out what works best for what kind of people.

And if we can eventually find out how to induce mystical experiences in a lot of people, the whole environmental movement is going to change. This is because it is no longer going to be a “moral should” that we ought to live a certain way (since in the meantime you are going to die, there is no real point to life, and you are scared, so get yours while you can). This perspective is going to change because a lot of people are naturally and intelligibly going to treat the world and each other as something to be valued intrinsically. In the long run then, a lot of us have rebelled against scientism since it was

invalidating us, and/or because it was eliminating something essential. Whereby we become involved in various spiritual systems, and we are still charmed by these spiritual systems. My guru wears a bigger turban than your guru and says more profound things.

In point of fact, most spiritual systems have many ways in which they could be improved and have areas in which they have no answers or the wrong answers. Thus they need more research, they need an enlightened kind of science to broaden their horizons and make them more effective. Whenever we are able to create this kind of science, I think things are really going to begin to change in our world. Meanwhile we do what we can. So this is my pitch for *the science archetype toward reforming science*.

Notes

¹ This article was transcribed and edited by Mark A. Schroll from Dr. Tart's presentation June 16, 2004, at the 16th International Transpersonal Association conference at the Riviera Hotel, Palm Springs, California, USA, as part of the symposium organized and moderated by Mark A. Schroll: Animism, Shamanism, and Ethnobotany: Ecospsychology's Link with the Transpersonal. This article is reprinted with revisions from the *AHP-Perspective*, June/July, 6-7, 2009, Conference Presentation: What Went Wrong? The Death and Rebirth of Essential Science, by Charles T. Tart, published by the Association for Humanistic Psychology, ahpweb.org.

² A comprehensive overview of "what went wrong" can be found in Tarnas (1991).

³ Tart points out that scientism "never recognizes itself as a limited belief system but always thinks of itself as true science, or the noble search for truth, the confusion is often pernicious" (Tart 2009: 192-193).

⁴ This section was eventually revised by Tart, and became the section "Ways of Knowing" (Tart 2009: 38-42).

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Dr. Charles T. Tart has been involved with research and theory in the fields of Hypnosis, Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology, Parapsychology, Consciousness and Mindfulness since 1963. He has authored over a dozen books, two of which became widely used textbooks; he has had more than 250 articles published in professional journals and books, including lead articles in such prestigious scientific journals as

Science and Nature, and provides regular public speaking appearances.

Commentary

I first met Charley at a PA conference in St Louis in 1978 – I think – and for a few years after that at PA conferences. He inspired me greatly and was (well, still is!) one of my parapsychology heroes, particularly his books on Altered States and Transpersonal Psychology, which were both right at the forefront of research into those areas.

My PhD dealt with altered states of consciousness and psychic awareness and I haven't really deviated far from those topics. One of Charley's teachings that I took on board is what he calls State Specific science. In order to truly research a subject you need to be in the state of consciousness of that particular subject. Hence, in my recent work with yogis in an ashram in India, and then with Tibetan Buddhist monks in monasteries in India, I have attempted to participate as far as possible in the practices and lifestyle of the participants I have been working with.

For me parapsychology is one method of exploring one of the fundamental aspects of most spiritual systems. For example, in shamanic teachings one goes into an altered state in order to go into your spirit body so as to overcome the evil spirit that is causing the persons' sickness, or for connecting with the spirit world and traveling to obtain information unattainable by any other means. In Yogic and Buddhist teachings they are very clear that, whilst psychic abilities can be a distraction on the path to enlightenment, one cannot actually become enlightened without having come to terms with these abilities and their attendant problems. So I have always considered parapsychology to be an integral part of transpersonal psychology and spirituality.

The other teaching from Charley is his take on what he calls the 'fear of psi.' Our western culture is so afraid of psi that many city people, and most

academics, deny its very existence. Christians say it is evil. Westerners in general are very conflicted about psi. This is a deep-rooted cultural fear and it affects our ability to experience psychic phenomena. In my work I am coming across this in a very dramatic way. Working in India with yogis, and with Tibetans, their main concern was about doing science, which they considered to be antithetical to spirituality. They *lived* psi, so that wasn't a problem. Working now with Westerners I am coming across exactly the opposite -- they have no problem with doing the science -- it's the psi that is showing up the fears and blocks!

I always read everything I can that Charley has written -- he is a truly great teacher. I encourage everyone else to seek out his many books and articles -- you will most definitely find many priceless pearls.

Serena Roney-Dougal



Obituary - **William G. Roll** **(1926-2012)**

Roll moved from Denmark to the United States in 1946, aged 20, and enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts at the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in psychology and philosophy. Following this he spent a number of years at Oxford University doing parapsychology research, where he received his M. Litt. degree for a thesis entitled "Theory and Experiment in Psychical Research." In 1957, Roll joined the staff of J.B. Rhine's Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University, where he spent seven years conducting psi experiments and investigating cases of haunting and RSPK/poltergeist activity, for which he is perhaps most well-known. In 1989, Roll received his Ph.D. from Lund University, Sweden, for a thesis entitled "This World or That: An Examination of Parapsychological Findings Suggestive of the Survival of Human Personality After Death."

During his career Roll wrote more than 100 scientific papers, authored four books, was President of the Parapsychological Association, and in 2002 was awarded the Dinsdale Memorial Award by the Society for Scientific Investigation. Roll remained active in paranormal research right up until his passing -- in fact, on the date of his passing the journal *Neurocase* posted the abstract for a new article

of which he was lead author: "Case Report: A Prototypical Experience of 'Poltergeist' Activity, Conspicuous Quantitative Electroencephalographic Patterns, and sLORETA Profiles -- Suggestions for Intervention":

"People who report objects moving in their presence, unusual sounds, glows around other people, and multiple sensed presences but do not meet the criteria for psychiatric disorders have been shown to exhibit electrical anomalies over the right temporal lobes. This article reports the striking quantitative electroencephalography, sLORETA results, and experimental elicitation of similar subjective experiences in a middle-aged woman who has been distressed by these classic phenomena that began after a head injury. She exhibited a chronic electrical anomaly over the right temporoinsular region. The rotation of a small pinwheel near her while she 'concentrated' upon it was associated with increased coherence between the left and right temporal lobes and concurrent activation of the left prefrontal region. The occurrence of the unusual phenomena and marked 'sadness' was associated with increased geomagnetic activity; she reported a similar mood when these variations were simulated experimentally. Our quantitative measurements suggest people displaying these experiences and possible anomalous energies can be viewed clinically and potentially treated."

Vale Willam Roll...may you be discovering the truth of it all as we speak.
Greg Taylor

Transpersonal Anthropology: What Is It, and What Are the Problems we Face Doing It?

Charles D. Laughlin

Science in general, and anthropology in particular, is in a period of rapid change. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, this change has led us away from a mechanistic, hyper-rational conception of science and toward a more holistic, self-reflexive and perhaps less ethnocentric conception of science. Before this period of change, most scientists were fairly clear about what they were on about: science was seen as a means of solving problems while remaining itself largely non-problematic. The project of science was the explanation of facts, and facts were almost palpable things that fairly crunched when you stepped on them, and that were discovered by objective, public and easily replicable methods.

Science is now a bit more insecure regarding what its on about. Science has come to view the process of inquiry itself as problematic, and has produced at least two principal trends from this revolutionary adjustment of view: (1) a shift from a fragmented, mechanistic, non-purposive conception of the world to a holistic, organic and purposive conception; for example, as in systems theory, and (2) a shift from a concern with objectivity to a concern with subjectivity — that is, with the role of perception and cognition in scientific inquiry.

Anthropology has not been immune from these developments. Indeed, anthropology from at least the turn of the century has been a bastion of positivist and empiricist science. Ethnographies have all too frequently been collections of "ethnographic facts" about the behaviors and institutions of societies, and seem to lose track of human experience. It was only after structuralism began to take hold in the early 1970s that concern with more existential issues such as experience, cognition, consciousness and symbolism began to shift from the wings to center stage. Concerns which were once considered marginal in interest, like performance, myth, healing, trance states, etc., became phenomena of prime concern to anthropologists, both in fieldwork and in theory construction. And it was in the midst of this reorientation that the transpersonal movement began to make some slight headway in anthropology.

Transpersonalism in Anthropology

Transpersonalism is a movement in science toward seeing the significance as data of experiences had in life that somehow go beyond the boundaries of ordinary ego-

consciousness. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan in their book, *Beyond Ego*, use the term *transpersonal* to "reflect the reports of people practicing various consciousness disciplines who spoke of experiences of an extension of identity beyond both individuality and personality" (1980:16). When we take the whole of humanity into account, there seems to be a remarkable range of such experiences. The *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* lists a number of these in the preface to each issue: transpersonalism may be said to encompass "transpersonal process, values and states, unitive consciousness, meta-needs, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, being, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, transcendence of self, spirit, sacralization of everyday life, oneness, cosmic awareness, cosmic play, individual and species-wide synergy, the theories and practices of meditation, spiritual paths, compassion, transpersonal cooperation, transpersonal realization and actualization; and related concepts, experiences and activities." In a more theoretically concise way, Kenneth Ring (1974, 1976) has developed a typology of transpersonal experiences, grouping these into expanding concentric rings from normal waking consciousness in the middle (the most narrow field of human experience), through what he terms preconscious, psychodynamic, orthogenetic, trans-individual, phylogenetic, extraterrestrial, and superconsciousness, to void consciousness at the periphery (progressively more expansive fields of experience).

As recognized disciplines, transpersonal psychology dates to the latter 1960s and transpersonal anthropology to the mid-1970's. Transpersonal anthropology is simply the cross-cultural study of the psychological and sociocultural significance of transpersonal experiences. "Transpersonal anthropological research is the investigation of the relationship between consciousness and culture, altered states of mind research, and the inquiry into the integration of mind, culture and personality" (Campbell and Staniford 1978:28). Although quite recent as a formally organized discipline in anthropology, interest in transpersonal experiences dates back to the nineteenth century and the work of Edward Tylor who is often considered the "father of anthropology" and who was very interested in dreaming and the origins of religion, and Andrew Lang who was

interested in the psychology of the paranormal. Andrew Lang was in fact one of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research in England, an organization that later drew the interest of both Jung and Freud.

Transpersonalism and Ethnographic Fieldwork

Anthropologists have routinely recorded data on extraordinary beliefs and experiences reported by informants, as well as on religious institutions and ritual practices associated with such experiences. All the same, some researchers have argued that western science does not pay enough credence to the importance of such experiences to the study of psychology and culture, and a number of these have even suggested that there exist universal structures resulting in similar transpersonal experiences among people all over the world.

A few ethnographers have undergone spontaneous transpersonal experiences while in the field. Geoffrey Gorer for instance reported such an experience in his book, *Africa Dances*. He found himself in a large gathering of people that included a famous Dahomeyan shaman. At one point he met the shaman's gaze: "I felt that for some reason it was necessary for me to meet his gaze and I continued staring at him across a space of about thirty yards til all the surrounding people and the landscape became an indistinct blur and his face seemed preternaturally distinct and as it were detached from his body and nearer to me physically than it was in reality. I wondered whether I was being hypnotized..." (1935:131).

More recently, Bruce Grindal (1983) has reported a profound experience which occurred to him while attending a Sisala funeral in Ghana in 1967. After undergoing several days of arduous privation involving fasting, loss of sleep, physical ordeal, and the like, Grindal entered a state of consciousness in which he perceived the corpse come alive and dance and play drums, as well as seeing radiant energy streaming from the corpse and other people attending the rite. According to him, this experience also occurred to some of the Sisala.

However, looking back over the history of ethnology, few fieldworkers have actually made a serious effort to produce alternative states of consciousness in themselves; this despite evidence that people in many, if not most, human cultures believe in cosmic realms the reality of which is commonly verified by way of experiences in alternative states of consciousness. It may well be argued that this oversight on the part of anthropologists is not accidental, but in fact is due to a bias born of enculturation to what we may call "monophasic" consciousness characteristic of Euroamerican societies.

Is it not interesting that while ethnographers are trained to participate in native activities and observe their significance from the intimate stance of "insider," so few have found it worthwhile trying to enter the alternative states of consciousness so important to many peoples?

Despite this bias, a few fieldworkers have attempted to attain alternative states of consciousness in order to advance their understanding of the culture or phenomenon being researched: these include Coult (n.d.) who attempted to establish a field he called "psychedelic anthropology;" Harner (1973) who worked on hallucinogens and religion; Chagnon's (1977:154ff) experiment with shamanic dance and chanting; and David-Neel's (1971) work among Tibetan lamas that involved extensive meditation. Some fieldworkers like Katz (1982:6ff) have reported participating in ritual practices intended to produce such experiences, but without attaining the intended state (or failing to report it if it was attained).

The relative poverty of attempts to enter alternative states of consciousness recorded in the ethnographic literature, and the seemingly paradoxical current interest in our own society about such states, underscores the importance to anthropology of several methodological issues: (1) the mind-body problem, (2) the question of what constitutes a "public" event, (3) the cross-cultural comparability of descriptions of transpersonal experiences, (4) the difficulty of constructing an adequate "phenomenological typewriter," and (5) symbolism and transpersonal fieldwork.

The Perennial Mind-Body Problem

With the shift toward greater self-reflection in science has come a renewed interest in the perennial question of the relationship between mind and body. At the very roots of this persistent problem is an inherent tendency toward mind-body dualism in Euroamerican culture. We westerners are enculturated to think of mental events as somehow distinct from physical events. Developing a stable methodology for moving perceptually and conceptually between the mental and physical domains has never proved easy, either in philosophy or in science. We even split-up the scientific disciplines according to these two domains with physics, chemistry and biology being on about the "physical" world, and sociology, economics, linguistics, anthropology, and-so-on being concerned with the "mental" world.

There have been a variety of solutions posed for the mind-body problem. Some theorists solve it by claiming that mind is spirit and essentially non-causal in nature, and therefore outside the province of the physical sciences. Some extremely materialistic schools of

anthropological theory, such as some forms of Marxist analysis, might exemplify this type of solution. Others like the behaviorists in psychology have virtually denied any existence of mind other than as sets of dispositions to behave. In anthropology, some brands of non-psychological structural-functionalism would seem to be solutions of this sort.

Central-State Materialism and the "New" Epiphenomenalism

But of the various philosophical points of view, only two really hold sway as serious positions in current science. These have been called by Campbell (1984) "central-state materialism" and the "new epiphenomenalism." Central-state materialism holds that all mental and physical events are "reducible" to the laws of the physical sciences. That is, the physical sciences are considered complete explanations for all conditions arising either in mentation or in behavior (this view includes many so-called "identity theories" of mind and brain). Materialistic theories of culture in anthropology often depend upon a central state materialism for their formulation.

The new epiphenomenalism holds (along with the "old" epiphenomenalism of the nineteenth century) that mental and physical events exist in two distinct domains, but some (never all!) mental events exist in a causal relationship with physical events. The structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss might provide an example of new epiphenomenalism in anthropology.

Transpersonal Anthropology and the Mind-Body Problem

The position of transpersonal anthropologists is often vague and inexplicit with respect to the mind-body issue. Yet it is of major methodological importance, for how one "gets at what's happening in the native's head" — something every fieldworker wants to be able to do — depends a great deal upon how one conceives of the relationship between external physical events (like behavior, speech, institutions, technologies) and internal mental events (like sensations, images, thoughts, intuitions and moods). For example, transpersonalists will want to argue that participation in certain types of ritual techniques, music, dance and drama may produce alternative states of consciousness. Yet the nature of the causality involved is often obscure: Are alternative states of consciousness merely passive effects of physical causes? Are such states epiphenomena separate from, but simultaneous with, physical states? Are out-of-body experiences due to this epiphenomenal relationship, or are all such experiences occurring within the "inner

space" of the brain and body? And what are we to make of claims for extraordinary effects of mind upon physical matter (i.e., psychokinesics)?

All such questions arise in part from a dualistic conception of mind and body, and how one evaluates them depends to some extent upon how one resolves the mind-body problem. For what it is worth, the author rejects both central-state materialism and the new epiphenomenalism as inappropriate to a modern and sophisticated science of consciousness. Rather, he believes that mind and body (including experience and behavior) are two imperfect ways of perceiving and knowing our being. "Spiritual" awareness is one way of knowing our being, "physical" awareness is another way of knowing our being. Neither the spiritual disciplines (theology, parapsychology, transpersonal anthropology), nor the physical disciplines (physics, chemistry, physiology, physical anthropology), can claim to be complete explanations of the full breadth of human experience (as demanded by central-state materialism). Furthermore, consciousness does not neatly divide itself into spiritual (non-causal) and mundane (causal) attributes (as required for the new epiphenomenalism). For instance, calming meditations and other spiritual techniques (mental processes) are known to produce a change in the autonomic nervous system balance in the body (physical processes).

Anthropologists, as human naturalists, have been understandably reluctant to buy into behaviorism during its heyday in psychology. Nevertheless, anthropologists have commonly been more than a little behaviorist in their approaches to things cultural, including religion. Whole volumes are written about religious ceremonies as sets of behaviors and mythologies as texts that contain little or no information pertaining to the experiences of people involved in those institutions. More unfortunate, the ethnographer frequently will mask his/her ignorance of (say) shamanic experience by the glib use of labels such as "trance," "vision quest" or "dissociative state" that appear to have descriptive power, but which to the transpersonalist indicates that the fieldworker has not actually experienced these states. We would suggest that a good bit of the resistance to the transpersonal project becomes more understandable if one looks carefully at attitudes pertaining to the mind-body problem prevailing in the discipline and in the enculturation lying behind the personal lives of ethnographers.

What is a Public Event?

Our traditional view of science demanded that the results of research be totally available to public scrutiny and replication, and not be dependent upon private

observations. In those days a clear and formularized distinction seemed possible between what constituted a public event and what constituted a private event. The existence of objective perception was taken for granted and ideally formed the observational ideal of all science. An event was public and of relevance to science if it could be shared by any and all observers. Any event that could not be shared by all observers was considered "subjective" and of no relevance to science. "Subjectivity," of course, included any truths about the nature of consciousness derived from introspection.

However, with an increasingly reflexive psychological and sociological perspective in the critique of science, researchers have begun to show that there exists a reciprocal feedback relationship between cognition and perception. Many explorations of the scientific enterprise now include the process of observation in their analyses: To what extent does theory as ideology produce a controlling influence upon what a scientist can or does see, and of equal importance, what a scientist cannot or does not see?

State-Specific Science

The serious examination of the role of conditioned perception in establishing the limits of scientific inquiry has led to (among other issues) the consideration of state-specific science. Is it possible, as theorists like Charles Tart have suggested, that the nature of reality being observed is determined to some extent by the state of consciousness of the observer? Is it not one of the functions of a scientific education to limit the scope of reality perceived and incorporated by any scientific perspective? If so, does not science in its best and broadest sense require scientists to be trained to enter all relevant states of consciousness so as to observe reality in its greatest perspective?

Certainly, what constitutes a "public," as opposed to a "private" event must now come under serious question: If an event is readily observable by those capable of entering a particular state of consciousness, even when most scientists are in fact incapable of entering that state, then does that not still constitute a "public" event? If members of another society routinely experience an alternative state of consciousness, is it not then a public event? And is not knowledge derived within that state publically available, whether or not the anthropologist is able to attain that state? Yet from another point of view, are not all observations ultimately "private?" Is there not a great deal of enculturation required before people in whatever mindstate come to agree upon exactly what reality they are experiencing?

Cross-Cultural Comparability

Amidst the hue and cry against the traditional view of science are to be found the writings of Paul Feyerabend who (among other things) brought into serious question the idea, implicit in objectivist science, that observational descriptions retain the same meaning bereft of their original theoretical context. In other words, the nature of our theoretical (we might also say conceptual and cultural) point of view stands in a reciprocally causal relationship with our descriptions of experience. Feyerabend was thus posing the philosophical equivalent of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis: not only does perception influence language and thought, but language and thought to some extent influence perception.

This hypothesis has profound implications for transpersonal science, for the transpersonal enterprise is nothing less than the exploration of the fullest possible range of human experience. In order for this enterprise to flourish, we must come to understand clearly the relationship between our point of view and both our experiences and the description of our experiences. The days are long gone when we as scientists can naively presume to offer "objective" observations somehow magically unaffected by our conceptual, perceptual, affective and somatic orientations. This is especially true in the case of anthropologists who offer observations and interpretations of their fellow human beings.

Transpersonal Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Comparability

As if inter-theoretical comparability of meaning was not enough trouble, there is for anthropologists the additional problem of establishing transcultural comparability of transpersonal experiences. To what extent do peoples of different societies practicing similar (or even different) ritual techniques encounter similar experiences?

Let us develop a rather elaborate example: Richard Katz (1976, 1982) describes for the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa a "transcendental experience" called !kia, an extraordinary state of consciousness during which:

...a !Kung experiences himself as existing beyond his ordinary level of existence. !Kia itself is a very intense physical and emotional state. The body is straining against fatigue and struggling with convulsion-like tremors and heavy breathing. The emotions are aroused to an extraordinary level, whether they be fear or exhilaration or fervor. Also, a !Kung practices extraordinary activities during !kia. He performs cures, handles and walks

on fire, claims x-ray vision, and at times says he sees over great distances. He does not even attempt such activities in his ordinary state. (Katz 1976:287)

The !kia mindstate is attained through the mastery of n/um, an "energy" that the Bushmen say dwells in the pit of the stomach. Individuals are known to master this energy which may be evoked by repetitious dancing. "As the master of n/um continues his energetic dance, becoming warm and sweating profusely, the n/um heats up and becomes a vapor. It then rises up the spine, to a point approximately at the base of the skull, at which time !kia results" (Katz 1976:286). According to one of Katz's informant-adepts:

You dance, dance, dance, dance. The n/um lifts you in your belly and lifts you in your back, and then you start to shiver. N/um makes you tremble; it's hot. Your eyes are open but you don't look around; you hold your eyes still and look straight ahead. But when you get into !kia, you're looking around because you see everything, because you see what's troubling everybody...Rapid shallow breathing, that's what draws n/um up...then n/um enters every part of your body, right to the tip of your feet and even your hair....In your backbone you feel a pointed something, and it works its way up. Then the base of your spine is tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling...and then it makes your thoughts nothing in your head. (Katz 1976: 286-287)

Now, a similar phenomenon has been described among Hindu yogis who recognize the existence of a primal, infinite source of psychic energy called kundalini which is considered by them to be the font of all religious states of consciousness:

Thus the rousing of the Kundalini is the one and only way to the attaining of divine wisdom, superconscious perception, realization of the Spirit. The rousing may come in various ways: through love for God, through the mercy of perfected sages, or through the power of the analytical will of the philosopher. Wherever there has been any manifestation of what is ordinarily called supernatural power or wisdom, there a little current of the Kundalini must have found its way into the Sushumna [central channel]. (Vivekananda 1956: 58)

The goal of yogic practice is to open the central channel (which runs up the center of the body just in front of the spine) of the psychic energy body to the kundalini energy. "When the current begins to rise through the Sushumna, we go beyond the senses, and our minds become supersensuous, superconscious; we go beyond even the intellect, where reason cannot reach" (ibid:63). There exist a number of major energy centers lying along the central channel, but the most important are the kundalini center at the base of the spine and the highest center in the head. The energy must pass from the lower center to the higher center for the highest state of consciousness to arise. To this end yogis practice a number of techniques involving breathing and rhythmic physical exercise to loosen and direct the kundalini energies.

The question is, to what extent are the !Kung n/um and the Indian kundalini experiences comparable? Are they essentially the same experience coming to us via different cultural filters, or are they essentially different experiences with apparent commonalities only at the level of cultural coding? Furthermore, how can we know for sure? Again, how one encounters this issue depends to some extent upon how one conceives of the mind-body relationship. Obviously if one denies any causal interaction between mind and body – in this case between direct experience on the one hand, and reports, legends, myths, and other cultural artifacts coming to us via language and other symbolism on the other hand – then one is limited to time honored historical and structural-functional interpretations of commonalities, for there is no compelling reason to raise questions about the precise qualities of direct experience. However, non-dualists will likely conclude that commonalities found in cultural description may point to essential similarities in experience.

Competing Explanations for Cross-Cultural Similarities

We would suggest that there are available in anthropology today at least three approaches to comparisons such as the !Kung and Indian cases, and they grade from the most common, but least powerful and persuasive, to the least common, but most powerful and persuasive: (1) *Comparative Method*. Methods like Fred Eggan's (1954) controlled comparison and Goldschmidt's (1966) comparative functionalism recognize common features in cross-cultural comparison and offer explanations for these on the basis of social and cultural dynamics (like previous historical contact or joint origin, or on the basis of functional necessity). (2) *Structuralism*. Methods such as Levi-Strauss' (1964) myth analysis recognize common features and principles in textual material cross-culturally

and deduce an explanation based upon universal properties of the human mind. (3) *Phenomenology*. Methods like Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology (see Rasmussen 1971) recognize common features in cultural materials and explain these by reference to similarities in direct experience. Only when one has experienced the reality intended by the text can one claim to truly understand the meaning of the text.

Comparative methods are weak because they virtually deny the existence of mind in their formulations, and little reference is made to the importance of individual experience. Analysis remains at the level of artifact, and there is little recognition of the symbolic function of artifacts. Structuralism does recognize the relevance of mind, but is strictly a deductive exercise geared to uncovering universal logical principles operating in the symbolic process. No reference is made to the relationship between symbolism and direct experience. Finally, phenomenology both recognizes the existence of mind and lodges explanations of meaning in the tension (or "dialectic") between artifact and experience.

The Power of Phenomenology

The power of the phenomenological approach, particularly to transpersonal states of consciousness, is in the independence gained from text in carrying out our analyses. The approach recognizes the finger-moon relationship so commonly encountered in esoteric disciplines: the finger points to the moon, one may need the finger to find the moon, but the meaning of the pointing is the moon, and when the moon is seen, the finger is no longer required. The person who has not seen the moon may be confused by the different forms of pointing (stick, finger, arrow, line, tower, etc.), and may even build typologies of pointers, develop theories to account for similarities and differences among pointers, develop methods to recover the "meaning" of pointers. However, once the moon itself has been seen, then the seer becomes independent of the pointer and at the same time can readily comprehend any and every form of pointing-to-the-moon. The knowledge of the moon, as it were, recognizes itself in the symbolism of diverse cultural systems. The phenomenological method, then, is simply participation in pointing-at-the-moon until the moon itself is seen. This is the kind of research referred to as the "hermeneutical" method in phenomenology.

The author has done fieldwork among Tibetan monastics in Nepal, India and elsewhere, and has himself practiced their form of tantric yoga for years, including some work on dumo yoga. Dumo is the Tibetan equivalent to kundalini, and is considered in some versions of Tibetan Buddhism to be the fundamental

practice for all higher forms of yoga. Experiences have arisen during the course of dumo yoga practice similar to those described by various authorities for kundalini (indeed, the Tibetan form of the yoga originated with Hindu tantrism), and as described by Katz for !Kung. Please notice the recognition is based upon *knowledge gleaned from direct experience* of dumo work, not by reading about it, or analyzing the reports of others who have experienced it (although these sources are of considerable scholarly value).

An advantage of direct experience is that one can see through the cultural filters of style, metaphor and custom to the essence of the experience in virtually any circumstance. For what one has done is work back through the cultural filters as media (or "pointers") to the direct experience (the "moon") produced by structures that are universal to humanity. Having had the experience of being engulfed in fiery light, bliss, visions and illumination while carrying out dumo yoga retreats, the author can intuitively sense the essential commonality between the description given of the experiences had by Indians and the !Kung noted above.

The Phenomenological Typewriter

An issue allied to that of cross-cultural comparability of experience is the problem of the "phenomenological typewriter." Presuming that anthropologists, by means of participant observation, successfully attain the experiences intended by mythic drama, ordeal, vision quest, ritual and other aspects of an alien culture's esoteric symbolism, how then do they describe those experiences so that the experiences become publicly available data? There are those who argue that the higher the state of consciousness, the more ineffable the experience. Others would argue that no experience is outside the capacity of linguistic description. We would like to steer a course between these extreme positions, for the former is both too cut-and-dried and cultish to be scientifically useful and the latter seems pretentious and naive.

The Problem of Transposition

In a very real sense all experience entails an ineffable quality. No matter how skilled one is in communication, one always recognizes a discrepancy between direct experience and experience communicated vicariously to others using some form of symbolic expression like language, pictures or mime. As George Herbert Mead taught, communication between people, even of the same society, involves a process of adjusting cognition ("attitude") of all participants in relationship to an exchange of symbols. The interest of the communicant is

the transmission of experience vicariously to other communicants, and must inevitably contend with the discrepancy between the relative richness of experiencing and the relative poverty of expressing what has been experienced. One way to conceive of this discrepancy is in terms of *transposition*:

...we are all quite familiar with this kind of transposition or adaptation from a richer to a poorer medium. The most familiar example of all is the art of drawing. The problem here is to represent a three dimensional world on a flat sheet of paper. The solution is perspective, and perspective means that we must give more than one value to a two-dimensional shape. Thus in a drawing of a cube we use an acute angle to represent what is a right angle in the real world. But elsewhere an acute angle on the paper may represent what was already an acute angle in the real world: for example, the point of a spear or the gable of a house. The very same shape which you must draw to give the illusion of a straight road receding from the spectator is also the shape you draw for a dunce's cap. As with the lines, so with the shading. Your brightest light in the picture is, in literal fact, only plain white paper: and this must do for the sun, or a lake in evening light, or snow, or human flesh (C.S. Lewis 1965:75ff)

The key to our understanding the problem of transposition is to be found in the phrase "adaptation from a richer to a poorer medium." This is because in order for an adequate transposition from a "rich" to a "poor" medium to occur, there must be knowledge of the former as the intended meaning of the latter - or as Lewis says, "It is clear that ...what is happening in the lower medium can be understood only if we know the higher medium" (ibid:82). The issue of the phenomenological typewriter arises precisely because all symbolic expressions may be considered as "poor" media relative to the experiences being expressed, or the experiences being evoked, by symbols. In other words, symbolization in natural human communication is never more than finger-pointing, never the moon itself.

This point must be repeatedly emphasized: the intended meaning of symbols is never greater than the optimal cognitive and experiential associations evoked by the symbols in the individual mind. Yet the cognitive and experiential reality unfolding in any human mind is far richer than any symbolic medium can possibly describe. The exclamation, "Swimming is fun!" has relatively little meaning to one who has never been in the water,

relatively more to one who has swum, and a great deal more to one who is an Olympic-class swimmer. There are severe limits to how much information about the experience of swimming can be communicated by a professional swimmer to a person who has never been near the water, no matter what symbolic system is being used. And yet remarkably little symbolic communication is required between swimmers to evoke the intersubjective awareness of a shared experience.

This is not a trivial matter. In fact the So of Northeastern Uganda, among whom the author once did fieldwork, live on mountains in the midst of the East African plains. There exists no body of water in their environment large enough in which to swim. As a consequence, the So do not know what swimming means. They have never experienced swimming, and their language - quite rich in many other domains - is devoid of any terms referring to swimming. The best they can do is talk about "bathing" which means standing ankle-deep in a shallow stream and sloshing water over ones body to remove the dust. For the So, swimming is virtually an ineffable experience.

The irony seems to be that we must rely heavily upon symbolic reports of experience for data in the social sciences. For example, Calvin Hall (Hall and Nordby 1972:12), the noted dream researcher, makes the distinction between experienced, remembered and reported dreams and points out that dream researchers must rely largely on the latter as data referring to the former two classes. Likewise the anthropologist must often rely upon the reports of informants about what they remember about what they experienced in the past. And if the anthropologist has not had comparable experiences (eg., "trance," "possession," "vision," and the like), then the meaning of the report intended by the informant may differ markedly for the anthropologist.

It would be preposterous to suppose that experiences, particularly those occurring in higher states of consciousness, can be so competently described using symbols that the experience and expression become equivalently rich. On the other hand, it is a copout to science to take refuge in the claim of ineffability and attempt no description of experience whatsoever. To throw up one's hands in frustration and claim ineffability is in effect to commit the same methodological error, for implicit in the claim of ineffability is the presumption that there exist other experiences that can be fully described in symbolic mode. Scientists must *never* confuse data, facts, descriptions, or models with experience. There is *always* the problem of transposition in the movement away from direct experience to description and theory construction. In effect we must come, with the great

philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, to distinguish what we can say - and say as clearly as possible - and what we cannot say and must "pass over in silence."

Transpersonal Methods

With full recognition of the process of transposition between direct experience and symbolic expression, the solution to the problem of the phenomenological typewriter suggests itself in two ways: (1) Broaden the range of experience of anthropological fieldworkers as much as possible, and (2) become as clever as possible when creating modes of symbolic expression of experience. Recognizing the facts that enculturation places constraints upon the range of experiences that a fieldworker may be capable of having, and that some people are more open to extraordinary experiences than other people, it seems reasonable for anthropology to nurture a cadre of transpersonalists within its midst who are capable of speaking to the fullest range of human experience. Such a cadre would operate as a check against some of the more extreme misunderstandings that arise in interpreting native experiences. As noted earlier, a transpersonalist who has worked on the organization of "psychic energy" in his or her own body would immediately see the relevance of Indian kundalini to an understanding of Bushman n/um, and visa versa.

One must be clever in one's search for an appropriate means of symbolic expression in order to avoid the uncritical presumption of ineffability. For instance, it has long been supposed that there is no way for a dreamer to directly communicate information about the dream state to researchers while the dream is in process. This presumption has now been shown to be highly conditional. Lucid dream researchers are now learning methods by which the dreamer can communicate information about dream events directly to researchers so that they may be correlated with electronic measures of physiological events during sleep. To give another example, it was long presumed that the congenitally blind cannot experience dreams and fantasies involving developed color and form, yet recent research with the use of haptic drawing and other techniques is indicating that this is not the case, that there exists an innate component to vision operating in the blind.

The author's impression is that the time has come in science to pay credence to reports of transpersonal experiences as presented in the ethnographic, folkloristic, theological, mystical and mythological literatures pertaining to peoples around the world. It now seems methodologically reasonable to presume some form of direct, personal or transpersonal experience "laying behind" even the most bizarre reports found in

myth, legend, and "superstition" -- until demonstrated otherwise. As Thompson (1935:201-202) suggests for tales of psychic powers attributed to saints in the Middle Ages, as Hufford (1982) shows for the so-called old hag phenomenon, as Jilek (1982:22ff) describes for Northwest Coast healing ceremonies and spirit quests, as Grindal (1983) describes for the raising of the dead, as Wambach (1978) claims for knowledge of past lifetimes, and as Greeley (1975) has noted for a variety of paranormal phenomena, including *deja vu*, clairvoyance and contact with the dead, we must carefully consider the possibility that our informants have indeed experienced a non-ordinary reality that has given rise to the tradition being examined. We are not saying that the informant's interpretation of his or her experience need be accepted as an objective description of reality. In fact, we doubt that any such description is possible by either natives or anthropologists. And in the end we also may be incapable of discerning the truth value of the native interpretation. Rather, every attempt should be made to ascertain in the greatest possible detail the elements of the informant's direct experience; fully realizing of course that there is likely to exist a causal interplay between experience and our very culturally loaded interpretation.

Symbolism and Transpersonal Fieldwork

A dynamic that we have repeatedly touched upon above is the way that direct experiences may be evoked by the presence of symbols. The author and his colleagues have worked for years on this relationship, and have reached certain conclusions with regard to the mechanisms by means of which the symbolic function operates in cognition. That set of mechanisms we have termed *symbolic penetration*: the process by which activation of a relatively limited sensory event comes to communicate with, evoke, and become associated with a more ramified, complex, and far less limited set of cognitive structures operating within the nervous system.

It is not our intent to repeat here what has already been written about the symbolic penetration hypothesis, but rather, presuming it to be true, to explore some of its methodological implications for transpersonal fieldwork. For there is one factor implied by symbolic penetration that has yet to sink into the general awareness of anthropologists: that is, at the level of basic principle, the cognitive system of the fieldworker operates exactly like that of the native. To the extent that the anthropologist comes to understand how symbols operate in the mind of the native, to that extent he/she comes to understand how his/her own mind works - and visa versa. Moreover, if he/she understands the mechanisms of mind operating among the natives, the fieldworker can use his/her own

mind as a laboratory to experiment with the symbolic processes that appear to be operating in the institutions being observed.

The novel and occasionally exotic conditions of fieldwork have been both the strength and the weakness of anthropology. The draw to experience the adventure of living in an alien cultural milieu is often the initial motivation that leads one to become an ethnographer. There is a selection in favor of individuals who appreciate the variance in cultural form, and who are predisposed to see the exotic features around them, and to record features in a sort of "oddities and quidities" manner - all of which was well and good during the "science of curious customs" phase in the development of the discipline.

But anthropology seems to be entering its maturity, and is doing so at a time when all of science is, as we noted above, in subtle crisis. A mature science is always a structural science. Its models, theories and explanations are always formulated using elements and relations, some of which are non-observables (eg., black holes, quarks, binding forces, not to mention principles of mind, schemes, slots, etc.). A mature science codes the structural commonalities underlying the apparent diversity of phenomena, and the principles uncovered are always conceived to be finite in number, universal to the phenomena being observed, and operating in an orderly, lawful manner.

Recognizing that at the level of cognitive functioning all human minds operate on the same fundamental principles, the transpersonal anthropologist is in search of those principles underlying the apparent diversity in the content of surface symbolism. And this is inevitably a reflexive process: the ethnographer him/herself ultimately becomes the object of scrutiny. Transpersonal experimentation in an alien symbolic milieu carries the method of participant observation to its ultimate extremes. The transpersonal ethnographer among the Bushmen would not only participate in the action and significance of the hunt, but also in the practices leading to the experience of !kia. And in either situation, one eye of the ethnographer is upon the hosts, the other is on his/her own phenomenology.

The old dictum that "you can't ever experience the world like the native does" is, like the claim to ineffability, a blend of a modicum of truth with a lot of copout. Taken at its most commonsense meaning, it recognizes no common structural underpinnings to human experience whatsoever. It is a naive view devoid of any information from the psychology and physiology of perception. Of course it is quite true that the meanings of an alien symbol system will be different for the ethnographer than for the native - and for that matter

different from native to native. This is the natural result of having been enculturated in different societies and having undergone different life experiences. But one must also recognize the structural, or archetypal, ground upon which culturally variant cognition is based. There will *always* be a structural-loading on any experience, no matter how exotic and pervasive the cultural-loading. Furthermore, it seems that, beyond a certain point in maturation, the higher the state of consciousness attained, the less symbolic and cultural loading is experienced. The ethnographer who attains higher states of consciousness working within the alien symbol system may expect to find less and less discrepancy between his/her experiences and those encountered by natives mastering the same techniques. As always, however, one must maintain a clear distinction between direct experience and interpretation of experience. Any culturally controlled interpretive tradition will bear a heavy symbolic-loading, regardless of how advanced the state of consciousness experienced, and the cultural interpretation may be at variance with the ethnographer's own interpretation. An experience of flow that for the native may be interpreted as due to (say) grace from the gods may be for the ethnographer interpreted as a retuning of his/her autonomic nervous system, or whathaveyou.

To utilize symbolic penetration techniques in order to gain direct insight and experience of the sort that enriches and vivifies the native cosmology, the ethnographer must have attained some degree of transcultural freedom in his/her own consciousness. In other words, the researcher must be able to "suspend disbelief" sufficiently to enter the alien symbol system, accept it as so many "fingers" pointing at perhaps extraordinary and culturally salient experiences, and enter fully into the field of ritual practices (including in some cases physical ordeals) intended to evoke those experiences.

And this brings us right back to the issue of state-specific science. Obviously not all ethnographers are capable of "letting go" into the alien milieu to that extent. In fact, if the ethnographic record is any indication, very few researchers have been able to do so. The number who are currently attempting transpersonal explorations is, of course, on the increase due to popular interest in transpersonal phenomena. However, no one should ever be forced into such explorations, for such work often requires years of preparation, arduous self-confrontation, and advanced spiritual maturity (usually requiring a slow developmental seasoning), to say nothing of possibly dangerous ordeals, encounter with fearful "supernatural" entities, radical loss of ego-boundaries,

and the like. The very best we can hope for, we believe, is to sensitize the discipline to the existence and legitimacy of transpersonal experiences, and the significance of an understanding of such experiences to an explanation of alien symbolic and religious systems.

The reward for those who are able to "suspend disbelief" and fully enter an alien esoteric symbol system may be great indeed, for sooner or later during the course of the work the symbol system may come alive in dream, in trance or in vision. One may have the opportunity to directly experience the kind of powerful adventure that enlivens the natives' view of themselves and their cosmos. But this often requires great sacrifice and patience, for alien symbols (which paradoxically may actually include symbols found, historically at least, within ones own Euroamerican milieu) take time and energy to penetrate to a (usually heavily) defended cognitive-affective field. One must be willing to steep oneself in the symbolism, to live it to the full, and be lovingly acceptant of personal limitations and recurrent failures in the pursuit. And above all, one must nurture the confidence in the native methods and perseverance of practice without which little can be accomplished.

Notes

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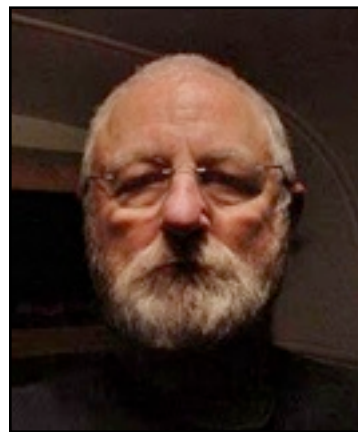
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African pastoralists in East Africa, Tibetan lamas in Nepal and India, and Navajo Indians in the American southwest. He naturally learned lots of things, including how cultures influence the states of mind of people, and how culture is both an adaptational strength and a trap for individual minds seeking the truth of being and existence.

Contemporary Physical Mediumship: Is it Part of a Continuous Tradition?

Jack Hunter

“It is prodigiously strange, prodigiously unusual, and it would seem so unlikely as to be incredible; but we must give in to the facts...Yes, it is absurd; but no matter – it is true.”

— Prof. Charles Richet on Ectoplasm

To many, physical mediumship seances are a social phenomenon relegated to the history books: rising to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century and eventually petering out amidst high profile exposures of fraud in the first decades of the twentieth century. In recent years, however, physical mediumship has made something of a comeback with new circles working towards the manifestation of physical phenomena being established in private homes across the UK, Europe and the United States. This resurgence has been facilitated by the development of internet forums promoting the subject, enabling private circles to disseminate their experiences and to exchange tips and procedures for the production of physical phenomena. This paper will aim to explore the issue of whether the forms of physical mediumship popular today are part of a continuous tradition beginning in the nineteenth century, or essentially modern phenomena with roots in the 1990s. The main point of the discussion will be to ascertain the extent to which the phenomena of contemporary physical mediumship resemble those documented in the early literature of psychical research.

Jon Klimo provides a fairly standard definition of physical mediumship as the purported ability of certain mediums to “channel unknown energies that affect the physical environment in ways that can be directly experienced by persons other than the channel” (Klimo 1987: 200). Manifestations of these “unknown energies” can take a variety of different forms including: the levitation and manipulation of physical objects (such as knocks and raps, table levitations etc); the production of anomalous environmental changes (such as breezes and unusual drops in room temperature); the generation of so-called “spirit-lights”; the “apportation” of physical objects into and out of the seance room, and the materialization of ectoplasmic forms (manifestations of limbs, heads or, occasionally, whole bodies),

amongst others (Braude 1997). Such phenomena are, by their very physical nature, particularly controversial even within the parapsychological community. Nevertheless, there is an extremely large body of literature composed by highly credible observers that seems to support the idea that certain mediums have, even under strictly controlled conditions, been able to produce these strange phenomena (Braude 1997: 23-48; Tynn n.d: 1; McLuhan 2010; Haule 2011: 122-125). Although the main focus of this paper does not require these phenomena to be genuine, as it will be primarily concerned with the “culture of physical mediumship” which undoubtedly exists regardless of whether or not its phenomena are ontologically real, it is both interesting and important to note that apparently good evidence does exist to suggest that such phenomena may be possible in the presence of particularly gifted mediums.

The Spiritualist movement itself was founded upon physical phenomena. In the small town of Hydesville, New York State, in 1848 the Fox family was plagued by anomalous raps and knocks that seemed, once a practical code for communication had been devised, to demonstrate the continued spiritual existence of a deceased peddler by the name of Charles B. Rosma, who had allegedly been murdered in the house some years previously (Doyle 2006 [1926]; Moreman 2010: 161). This example of what would later be termed physical mediumship was



found to be focussed around the three Fox children and spawned a movement which spread rapidly across the United States and Europe, and which still persists today. The Fox sisters, Leah (1814-1890), Kate (1837-1892) and Margaret (1833-1893), became the first physical mediums and toured all over the United States giving demonstrations of their ability to produce anomalous knocks through which ostensible spirits were able to communicate. As the Fox sisters toured, new mediums began to appear in their wake, and with them came an increasingly varied array of different spiritual manifestations: from mental mediumship and deep-trance communication to the materialization of spirit forms (Moreman 2010: 161).

Perhaps the most influential innovator in early physical mediumship was the Scottish-born Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886). After an early life allegedly filled with spiritual visions and premonitions, and coming from a long line of Scottish seers, Home conducted his first seance at the age of eighteen and swiftly gained a reputation as a powerful medium. By 1856 Home was conducting seances in Britain. In 1868 he performed his most famous paranormal feat -- the levitation of his body



horizontally out through a third-story window at Ashley House in London. This event was apparently witnessed by Lord Lindsay, Lord Adare and Captain Charles Wynne, all men of high repute and considered at the time to be honest in what they described (Doyle 2006 [1926]: 99; Lamont 2006: 185-187). In 1874 Home's mediumship received further support with the publication of Sir William Crookes' report which seemed to confirm, after laboratory experimentation, that Home did indeed possess the ability to manipulate physical objects by paranormal means. Using specially designed laboratory equipment Crookes tested Home's ability to change the weight of physical objects and to play tunes on an accordion suspended out of reach in a cage (Lamont 2005: 204-207; Alvarado 2006: 142; Melechi 2008: 198-200). Home's seances also often featured the alleged materialization of glowing hands that would mischievously touch the sitters, though he never produced full-body materializations (Doyle 2006 [1926]: 106). Arthur Conan Doyle considered Home to be something of a virtuoso medium in that he was proficient in four different forms of mediumship: the direct voice (whereby spirits communicate verbally independent of the medium), trance mediumship (whereby spirits communicate verbally through the body of the medium), clairvoyance (the ability to see visions of the spirit world, the future and distant locations) and physical mediumship (the ability to psychically manipulate physical objects) (Doyle 2006 [1926]: 106). Although accusations of fraud were made, Home was never actually caught cheating (Moreman 2010: 164-165).

The substance known as "ectoplasm" is by now practically synonymous with physical mediumship and is well documented in the early literature of



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psychical research. The term itself was first coined in 1894 by the Nobel prize winning physiologist Prof. Charles Richet (1850-1935) in reference to observations of anomalous limbs during experiments with the medium Eusapia Paladino (1854-1918). Writing a little later, in his book "Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments" (2006 [1927]), the psychical researcher Dr. Gustav Geley (1868-1924) provides a good description of this mysterious substance:

"During trance a portion of [the medium's] organism is externalised. This portion is sometimes very small, sometimes very considerable... Observation shows this ectoplasm as an amorphous substance which may be either solid or vaporous. Then, usually very soon, the formless substance becomes organic, it condenses, and forms appear, which, when the process is complete, have all the anatomical and physiological characters of biologic life. The ectoplasm has become a living being or a fractional part of a living being, but is always closely connected to the body of the medium, of which it is a kind of prolongation, and into which it is absorbed at the end of the experiment" (Geley 2006[1927]: 176)

Ectoplasm quickly became an essential component of any good Spiritualist seance. Some of the most intensive studies of ectoplasmic phenomena were conducted with the medium Eva C. (1886-19??) under the supervision of Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929), and were published in the book "Materialisation Phenomena" in 1914, complete with numerous photographic plates. During seances with Eva C. the ectoplasmic substance, which Schrenck-Notzing termed "teleplasm" (Brower 2010: 117), would be exuded from the medium's mouth, breasts, navel, fingertips, vagina and scalp. This substance was described as coalescing into crude limbs, referred to as "pseudo-pods," and human-like heads which would move independently and were particularly sensitive to light and touch. These materialisations would later dissolve or be absorbed back into the medium's body (Sommer 2009: 304). Eva C.'s ectoplasmic manifestations are graphically described by Mme. Bisson:

"On 2nd December 1910 a particularly interesting phenomenon occurred. As the by now exhausted medium asked me to give her more strength; she moved towards me, her hands outstretched, and I made a movement to take her hands. At that moment, and in full view of all the

sitters, a fully modeled arm and hand seized the medium's left arm around the elbow and thrust her roughly backwards. Eva, frightened, cried out and started to tremble; she had an attack of nerves that I had to calm. Some minutes later the arm and hand reappeared on the medium's knees; this time they were flat and motionless. This phenomenon is all the more remarkable in that it suggests a will operating independently of the medium, myself and others" (as cited in Barrington 2011: 5)

The so-called 'Margery' mediumship was arguably the real cutoff point for serious psychical research into physical mediumship. Margery was alleged, by a certain Dr. Crandon, to have produced a variety of impressive physical phenomena. Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, one of the chief investigators of Margery's (Mina Crandon's) mediumship, provides a survey of some of her feats:

"At hundreds of sittings, it is claimed, 'ectoplasmic' limbs – extruded from her body and afterwards reabsorbed – have performed various acts, such as touching persons seated nearby in the darkness, shoving, lifting and throwing objects, overturning a small table, ringing the bell in a box activated by contact cover, producing phosphorescent lights, etc." (Prince 1926: 431)

Mina Crandon's mediumship, however, was very publicly declared fraudulent by the escape artists Harry Houdini in a pamphlet entitled "Houdini Exposes the Ticks Used by the Boston Medium 'Margery'" published in 1924 (Polidoro 2001). Over the course of his public debunking Houdini employed increasingly tight controls on the medium including, at one point, completely





sealing the medium within a specially constructed wooden box, with only her head and hands visible (Polidoro 2001: 143-145). Her ectoplasmic protrusions were called into question when, in 1925, the Society for Psychical Research sent Eric Dingwall to investigate Mina Crandon's claimed abilities and discovered that her ectoplasm was apparently composed of "animal lung material" (Polidoro 2001: 155). This form of public debunking likely contributed to the demise of physical mediumship. Nevertheless, ectoplasmic materialisations of varying quality were present, though becoming increasingly rare, in physical mediumship demonstrations right into the 1930s and 1940s. This later physical mediumship is perhaps best exemplified by the mediumship of Jack Webber (1907-1940) (see Edwards 1978) and Helen Duncan (1897-1956) (see Gaskill 2001; Hartley 2007). The following is a description of the process of materialization and dematerialization during Jack Webber's seances:

"...at first a vague, shadowy form is seen, darker than the prevailing light. This form then becomes denser, and the hands and head are held to the red light for closer examination. The red light is about

nine feet from the floor, yet the materialized people are able to rise to it from the floor and expose their heads in close proximity to the bulb... When a form has built up in the red light, its disappearance is of interest. Standing full length in the centre of the circle, it is seen to diminish downwards as if passing through the floor. The period of time necessary for the disappearance is about two seconds. After the disappearance of a form, throat action is heard from the medium — gulp like sounds, rather similar to those made when ectoplasm is returning to the medium's body" (Edwards 1978: 96-97)

Again, accounts from the seances of Helen Duncan, arguably the last of the "great" physical mediums, feature many of the same characteristic descriptions of ectoplasmic materialisations and dematerialisations as earlier accounts of other mediums:

"Witnesses used terms such as disappeared, vanished, melted, sinking towards the floor... Mrs. Lock stated her mother disappeared down to the floor when seeing her on the 17th and 18th of January and her friend Pinkie who did so displaying a clear face with a red complexion with hair. He drifted down to the ground. Mrs. Jennings was so struck by the way the figures disappeared she explained in her testimony that she took a special interest and stood to observe the method. She explained at the trial that the head portion went first, then the shoulders down. The last thing she could see was a lot of white on the floor. She explained they all disappeared in the same way. Mr. Lock also described this same method for a figure purporting to be his sister Sally... He described how the white form disappeared towards the ground" (Hartley 2007: 205)

The phenomena described so far (raps, levitations, the movement of objects and ectoplasmic materialisations), form the basic itinerary of what I will term "classical physical mediumship," which flourished roughly from 1848 onwards with a gradual decline in activity after around about 1945. Although Spiritualism by no means disappeared after this period, physical mediumship certainly suffered a lull in interest. Numerous explanations for this have been offered, including: the idea that, in our busy modern world, people no longer have the time or energy to devote themselves to the development of physical mediumship; the idea that the harsh ways in which physical mediums had been tested in

the lab put people off developing mediumship, and the idea that the numerous exposures of fraudulent mediums had given the profession a bad reputation which put people off entering into it (Foy 2007). Whatever the reasons, it wasn't until the late 1990s that interest in physical mediumship returned to the popular consciousness. A reinvigorated interest in physical mediumship developed after the publication of Montague Keen and David Fontana's "The Scole Report" by the Society for Psychical Research in 1999 (Moreman 2010: 164), and the popularised version "The Scole Experiment: Scientific Evidence for Life After Death" by Grant and Jane Solomon, also published in the same year. Montague Keen (2001) describes the basic claims made about the Scole experiments:

"Based on two years of regular séances, the Group's chief claims were that they had established contact with a "team" of spirit communicators comprising, or in contact with, a number of former scientists. These had been accessed through...a husband and wife team, both of whom entered swiftly into deep trance, remaining thus throughout the proceedings, of which they retained no conscious recollection. The purported discarnate contacts had facilitated the manifestation of spirit lights, moved furniture, created apports (objects appearing from no known source and by no known means), displayed shadowy figures described as angelic forms, and produced films, allegedly employing a novel form of energy not involving the traditional ectoplasmic extrusions with their enervating and sometimes physically hazardous, and invariably contentious, associations." (Keen 2001:167-168)

One of the chief developments of the Scole group, in terms of the history of physical mediumship, was their



claim that a new "form of energy," significantly different to the ectoplasm of classical physical mediumship, was the basis of the physical phenomena being produced. Ectoplasm, it would seem, was considered dangerous by the Scole group's guiding spirit team and so was necessarily replaced. Indeed, numerous mediums and psychical researchers have commented on the potential dangers involved in the production of ectoplasm. This shift towards the use of a "new energy" has been quite influential in the development of subsequent physical mediumship circles who have been inspired to conduct their own experiments after reading descriptions of those carried out at Scole. The Bristol Spirit Lodge, the group with whom I conduct my own fieldwork (Hunter 2009; 2011), often utilises a glass bell-jar for the containment of "energies" directly inspired by the recommendations of the Scole group, for example. Nevertheless, while modern physical mediumship circles do claim to employ this "new energy," the use of ectoplasm continues to be a particularly common feature of physical seances along with other of the traditional physical phenomena, such as "spirit lights" and raps. Indeed, the founder of the Bristol Spirit Lodge was inspired by the experience of "traditional" physical mediumship on 24th May 2006 in Banbury, Oxfordshire:

"My personal evidence was followed by the display of a misty formation that was barely visible within the set red-light conditions. In these conditions I could see the shapes of sitters all seated in their chairs around the room. They were all there. There were no empty chairs. So, I could see a haze, of perhaps 'something else,' some partial materialized 'something' near the cabinet" (Di Nucci 2009: 23-24)

More elaborate descriptions of classical ectoplasmic materialisations produced in private home-circles are now emerging on the internet. For example, the following is extracted from a report by Dr. Mnahm of a seance conducted with the Felix Experimental Group in Germany (see Braude 2010), in April 2011. The description focusses primarily on the process by which ectoplasm was seen to be produced by the medium. Many of the characteristics of the ectoplasmic productions in this account do seem to match descriptions from the earlier literature of psychical research:

"When the red light was turned on for the first time, all sitters could plainly see a whitish cloth-like mass protruding from the medium's mouth. He bent to the front and seemed to facilitate the

ectoplasm's outflow...by accompanying movements of both hands. During the first display, the ectoplasm was comparably short, perhaps, 30-40 cm; during the second display shortly after it had already reached the floor... The next two displays in red light simply showed the ectoplasmatic veil lying curled on the floor between and in front of the medium's feet. There was no connection to the medium's body... The next two displays showed the supposed hand of HB, who announced that he would sort of dip his own hand into the mass and aggregate the ectoplasmic hand accordingly, then waving to the sitters with it. The purpose of this was to show the autonomous quality of the mass, and its ability to move. Indeed, a hand-like shape had risen about 30 cm upward, continued to rise some other 10 cm, and performed jerky waving movements... This ectoplasm was of condensed matter, not the veil-like stuff from before. It looked more like solid cloth... The next two displays showed how a different column of ectoplasm moved upward on

the mediums body, from the belly region towards the right chest. It was again of the veil-like quality... It seemed to grow and move on its own behalf...the medium's body was perfectly still, his arms hanging straight down at the sides... HB announced that the medium would wrap the ectoplasmatic veil around his entire body (with his hands) to supply the body with energy. Indeed, when the lamp was switched on again, the medium was covered all over by an extremely fine and very thin white veil (the "cocoon" condition)." (Mnahm 2011)

The following account is taken from a report of a seance held in England in October 2011 with the medium Stewart Alexander. It describes the apparent transformation of an amorphous "blob" of ectoplasm into a well formed human hand:

"Walter returned and asked that everyone return to their seats and away from the table. The table had a translucent top with a red light underneath it, so that we could see what was happening on its surface without harm to Stewart. Walter then invited Brian K. to sit at the table across from him. Soon a blob of ectoplasm could be seen on the illuminated table top. It slowly formed into a large hand which Walter said was his. It knocked on the table and Brian said that it was a big hand. Next, Walter asked Brian to place his right hand on the table with his palm downwards. We could see that the hand moved toward Brian's hand and he announced that it was holding his hand and that it felt like a human hand." (Butler & Butler 2011)

My own encounters with visible ectoplasm at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, although not quite as dramatic as that produced by the Felix Circle, also appears continuous with the general tradition of physical mediumship. The following extract is taken from my field-notes dated 05/02/2011:

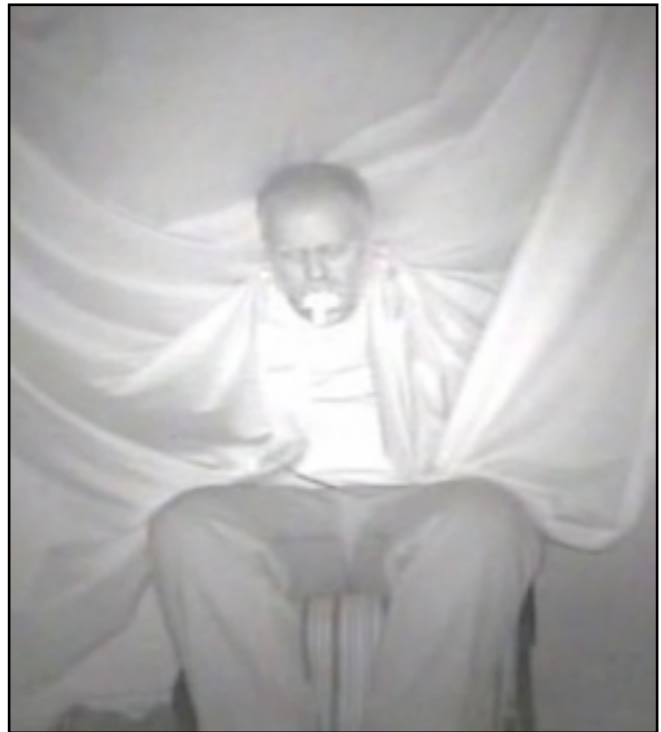
"The first time [ectoplasm] was produced on a glowing board and appeared like a sausage in silhouette. It moved as though pulled... The second example of ectoplasm production was a thin strip of the substance apparently protruding from the cabinet – somehow attached to the top of the spirit trumpet (a cone of sheet aluminium). This took a while to develop in darkness, and when it was fully present the spirit voice told Christine to turn the red light up slowly. The ectoplasm looked



remarkably like a thin strip of silk (on talking to Sandy in the car on the way home she too thought it looked like a piece of silk). The spirit voice asked if we would like to see it move, we of course replied with a resounding “Yes!” The light was asked to be switched off and when it was turned on again the strip of ectoplasm wagged about a little, quite unimpressively. The sitters were apparently impressed by this demonstration.”

Again, it must be stressed that regardless of whether or not the phenomenon observed in this instance was real ectoplasm produced by paranormal means is irrelevant to an examination of the culture of physical mediumship. This event, as well as the other descriptions of contemporary ectoplasm presented here, was clearly within the same tradition as the ectoplasmic manifestations of mediums at the turn of the nineteenth century, though they would appear to be of a much diminished quality. In comparison with the dramatic and extravagant, and often full-body, materialisations described in the earlier literature of psychical research the ectoplasmic manifestations of the modern world are distinctly lacking. Why could this be? Writing on the history of ectoplasm in volume two of his “The History of Spiritualism” (Doyle 2006 [1926]) Arthur Conan Doyle noted precisely the same thing:

“When we examine the descriptions of the appearance of ectoplasm in Spiritualistic circles forty and fifty years ago, and compare them with those in our own day, we see how much richer



were the earlier results” (Doyle 2006 [1926] Vol. II: 47)

The explanation he offers for this apparent degradation in the phenomenon was that attitudes towards mediums had changed. He writes: “At least...the early researchers observed one golden rule. They surrounded the medium with an atmosphere of love and sympathy” (ibid.). By the time Doyle was writing his history of the Spiritualist movement, physical mediums were subject to increasingly severe forms of testing, perhaps best exemplified by the methods employed by the psychical researcher Harry Price (cf. Tabori 1968: 90 for a description of Harry Price’s electrically controlled seances). In addition to this, the popular image of the physical medium was becoming increasingly associated with the notion of fraud and dishonesty, which naturally did not bode well for the way in which mediums were perceived and treated by those who attended their demonstrations. A further reason might also be found in the shift in the perspective of psychical researchers towards a laboratory based approach, inspired by the establishment of Dr. J.B. Rhine’s parapsychological laboratory at Duke University in 1930, with its focus directed firmly on the much subtler mental phenomena of ESP and clairvoyance. Physical mediumship was, by the 1930s, simply out of fashion and has never really regained its status as a respectable practice for either mediums or researchers. Perhaps the renewed interest in the practice of physical mediumship that has developed over the last decade,



coupled with the interests of serious psychical researchers to investigate such groups (for example Prof. Stephen Braude's investigations with the Felix Experimental Group), will lead to the reinstatement of some of the more elaborate physical phenomena described in the early literature of psychical research.

To conclude, then, I feel it is fair to say that contemporary physical mediumship is, in essence, a continuation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tradition, though it has degraded quite considerably due to a variety of factors, some of which have just been discussed. The situation is reminiscent of a similar scenario described by the anthropologist Zeljko Jokic (2008) with regard to the practice of contemporary Buriat shamanism. Traditional Buriat shamanism was banned in Buriatiia, Siberia, by the Soviet Russian authorities. Jokic writes of the practices of contemporary neo-shamans in Buriatiia, who are striving to reinvigorate the traditional forms of shamanism practiced before the Soviet period, and describes how the inability of the modern neo-shamans to recall their trance journeys is indicative of lost knowledge about the techniques of the traditional shamans who were able to remember and describe their trance experiences. Jokic writes:

"The apparently unconscious trance of modern shamans from the Tengeri association is the direct result of the stress and discontinuity that come from the inhibition of the system during the Soviet times, which has left a deep impact on Buriat culture. Fortunately, it appears that the shamans are well on their way to reclaiming the "eternal blue sky" over modern-day Buriatiia" (Jokic 2008: 45)

Perhaps contemporary physical mediumship could be viewed in a similar way. The culture and practice has degraded under a bad reputation, and only with the dedicated work of those who are striving to reinvigorate, promote and develop it will physical mediumship become as dramatic as it was when the pioneers of psychical research described it in the nineteenth century. As anthropologists with an interest in the culture of physical mediumship, therefore, we are uniquely placed to witness, record and document the reemergence of this unusual social phenomenon.

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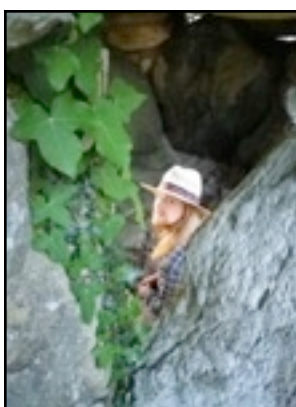
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Charles Richet at the Villa Carmen

Robert McLuhan

Last year I published a book called *Randi's Prize*, in which I tried to expose some fallacies of sceptical thinking, particularly with regard to the Million Dollar Challenge. It seems to me now that I barely scratched the surface of the problem. Many people are certain that psi can never be demonstrated in test conditions – so much so that they confidently assert they would be convinced if just one psychic were to win the prize. The truth surely is that they find psi claims so hard to accept that even if this did happen it would barely dent their disbelief.

I was thinking about this with regard to the Villa Carmen episode, which remains for me one of the most curious episodes in all of psychic research. This was the encounter that took place in 1905 between Charles Richet, a French professor of physiology and future Nobel prize winner, and a spiritualist circle in Algiers, at that time a French colony. It's a classic of its kind, for the simplicity of the setup, the clarity of the exposition and the certainty of its conclusion. Although shorter and less

comprehensive, it recalls the Feilding Report on Eusapia Palladino in this respect.

The circle was held by a retired general and his wife, the Noels, who were usually joined by five or six other people: an unnamed female friend, a male friend, Marthe Beraud (the 19-year-old fiancée of their son, who had recently been killed in battle) and her two younger sisters. The medium was Marthe, sometimes assisted by a black servant girl.

The sittings were held in the room above a stable and coach house, which was a separate building in the grounds of the property. The floor was of cemented flagstones; there were two windows, both of which were blocked up, and a single door. There were no other entrances, and no trap door. Richet searched the room thoroughly before each sitting and was certain no one was hidden in the room before the sitting, or that anyone could have entered after it started.

The sitters sat round a wooden round table, which itself was placed directly in front of a heavy curtain that formed the so-called cabinet, a recess in one corner. A candle in a red lantern was placed on a shelf at a height of some seven feet, providing a dim light sufficient for the sitters to see each other and to see the forms of the mediums in the recess, if not always the detail of their faces.

In these conditions, Richet affirmed, a new figure appeared beside the medium and emerged through the curtain into the room for short periods. It was dressed in the garb of a tribal chieftain, that included a medieval metal helmet and ornaments, a large black moustache and the body covered with copious amounts of white drapery – a common feature of materialisation phenomena. Despite the rather put-together look that one sees in Richet's photographs it was clearly not a puppet, but a living being that could walk and talk (it called itself Bien Boa). Richet said he heard it breathing – on one occasion, when Marthe and the servant girl were just about visible in the recess, he persuaded it to breathe into a flask of baryta water, which clouded, indicating the presence of carbon dioxide – and touched its hand several times, finding it warm and jointed.

One might think the form was Marthe herself, having done a quick costume change behind the curtain. This is the line that Richet himself pursues in his discussion. He points out that the room had limited access, and was



always thoroughly searched beforehand; no one could get into it, or hide in it, undetected; and the sitters were all visible to each other – all of which ruled out the possibility of an accomplice. (This is also the explanation favoured by sceptics in other cases of the kind, notably William Crookes's investigation of Florence Cook in London three decades earlier.) The notion gains some support from the fact that the sleeve of Marthe's dress seemed on occasion to be inexplicably empty, and that the face of the form bore a resemblance to hers (also noted by Crookes with Cook).

Against this is the fact that Marthe and the form were frequently seen together, and the insuperable difficulty of Marthe getting in and out of a complicated costume in the blink of an eye, and several times in one sitting. She typically wore a tightly fitting dress fastened by hooks at the back, and there was nowhere for her to conceal the material.

Especially decisive for Richet were the occasions when the form appeared to build from a luminous white spot on the ground, for example:

I half rose in order to look over the table; I saw as it were a white luminous ball floating over the ground; then, rising straight upwards, very rapidly, as though issuing from a trap-door, appeared B[ien B[oa]. He appeared to me to be of no great height; he had a drapery and, I think, something like a caftan with a girdle at the waist. He was then placed between the table and the curtain, being born, so to speak, out of the flooring outside the curtain (which had not stirred).

Then B.B. tries, as it seems to me, to come among us, but he has a limping, hesitating gait. I could not say whether he walks or glides. At one moment he reels, as though about to fall, limping with one leg, which seems unable to support him... Then, without, as far as I believe, opening the curtains, he suddenly sinks down, disappears into the ground, and at the same time a sound of clac, clac, is heard, like the noise of a body thrown on to the ground... This process is repeated a few minutes later, a white ball on the ground, mounting rapidly to the height of a man, then suddenly sinking to the ground with the clac clac noise. [1]

Local sceptics claimed that Marthe had confessed to faking and was in league with a disgruntled former servant who was impersonating the form, and who managed to enter with the other sitters without anyone noticing. Given the conditions that Richet describes, this would not

have been remotely possible; Marthe denied making any such statement. Nevertheless Ruth Brandon, the only sceptic I know of to have written in any detail about the episode, has no problem believing it, on the general basis that scientists don't understand magic tricks.

Her analysis is incoherent, but it's understandable that she takes the easy way out. Richet himself clearly struggled to come to terms with the phenomenon, as do many people like myself, who believe psi to be genuine, but balk at claim of human forms emanating from ectoplasm.

I'm interested in the wider implications of this. As a little thought experiment, imagine that James Randi, or someone else with a reputation as a debunking sceptic, were to perform a test of this kind, and observed what Richet observed, under the same conditions, to the extent that he could not doubt it. He'd quickly understand the difficulty that psi investigators face. How many times would he have to repeat the exercise for the phenomenon to become generally accepted? Would it *ever* be accepted?

If it's true, what kind of science could ever reveal such a phenomenon so that it's acknowledged to occur? And what kind of society would we have become?

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Nourished by Dreams, Visions and William James: The Radical Philosophies of Borges and Terence McKenna

William Rowlandson

I try not to be dead – Jorge Luis Borges

In the 1970 film *Performance*, screenwriter and co-director Donald Cammell makes abundant allusions to Borges, presenting a stoned Turner (played by Mick Jagger) reading Borges' tale 'The South', and showing the face of Borges pierced by a bullet in the film's enigmatic violent conclusion. *Performance* is an enduring testimony to the psychedelic era of the 1960s (it was shot in 1968), depicting the exotic and perturbing aesthetic typified by film and music of the time, casting Jagger and Anita Pallenberg, and portraying a mushroom trip in vivid detail. The plot is labyrinthine and contains Burroughs-inspired cut-ups; the editing is experimental; the set is sensuous and oneiric; and the narrative involves identity dissolution, mirrors, book references, labyrinths and the doppelganger. Even were the film not to have overt references to Borges, one could still declare that 'the literary shadow behind *Performance* is perhaps Borges' (Sinyard 1991: 13).

Borges gained prominence with an English-speaking readership in the 1960s, and for many (novelist Peter Carey, for example, who first came across Borges' works in a Melbourne hippy bookshop called The Whole Earth Bookshop [Aizenberg 1990: 45]), Borges is integrally associated with the psychedelic cultures of the 1960s. There are manifest contradictions and conflicts in this association, given the political and social dynamics of countercultural movements during this period and Borges' outspoken disquiet of such movements. Nevertheless, there are many instances of Borges' appearance within psychedelic culture that could bear out further this association. But is Borges psychedelic? What does that mean? In this article I appraise Borges in the light of one of the foremost writers of psychedelic philosophy: Terence McKenna, who, whilst pertaining to an era posterior to the 1960s, was nevertheless nourished by the strong artistic and intellectual currents from the period. McKenna, who died in 2000, remains a prominent figure in ever-growing scholarship of psychedelic studies in the last decade. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, he toured and lectured extensively, though so widely disseminated are his practical – if at times outlandish – philosophies of psychedelic plants, ethnobotany and the acceleration of history, that his deep

understanding of hermetic philosophy, Gnosticism, alchemy, the Florentine Renaissance, modernist literature and Jungian psychology are often overlooked. It is in these domains that much parity can be drawn between McKenna and Borges.

McKenna was a reader of Borges, and often alluded to the tale 'The Aleph.' In particular, he likens the secret of 'The Sect of the Phoenix' to the ecstatic revelation of 'The Aleph': 'Borges never explicitly says what the Secret is, but if one knows his other story, The Aleph, one can put these two together and realize that the Aleph is the experience of the Secret of the Cult of the Phoenix' (1991: 44). In combining the two tales, McKenna interrelates the esoteric body of knowledge known by the 'sectarians' of the Phoenix, and the Jamesian moment of 'mystical intuition, [the] very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness' (James 1910: 85). Thus the two roots of McKenna's philosophical outlook are married in two of Borges' tales: esoteric traditions and individual mystical experience (predominantly mediated through psychedelics). We can chart how these two streams of thought play out in Borges and McKenna.

Paradox of Knowledge

McKenna habitually quoted the British evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane: 'My own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose' (Haldane 1927: 286). For McKenna, this was the articulation of the paradox of knowledge – we strive to gain answers to the deeper riddles of existence while intuiting that we will never gain this knowledge. In a lecture on alchemy he elaborates this, suggesting that to live with mystery and not to be defeated by its mystery is the supreme challenge:

That's a dizzying perception. It's one thing to think it's very strange. It's another thing to think it's stranger than you can suppose. You may suppose and suppose and suppose and you'll fall so short of the mark that it's absurd. That's what it means to be in the presence of a mystery. The modern word mystery translates out to unsolved problem. That's not what a mystery is. A mystery is not an unsolved problem. A mystery is a mystery

and ratiocination can exhaust itself and make no progress with it and that's what's at the core of our being and that was what was at the core of this ancient perception. These were thoroughly modern people. They were shoved up against the same things that tug at our hearts and our minds and our souls and beyond that there's not a whole hell of a lot that you can say about it. (1998)

Here we also find a striking parallel with Borges, who repeatedly discussed the essential mystery of existence and the perpetual paradox of how we seek to understand a mystery that we know to be essentially mysterious.

If life's meaning were explained to us, we probably wouldn't understand it. To think that a man can find it is absurd. We can live without understanding what the world is or who we are. The important things are the ethical instinct and the intellectual instinct, are they not? The intellectual instinct is the one that makes us search while knowing that we are never going to find the answer. (1998: 241)

One line of analysis of Borges' earlier works – especially the 1940s in which he composed the tales of *Ficciones* – suggests a Sartrean despair at the meaninglessness of existence. Two oft-quoted lines from this period may be considered synoptic of this worldview. The first, from the essay 'The analytical language of John Wilkens' summarises the conjectural and wholly anti-Platonic nature of categorised systems of thought: 'obviously there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural. The reason is very simple: we do not know what the universe is' (2000: 231). The other renowned expression is uttered by the pedantic narrator of 'Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*': 'There is no exercise of the intellect which is not, in the final analysis, useless. A philosophical doctrine begins as a plausible description of the universe; with the passage of the years it becomes a mere chapter – if not a paragraph or a name – in the history of philosophy' (1976: 70). In both cases, the systems are shown neither as being futile nor undesired, but rather merely provisory, relative only to the moment, true, in the sense that William James would understand, only insofar as they *appear* truthful to their authors and readers. Indeed, the Borges narrator of 'John Wilkens' qualifies his earlier assertion by stressing the necessity of such provisory systems: 'But the impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot dissuade us from outlining human schemes, even though we are aware that they are provisional' (2000: 213).

The very fabric of reality, indeed, is shown to be unstable and beyond the control of man's affairs. The dreamer of 'The Circular Ruins' understands 'with relief, with humiliation, with terror' (1976: 77) that he had been dreamt by another. The chess players in the poem 'Ajedrez' are unaware that they are mere pieces in a larger chess match. The inhabitants of Uqbar (from the tale 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius') would remain ignorant of the fact that they are ciphers in a fictional encyclopaedic entry. This radical iconoclasm, a defining feature of the Borges oeuvre, is reflected in Borges' depiction of the human capacity to be swept up in dramas that afford ontological reassurance, despite the fact that the philosophical, religious, political or ideological system upon which the individual has placed his faith, or to which he has pledged allegiance, refers only to contingent human affairs, and not to any cosmic or divine order. This is important when considering the allure of ideology upon the unwary, something outlined by the narrator of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius':

Ten years ago any symmetry with a semblance of order – dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism – was sufficient to entrance the minds of men. How could one do other than submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet? It is useless to answer that reality is also orderly. Perhaps it is, but in accordance with divine laws – I translate: inhuman laws – which we never quite grasp. (1976: 42)

Presented with the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, the seeker would inevitably be driven to despair; as it is the human condition to create structures in this void which grant us ontological security, and yet we fail to appreciate the contingent substance of this structure. 'Repeatedly', argues Evelyn Fishburn, 'Borges subverts any belief in a certainty, exposing the partiality of man-made limitations upon every explanation of the Universe, whether philosophical, theological, or mystical' (Fishburn 1988: 412). The many depictions of games in his poems such as chess and *truco*, perennial antagonisms between rivals, the Lottery of Babylon, political ideologies such as Nazism or Peronism; all such systems are shown to be fictions, structures built to provide order over the structure-less nature of existence. This is the conundrum identifiable in Borges and in McKenna: ordered human systems such as politics and schematised religions provide ontological security only through nullifying the sense of ineffable mystery. One is given sanctuary only at the expense of freedom. McKenna articulates this

position of the beauty of inexplicability in *Archaic Revival* (1991):

The myths of science and religion and shamanism all represent a polarity between the mystery of the Self and the mystery of the Other – and remember a mystery is not to be confused with an unsolved problem; a mystery is by its nature mysterious and will not collapse into a solution. We are unfamiliar with that kind of thing. We think that if there's a mystery, then experts of whatever kind can get it straightened out and issue a report. But this approach only works for trivia. And what's important – our hearts, our souls, our hopes, our expectations – is completely mysterious to us. (1991: 83)

Borges famously quipped that Catholics demonstrated the astonishing ability to reduce the baffling mystery of the afterlife to a simple article of dogma to the extent that they appear wholly unaware of its enticing oddity: 'Catholics (read: Argentine Catholics) believe in an ultraterrestrial world, but I have noticed that they are not interested in it. With me the opposite occurs: I am interested but I do not believe' (2000: 256). Interest, curiosity, amazement – these are the key attributes both of Borges and McKenna and the means by which the absence of concrete answers does not lead to despair, but to delight.

The Ecstasy of Bafflement

Many of Borges' later poems, such as 'In praise of darkness' and tales, such as '*Undr*', depict the conversion of despair into the rapture of bafflement, mystery, mystification. Borges explains to Willis Barnstone the essential wonder at the riddle of the universe:

But this fact of wondering at life may stand for the essence of poetry. All poetry consists in feeling things as being strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as very obvious. Of course I *am* puzzled at the fact of my existing, of my existing in a human body, of my looking through eyes, hearing through ears, and so on. And maybe everything I have written is a mere metaphor, a mere variation on that central theme of being puzzled by things. In that case, I suppose, there's no essential difference between philosophy and poetry, since both stand for that same kind of puzzlement. Except that in the case of philosophy, the answer is given in a logical way, and in the case of poetry you use metaphor. [Through writing] I

was trying to find a foundation for my puzzlement. (1982: 15-17)

On repeated occasions in his later years he reiterates this joy of confusion. 'I think of the world as a riddle. And the one beautiful thing about it is that it can't be solved. But of course I think the world needs a riddle. I feel amazement all the time' (1982: 81); 'The world is so mysterious and so rich' (1982: 86); 'There is nothing in the world that is not mysterious' (1985: 28). The absence of revealed *telos* is not questioned; what Borges emphasises is the derivation of joy rather than despair from this predicament.

Herein also lies the central thrust of McKenna's philosophy of a psychedelic society – not a society of drug-users – but a community enraptured by this Borgesian sense of beatic bafflement. 'What I think a psychedelic society' declares McKenna, 'what that notion means or implies to me in terms of ideology, is the idea of creating a society which always lives in the light of the mystery of being. In other words, that solutions should be displaced from the central role that they have had in social organization. And mysteries, irreducible mysteries, should be put in their place' (1997: 57). McKenna reiterates the idea that awareness of mystery is of paramount importance for a more tolerant and harmonious society. This ethical consideration, whilst it may appear distant from Borges' reluctance to discuss ethics, is in fact remarkably close to Borges' position regarding philosophy as awareness of mystery. Borges declared in interview with Burgin:

I think that people who have no philosophy live a poor kind of life, no? People who are too sure about reality and about themselves. I think that philosophy helps you to live. For example, if you think of life as a dream, there may be something gruesome or uncanny about it, and you may sometimes feel that you are living a nightmare, but if you think of reality as something hard and fast, that's still worse, no? I think that philosophy may give the world a kind of haziness, but that haziness is all to the good. If you're a materialist, if you believe in hard and fast things, then you're tied down by reality, or by what you call reality. So that, in a sense, philosophy dissolves reality, but as reality is not always too pleasant, you will be helped by that dissolution. Well, those are very obvious thoughts, of course, though they are none the less true for being obvious. (1969: 142-3)

Borges and McKenna speak a very similar language here, most strikingly in their shared declaration that ideological or philosophical certainties, as rigid belief systems, are pathways to dogmatism and intolerance. Borges discusses the riddles of time and the ego, stating that they 'are the essential business of philosophy, and happily for us they will never be solved, so forever we can go on. We can go on making guesswork – we will call that guesswork philosophy, which is really mere guesswork. We will go on weaving theories, and being very much amused by them, and then unweaving and taking other new ones' (1982: 111). This is a powerful statement on the history of thought, and yet it is a generous principle, allowing for conflicting and competing systems of thought to inform and instruct without losing sight of the essential unsolvable mystery. Here again we see striking parity with the position that McKenna takes vis-à-vis the pretence to foundationalism within schools of thought:

I suggest that as we look back over human history every pinnacle of civilization [...] has believed that it was in possession of an accurate description of the cosmos and of man's relationship to it. This seems to go along with the full flowering of a civilization. But from the point of view of our present civilization we regard all those earlier conceptions as at worst quaint, at best half right. We congratulate ourselves that our civilization at last has its finger on the real description of what is going on. I think this is an error, and that actually what blinds us, or makes historical progress very difficult, is our lack of awareness that our beliefs have grown obsolete and should be put aside. (McKenna 1997: 57)¹

Such a position leads to a shared outlook regarding the conflict between doctrine and experience. I argue elsewhere how central to Borges' reading of Swedenborg and other mystics were his misgivings towards doctrinally-inspired rather than experientially-inspired metaphysical and mystical texts (Rowlandson 2011). Experience is paramount, and indeed, reflecting the Jamesian stance of radical empiricism, Borges was keen to understand more of his own 'timeless' experiences whilst willing to discard Catholic doctrines of heavenly prize and punishment. 'And yet I am not a Catholic. I cannot believe in theology. I cannot believe in the idea of punishment or reward. Those things are alien to me. [...] I

cannot accept the story, for example, of God making man and then making Christ. All those things are beyond me. They really are' (1982: 93-4). For Borges, such theological systems simply failed to equate to his experience, and consequently, reflecting his Jamesian predisposition, he felt no compulsion to believe them. It is important to note that this does not constitute an outright rejection, which would itself be a declaration of faith, but merely a recognition that experience and doctrine fail to cohere. Rejection, as Borges emphasises, can itself be dogmatic – atheist rather than agnostic, whilst agnosticism can be generously accommodating: 'Being an agnostic means all things are possible, even God, even the Holy Trinity. This world is so strange that anything may happen, or may not happen. Being an agnostic makes me live in a larger, a more fantastic kind of world, almost uncanny. It makes me more tolerant' (in Shenker 1971).

Here again we find salient parallels with McKenna, who, rather more stridently, advocated greater epistemological value on individual experience (especially the extreme experiences) over culturally imposed belief systems. 'Much of the problem of the modern dilemma [is that] direct experience has been discounted, and in its place all kinds of belief systems have been erected. [...] You see, if you believe something, you are automatically precluded from believing its opposite; which means that a degree of your human freedom has been forfeited in the act of committing yourself to this belief' (1997: 58). This is, of course, an outlandish statement, as one cannot learn and develop informed only by personal experience, alone outside of culture – indeed personal experience is always acculturated. However, as is often the case with McKenna's presentations, this declaration is designed more as a provocative gesture than a philosophical truism. It does, nevertheless, reveal the problematic at the heart of the argument of belief systems, especially when belief conflicts with experience. Here, as Carl Jung perceived in his father and in so many of his analysants, the distance between faith and experience can cause disillusion and despair. Borges, as keen as McKenna to throw incendiary assertions to his audience, similarly revealed this problematic of belief systems, perceiving a causal relationship between belief and intolerance:

When the Church was strong it was intolerant; it went in for burning and persecution. It seems to me that the Church's present tolerance largely

¹ McKenna articulates this elsewhere: 'every ideological system that has been granted the status of being the official view of reality has always proclaimed that it had everything nailed down but the last 5 percent. Their best people were working on that. But I think that we know practically nothing' (1991: 87).

derives from weakness; it's not that it has become more broad-minded, because that's impossible. No church – whether Catholic or Protestant – has ever been tolerant, nor is there any reason for them to be tolerant. If I believe I am in possession of the truth there is no reason for me to be tolerant of those who are risking their own salvation by holding erroneous beliefs. On the contrary, it's my duty to persecute them. I can't say: 'It doesn't matter that you are a Protestant because we're all brothers of Christ in the end.' No, that would be a proof of skepticism. (1998: 73-74)

For both Borges and McKenna experience must be primary, and should be aligned to cultural patterns only where such patterns accommodate experience, such as Borges' ease with Schopenhauer's shifting philosophy and McKenna's endorsement of the practical principles of shamanism. This position, though, does lead into the more turbulent waters of both writers' relationship with 'popular' (as opposed to perennial or archaic) cultural forms, and in this case neither is free from bombast and controversy.

Archaic Philosophy

Borges courted controversy in his repeated statements about neither reading newspapers nor contemporary writers, in his criticism of popular poets, of art of political content, and of any form of mass media advertising or political propaganda. Whilst for some this attitude reinforced the image of the ivory-tower elitist out of touch with reality, and whilst for others it was a *faux-naïf* gesture on behalf of a man who knew far more than he was revealing and was aware of certain blunders with regards his political and cultural assertions,² nevertheless I would argue that it demonstrates a keen understanding of the limitations of corporate-driven, politically-compromised artistic and cultural forms, and the relationship between politics, marketing, mass hysteria, intolerance and the very belief systems that he habitually criticised. In particular, Borges presents a poetic and Swedenborg-inspired vision of the emptiness of following 'mechanical' systems of action or thought which proscribe oneself the vital force of wonder and mystery.

I think that one is dying all the time. Every time we are not feeling something, discovering something, when we are merely repeating something mechanically. At that moment you are dead. Life

may come at any moment also. If you take a single day, therein you find many deaths, I suppose, and many births also. But I try not to be dead. I try to be curious concerning things, and now I am receiving experiences all the time, and those experiences will be changed into poems, into short stories, into fables. I am receiving them all the time, although I know that many of the things I do and things I say are mechanical, that is to say, they belong to death rather than to life. (1982: 13)

We can see, therefore, that when Borges declared to Jorge Oclander that: 'I don't think I have read a newspaper in my life' (1982: 1), he is on the one hand making a challenging statement about the illusory nature of time and the fictional nature of journalistic representation, and on the other he is alluding to the deadening nature of mechanical, uninspiring, mundane exercises that fail to enliven wonder in the intellect and imagination. In the light of other comments in interviews and essays, we can also intuit that he is alluding to the ill-concealed political ideology that the reader unwittingly absorbs in such popular media. Borges stresses that 'poetry consists in feeling things as being strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as very obvious' (1982: 15), and that rhetoric is the language of politics. As such, politics and its representation through the news troubled Borges as embodying no mystery, no sense of wonder, and that consequently the experience of reading the newspaper 'belongs to death rather than to life.'

In a markedly different context, but revealing a similar basis, McKenna also railed against the stultifying hollowness of popular cultural forms, though true to style he spoke in a hyperbolic and provocative fashion:

So one of the ideas I'd like to put out is that – and it may seem strange, in this menu, but perhaps not – the idea that ideology is not our friend. It is not a matter of choosing from a smorgasbord of ideologies and rejecting the flawed, the self-contradictory, and the over-simple, in favour of the unflawed, the complex enough. Where is it writ in adamant that semi-carnivorous monkeys can or should be capable of understanding reality? That seems to me one of the first illusions – and one of the more prideful illusions – of human culture: that a final understanding is possible in the first place. Better, I think, to try and frame questions which can do it – and leave off searching for answers,

² See Monegal, Santi, & Alonso (1978); Franco (1981); Louis (2008).



because answers are like operating systems: they're being upgraded faster than you can keep up with it. (1999)

McKenna's 'culture is not your friend' rap has become an internet meme over the last few years and has incited the expected inflamed reactions from certain commentators. Nevertheless it is important to examine the thrust of his argument in the light of Borges' comments on enlivening or deadening experiences and of philosophical systems as chapters of human thought.

We have to create culture, don't watch TV, don't read magazines, create your own roadshow. The nexus of space and time where you are now is the most immediate sector of your universe, and if you're worrying about Michael Jackson or Bill Clinton or somebody else, then you are disempowered, you're giving it all away to icons, icons which are maintained by an electronic media so that you want to dress like X or have lips like Y. This is shit-brained, this kind of thinking. That is all cultural diversion, and what is real is you and your friends and your associations, your highs, your orgasms, your hopes, your plans, your fears. And we are told 'no,' we're unimportant, we're peripheral. 'Get a degree, get a job, get a this, get a that.' And then you're a player, you don't want to even play in that game. You want to reclaim your mind and get it out of the hands of the cultural engineers who want to turn you into a half-baked moron consuming all this trash that's being

manufactured out of the bones of a dying world.
(McKenna 1994)

McKenna's position is uncompromising. Fervent adulation of celebrities and fashion, slavish enrolment into political programmes, unthinking repetitions of ideological slogans, and the culture of ceaseless purchase and consumption – all these activities are for him a surrender of autonomy and an enslavement in the structures of 'The Pentagon and Madison Avenue.' And whilst McKenna ostensibly promoted the psychedelic experience as a means to reclaim the autonomy of individual experience, the psychedelic experience entails also reading Gnostic literature, exploring alchemical symbols, losing oneself in *Finnegans Wake* or, if we were to stray into Borges' interests, reading Dante, Swedenborg, Angelus Silesius, and J.W. Dunne.

The Ontological Challenge of Dreams and Visions

Borges was an inveterate reader of Swedenborg (1688-1772. Swedish scientist, theologian, visionary and mystic who recounted his voyages to heaven and hell and his dialogue with angels and demons), and wrote many pieces – poems, essays, and a biography – about the Swedish visionary. The experience of reading Swedenborg is, indeed, a tremendous challenge to our ontological security. As Borges identified, Swedenborg's works are not the ravings of a manifest psychotic, nor are they theological speculation: Swedenborg was adamant in the reality of his experiences. To read Swedenborg, even to allow the possibility of his experiences, is to disassemble structures of thought that are consensually held to be the only valid and permissible ones. If he *did* talk with angels, if he *did* talk with the dead, if he *did* physically inhabit these heavenly and infernal landscapes, well, in the language of Coleridge, 'ah, what then?'

The ability both of the psychedelic experience and radically otherworldly texts to dissolve rigid thought structures is precisely the element that both McKenna and Borges respectively seize upon. Whilst Borges sanguinely claims in the whimsical work *Atlas* (1985): 'Asleep, in my dreams, I see or converse with the dead. None of these things surprises me in the least' (54), McKenna offers the psychedelic experience as an equally improbable yet tangible enterprise. Indeed, he suggests that inscribed in the structure of hegemony is the prohibition of such awareness; and that, similar to the Church's misgivings about individual mystical experience owing to the fact that it is unmediated through the clergy and hierarchy, so, argues McKenna, the individual in society is discouraged from such a shattering of the social

mores: 'Psychedelics are illegal not because a loving government is concerned that you may jump out of a third story window. Psychedelics are illegal because they dissolve opinion structures and culturally laid down models of behavior and information processing. They open you up to the possibility that everything you know is wrong' (1987).³ In McKenna's analysis, the audacious psychedelic experience presents a vision of reality as outlandish as Swedenborg's depiction of the land of the dead. As such, we should be careful not to downplay the entheogenic experience that McKenna proposes in our attempts to see affinities between Borges and McKenna. Reading *Finnegans Wake* is clearly a challenging experience, but for McKenna nothing is as challenging as the 'heroic dose' of a psychedelic. Nevertheless, from a phenomenological perspective, we can build bridges between the dream/nightmare as experienced by Borges, the psychedelic trip as experienced and recounted by McKenna, and the otherworld journeys as documented by Swedenborg.

Here we find ourselves in the perennial debate concerning not only the phenomenology and the ontology of the dream, the vision and the hallucination, but the question of the epistemological value of these experiences. Borges placed great epistemological significance on the dream, the nightmare and, importantly, the fiction, declaring that dreams are as much a part of experience as waking, and that 'dreams are an aesthetic work, perhaps the most ancient aesthetic expression' (1984a: 40). Consequently it was of great significance to Borges that literature and art are in so many traditions inspired by dreams – that Stevenson, for instance, dreamt the plot of *Jekyll and Hyde*. 'Literature is a dream', Borges explains, 'a controlled dream. Now, I believe that we owe literature almost everything we are and what we have been, also what we will be. Our past is nothing but a sequence of dreams' (1984b: 34). He examines the aesthetic creativity that animates dreams:

The essential difference between the waking experience and the sleeping or dreaming experience must lie in the fact that the dreaming experience is something that can be begotten by you, created by you, evolved out of you [...] not

necessarily in sleep. When you're thinking out a poem, there is little difference between the fact of being asleep and that of being awake, no? And so they stand for the same thing. If you're thinking, if you're inventing, or if you're dreaming, then the dream may correspond to vision or to sleep. That hardly matters. (1982: 29)

Similarly, the true nature of identity is revealed to Borges' characters (both 'real' and fictional), such as Hladik ('The Secret Miracle') and Dante, in dreams. They are condemned to be unable to recall the revelation upon waking:

Years later Dante lay dying in Ravenna, as unjustified and as alone as any other man. In a dream God declared to him the secret purpose of his life and his work; Dante, filled with wonder, knew at last who he was and what he was, and he blessed his bitter sufferings. Tradition has it that, on waking, he felt he had been given – and then had lost – something infinite, something he would not be able to recover, or even to glimpse, for the machinery of the world is far too complex for the simplicity of men. (1970: 50)

Nightmares, also, are the source of aesthetic creativity, and are thus also sources of knowledge: 'Unhappily, I know nightmares only too well, and they have been very helpful to literature. I remember the splendid nightmares – were they dreams or were they inventions? It's all the same – the splendid nightmares of De Quincey' (Borges 1982: 8). Similarly, the visions of Plato about transmigration of the soul inform Borges' metaphysical speculation, and Swedenborg's depictions of the angelic realms influenced Borges to perceive the ethical dimension of his own life, suggesting, for example, 'No pasa un día en que no estamos, un instante, en el paraíso' ['Not a day passes in which we are not, for an instant, in Paradise'] (2005: 7). Thus dreams, nightmares and visions inform literature; and literature, for Borges, is not simply an expression of reality, it *is* reality, and thus the oneiric, visionary landscape is as phenomenologically – if not ontologically – real as the physical landscape.

³ McKenna's position regarding legislation is strikingly similar to Alan Watts: 'Psychedelic drugs are feared, basically, for the same reason that mystical experience has been feared, discouraged, and even condemned in the Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic orthodoxies. It leads to disenchantment and apathy toward the approved social rewards of status and success, to chuckles at pretentiousness and pomposity, and, worse, to disbelief in the Church-and-State dogma that we are all God's adopted orphans or fluky little germs in a mechanical and mindless universe and the consequent mistrust in the institution of state and social power. No authoritarian government, whether ecclesiastical or secular, can tolerate the apprehension that each one of us is God in disguise, and that our real inmost, outmost, and utmost Self cannot be killed. That's why they had to do away with Jesus' (1962: 15).

McKenna equally pays great attention to the relationship between dreams, poetry and literature, suggesting, for example, that *Finnegans Wake* 'was conceived of as a dream, [but] whose dream is it?' (1995). Like Borges, he writes not only of art's debt to dreams, but to the aesthetic act that is the dream, and like Borges, he likens dreams and visions; though for McKenna the emphasis lay with the visions induced by psychedelic plants. 'The psychedelic experience is hard to remember, dreams are hard to remember. [In a dream] empires fall, dynastic families unfold themselves, power changes hands, princes are beheaded, a pope disgraced. [...] That's the reality of life, but we suppress this chaotic, irrational side' (1995). McKenna distinguishes dream and visionary experiences, describing, for example, the heightened cognitive functions under the effects of cannabis, the encounter with the intelligible 'Logos' under psilocybin, and the astonishing dialogue with radically alien entities under the effects of DMT. He approaches such experiences through a methodology akin to Borges' approach to dreams and mystical vision: not only are they strikingly 'real' for the experiencer, but, crucially, they are noetic – vital sources of knowledge about man's position within the cosmos. 'A hallucination is a species of reality, as capable of teaching you as a videotape about Kilimanjaro or anything else that falls through your life' (1992a). McKenna's comment is notably akin to Borges' vision of the experience of literature: 'I think of reading a book as no less an experience than traveling or falling in love' (Borges 1998: 14). In both cases, the experience of a state of consciousness or non-material reality is as (in)formative as a materially empirical one. Furthermore, as with Borges' reading of Swedenborg, McKenna displays a Jamesian pragmatism in evaluating the psychic value of the experience of the vision before evaluating its specific ontological nature.

McKenna contemplates dreams as the most commonly accessed entrance into this otherworld landscape, suggesting that the dream is cognate with the psychedelic experience: 'I think dreaming and states of psychedelic intoxication, possibly the after-death state, possibly the postapocalypse state for the collectivity, all these are related to each other. Certainly dreaming is the natural access point, because it's part of everyday experience' (1991: 77). This perspective is similar to Borges' own profound interest in dreams (which he described to his 7 year old nephew as 'a hobby' [1984: 29]), and the dream's symmetry with mystical vision. Note that he paid great attention to the fact that Swedenborg's visions were preluded by dreams, and that all through Swedenborg's three decades of spiritual

journeys he maintained a detailed dream diary. Borges, referring to J.W. Dunne, even suggests that, 'each man is given, in dreams, a little personal eternity which allows him to see the recent past and the near future' (1984: 28).

Daimonic Beings

The nature of such experiences leads us into a consideration of the particular entities encountered in this *mundus imaginalis* (Corbin). Borges paid close critical attention to the perennial depiction of 'imaginary beings'; in particular, he demonstrates a Jungian approach towards beings whose perennial presence within the human imagination grants them archetypal status. Borges' sister Norah painted angels, and Borges himself published in 1926 an essay entitled 'History of Angels' in which, demonstrating the influence of Swedenborg, he assesses this ancient imaginal being: 'I always imagine them at nightfall, in the dusk of a slum or a vacant lot, in that long, quiet moment when things are gradually left alone, with their backs to the sunset, and when colors are like memories or premonitions of other colors' (2000: 19). Borges evaluates the perennial appearance of such imaginary beings within literature, paying particular attention to them as inspiration for poets. He pays attention to the ancient Muse, and laments her conversion through the language of psychology into 'the unconscious' (1993: 21), and he spoke with fascination about the Brownies whom Stevenson accredited with the inspiration for much of his major fiction: 'Stevenson said he had trained his Brownies in the craft of literature. Brownies visited him in his dreams and told him wondrous tales' (1974: 32). McKenna also reflects this understanding of art and entities, suggesting that 'If we examine the history of early modern science, we discover that some of the major movers and shakers were in fact being guided and directed in the formulation of early science by disincarnate entities' (McKenna 1989). Borges, in particular, appears fascinated by the commerce that Swedenborg maintained with the angels, and gauges the noetic value concerning the world of the dead that Swedenborg gained in this exchange. As with dreams, nightmares and other visions, Borges was not concerned with establishing specific ontological locations for the angelic beings, but with assessing the aesthetic and psychological value of the encounter.

McKenna, in addition to being a reader of mystical and folkloric texts about such meetings, habitually encountered otherworldly entities himself whilst tripping, especially with DMT. He defiantly maintained that such experiences were psychically, if not physically, astonishingly real, and that the sheer outlandishness of

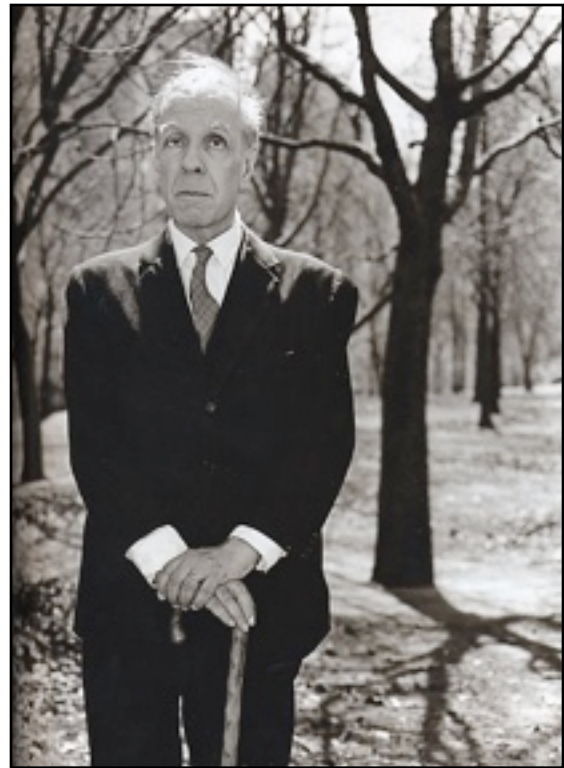
the experience was such that he disavowed his own powers of imaginative creativity in evoking the scene.⁴ As such, he reflects Borges' comments that the nightmare could be an aesthetic act that, owing to its sheer oddness, could *not* be begotten by the dreamer. Borges, exhibiting the 'tolerance' of his agnosticism, considers the ancient tradition that dreams and nightmares may have a demonic or infernal origin.

We also have the French word, *cauchemar*, which is probably linked to *nightmare*. In all of these words there is an idea of demonic origin, the idea of a demon who causes the nightmare. I believe it does not derive simply from a superstition. I believe that there is – and I speak with complete honesty and sincerity – something true in this idea. [...] We also have the possibility of a theological interpretation, one that would be in accord with etymology. Take any of the words: the Latin *incubus*, the Saxon *nightmare*, the German *Alp*. All of them suggest something supernatural. Well, what if nightmares were strictly supernatural? What if nightmares were cries from hell? What if nightmares literally took place in hell? Why not? Everything is so strange that even this is possible. (Borges 1984a: 41)

Borges and McKenna also both consider the ancient form of the incubus as the creature that appears in such nightmarish scenes. Borges considers the etymology:

In Greek the word is *ephialtes*: Ephialtes is the demon who inspires nightmares. In Latin we have *incubus*. The incubus is the demon who crushes the sleeper, causing the nightmare. In German we have a very curious word, *Alp*, which has come to mean both the elf and the torment brought by elf – the same idea of a demon who inspires nightmares. (1984a: 41)

McKenna also considers the relationship between the incubi and the modern phenomenon of UFO encounters:



The incubi and succubi of medieval mythology. These were male and female spirits that were thought to come to people in the night and have intercourse with them. This was thought to be very bad for one's health, and general wasting diseases were often explained by invoking this phenomenon. (1991: 72)

Borges was a reader of Jung, and in the 1957 preface to *The Book of Imaginary Beings* makes a firm distinction between 'the zoo of reality [and] the zoo of mythologies, to the zoo whose denizens are not lions but sphinxes and griffons and centaurs' (1974: 14). Within this second-order zoology, however, the distinction lies between creatures that are creations of a specific author, such as the Eloi and the Morlocks of H.G. Wells, and those of collective human imagination, such as angels, fairies, elves and mermaids. Borges' assessment of these archetypal beings is mirrored by McKenna, who, like Borges, is unable to dismiss the entities as being mere

⁴ Such an appraisal of sheer astonishment is common amongst those patients whom Rick Strassman (2001) analysed following their experiences of intravenous DMT, with many respondents suggesting that the experiences were far beyond their own creativity or powers of invention.

textual creations, owing to their persistence across time and their diversity across cultures. McKenna, like Borges, explores this ancient lineage: 'When you start looking at the question of these disincarnate entities, the first thing that strikes you is their persistence in human experience and folklore. This is not something unusual or statistically rare' (McKenna 1989). In relation to the evidently fictional (the Morlocks) there is no ontological confusion: they are literary inventions. Concerning the putatively nonfictional, however, such as Swedenborg's angels, Borges suggests that their repeated psychic appearance grants them some undefined ontological status, what Jung would call *psychoid*.⁵ If we then consider Borges' enthusiastic interpretation of Swedenborg's visions, we are presented with a radical question about the nature of these psychoid beings. Here is where we find a correspondence with McKenna, whose repeated experiences of the 'self-transforming machine elves' (1991: 16) led him not to question his own sanity (although that is also the case!) but to question whether his own imagination could possibly invent such a vivid and manifestly 'real' landscape populated with 'real' beings. Resistant to the term 'hallucination' McKenna proposes that with the plants 'you are conveyed into worlds that are appallingly different from ordinary reality. Their vividness cannot be expressed enough. They are more real than real. [...] They establish an ontological priority. [...] This is a tremendous challenge to the intellectual structures that have carried us so far during the last thousand years' (1991: 79). Whilst McKenna departs from Borges in experiencing – rather than merely reading about – such a conversely *non-imaginary* landscape, we can nevertheless imagine the scenario wherein Borges reads McKenna's depiction of the elves alongside Swedenborg's depiction of the angels and presumes in his reading a shared experience of both authors.

At this juncture, therefore, we can perceive a similar enterprise carried out not, in this case, by McKenna and Borges, but by McKenna and Swedenborg; and the impression that links them is that of lucid and personal (i.e. non-textual) exploration of otherworldly landscapes. Ralph Waldo Emerson described Swedenborg as a 'Viking,' evoking the sense of epic adventure into the unknown, a term that Borges repeats in his biography of Swedenborg (2000: 449-458). Borges elucidates further, suggesting that Swedenborg 'energetically and

lucidly traveled through this world and the others. [...] that sanguine Scandinavian who went farther than Eric the Red' (2000: 449). Borges places great value upon these voyages of exploration, displaying a curiosity and gleeful wonder in the face of Swedenborg's extraordinary journeys. Here, again, Borges and McKenna depart from each other, as whilst Borges maintains that mystical flights of such magnitude are not available to most people, McKenna would argue precisely the opposite: that they *are* accessible, if only people would avail themselves of the plants. However, McKenna, like Borges, sees a similar methodology and set of objectives of such endeavours, evoking also the metaphor of voyages of exploration. Note that such a metaphor is found also in Huxley: 'antipodes of the mind' (1959: 71), in Leary & Alpert: 'ecstatic voyage' (Watts 1962), and not least in the word 'trip.'

People in the confines of their own apartments are becoming Magellans of the interior world, reaching out to this alien thing, beginning to map invisible landscapes and to bring back stories that can only be compared to the kind of stories that the chroniclers of the New World brought back to Spain at the close of the fifteenth century. Stories of insect gods, starships, unfathomable wisdom, endless realities. (McKenna 1991: 75)

McKenna also proposes that the destination of such voyages is, like the angelic landscapes of Swedenborg, so removed from our everyday conceptual schema of reality, that the trip constitutes a new exercise separate from the scientific method.

I call myself an explorer rather than a scientist, because the area that I'm looking at contains insufficient data to support even the dream of being a science. We are in a position comparable to that of explorers who map one river and only indicate other rivers flowing into it; we must leave many rivers unascended and thus can say nothing about them. (1983)

It is far from my intention to compare Swedenborg and McKenna, as their social, political and religious contexts are widely divergent. It is, however, of interest to perceive

⁵ The real impact in Jung of this distinction between creatures of the imagination and ontologically distinct beings was made clear in 2009 with the long-anticipated publication of *The Red Book*. Jung's dialogues with discarnate souls, with Old Testament prophets and with his guru Philemon display a tension regarding their specific location. Elijah, for example, is adamant that he and Salome: 'we are real and not symbols' (Jung 2009:246). The dead with whom he converses, likewise, are discarnates who were formerly incarnate, and they 'exist' somehow extrinsic to Jung's psyche.

phenomenologically Swedenborg's angels and McKenna's elves: both inhabit a time-space that is separate yet interconnected with ours, both communicate telepathically amongst themselves and to the explorer, both reveal knowledge about other dimensions, the world of the dead and the ancestors, both impart knowledge about the physical impact of man upon the earth. With such considerations, we return to the old debate comparing mystical states and psychedelic states (Watts 1962, Pahnke 1966, Smith 2000), as it is clear from even this perfunctory assessment that we are not dealing with two radically separate or opposed experiences or epistemologies.

Conscious Reality

'Psychedelic Society,' Terence McKenna expressed, 'is the idea of creating a society which always lives in the light of the mystery of being' (1997: 57). This putative society, as he describes it, is motivated by a Jamesian radical empiricism in which experience is given greater value than it has hitherto (in McKenna's eyes) been given: 'a kind of intellectual anarchy where whatever was pragmatically applicable was brought to bear on any situation' (1997: 58). When we correlate McKenna's statement with Borges' claims for agnosticism – a cognitive and intellectual state that allows even the most outlandish idea 'even God, even the Holy Trinity' to be possible – we can perceive firstly the presence of William James behind both; but more importantly, an epistemological position apropos the non-ordinary states of consciousness and the entities encountered therein. Not only would both Borges and McKenna give great value to their own mystical experiences, but they would not discredit others' experiences *a priori* based upon allegiance to a belief system. McKenna is clear about this. Living psychedelically 'means taking a position *vis-à-vis* the emergent hyper-dimensional reality. It does not necessarily mean becoming a psychedelic drug user yourself; but it does mean admitting to the possibility'; and that in such a position, 'you orient yourself toward the psychedelic experience as a source of information' (1997: 59). It is about giving credence to others' experience – especially their psychedelic experiences – and not denying them as phenomenologically impossible or morally impermissible. In this sense McKenna can be considered agnostic in the sense that Borges elaborates.

'The world is so mysterious and so rich' (1982: 86), writes Borges, reflecting on the fantastical nature of reality. Consequently one need not make a rigid distinction between the wondrous in fiction and the wondrous in life. He declares this very unitive element to

Richard Burgin, explaining that a writer need not be so much inventive as observant: 'It's almost an insult to the mysteries of the world to think that we could invent anything or that we needed to invent anything. And the fact that a writer who wrote fantastic stories had no feeling for the complexity of the world' (1998: 31). From this particular perspective, one can understand how Borges comes to include Wells' Eloi and Swedenborg's Angels in the same compilation (*Book of Imaginary Beings*), as whilst the former is a literary invention and the latter a supposed experience, both nevertheless reflect the extraordinary prevalence of phenomena that defy scientific principles and moral codes. Borges revealed an intuitive understanding of Jung's idea of synchronicity, reflecting it in his discussions of 'symmetries' and 'patterns'. He explained to Burgin that 'I'm on the lookout for symmetries' (1969: 110) describing the statistically improbable occurrence of a miss-translated line of Montaigne appearing in different texts: 'Coincidences are given to us that would involve the idea of a secret plan, no? Coincidences are given to us so that we may feel there is a pattern – that there is a pattern in life, that things mean something [...] a more subtle kind of pattern, no?' (1969: 110). It is from this perspective that Borges derives knowledge from the dreamworld, from visions, and from the revealed patterns of everyday reality. Yet in maintaining that 'coincidences are given to us', and that there is a pattern, 'that things mean something', he is revealing sympathy with Jung's articulation of a conscious universe, or *anima mundi*. In this sense meaning is not arbitrarily ascribed to inanimate features of reality extrinsic to the psyche, but is somehow derived from and interconnection between the individual and the world. Reality is thus in some measure conscious. McKenna also derives knowledge from the dreamworld and the visionary landscapes, and in a similarly subtle fashion, suggests that this meaning is not purely subjective and arbitrary. 'I think the entire message of the psychedelic experience, which is basically the *sine qua non* of the rebirth of alchemical understanding, the very basis of that understanding is that nature seeks to communicate' (1996a).

Here we arrive at a radical vision of the relationship between art and reality, and here the Cervantine riddles that Borges weaves at the level of author, narrator, character and reader assume a more uncanny aspect. Literature operates through symbols whose significance lies with their status as artifice. This is the bedrock of literary criticism. Elements in earlier chapters may allude to those of later ones, dreams may be meaningful or precognitive, and names of characters or locations may encode aspects of the character's personality. In these

matters there is reassurance that the author of such wizardry is the writer. As such there is no cognitive challenge to the reader to permit textual precognitive dreams or symbolic names or locations. Indeed social taboos can be easily broached within the fiction owing to it being fictional; and in this sense a divinatory reading may be depicted – tarot, astrology, I Ching, etc. – and the relationship between the divination and the character's narrative is permissible owing to its confines within the pages of a novel. Where the boundaries between author, narrator, character and reader are broken down, however, the delineation of fictional and real is likewise blurred and the symbolic aspects of the fiction can interpenetrate the putative solidity of reality. This is a mainstay not only of Borges' fictions – most famously 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' – but was the focus of so much of his literary scholarship, where, for example, he suggests in the poem 'Sueña Alonso Quijano', that Don Quixote was a dream of Cervantes as much as Cervantes was a dream of the knight. He recognises, for example, the textual and the meta-textual Dante; or the Walt Whitman author, the Walt Whitman character, and the Walt Whitman reader, all of whom interact within the fictional space. As Borges repeatedly argues, fiction is reality and reality is fictional.

Here lies the possibility for the symbolic attributes of the meta-text – the world around us – where names may also be considered representational and dreams and divinations may reveal aspects of the future. Cognitive dissonance may be avoided if God or gods are invoked as the authors of such matters, but in the spiritual agnosticism prevalent in Borges and McKenna, there is a stranger, more puzzling layer present in reality. Both Borges and McKenna critique scientific or philosophical certainties; Borges, for example, calling philosophy mere guesswork (1982: 111), and declaring that 'there is nothing in the world that is not mysterious' (1985: 28). McKenna habitually lambasts the 'scientistic' perspective that assumes that explanations to all of realities phenomena are forthcoming:

The world is not an unsolved problem for scientists or sociologists. The world is a living mystery: our birth, our death, our being in the moment – these are mysteries. They are doorways opening on to unimaginable vistas of self-exploration, empowerment and hope for the human enterprise. And our culture has killed that, taken it away from us, made us consumers of shoddy products and shoddier ideals. We have to get away from that. (1994)

The scientific method would concern itself with seeking eventual concrete answers to these mysteries where the psyche and the world interconnect; and as the answers are not forthcoming, such approaches are at best not considered epistemologically valuable, at worst taboo. McKenna encapsulates this perspective: 'The intellectual tension that seems to work its way through this society almost like fat through meat is the tension between scientific reductionism and the deeply felt intuition of most people that there is a spiritual dimension, or a hidden dimension, or a transcendental dimension' (1996b). Art and poetry, however, are the operations of magic and imagination, and as such it is the artistic method that is the most appropriate for exploring these fields of experience at the boundaries of rationality, summarised by McKenna: 'The imagination is a dimension of non-local information' (1996b). This is the poetic nature of reality that Borges admired in Blake: 'Blake also affirms that the salvation of man demands a third requirement: that he be an artist' (Borges 1995: 13). McKenna ceaselessly attributed this power to art and artists: 'Art's task is to save the soul of mankind, and that anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. Because if the artists, who are self-selected for being able to journey into the other, if the artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found' (1992b).

Borges and McKenna explored the rich traditions at the limits of rational thought – Gnosticism, hermeticism, alchemy, poetry, depth psychology and mysticism – and they shared the epistemological value of ecstasy and mystical states. Borges focused throughout his life on the writings of mystics, such as Swedenborg, Eckhart, Silesius and Blake, whilst McKenna concentrated on the varieties of shamanic experience. Borges was critical of countercultural movements of the 1960s, and consequently would have treated with discretion the psychedelic explorations inherent in many such movements. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the perennial discussion concerning mystical and psychedelic states – William James, Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Huston Smith, etc. – we must consider the related aspects between mysticism and psychedelics rather than the differences. As such, it may be determined that Borges and McKenna were fascinated by similar fields of ecstatic experiences. McKenna writes of shamanism:

The shamanic plants allow the healer to journey into an invisible realm in which the causality of the ordinary world is replaced with the rationale of natural magic. In this realm, language, ideas, and meaning have greater power than cause and effect. Sympathies, resonances, intentions, and personal

will are linguistically magnified through poetic rhetoric. The imagination is invoked and sometimes its forms are beheld visibly. Within the magical mind-set of the shaman, the ordinary connections of the world and what we call natural laws are deemphasized or ignored. [...] The rational, mechanistic, antispiritual bias of our own culture has made it impossible for us to appreciate the mind-set of the shaman. We are culturally and linguistically blind to the world of forces and interconnections clearly visible to those who have retained the Archaic relationship to nature. (1992c: 6-8)

This relationship to nature is precisely what so intrigued Borges about, for example, the otherworld journeys of Swedenborg – this latter-day Viking who voyaged further ‘than Erik the Red.’ Whilst McKenna does not appear to write about Swedenborg, his interest in the otherworld journeys and the beings encountered is manifest in his admiration of John Dee and the magico-alchemical individuals of the Elizabethan era. They, he argued, with or without plant-based techniques of ecstasy, were able to enter the same ‘invisible realm’ in which the shaman is familiar.

Conclusion

To conclude, therefore, I would argue that there is great value in appraising Borges’ shifting metaphysics alongside McKenna’s. Whilst some scholars of Borges may recoil at the idea of associating Borges with the radical countercultural figure of McKenna I would argue, firstly, that Borges, whilst conservative in some outward manifestations, was deeply radical in his challenges to the very ontological certainties that his reader may hold. As I have hoped to demonstrate in this article, Borges and McKenna share far more than they differ, and that what binds them beyond anything else is a tireless – and always humorous – drive to explore the further reaches of human cognition and experience, all the while knowing that mysteries will remain mysteries. McKenna emphasises the genesis of such an exploration as motivated by a curious and critical mind: ‘You claim this higher level of freedom by the simple act of applying attention to being’ (1997: 63); a position reflected by Borges in his comment that many people are dulled by the world because ‘they take the universe for granted. They take things for granted. They take themselves for granted. That’s true. They never wonder at anything, no?’ (1969: 6). From this position of curiosity, of being puzzled, and of being enthused by such puzzlement; and armed with the pragmatic values of William James in which experience is primary, Borges

and McKenna weave their own paths through traditions of philosophy, religion, theology, literature and poetry, sometimes sharing interpretations, sometimes differing. In particular, their trajectories intertwine in their understanding of the limitations of dogma and doctrine and the fictional and mutable construction of culture. From this their attention is drawn towards the heretical fringes of culture’s traditions: archaic Gnosticism, neo-Platonism, Renaissance hermeticism, alchemy, mysticism, esotericism, and Jung. They share an interest, again reflecting James, of the noetic and ineffable experiences of mystical (and psychedelic) visions, and a fascination with the entities encountered upon these visionary journeys (McKenna’s elves, Swedenborg’s angels). Importantly, they critique the limitations of post-Enlightenment rationality, and they recognise the importance of art, dreams and the imagination as the true catalysts of cultural development. Plato, according to Borges, did not distinguish between dreaming and thinking.

With Plato, you feel that he would reason in an abstract way and would also use myth. He would do those two things at the same time. But now we seem to have lost that gift. I mean, you have gone from myth to abstract thinking. But Plato could do both at the same time. [...] I suppose at that time it could be done. But nowadays those things seem to be in watertight compartments. Either we are thinking or we are dreaming. But Plato and Socrates could do both. (1998: 160)

Jorge Luis Borges and Terence McKenna, pioneers in their respective cultural fields, were not restricted by the division of reason and myth. Both were thinking and both were dreaming.

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Dr. William Rowlandson is Lecturer in Hispanic Studies at the University of Kent. He is currently preparing a book concerning Borges and Mysticism, focusing in particular on Borges' abiding veneration for Swedenborg and Dante. A chapter of the book appraises Borges' poetics through the lens of Jung's vision of individuation. William's book on Cuban poet and novelist José Lezama Lima concentrated on Lezama's equation of poetry and the numinous. He is former co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Myth, at Kent, in which he co-ran a reading group that focused predominantly on Jung. William is a native of Salisbury Plain.



The sixth installment of Greg Taylor's anthology series covering hidden history, fringe science and general Forteanism, *Darklore Volume VI*, is now available for sale. You can pick up your copy from any number of online retailers through a simple search. The anthology features articles in which:

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For more information visit <http://darklore.dailygrail.com>

An Inner Curriculum Vitae

Paul Devereux

At various times in our lives many of us have had to present a CV, a résumé, when applying for a post, and this is usually a banal list of dates giving educational and work experience details and perhaps a couple of lines of “personal interests.” A life wrapped up in a narrow, mundane list. But what if we were to supply CVs of our inner life, how different would they be? That is what I decided to experiment with for an essay in a forthcoming anthology*.

Here, I give just a few excerpts from that essay. They tell of both inner experiences and also experiences that cross our culturally ordained boundary between the so-called inner mental world and the so-called outer world of consensus, material reality -- what we tend to call “paranormal” experiences. I have given titles to the small handful of examples recounted here as one would frame a valued snapshot. *I promise the reader that the accounts I give here are truthful*, and as accurate as my memory and descriptive skills allow. I give no explanations, I simply tell each one just as it was at the time.

Designer Decor

I’m 5 years old, nearly 6, and this is my first day at the village school. The class I am put into is not in the main school building but in a church hall nearby. I’m placed at a round table with three other kids. The one I sit next to is called Kenny. Midmorning I raise my hand to tell the teacher I need to go to the toilet. It means going down a long corridor behind the hall’s stage. It’s fantastic! The walls are covered in little sparkles of light, like tiny, twinkling stars, and they give off silver rays that crisscross the corridor like nets of light.

When I get back to my classroom table I say to Kenny, “You should see the wallpaper they’ve got back there!” At lunchtime he goes to see the wallpaper for himself, and I go with him. But the corridor is just dull and grey. “What wallpaper?” Kenny asks disappointedly, and a little accusingly.

Visitation

I am about 9 years old. Everyone is talking about the news that a little girl has been found murdered. When I go to bed my mother tells me to say a prayer for the little girl, which I do.

It is the middle of the night and something has awoken me. I look around. There is a broad windowsill next to my bed. At the far end of it is a soft-edged blue glow glittering with white points of light contained within it. Its shape is vaguely that of a small human figure but there are no details, no face or other features -- it is just a shimmering shape. I somehow know what it is -- it is the murdered little girl. This is too weird. I yell out and wake the household. The sparkling figure of blue light vanishes. My parents and brother come running, and I’m assailed by questions asking me what the matter is. I am unable to speak. My parents tuck me up again in bed, with soothing words.

Mysterious Fly-Past

I am 11 years old. It is just past noon and a school friend and I are going home for lunch walking along a path that leads uphill from our village school. I suddenly notice, up ahead, a huge airship hovering above the brow of the hill. It is almost black, with the sunlight catching the angles of its body formed by its structural ribbing. At its left end from our viewpoint there are tail fins, and slung underneath is what looks like a cabin or gondola. I have seen pictures of the old airships, but here is one floating in the sky! I turn to my friend to see her staring at the object with her mouth open. “See that? See that?” I shout at her excitedly. Still staring and gaping ahead, she doesn’t respond. I turn back to look at the airship, but it has vanished. I run to the top of the hill which offers views across half the county. There is no airship to be seen anywhere. My friend does not speak again as we walk onward to our homes.

I tell my brother and my father about the airship. They assure me there is no such thing now flying in Britain, nor has there been for decades.

Just a Matter of Time

I’m 20 years old. Friends from my new college near London have obtained some heroin. We decide to experiment. We draw the curtains in the student house we’ve rented, light a warming fire, and snort the heroin. Everything is warm and cosy -- that is until we all begin to itch like mad. I start to have sporadic hallucinations and decide to go upstairs to an empty bedroom and lie down alone.

My girlfriend comes in and looks down at me, checking that I'm all right. She doesn't realise that she turns into an Egyptian statue a hundred feet tall and carved in onyx as she leaves. The room is empty again. Then suddenly and somehow it is filled with people, a dense crowd of people, not an inch of spare space. Who the devil are they? Where did they all come from? I look closely. Am I looking at the room through time, seeing all the people who have been, or perhaps will be, in it? They vanish.

John peers round the edge of the half-open bedroom door, grinning, his head tilted sideways in a comical way with both his hands holding onto the edge of the door. He goes away. Ten minutes later, he reappears and does the exact same thing again, the precise same pose.

"Were you up here a short while ago, John?"

He shakes his head from side to side. "No," he says. "This is the first time."

This confirms my suspicion that I haven't been in a room so much as in a corridor. A time corridor. Perhaps one of those that William Burroughs referred to in his *Naked Lunch* as "the back alleys of time."

There is still a lot for our physicists to figure out, that's for sure.

Black is the Colour...

I'm 23 years old. It is a late summer's afternoon, and I am with two artist friends driving back toward London through sun-drenched countryside after hanging an exhibition of our work in Norwich. I am in the back seat of Ivan's VW Beetle, and Sam is in the passenger seat in front of me. I look at the passing landscape. Um...what's that? I see a black (an oh-so-black) round thing in the sky just above the treetops on the far side of the field we are passing. Out of the corner of my eye I note that Sam has seen it as well. We both stare at this sphere, this disk, this dimensional hole in the sky, this utterly black whatever-it-is. As we look, it vanishes. Clear vanishes, like in a movie. (Cognitive flash: THIS IS NOT A MOVIE). Ah, there it is again, the black round thing, reappearing almost instantaneously, two fields away. There it goes -- swooping up into the sun's glare and disappearing from sight.

Released from our paralysis of fascination, Sam and I yell out in unison. Ivan slams on the brakes and we slide sideways down the road. We stutter out what we have seen.

"Why the hell didn't you tell me while it was still visible?" Ivan rages.

Down Mexico Way

I'm 46 years of age and planning to write a book on the prehistory of psychedelia.¹ I've been trying out all kinds of obscure psychoactive potions. This time it is the turn of *Calea Zacatechichi*, a Mexican Indian substance. Its name apparently translates as "bitter grass" and bitter and foul it is. The herb's action is supposedly to extend the phase between wakefulness and sleep -- the hypnagogic and hypnopompic phases. After a while I settle to sleep and almost immediately start passing through brief but remarkably realistic scenes, scenes that have an exceptionally solid plasticity to them. Then suddenly I'm flying. I am speeding over a rocky and hilly or mountainous landscape; all I see passing beneath me are slopes cluttered with a chaos of granite boulders and outcrops. Then I am lying on a narrow, wood-frame bed or litter. Two men swathed in coloured blankets or ponchos are looking down at me -- they look like Mexican Indians. They are smiling in a knowing way. Somewhere in consensus reality this is an actual place and these are actual, living people, I know it. I absolutely know it. What secret traffic of souls ushered me here? What inner-world currents circulating through consciousness washed me up here? Did these two fellows have anything to do with it? Then the uncharted tides of mind whisk me away and I fall through a cascade of further but lesser imagery into wakefulness, before dissolving into sleep.

* David Luke (ed.), *Ecology, Cosmos and Consciousness Anthology*. London: Strange Attractor Press, 2012.

The excerpts in this article represent just a few of the many more even weirder and arguably wonderful examples presented in the full essay, 'A Life in Visions', in the strangely attractive anthology. Be sure to read it!

Note

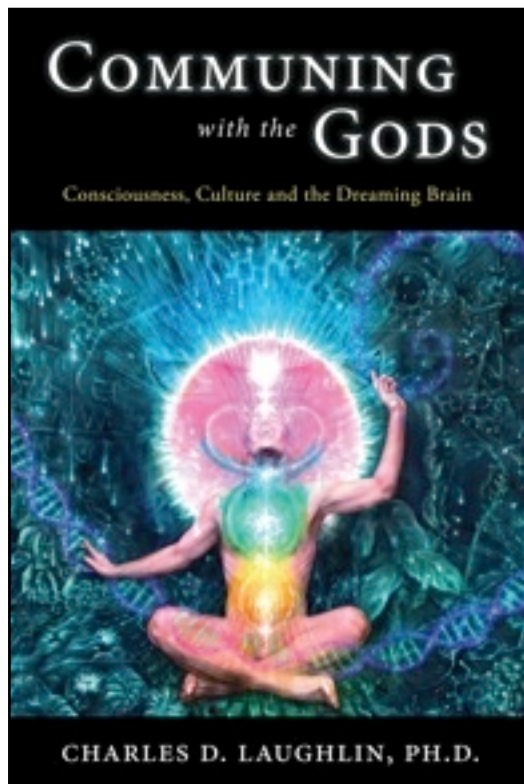
1. The book did, eventually, appear: *The Long Trip*, New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1997; 2008 updated edition: Brisbane: Daily Grail Publishing.



Paul Devereux is a founder and managing editor of the peer-reviewed *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergjournals.org/timeandmind), and a research affiliate of the Royal College of Art, where he is co-investigating archaeoacoustics, the study of sound at archaeological sites, and at the source of the Stonehenge bluestones in particular (www.landscape-perception.com). He is also co-director with Amanda Feilding (Beckley Foundation) of the Black Swan

Project, exploring innovative ways of conducting psi research. He is a prolific author with a slew of articles and academic papers plus nearly 30 books to his credit -- his latest titles being *SACRED GEOGRAPHY* (Gaia Books) and, with his wife Charla Devereux, *LUCID DREAMING* (Daily Grail Publishing). His website is www.pauldevereux.co.uk.

Charles D. Laughlin Gives an Overview of “Communing With the Gods”



Title: “Communing With the Gods: Consciousness Culture and the Dreaming Brain”

Author: Charles D. Laughlin

ISBN: 9780980711165

Publisher: Daily Grail

Price: £24.95

Dreaming is the most common alternative state of consciousness experienced by human beings. All humans sleep and dream, and all humans are embedded in a culture that conditions individual access to dreaming, types of dreaming, how dreams are shared and what actions, if any, are taken with respect to dreams. *Communing with the Gods: Culture and the Dreaming Brain* is a comprehensive account of culture and dreaming, and is written by an anthropologist who is trained in neuroscience, who is himself a lucid dreamer and a long time practitioner of Tibetan Tantric dream yoga. The book examines the place of dreaming in the experience of people from diverse cultures and historical backgrounds. The perspective is that of *neuroanthropology*; that is, the merger of neuroscientific findings with both the century and a half of ethnographic research on dreaming and a method, founded by the author in the 1980s, called *neuropsychophenomenology*. It

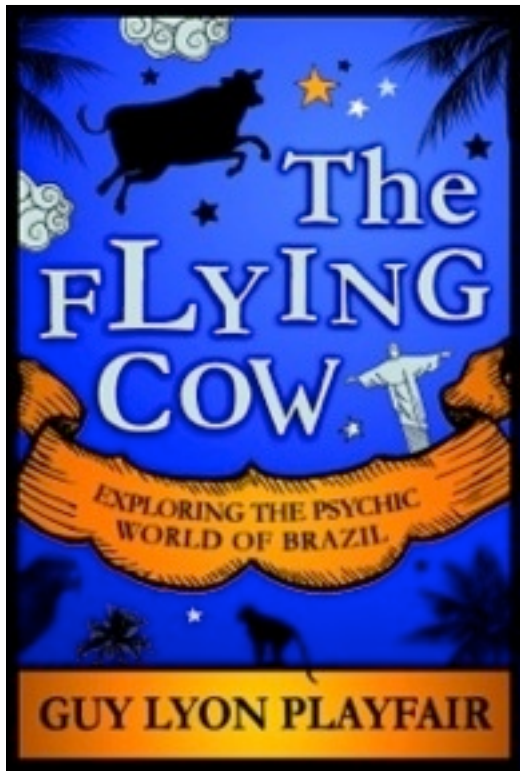
traces the history of anthropological thinking about dreams and the role dreaming plays in the production of peoples world views. It surveys what we know about how the brain produces dreams and why. It also critiques the history of lucid dream research from an ethnological point of view and applies the notion of lucidity to dreaming in traditional societies.

The middle and longest section of the book explores the various ways that societies encourage, evoke, experience and interpret dreams, as well as how people act in response to information obtained in the dream state. It is replete with actual examples of dreams from different societies. Most of the 4000+ cultures on the planet conceive of dreaming as another domain of reality, and this perspective has repercussions for belief systems and social action in everyday life. A common viewpoint is that dreams foretell the future, and thus require careful scrutiny and evaluation. Chapters in the middle section treat the phenomenology of dreaming, cultural theories of dreams, dreams and dream sharing as social acts, dreaming and the self, the role of dreaming in religion, shamanism and healing, archetypal big dreams, transpersonal and paranormal aspects of dreaming, and dream yogas. In the chapter on dream yogas, the author gives a detailed account of his experiences as a practitioner of Tibetan dream yoga for many years.

In the final section of *Communing with the Gods*, the author develops a comprehensive theory of brain, culture and dreaming. The theory explains the neurobiological functions of sleep and dreaming, the evolution of dreaming, the universality of and cultural variation in dream elements, the role of dreaming as a system of intra-psyche communication (Hollan’s “selfscape” dreams). This theory is then applied to an examination of dreaming in modern society. The book shows how modern dream-work movements and psychotherapies have reinvented the wheel, so to speak have rediscovered the properties of dreaming and their potential for ameliorating widespread alienation, spiritual exhaustion and despair in modern society.

An anthropologist by trade, education and inclination, Charlie taught the subject at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, for 25+ years. He retired in 2001. Among other things, being an anthropologist allowed Charlie to live with different peoples all over the planet, including African pastoralists in East Africa, Tibetan lamas in Nepal and India, and Navajo Indians in the American southwest. He naturally learned lots of things, including how cultures influence the states of mind of people, and how culture is both an adaptational strength and a trap for individual minds seeking the truth of being and existence.

Guy Lyon Playfair Gives an Overview of “The Flying Cow”



Title: “The Flying Cow:
Exploring the Psychic World of Brazil”
Author: Guy Lyon Playfair
ISBN: 9781907661945
Publisher: White Crow Books
Price: £12.99

Brazilians like to tell the story of the man who comes home and tells his wife that he just saw a cow flying across the road.

‘Ah, é?’, (oh, really?), she replies, without questioning his sanity for a moment. ‘What colour was it?’ Like many Brazilians, she would probably go along with the saying ‘I don’t believe in witches (or whatever), but I know they exist.’

For me, a flying cow is a good metaphor for all kinds of equally supposedly impossible phenomena that I was able to witness during my time in Brazil. For instance, I watched as ‘psychic surgeons’ appeared to plunge their bare hands into people’s bodies, memorably including mine, and I interviewed several patients of such legendary practitioners as Zé Arigó, Antonio Sales and Lourival de Freitas.

I spent several days and nights in a poltergeist-infested house in São Paulo, where I recorded some

useful evidence. I was nearly stoned to death in an open-air case out in the suburbs, and I collected valuable testimony for an earlier case from one of the police officers who had originally investigated it.

I was also given eyewitness testimony from a number of people, including a serving chief of police, who had attended sessions with many of the country’s best known mediums such as materialisation specialist Peixotinho, the colourful and controversial Carlos Mirabelli and the almost certainly fraudulent Otilia Diogo.

I met a young fellow named Luiz Gasparetto, who surprised me by dashing off drawings in near-total darkness which turned out to be portraits signed with such names as Manet, Renoir and Van Gogh, and surprised me even more by doing two drawings at once, using both hands, one of them being upside down. Later, I even saw him produce quite a decent ‘Manet’ with his feet.

I got to know a woman from a respectable family who clearly recalled a past life as a prostitute in Pompeii, which she was able to describe in very graphic detail.

I also had a memorable meeting with Chico Xavier, considered by Brazilians as one of the greatest mediums ever, who produced more than 400 books through automatic writing, earning him a fortune all of which he gave away to charitable causes. He too seemed to have memories of life in first-century Rome, which he described in several of his books. For many years he was little known outside Brazil, but recently there have been a number of English translations of some of his best works. I was the first to write about him at length in English, and an outline of his career plus translations of several extracts from his works can be found in my *Chico Xavier. Medium of the Century* (Roundtable, 2010)

One way and another, I had a good deal of beginner’s luck as a psi researcher.

All this was due to my meeting with Brazil’s leading parapsychologist Hernani Guimarães Andrade (1913-2003) founder-director of the Brazilian Institute for Psychobiophysical Research (IBPP) who gave me free access to his enormous collection of case material collected by himself and a handful of colleagues in a few years of intensive field research, chiefly into poltergeists and cases suggestive of reincarnation, of which the city and state of São Paulo seemed to have far more than their fair share.

Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

Before long it became clear that there had to be a book, and I had more than enough material to fill one, so in 1975 the first edition of *The Flying Cow* was published by Souvenir Press and soon translated into several foreign languages. It was well received by most reviewers. Philip Norman (*Sunday Times*) found it 'a striking example of an author's participation in his own book' while Robert Shields (*The Observer*) concluded that 'there's too much evidence for it to be simply a matter of invention.'

I have often been asked how it was that so much of what is generally called 'paranormal activity' took place in or around Brazil's largest and most modern city, where a fair amount of the country's gross domestic product is generated. The answer is simply that Andrade and his small band of colleagues took a proactive approach to research. We went out and looked for cases, several of which we originally found in the local press, instead of waiting for them to come to us, and witnesses tended to be willing to be investigated and open to the possibility of psi phenomena of all kinds.

Brazil's social and cultural history having produced an attitude to anomalous events that is considerably more sympathetic than is generally the case in the UK or the USA.

Andrade was an electrical engineer who spent most of his working life with the São Paulo electricity board, yet he was also an active Spiritist, as were most of his colleagues in his Institute. I had spent time checking out the Spiritist scene and attending meetings, and though not a fully committed believer I could be considered a sympathetic observer of the movement founded by Allan Kardec in France in the

1860s and soon brought to Brazil, which at that time looked to France for cultural and artistic inspiration.

Kardec's Spiritism differed from European and American Spiritualism mainly by its firm belief in reincarnation – it was a Spiritist-scientist, Gabriel Delanne, who was the first to collect the evidence for it. Kardec also saw poltergeists as unruly and disturbed spirits, a view not popular with today's psi researchers, though one of the most intriguing features of the poltergeist cases we investigated was the clear evidence in many of them of what we would call black magic practices, as I was able to see for myself.

The updated edition of *The Flying Cow. Exploring the Psychic World of Brazil* is published by White Crow Books, specialists in rescuing books of interest to psi researchers from out-of-print oblivion. I hope readers will find it as informative and entertaining as an earlier generation of readers found it in 1975.

Guy Lyon Playfair was born in India and educated in England, obtaining a degree in modern languages from Cambridge University. He then spent many years in Brazil as a freelance journalist for *The Economist*, *Time*, and the Associated Press, also working for four years in the press section of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The first of his twelve books, *The Flying Cow*, in which he described his experiences investigating the psychic side of Brazil, was translated into six languages and became an international best seller. His most recent book is *Telepathy – the Twin Connection*. He now lives in London and is a council member of the Society for Psychical Research.



Micro-News: Consciousness, Anthropology, Psychology, Spirituality, Psychedelics, Paranormal.....

Bolivia Set to Pass Historic 'Law of Mother Earth' Which Will Grant Nature Equal Rights to Humans (<http://www.pypulse.com/en/news/world-news/bolivia-set-to-pass-historic-law-of-mother-earth-which-will-grant-nature-equal-rights-to-humans#startOfPageId776>)

Using fMRI to Investigate the Effects of Psilocybin on Brain Activation and Blood Flow - Robin Carhart-Harris, Ph.D. (<http://vimeo.com/16776520>)

Leap of Faith: This event asks what part scientific proof can – and, indeed, should – play for three inexplicable phenomena: alien encounters, near-death experiences and the so-called 'God Particle' (<http://www.wellcomecollection.org/whats-on/events/leap-of-faith.aspx>)

In the Quantum World, Diamonds Can Communicate With Each Other (<http://www.physnews.com/physics-news/cluster199204497>)

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