



Journal for the Study of Religious Experience



Introduction: Special issue on ‘Religion, Culture, and Extraordinary Experience’

Guest editor: Gregory Shushan

Honorary Research Fellow, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

g.shushan@uwtsd.ac.uk

Despite longstanding theoretical and methodological objections, scholarly research into so-called ‘religious experience’ continues to flourish. This issue of the Journal for the Study of Religious Experience is dedicated to exploring the relationships between religion, culture, and unusual experiences which are commonly viewed in religious, spiritual, or mystical terms within their own local contexts. Examples of such experiences include (but are not limited to) unitive, visionary, transcendent, numinous, mediumistic, near-death, and out-of-body, as well as other kinds of deathbed phenomena, supernatural healings, and divine revelations, voices, and precognitions. The contributions here are grounded variously in historical research and ethnographic and sociological fieldwork, though are all characterized by sound theory and method. It is especially gratifying that many are of an interdisciplinary nature.

The kinds of questions underlying this issue include:

- In what ways do people negotiate, interpret, and integrate extraordinary experiences into their beliefs systems?
- Can such experiences account for the origins of religious beliefs?
- Are extraordinary experiences ‘all in the brain’?
- In what ways does culture influence experience?
- Do extraordinary experiences challenge or support cultural-linguistic constructivist assumptions concerning religious phenomena?
- What are the implications of extraordinary experiences for debates surrounding terminology in the Study of Religions (e.g., ‘religion’, ‘religious experience’)?

In the first article, German ethnologist and photographer Dirk Schlottman guides us through the world of the Hwanghaedo tradition of Korean shamanism, while also questioning Western scholarly assumptions about spirit possession and other experiential phenomena. The article is supplemented by the author’s own evocative and artistic photographs.

The second article, by U.S. Hinduism scholar Loriliai Biernacki, is a highly innovative and interdisciplinary exploration of transcendent experiences in sports, interpreted through the lenses of Tantric practices and cognitive science.

Rudolph Steiner's writings are the subject of the third paper, which study of religions scholar Loren Fetterman utilizes in his critique of cultural/linguistic constructivist interpretations of mystical experiences, and to propose a theory that also draws upon transpersonal psychology and neuroscience.

Study of religions scholar (and Lampeter alumnus) Jennifer Uzzell then examines anomalous experiences in contemporary Pagan communities, and contrasts them with William James' definition of religious experience – particularly in relation to the notion of transcendence.

In our last formal article, Medieval historian Simon Young presents the results of his survey of children's fairy experiences, looking at the questions of how children integrate such experiences into their beliefs systems and spiritual development.

We are also pleased to include in this issue a special section on the eminent anthropologist Edith Turner (1921-2016), much of whose work highlights the centrality of extraordinary experiences in religious beliefs and rituals. First is a piece entitled 'The Body and the Spirit,' which Turner wrote for the symposium *Anthropology and the Paranormal*, held at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California in 2013. Though brief, it is rich with the experience, insight, wisdom, and warmth that typifies Turner's writings. She also very helpfully included a list of references to her works which concern the paranormal in anthropology. Accompanying this piece are reflections by anthropologist Jack Hunter on Turner's significance to the ethnographical study of religious experience. Finally, we are fortunate to be able to include a series of short personal narratives by three of Edith and Victor Turner's children, concerning their memories of accompanying their parents on fieldwork in Africa during the 1950s. Written especially for this issue, these pieces give us new insight into the physical, everyday contexts of the Turner's immense contribution to the study of religious ritual and experience across cultures. We hope that this small tribute will inspire further reflections upon and engagement with Turner's life and works.



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Spirit Possession in Korean Shaman rituals of the Hwanghaedo-Tradition

Dr Dirk Schlottmann

Director of the Institute for Korean Shamanism / Berlin

visiodradek@gmail.com

The Cartesian view of the world influenced anthropological studies of ritual and spirituality. Spirit possession studies in particular suffer from this Western idiosyncrasy, because many anthropologists who write about possession argue that possession cults and rituals are “just” traditional performances for treating psychosomatic illness brought about by disharmonies in the social order. A spiritual reality, as perceived by the participants of religious rituals and shamans is in principle excluded. This reduction of the psycho-social aspects of spirit possession ignores a “transcendent reality,” where physical and spiritual experiences can be an expression of individual and culturally specific reality. In this article, I analyse the various anthropological perspectives on spirit possession and compare the epistemological approaches on “ritual reality” with the indigenous terminology for states of possession of Korean Hwanghaedo-shamans from Seoul. The Hwanghaedo tradition of Korean shaman is particularly ecstatic and moments of spirit possession exist in many variations. For this reason, the analysis is focused on this tradition.

Keywords: Korean Shamanism, spirit possession, incorporation, ritual, social anthropology

1. Introduction

In the polyphony of conflicting, intersecting, and overlapping discourses about spirit possession where the participants use their favourite terms in accordance with their respective academic perspective, there are many different definitions of spirit possession, influenced both by *Zeitgeist* and teleological orientation. Each of them focuses on different elements of the complex phenomenon.

This article analyses the various anthropological perspectives on spirit possession and compares the epistemological approaches on “ritual reality” with the indigenous terminology for states of individual possession. The individual experience of liminal moments discussed here includes trance, ecstasy or incorporation by gods, spirits or ancestors of Korean Hwanghaedo-shamans.¹ Particular emphasis is placed on the

¹ Hwanghaedo is the name of a North Korean province. Due to the Korean War (1950-

spiritual experience of the shamans themselves, whose perspectives on spirit possession are rarely discussed in depth in the existing literature.²

In 1921, Traugott Konstantin Oesterreich, a German philosopher of religion, documented that in most cultures people have attributed bad, harmful, and fateful events such as illnesses and accidents to the work of evil spirits for many centuries in his great work "Die Besessenheit". The existence of these demonic beings as they are understood in the Christian context served as a justification of suddenly occurring and often dramatically progressing mental disorders in a pre-scientific world.

The idea of possession by spiritual entities by no means disappeared with the rationality of modernity. Even in modern research directions such as transpersonal psychology, the concept of possession is accepted and is not dismissed as superstition. Using Oesterreich's concept over half a century later, transcultural psychologist Wolfgang Pfeiffer proved in his research that spirit possession is based on the culturally accepted ideas of those affected. In many of these, the explanation of those affected was that a spiritual power took possession of them (Pfeiffer 1994, p. 143). Accordingly, supernatural causes might cause mental disorders.

Other psychologists formulated their theses in a less transcendent way, describing spirit possession as the result of illness and emotional stress, which among other things was repeatedly linked to unsettling social changes in modern times.

This idea is not new from an anthropological perspective, since a relationship between culture-related social stress and possession as an expression of negative feelings and protest against socio-cultural norms is considered proven by many authors (Geertz 1960, Stange 1979, Hoare 2004, Hayes 2006). In contrast to the psychological approaches, ethnological research remains more open to interpretation when it comes to the topic of spirituality. The indigenous experience of spirit possession is easily lost and disregarded in psychological discourses that are not generally based on experience and researchers are, as a result, pathologizing the culturally "other", because the exceptional transpersonal altered state of consciousness is an experience Western civilization is no longer familiar with (Scharfetter 1997, p. 84).

1953) and the ensuing religiously hostile policies of the North Korean government, the shamans were forced to flee to South Korea. Many of the shamans used the sea route to flee and landed in the port city of Incheon. To this day, shaman rituals of the Hwanghaedo tradition can be observed mainly in Incheon and Seoul, though Hwanghaedo shamans can still be found nationwide. The Hwanghaedo tradition replaced the customs of the Gyeonggido hereditary shamans after the Korean War. In Seoul, the Hwanghaedo shamans established themselves alongside the traditional, urban Hanyang shamanism, whose ritual practice is strongly interwoven with the courtly traditions of the Joseon dynasty.

² Even in Korean studies on Korean shamanism there is very little research on altered states of consciousness or spirituality of Korean shamans.

Under the pathological points of view, psychological analysis draws parallels to western psychological concepts of hysteria (Cortes & Gatti 1984, Mattoo et. al. 2002, Sethi & Bargava 2009), dissociative identity disorder (DID) (Bulatao 1982, Castillo 1994a, 1994b, Freeman et al. 1999, Mayaram, et al.1999), or "neurotic" defense strategies (Carrin 1999, Suwanlert 1976).

2. Spirit possession

Although there is a clear awareness that ritual spirit possession in a cultural context should not be evaluated as a disease and renowned psychologists explicitly refer to this fact, the World Health Organisation included "trance and possession disorders" under the code F44.3 in the 10th version of its "International Classification of Mental Disorders" in 1991.

For the American anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano, spirit possession phenomena, i.e. all altered states of consciousness due to spiritual foreign influence, are in response to complex psychosocial problems. He refers to a problematic perspective shift that is fundamentally inherent in the Western psychological interpretation patterns of spirit possession due to their focus on the "inside" (Crapanzano 1977, p. 14). These psychological explanations are within the Cartesian determination principle of inside and outside, which does not necessarily converge with the mentality of other cultures. Psychologists see spirit possession as a "projection" of repressed inner feelings or conflict with another person or entity, while in the indigenous sense it is perceived as incorporation (Strecker 2000, p. 56). Because of this, they deny the spiritual experience of those affected and ignore the ideological core of the transcendent experience in their discourse.

In contrast, the cultural-semiotic approach of anthropologist Michael Lambek describes possession as a communication system in which positive and negative social, cultural, and historical contexts are reflected. Unlike Crapanzano, who sees altered states of consciousness at the center of analysis, trance is only of secondary importance for Lambek. He sees trance as an expression of a variety of the rarely explored psychophysiological states of exceptional circumstances in various aspects of human existence and thus, as difficult to understand in ethnographic terms (Lambek 1981, p. 53, pp. 55-56).

Other academic definitions focus on the effects of spirit possession with regards to the ability of the people concerned to act in a self-determined way. The New Zealand anthropologist Raymond Firth divided spirit possession into the categories of spirit mediumship, spirit possession, and shamanism (Firth 1967, p. 296). Under spirit possession, he subsumed the phenomenon of deviant behavior. This is seen as a sign by other members of society that the person is controlled by a spiritual entity. In spirit

mediumship, the possessed person is able to communicate with beings of the other world. The defining characteristic of this communication is that the people involved understand what is said and are able to interpret the messages. In Firth's categorization, the term "shamanism" focuses on phenomena in which a person has control over the spirits. The capability to control spiritual entities is applied in a socially acceptable manner. Similar thoughts, approaches, and terminologies are also the distinctions in „kunstmäßig gewollte Besessenheit“ and „spontane Besessenheit“ as defined by Oesterreich (Oesterreich 1921, p. 129, p. 231), or "positive (voluntary)" and "negative (involuntary) spirit possession" from Bourguignon (Bourguignon 1976, p. 98).

The psycho-ethnologist Colleen Ward also regarded spirit possession from the perspective of the capacity to act, but as opposed to Firth, she focused more on socio-cultural aspects (Ward 1980, p. 155). She distinguishes between central or ritual possession and peripheral possession. Ritual possession is part of the spiritual performance at public ceremonies. The state of possession is usually reversible and of short duration. Spirit possession is classified by cultural beliefs as "normal" when it is embedded in a ritual context of the relevant culture. Outside this context, it is considered as a disease. Ritual possession is a socially accepted possibility for some cultures to handle stressful situations that are different from what they are used to. In contrast, peripheral possession is possession rated as negative within the given culture. This state is not deliberately brought about by the person concerned, and has a much longer duration than Ritual possession. Peripheral spirit possession is seen as a disease and must be treated and cured accordingly. Ward interpreted peripheral possession as an individual's pathological response to stress situations and as an indirect social protest by marginalized members of a society. In summary, she identified two types of possession that are applicable to all cultures practicing rituals of spirit possession: the spontaneous spirit possession, which can take place during and out of rituals, and the induced spirit possession which only occurs during rituals (Büttner 2001, p. 61).

Ward's differentiation between ritual and peripheral possession is, in sociological aspects, strongly influenced by the functionalist theory of British social anthropologist I.M. Lewis. Lewis's studies on this subject have greatly impacted many sociological and anthropological analyses in the field and still do to this day. During his studies on Somalian pastoralists in the Horn of Africa, Lewis observed that spirit possession disorders occurred most frequently in certain social groups. In his "epidemiology of possession," (Lewis 1966, p. 308) he makes the assertion that the individuals of those special groups, primarily composed of women with subordinate or marginal social positions and mentally disturbed men, are particularly susceptible to possession disorders (Lewis 1966, p. 315). Based on this premise from his epidemiological approach, he aimed to better understand the social implications of spirit possession. Lewis was less interested in the psychological and expressive aspects of possession, but rather more curious about the social conditions that were the breeding grounds for

the emergence and development of possession cults. His epidemiology of possession is, therefore, a comparative attempt to isolate the social and cultural conditions present in different societies and that lead particular women and weak men to develop a predisposition for spirit possession.

Lewis concludes from his research that possession cults are "religions of the oppressed" (Lewis 1971, p. 127). Based on the close relationship between oppression and spirit possession, he developed the famous theorem of peripheral possession cults (marginal cults), which oppose the central possession religions (central cults). According to Lewis, the central cult is the moralizing instrument of the religious elites. Priests or shamans are chosen by deities or ancestral spirits and are consequently, thanks to this contact with supernatural powers, empowered to constitute public morals. They decide what is right or wrong as well as the reward and punishment system for these deeds (Lewis 1971, p. 29, pp.134-135). In the peripheral possession cults, people with socially lower status usually organize themselves. The spiritual entities that appear during a possession are amoral and secondary, i.e. they are not relevant to public morality and their origin is often located outside of the dominant society. It is characteristic for peripheral possession to at first manifest itself as a disease, wherein a cure can often only be achieved if the person concerned is taken in by the cult community. The spirit will not be exorcised by the community, but rather tamed and domesticated (Lewis 1989, pp. 26-28). Peripheral possession cults are an expression of resistance against the politically powerful representative of a society in which the superiority of the dominant group or class is not really questioned.

Although it seems that the sociologically oriented explanations of many ethnologists and social anthropologists touch the core of the issue, the danger remains that too narrow a sociological approach often leads to a reductionist perception of these transcendent phenomenon. This can be demonstrated on the basis of Lewis's thesis, which almost exclusively evaluates possession as a protest behavior on the part of the underprivileged

3. Korean shamanism and spirit possession

Different intensities of spirit possession during rituals can be observed within Korean shamanism³. For a description of these various forms of spirit possession or incorporation, I refer to the categorization of the Finnish anthropologist Anna-Leena Siikala, who characterizes possession as follows (Siikala 1992, p.35-36):

role identification:

³ Shamans in Korea are mostly women (80%-90%). For this reason, I will use the female term "*mudang*" throughout the article.

The shaman identifies completely with the role of the incorporated spirit and is perceived by those present at the ritual as a spiritual entity. This form of complete incorporation is particularly widespread in Central and Eastern Siberia.⁴ In Korean shamanism, complete incorporation is the most common manifestation of spirit possession.

dual role:

The shaman acts in a dialogue, where multiple views on a problem can be presented from the shaman, the spirits, gods, or ancestors. It is assumed that the spiritual entity is outside the body of the shaman. This separation of the shaman and the spiritual entity can be observed only occasionally. Usually these scenes occur when the Korean shaman (*mudang*)⁵ deals with minor spirits and wants to expel these from the ritual place. Often, auxiliary shamans and the main shaman interact in a dialogue as a spiritual being and "translator", so that a "role allocation" is recognized. It is however assumed that the shaman who performs a sequence of the ritual is completely incorporated. In this respect, this description does not meet the nature of incorporation in Korean shaman rituals.

counter role:

The shaman interacts with transcendent beings. The dialogue with the spirits is only perceptible to the shaman. Throughout Korean shaman rituals (*gut* / 굿) there are always divination situations where the will of the gods is interpreted. I had the impression at some rituals that in these divination situations, there is a kind of inner dialogue between *mudang* and gods, especially when the interpretation of the transcendent message was not clear or was in doubt. Otherwise, this type of spiritual possession plays only a minor role during Korean shaman rituals.

The term "role" that is used in this context by Siikala seems improper to me because it suggests that the ritual is "just" a spectacle or performance in which the shaman

⁴ Variations of this kind of spirit possession were described by the following authors: Shamans of the Yukaghirs (Jochelson 1926, pp. 196-199), Shamans of the Ewenks (Anisimov 1963, pp. 100-105), Shamans der Yakuts (Hudyakov 1969, pp. 311-355) Manchu shamans (Shirokogoroff 1935, pp. 308-309, pp. 313-314), shamans of the Nanai (Lopatin 1960, pp. 169-172) and Orochi shamans (Lopatin 1946-1949, pp. 365-368). (quoted from Siikala 1989, p. 35.)

⁵ *Mudang* (Korean female shaman), the term most commonly used nowadays to refer to Korean Shamans, and has a pejorative connotation and is therefore associated with a certain disdain. At the same time, it has been observed with the new self-confidence of Korean shamans in recent years that the term *mudang* is again used consciously to quell public stigma and to give the "label" a more objective, job-related character.

plays a role. This unfortunate choice of word reinforces the contradiction between spirituality and spectacle that insinuates a hint of fraud or quackery, and subliminally - though often sociologically or psychologically justified -- creates doubts about spirit possession as a transcendental phenomenon.

Spirit mediums, shamans, and healers of possession trance cults such as the dancers of Theyyam in South India, the mediums and the worshippers of the *Đạo Mau* in Vietnam, the participants of Rangda/Barong ceremonies in Bali, the shamans of the Buryats in Siberia and Mongolia, the shamans of Tamang in Nepal, the shamans of the Orochon and the Daur from China, the Yuta shamans of the Amani archipelago in Japan, or the mediums of the Nat rituals in Myanmar (to name just a few examples from Asia) usually have no doubt that other spiritual specialists of their culture are possessed. If the phenomenon of spirit possession was just acting, it stands to reason that sequences of altered states of consciousness claiming spiritual messages from the gods would be unmasked as lies or fraud. A fraud that has been practiced for hundreds of years, taught, and passed on? Is it really likely that so many generations would preserve and maintain a religious tradition that they consider to be meaningless, ineffective, and fruitless?

Ritual or religious possession and incorporation are characterised by the conviction of the affected individual to be "the other" during the transcendent contact. The continuity of the self-experience is interrupted by an alien consciousness.

It is just as important that the supporters of a Korean shaman perceive her behaviour as the result of the interaction with a different and transcendent personality and therefore interpret the spiritual performance of a *mudang* as actions of an incorporated entity. The messages delivered during spirit possession in the form of divination or "words of gods" (*gongsu* / 공수)⁶ such as solutions for business problems, instructions for healing a sick person, support in the endless search for personal happiness, or other advice for everyday life can only be perceived as true under the premise that spiritual possession is an experienceable reality. This belief in the authenticity of the transcendent revelation is the foundation of Korean shamanism religion and an existential part of its world view. If the messages of the spirit mediums, shamans, and healers are not questioned in possession trance cults, it seems reasonable to suppose

⁶ In contrast to all other religious specialists in Korea, it is only possible for the *mudang* to create a contact between this world (*iesseung* / 이승) and the other world (*jeoseung* / 저승). Only the *mudang* can culminate in the course of a shamanic ritual the incorporation of a spiritual entity into a dialogue. Divination elements have just a confirmatory character and symbolize the satisfaction or benevolence of the gods, spirits and ancestors during the ritual, meanwhile *gongsu* is perceived as the direct message of the gods. Through *gongsu* the spiritual presence is experienced intensely and as a consequence thereof the belief in the veracity of the statements increases. For the customers *gongsu* is the most significant and hence most critical moment of the ritual.

that the altered state of consciousness in which the answers to problems of the community or members of this community are obtained must be authentic. In this sense, the experience of possession and incorporation is for the shaman and for the attendant(s) a real and intense cultural act of faith. From an emic perspective, spirit possession is classified as a normal ritual behaviour. However, there is an awareness that ritual behaviour could only be feigned. The participants of a ritual observe the moments of altered states of consciousness very closely and assess the quality of a *mudang* based not only on the results of a ritual, but also on her ability to amuse gods, spirits, and ancestors and to receive messages from the other world that “make sense” in moments of incorporation.

It is observed that when preparing for an initiation ritual (*naerimgut*), the spiritual mother controls her new initiate quite severely. There is not necessarily insinuation that the new shaman means to cheat by feigning the physical entrance of a spiritual entity, but the course of the ritual is still observed argus-eyed to prevent fraud, and more importantly, to avoid "deception" and "misinformation" by lower spirits. Young and lesser-known shamans are particularly aware of the surveillance by those present at their rituals, insuring that no one dares to simply play at spirit possession. As with all matters of faith, there is no definitive, concrete evidence because the transcendent escapes possibilities for verifiability. However, as observers of shamanic or religious rituals, we should provide a leap of faith, which we often concede in situations during our daily lives. Of course, we cannot prove that possessed or incorporated individuals undergo those conditions of an altered state of consciousness or experience spiritual contact, but we can just a little prove that they do not. In "everyday" situations, people believe that others are pleased by gifts they receive, or that they can become annoyed when losing a game of chess against another person. The truthfulness of their emotions is verified when they say "I am happy" or "I am angry". Where is the difference between these examples and the statements of a possessed person (Büttner 2001, p.21)? Spirit possession can be made perceptible through words, gestures, facial expressions, and illustrations. Generally, the perception of myth and religion is heavily based on narrative attempts or dramatic presentations to come closer to the divine.

In light of this knowledge, it makes sense to refer to the semiotic theory of “the sign” of Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined a sign as being made up of the matched pair of “signifier” and “signified”. The signified is the concept, the meaning, the thing indicated by the signifier. The signified does not need not be a real object, but it is some referent to which the signifier refers. The thing signified is created within the perceiver and it is internal for him; no one else can discern exactly what it means to any given perceiver. When we share concepts, we do so via signifiers.

Transferred to spiritual or religious phenomena, the sign itself can already be understood as a model of the Holy because it creates a relationship with the “absent other”. The “distance” is overcome by the transcendence of the sign.

The problem of understanding spirit possession has its origins in the paradoxical, unresolvable contradictions that arise from familiar dichotomies between self and non-self, between identity and otherness, reality and illusion, body and spirit, rationality and irrationality (Lambek 1989, p.52). William James, the "Father of American psychology", thematised the discomfort in attempting to define "the religious" - and in this context I would classify spirit possession -, which he had already implied in his famous work "The Varieties of Religious Experience" in 1902. He writes:

“(...) the truth must at last be confronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously ‘scientific’ or ‘exact’ in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less religious, reactions are more or less total, but the boundaries are always misty, and it is everywhere a question of amount and degree”.
(James 1997 (1902), pp. 41-42)

Spirit Possession as mystical-religious experience is certainly embedded in a sociocultural context, and psychological components also play an essential role in possession rituals, but if we want to approach the essence of the phenomenon from an emic perspective it is of particular importance that those affected speak for themselves and describe their experiences if we want the insights to be of any significance. This does not mean that the analytical value of the mentioned classifications should be denied, but it illustrates that the conceptual rigidity of those analyses stand in sharp contrast to the lived and experienced spiritual experience of possession. This subject specific, academic stiffness restricts the scope and flexibility of interpretations (Crapanzano 1977, pp. 9-10.).

4. Mudang and incorporation

As we already know, there are a variety of cultures where possession cults are practiced. Yet the ideas of spirit possession vary considerably. In Korean shamanism it is for example assumed that gods, spirits, or ancestors enter the body of the shaman. This form of "ritual possession" will therefore hereinafter be referred to as "incorporation," in order to capture the physical idea of this entering. Korean shamans have diverse and very specific terminologies to describe the particularities of incorporation and are therefore able to differentiate between spirit possession and unintentional spirit contact.

Sinnaerim (신내림) is the term for the deliberate incorporation of gods, which takes place at initiation rituals (*naerimgut* / 내림굿) and happens during a rather controlled state of consciousness. Particularly in relation to young shamans, this term is often used to emphasize the ability acquired via apprenticeship to control the gods, spirits,

and ancestors. The word *gangsinsin* (강신) ⁷ emphasises the power to summon and to incorporate gods, spirits, or ancestors via rituals, ceremonies, and prayer. The shamanic concept *jeopsin* (접신) on the other hand refers to the moment of incorporation in which the *mudang* comes into direct contact with a ghost, or the phase of incorporation when both souls are contained in the body of the shaman.

In Korean shamanism, the idea of spirit possession as opposed to incorporation is more comparable with the concept of the Korean shamanic spirit sickness (*sinbyeong* / 신병) or spiritual illnesses (*singamul* / 신가물). Neither phenomena take place in a ritual context. *Singamul* is an unintentional contact with lower spirits who make the affected person's life difficult. This disturbing phenomenon is usually a suddenly occurring event that may continue for a while, and is often associated with a relatively concrete experience. This spiritual contact is not to be confused with *sinbyeong*, the shamanic spirit sickness, because the contact with lower spirits does not lead to a *naerimgut* but to a *nullimgut* (놀림굿), which will be held in order to suppress this spirit contact or expel the ghosts. In modernity, however, many *nullimgut* are sold by business-minded Korean shamans as *naerimgut*, what is well received, especially among foreigners, since the initiation process to become a shaman is perceived less as a misfortune, but rather as a "consecration". ⁸

Unintended spirit contact is colloquially referred to as *bingui* (병의). *Bingui* is not typical for the transcendent contact experienced at shaman rituals, but describes the striking change in the behavior of a person. The deviant conduct whose origin appears inexplicable is displaced because of the obscurity in the spheres of the spiritual world. In contrast to *bingui* is *sinbyeong*, a process that includes various stages of development before the possession. The manifestations of this process can vary considerably and do not necessarily have to be associated with the idea that the "intrusion into the body" inevitably leads to the incorporation of a transcendent entity. No matter how much we know or read about spirit possession, it remains only an academic perspective, which is missing the experience and the implicit knowledge that often eludes the scientific, linguistic expression. A truth in the classical, epistemological sense based on the Aristotelian notions of *epistēmē* (within the meaning of scientific knowledge) rather than the philosophical *doxa* (within the meaning of opinion, belief) of Parmenides does not exist.

⁷ Shamans, which are incorporated by spirits, are called *gangsinsinmu* (강신무). *Gangsinsinmu* experience the Korean shamanic spirit sickness *sinbyeong* prior to their initiation. *Gangsinsinmu* learn how to handle moments of trance and ecstasy under the guidance of older and more experienced shamans or a spiritual shaman mother during their apprenticeship, which leads to a more or less controlled incorporation by gods, spirits, or ancestors.

⁸ Famous shamans offer abbreviated "initiation rituals" that sometimes take only a few hours for the equivalent of 5,000-10,000 Euros.

This discrepancy between knowledge and experience can only be bridged if we give both forms of knowledge equal voice in the discussions on spirit possession and/or altered states of consciousness. With this in mind, scientists should take a step back from time to time to allow room for the subjective perceptions, descriptions, and reports of affected people. Notions such as embodiment, spirit possession, and incorporation should not be the panacea for explaining why and how people actually experience altered states of consciousness and/or spirit contact, but the starting point for new inquiries in this fascinating domain. From a methodological point of view, it therefore seems to me important to give more space to the experiences and self-perceptions of Korean shamans and the ritual participants in the description and analysis of rituals and to conduct long-term fieldwork in which the most diverse variations and forms of expression of spirit possession can be recorded and compared.

4.1. Incorporation of gods (description by *mudang* Oh Su Ja)

“Already during the ushering song⁹, the gods start to pass in front of my inner eye. If I sing, for example, the *manse baji* at a *sancheon geori* (산천 거리)¹⁰ I imagine the scenery and the mountains that I know. In my mind, I walk through the landscape being sung about. I start dreaming while singing. And then I suddenly notice that something is not right or appears differently. This feels as if a movement is interrupted. Suddenly, the inner flow of images stops. I try to realize the change and to understand the meaning of this sign. The gods reveal something to me and want to transmit something. The auguries, impressions, and symbols condense during the chanting and then all at once, *gongsu* comes through. For this experience of spirit contact, a shaman must be sensitised. I am seeking constantly for contact with my gods, over and over, again and again. I listen to myself, trying to understand my emotional impulses and feel the intuitions that go along with this search. If, for example, I look at the bowl with water on my *sindang* (신당)¹¹ and I have the impression that the water is “disquiet”, then I’m searching for an explanation. I do not even know why water should be restless, but there is something that is conveyed by the water. Then I ask the gods for help, looking for clues to find the answer.

Gods are like air or water. You cannot touch or hold them. As a young shaman, you are very often unexperienced and unfocused. By unfocused, I do not mean that these young shamans act carelessly. It is more likely that they still think of many other things. When they sing *manse baji*, many still have to focus on the text or even have to read it from a paper. There's no room for dreams while reading. Only with time and experience, they internalize singing, dancing, and the many details that must be learned for a ritual. Only then will the ability to understand the gods properly mature.

⁹ Chant called *manse baji* (만세 받이) at the beginning of every *geori*, with which the gods are invited to join the ritual (see photo 1).

¹⁰ Chant for the various mountain spirits (mountain gods) and the gods of the rivers.

¹¹ The private shrine of a shaman.

4.2 Incorporation of spirits of the dead (description by *mudang* Oh Su Ja)

The periods of incorporation during *jinjinogigut* (진진 오귀) are very intense. They are often accompanied by a sense of fear. The deceased fears the passage into the beyond. I feel these emotions most intensely at the moment of *gilgareugi* (길 가르기)¹². Sometimes I have the impression of entering a tunnel and at the end of the tunnel, I see a small light. The light attracts me, and I have the impression of being sucked in. This ritual section is accompanied by strong emotions of fear and anger. Occasionally, I also feel a burning sensation on the skin, when the deceased was cremated. Since I was already very ill myself and was confronted with dread, this feeling is not alien to me. I then told myself repeatedly that I want to live. And I live. I believe that I am protected by my gods, as long as I am faithful to them.¹³

4.3. Incorporation of a spiritual general at the moment of *jakdu dancing*¹⁴ (description by *mudang* Lee Myeong Cha)

While dancing on the *jakdu*, I feel strong and wild. The *Janggun*¹⁵ feels very masculine. Sometimes I have the feeling that it should spray fire out of my eyes, like in a comic strip. My head is hot and an indescribable power runs through my body.

I am sometimes a little afraid before the *jadu geori*. But during the *jakdu geori*, when I slowly feel the power that is in me, I want to let off steam¹⁶. When I finally stand on the knife, the other people seem far away. I stand on a high tower or on the top of a mountain. I want to scream and laugh and dance. The more I dance on the knife, the stronger I feel. It's a wonderful feeling. Sometimes I get the impression that a whole army is standing behind me and cheering. I have a feeling of power. I don't experience this feeling of power with other gods.

4.4. photography of spirit contact and/or moments of incorporation

¹² A *geori* during a death ritual in which, by the tearing of a linen, the bridge between here and beyond is symbolized, and the deceased is seen off (see photo 4).

¹³ Interview with *mudang* Oh, Su Ja on 15/11/2015 and on 18/05/2016 after a *jaesugut* and after a *jinjinogigut* (translation by Jung-a Jung)

¹⁴ *Jakdu* is a sharp blade (or blades) of the traditional straw cutter, on which a shaman performs the blade *dance* to demonstrate her spiritual powers

¹⁵ *Janggun* is a military commander or general

¹⁶ See photo 5 for an impression of *mudang* Lee Myeong Cha in ecstasy (just minutes before she dances on the *jakdu*)



photo 1: *Manse baji* (만세 받이) at the beginning of a *geori* (*mudang Han Gong Ju*)



photo 2: A moment of incorporation (*mudang Oh Su Ja*)



photo 3: In periods of incorporation the shaman gives advice, shares the emotions of grief and gives comfort. (*mudang* Oh Su Ja)



photo 4: *gilgareugi* (길 가르기) at a *jinjinogigut* (*mudang* Oh Su Ja)



photo 5: ecstasy and trance, a shaman licking a sharp blade before dancing on it
(*mudang* Lee Myeong Cha)



photo 6: a shaman falling in Trance (*mudang* Park Mi Ryeong)

5. Indigene concepts of spirit contact and incorporation

During the periods of incorporation, a *mudang* is perceptibly in an altered state of consciousness and touches the otherworldly reality for the visitors of the ritual. The *mudang* is a hybrid creature for this period of time, balancing between spiritual entity and her own ego. She communicates only secondarily with the ritual participants, despite the fact that her ability to focus on the needs of the client indicates the quality of the *mudang*. Primarily she interacts with and through divine beings and ancestral spirits and is, therefore, the link between the real world and a transcendent dimension. In a process of dialogue, the "non-possessed" are given an insight into this "other reality" and the problems of the clients are considered from a new spiritual perspective and brought into an altered context.

For Korean shamans themselves, altered states of consciousness are not the essence of their rituals. It is therefore not surprising that there are no terms that explicitly describe altered states of consciousness. Korean shamans experience the moment of incorporation not as altered or ecstatic consciousness, but as contact with gods and spirits, as can be seen from the above examples. In this respect, the vocabulary correspondingly reflects this perception. *Sin i olatta* (신이 없다) is a term for the moment when the "spirit is coming down". Interestingly, *sin i olatta* is not exclusively a shamanic ability, but can for example also be experienced by those present during the course of an entertaining section of a ritual called *mugam* (무감)¹⁷. Other appellations for the moment of incorporation are *sillyeongnim deureooda* ("the gods enter" / 신령님 들어오다) or *sillyeongnim naerida* ("the gods coming down" / 신령님 내리다). The term *sillyeongnim naerida* is used particularly at initiation rituals to name the first controlled contact between *neophyte* and her *momju* (무감). Other names used for altered states of consciousness such as trance or ecstasy have different connotations in the Korean language. Two words that are often translated as ecstasy or trance are of religious origin. *Mua* (무아) is actually a Buddhist word meaning "to be without oneself". Today it is used in conjunction with feelings of trance and ecstasy that are experienced, for example, as a listener (or musician) at a rock concert. It describes the feeling of "losing yourself" which some people experience when they "melt with music" they feel is particularly intense. The word *pobyeol* (법열) also derives from Buddhist terminology and defines moments of ecstasy that can be experienced in deep meditation. Most often, the word *dotshi* (도취) is used as a synonym for ecstasy. *Dotshi* refers in part to a state of complete intoxication induced by alcohol or drugs and on the other hand, specifies the feeling of rapture that overwhelms a person when experiencing something particularly beautiful or impressive, such as a fascinating landscape.

¹⁷ Between *geori* a kind of interlude can take place in which visitors and customers of the shaman wear shaman clothes and dance themselves in a trance. Some dancers feel spirit contact. *Mugam* is usually very amusing and cheerful. The dance contributes much to the entertainment and is a ritual element in which one can let off steam.

The anglicism ecstasy (엑스터시) is used exclusively in the context of drug usage. Sexual ecstasy or extreme moments of positive excitement are referred to as *hwanghol* (황홀) or *hwangholkyeong* (황홀경). Although the descriptive phenomenology circumnavigates the linguistic problems, the description of extraordinary experiences remains the only sensible approach that allows a methodical classification of the contents of experience shamans undergo in altered states of consciousness. Therefore, any description of different states of consciousness requires the researcher to clearly define all terminology to illustrate the differences and limitations in comparison to the indigenous terminology.

6. Conclusion

Regarding Korean shamanism, one can roughly distinguish three varieties of spirit contact between the *mudang* and gods, spirits, or ancestors. The *mudang* meets her function as a mediator between the worlds most noticeably when she is incorporated and transmits the will of the spiritual entities directly. This form of transcendent contact with the other world is concrete and perceptible for all those present at the ritual.

In her function as a fortune teller, she interprets the messages of the gods. The contact with the other world is brought about deliberately, but a direct connection is only experienced by the *mudang*. Additionally, divinatory ritual practices repeatedly visualize the approval or disapproval of the gods on the progress of the ritual.

As a last variation of spirit contact, all ritual sequences that serve to feed or supply lower spirits must be considered. The segments of a Korean shaman ritual that take place at the beginning and the end of a *gut* do not aim to ask the spirits for their will. Divination or messages from the other world do not matter. More important is the idea of harmony between the “real” world and the “transcendent” world. Harmony should be maintained in order to avoid dissonance that may pose a threat to the success of a ritual and potentially lead to problems for the participants of the *gut*. The character of this form of spirit contact is not communicative or dialogical, and does not therefore bring further insights. It is more a spiritual, reciprocal trade; a “spiritual duty” to every shamanic ritual in Korea.

A *mudang*'s capacity to embody gods, ancestors, and spiritual entities is fundamental to her claim that she can perform an effective ritual. The genuine belief in the transcendental nature of the *mudangs* experiences forms the structural framework for all rituals (invoking the gods, entertaining the gods, and sending off the gods). This is the basis for the relationship between customers and shamans and is seen as having the power to effect a transformation in the client. In this sense, the genuine belief in the transcendental nature of such experiences as trance, ecstasy, and incorporation is the core of all Hwanghaedo shaman rituals.

As a researcher and observer, it is not always easy to understand how spiritual-religious experiences that do not correspond to our world view are triggered, experienced, and lived. The challenge in the study of spirit possession lies in experimenting with potential articulations between the psychological, biological, and social dimensions of possession phenomena without overlooking the fact that there is a culturally bound, indigenous perspective that perceives spiritual experiences as a reality in their own right.

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Transcendence in Sports: How Do We Interpret Mysticism in Sports? Tantra and Cognitive Science Perspectives

Loriliai Biernacki

Department of Religious Studies, University of Colorado at Boulder

Loriliai.biernacki@colorado.edu

This article proposes that transcendent experiences in sports follow a model of mystical experience aligned with Tantric practices. Using the writings of 20th century scholar Gopinath Kaviraj, the mechanisms for special sports abilities operates in terms of what Kaviraj calls *parakāya praveśa*, entering another body. This article explores these practices in relation to sports and cognitive science.

Keywords: Sports; Tantra; Cognitive Science; Body-Mind; Mysticism

I. Introduction

When we think of mystical experiences we conjure up images of the yogi, or a Theresa of Avila reciting rosaries, or even perhaps an Emersonian forest recluse. However, our current culture looks to transcendence of another sort, in the spectacles of the body transcending its habitual physical limits in sports, in football, basketball, track. Is there something spiritual, mystical in the kinds of phenomenal feats we find in sports? Certainly rather than the mystic as an other-worldly recluse, the transcendence of sports is more akin to a Tantric sensibility, the expression of transcendence through and with the body. To explore the possibility of sports as a medium for transcendence I will draw from Michael Murphy and Rhea White's classic text on transcendent, mystical experiences in sports, *In the Zone: Transcendent Experiences in Sports*, itself a testament to the meme of being 'in the zone' as a way of understanding sports as privy to altered, mystical states. What is important about this landmark study is precisely that many of the experiences that they record appear to be mystical or religious experiences, offering glimpses of an idea of spirit and soul beyond the confines of ordinary human bodies—yet these experiences do not happen in the context of religion. None of the sports players they quote connect their experiences to a specific religious tradition, even if several espouse belief in some higher, transcendent power or capacity, sometimes as a result of their experiences.

So, remarkably, these seeming mystical encounters are all associated with a secular, and apparently cross-cultural experience connected to the fact of being in a human body, not so much connected to theological or philosophical speculations on the

nature of god, cosmos or humanity.¹ At the outset, then, Murphy's and White's study makes a preliminary case for a type of cross-cultural, human capacity for transcendence. Their choice to seek out this experience away from the confines of mysticism or religion attests to the genuineness of the accounts of many of these reluctant experiencers. It also demonstrates how important it is to find ways of understanding the farther reaches of the human condition, particularly those that force us to rethink our current models of human embodiment. They point out that sports itself, with its striving, its integral components of mind and body, offers the kind of space that makes it amenable to experiences mostly associated with mysticism or religion.

My primary focus for this paper is to outline what I suppose to be a fundamental mechanism for many of these sports experiences of transcendence. Namely, as these players describe their experiences, a key, repeated condition appears to be generating a sense of union with something that extends beyond a person's own physical body.

To address this, I will draw from two Indian sources. On the one hand, I think the best fundamental framework for understanding these experiences is a map of the body that we find in medieval Tantra, particular its discussions of employing the subtle body, and the important medieval Indian Tantric conception of *samāveśa*—translated variously as immersion or trance or possession. On the other hand, I draw also from a modern Indian writer, a brilliant scholar and practitioner initiated in Tantric practice, Gopinath Kaviraj, who died in the latter part of the 20th century. From Kaviraj I use in particular his discussion of *parakāya praveśa*, the practice of entering another body. I should note to begin that I am presuming that it is even cogent to consider to understanding the experiences of Western athletes in terms of Indian philosophical conceptions of yoga. That is, I take for granted that the types of bodily experiences mapped here can and do survive cross-culturally, even if cultural explanations vary. Indeed, my hope is that bringing the cultural conceptions of Indian philosophy and yoga to bear on the experiences of Western athletes may offer a so-far untracked rubric for understanding physical phenomena that find at least occasional expressions across cultures.

Since this paper represents an attempt to connect different domains to understand the phenomenon of extraordinary sports performance and experiences, I should also note a caveat in how I address this. While Indian philosophical conceptions of a subtle body can map easily onto the types of experiences described, another domain that will ultimately be important for understanding extraordinary sports experience, contemporary neuroscience, is a more difficult fit. Some of Antonio Damasio's work, and perhaps also some of Giulio Tononi's and Christof Koch's panpsychism may be loosely compatible, however our contemporary Western model of the mind and brain routinely discounts any possibility of an extension or separation of subjective awareness outside the physical body. A good portion of these sports experiences describe precisely this. Some of the experiences described will no doubt be benefitted, better understood, by linking particularly some of what a scientist like Damasio says

¹ One is plausibly convinced that these types of experiences are universal, a world-wide phenomena, available across the board even if the data presented by Murphy and White tend to favor the databases available to them as North American researchers. That they look at men and women also reinforces a sense of the universality of the sports' experience.

about neural connectivity between different parts of the brain that bypass the secondary processes of mental articulation. Even with this, however, none of the neuroscientific models come even close to being able to incorporate the kinds of experiences described that involve consciousness and awareness extending beyond normal corporeal spatial and temporal boundaries. Yet these abound in Murphy and White's study. The charts categorising different types of experiences (Murphy and White 1995: 138-148) demonstrates this amply. By way of anecdote, perhaps the most striking are the accounts of leaving the body and viewing it below as we see in the swimmer Robert Beggs, who, from above, watches his body drown (Murphy and White 1995: 64). So, what we are talking about here are phenomena that are routinely discounted by our dominant model as fundamentally 'impossible'.

2. Contemporary Cognitive Science Caveats

Contemporary neuroscience hinges on the idea that everything happens in the body. Consciousness is a product, or by-product, for some thinkers like Dennett, of a physical process: the firing of neurons in the brain. Leaving aside thinkers like Dennett, who suggest that what happens in the brain happens without any kind of 'person' or mind overseeing or driving what happens at all, even the less reductive position, that the mind arises out of the brain and has some interactive influence upon neuronal firing, still stands far from any notion of a separable spirit that either controls or interacts with the body/brain, and further still from a dualist position of an awareness separable from the physical body. Cognitive neuroscience has no room for classical subjects of religion or the idea that a person may have an out-of-body experience. Some, or rather most, discount the possibility altogether (for instance, Dennett, the Churchlands). In the most prevalent theory of consciousness among philosophers of science and among neuroscientists, such phenomena are not thinkable, not possible. So the out of body experiences that Murphy and White describe (63-65) will definitionally be excluded in our current materialist model. If, however we explore the validity of this type of phenomena, divorced as they are from what William James would call an 'overbelief' imported from a religious tradition, we would need to explore different explanatory models for incorporating them within a naturalistic framework.

So if we accept the evidence presented by these sports figures, how can we explain it? Can we explain it with contemporary models from neuroscience and philosophy of mind?

The species of sports phenomena that we outline here fall primarily under the rubric of a species of Out of Body Experiences (OBEs), particularly of the heautosopic type, where the person has a partial experience of leaving the body, but where awareness also maintains a sense of connection with the physical body. Thomas Metzinger argues for the importance of examining the types of experiences we outline here, in that they offer possibilities for understanding how human selves generate a first person perspective and how embodiment is mediated in these processes (Metzinger 2009, 257). He notes as well the historical religious significance of OBEs, relating them to terms relevant to religious traditions, and specifically to terms that our Indian sources draw upon as '*prana*' and the 'subtle body' (257). Even as he understands these terms as 'mythical' representations, at the same time he cedes the possibility that 'OBE research now makes it an empirically plausible assumption that this subtle body does indeed exist' (257), however, his explanation diverges sharply from the emic

perspective of the tradition which understands the manipulation of matter by means of a person's subtle body entering and transforming that matter. Metzinger instead rejects an idea of 'astral matter,' concluding that the subtle body is the embodied brain's self-model, that it is 'made of pure information flowing in the brain' (257). So this model supposes that the subtle body experience is a function of neuronal firing in a pattern that represents self as out of the body. The key question, which is unfortunately not considered for this neuroscientific perspective, is how this brain pattern can also affect external objects, like a golf ball, or a football, if indeed we take seriously the self-reports of these sports figures. That is, 'information flow' within a particular brain should not have a capacity to affect anything other than that particular brain. The easy way out, of course, is to ascribe these experiences to a type of chance or coincidence and discard them as evidence.

On the other hand, however, much speculation about AI and bodily transformations vis a vis a transference of human consciousness into computers relies precisely upon a conflation of 'information flow' in the brain with a sense of personal identity as a persistent self. For instance, Ray Kurzweil's infamous dream of downloading human consciousness into a computer that might then guarantee a type of immortality rests on precisely Metzinger's stipulation that the embodied brain's self-model is 'made of pure information flowing in the brain' (257). This has generated in turn much fodder for science fiction, especially in the sci-fi movement known as cyber-punk, which explores what happens when consciousness is disconnected from the body. Our current model suggests that information does not have causal physical efficacy as information. However, the notion of information as neuronal patterns slides rather readily into conflating neuron firing with the subjective experience of a human perspective. In this way 'information flow' in the brain becomes a physical object that can be physically instantiated in some other body, the robot body impervious to time and disease.

In another vein, the extensive work on OBEs by Blanke and a number of his co-authors understands the OBE simply as a phenomenon related to improper bodily sensation generated by a dysfunction in the temporo-parietal junction region of the brain, noting as well the paucity of systematic neurological studies of OBEs. In these cases, Blanke and his co-authors suggest that ambiguous input from different sensory systems is a key mechanism for OBE, and specifically link a number of cases to pharmacoresistant epilepsy involving the temporal parietal junction (Blanke et al. 2004, 244). Blanke and others working on OBEs do not address these types of sports experiences, in part no doubt because they do not assimilate to typical clinical presentations of OBEs as causing dysfunction. I should also note here the extensive critique that Greyson, Kelly and Kelly offer to Blanke's et al. postulation that the temporal parietal cortex is involved in OBEs 'caused by paroxysmal cerebral dysfunction of the TPJ in a state of partially and briefly impaired consciousness' (Greyson, Kelly and Kelly 2007, 221, citing Blanke et al. 2004, 243). They note that the brain areas pointed to are not consistent among patients cited, that only 6% of seizure patients report OBEs; and seizure and electrical stimulation will disrupt brain activity, but not demonstrate the coherence of an OBE. They also point to another study by Devinsky et al., pointing to the unresolved problem of 'the paradox of apparent consciousness during the seizure' (Greyson, Kelly and Kelly 2007, 221-223). Given the difficulties surrounding both the interpretation from a subjective viewpoint of the phenomenon of OBEs, as well as where precisely in the brain we should look to find and generate OBEs, that no clear answer exists yet

suggests the phenomenon deserves a deeper look. And indeed, we should keep in mind the 10% figure for OBEs occurring in the healthy population as Blackmore suggests (1982) and Blanke et al.'s circumspect awareness of the paucity of systematic neurological studies.

In any case, I suspect the more likely compatible models will be those of thinkers and scientists like Koch, Nagel, Chalmers, Tononi. Nagel's landmark seminal 1974 paper 'What is it like to be a bat?,' published in *Philosophical Review* opened up initial questions, bringing to light tears at the seams of our current dominant way of understanding the nature of the mind-body relation. His more recent 2012 work, in *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Is Almost Certainly False* extends this argument and gained a wide, if patchy, favorable reading, even as it was vociferously attacked on ideological grounds (Chorost 2013, Coyne 2013, Leiter and Weisberg, 2012). His fundamental turn to a form of panpsychism has been an influential model for reassessing materialism. Koch, formerly a strident reductive materialist, also has made a recent turn away from reductionism to panpsychism, utilising as well the work of Tononi, both of whom open up possibilities for a different apprehension of the mind-body connection. Others like Damasio, insist that these are separate domains and that what we find about neuronal correlations of the brain to subjective mental states will in no way detract from the meaningfulness of human experience that might result from reducing mental experience to corollary brain functions (in line with Gould's attempts to separate out religion from biology and evolution). Others like Patrick McNamara offer some sense of agnosticism, and skirt around issues of meaning. Damasio appears at times to take a position similar to McNamara, and other times to propose that even with a mapping of the brain neural states to emotions and subjective experiences, this will not diminish the human significance of subjective experience and awareness, even if it is entirely determined by bodily, neuronal processes. Damasio's work is particularly fruitful because he focuses on how sensory capacities, sensory awareness links up to mental states. In particular, Damasio's explanation of how sensory perception is tied into mental awareness, the early visual cortices connect by neuronal pathways with emotional centers of the brain, including the ventral medial cortex and the amygdala is helpful. What is at stake in much of this science is an idea of causality and a science based on materialism and the effective manipulations that such a science has generated in the forms of material progress.

3. Detachable Bodies and Union: A Model for Understanding Extraordinary Sports Experiences

In this section I address the heart of this template for understanding extraordinary sports experiences. Murphy offers an anecdote of a football player in the San Francisco 49er's locker room who after a powerful, apparently mystical experience in the course of a game says to his fellow player in the locker room 'I am you.' The prototype for many of the experiences described follows the model of transcendent unity familiar in classic religious accounts by mystics. Here, however, I think it may be helpful to break this down in terms of a continuum of unity experiences—one can have unity on a cosmic level or simply on a more limited scale. This notion of a continuum is intrinsic especially to Tantric traditions and can also be understood in relation to some of the distinctions between Tantra and classical Pātañjala yoga.

For instance, a question we might ask is: How connected is the experience of the football player in the locker room to the experience Magic Johnson has with dribbling the basketball (Murphy and White 1995:125)? Or to the experience reported of Jack Nicklaus or Arnold Palmer mentally pushing the golf ball into the hole?

The basic model I proffer here is that human body boundaries are not so closed as contemporary science suggests, and that by generating a sense of union, a person can extend her or his mental thought and will beyond the familiar limited muscles and limbs we usually control. When this sense of unity extends further, in particularly cognitive directions, a person has a sense of union with other minds. A culminating experience of cosmic union is what we usually associate with mystical experience, yet it is important to keep in mind the possibility of partial union with specific other persons, specific other objects. This would be the sense of a continuum, greater or smaller spheres of union, in these various cases all extending beyond the normal capacities of a person's proper body.

Classical Pātañjala yoga presupposes that the awareness and consciousness of an individual has a capacity to exist separately from the body; the goal of yoga is primarily to leave the body in favor of an identification with a sense of self as cosmic or transcendent self. This is also a goal in Tantric philosophical schools. For instance, Abhinavagupta talks about a cosmic union with the absolute, *samāveśa* as a unity with the greater self or divine,² as an attainment of a deep mystical state which strengthens the self and allows it to overcome various obstacles that beset any profound task (Sanderson 2005: 92). Etymologically, *samāveśa* refers to a 'possession' state; the root for the word is *viś*, meaning 'to enter.' Its function in the tradition for Abhinavagupta is to highlight a complete absorption into a state of self-awareness at a level that transcends limitations of mind. In this respect, it is understood as marker of a state of enlightenment. However, the etymological roots point to a widespread understanding of enlightenment as connected to possession. The basic component of the word, as *āveśa*, refers commonly to the concept of possession more generally as a state of trance where the person in trance becomes possessed by some other disembodied being, a particular deity in possession states.³

Here we might wonder, why is enlightenment at least etymologically connected to the idea of possession states?⁴ Certainly, we do not see this concept of possession as model for enlightenment in early yoga traditions. The goal is a release from repeated birth and death, into a pristine purity of selfhood. Curiously, however, the terminology for the early tradition, if anything, belies a preoccupation with precisely *not* being possessed. We find that the early tradition of yoga connected with Sāṃkhya favors a state of enlightenment as something quite opposite to possession, with an ideal of enlightenment as *kaivalya*, or 'aloneness.' Even if it is the case that Patañjali recognizes the possibility of possession in the third infamous *Vibhūti* chapter on

² For our purposes here, this need not be too strictly defined at the moment.

³ See Loriliai Biernacki, 'Possession, Absorption and the Transformation of *Samāveśa*' for a discussion of the historical contexts undergirding the shift in meaning of *Samāveśa* as possession.

⁴ Frederick Smith note the polyvalency of meanings and contextual ritualizations for possession in his *Self-Possessed* (Smith 2012, 30), which is easily the best and most comprehensive work on possession in South Asia to date.

magical powers, where he tells us that ‘from loosening the cause of binding and from understanding movement, one can enter and possess another’s body with one’s own mind-stuff,’⁵ nevertheless this is not a model for early yoga. This shifts however, especially as yoga comes to be influenced by Tantric praxis. As David White argues, much of what we see of yoga, especially popular literature and later literature of yoga depicts the yogi as especially skilled in entering other bodies, possessing them. In some cases, the yogi enters the body of a king in order to rule a kingdom (White 2009: 23) or in the well-known apocryphal story of the philosopher-ascetic Śaṅkara, he enters the body of a newly dead king in order to properly win a philosophical debate that requires him to discuss love (White 2009: 27), or in the story of an old yogi ascetic, the yogi enters a brahmin corpse in order to regain his youth (White 2009: 29). Oddly, this last instance curiously sounds not so far off from what we saw earlier, Kurzweil’s hope to somehow transfer his consciousness to an inert robot body, to stave off death and old age. Similarly, White points to instances where gods, like the sun god, use the power of yoga to reveal themselves to humans and enter into them, as when the sun god enters into the mother of the Paṇḍavas, Kuntī and impregnates her (White 2009: 141). Here again the terminology involves this same root, ‘viś’ with the word ‘āviveśa’ in this case. Humans also, White points out, can enter other humans through yoga, as the sage Vidura fixes his breaths and limbs with the king Yudhiṣṭhira’s breaths and limbs, and enters into and possesses Yudhiṣṭhira (White 2009: 142). In this and many of these cases, though certainly not all, yogic possession is fairly benign and designed to help the person possessed.

Similarly, in Frederick Smith’s magisterial study on possession, we find a multitude of cases of possession throughout both classical Sanskrit literature as well as in popular practices. In some cases as Smith points out, the possession is deemed beneficial, as when the sage Vidura possesses the righteous king Yudhiṣṭhira (Smith 2012: 249) or when the sage Vipula possesses the wife of his guru Devaśarma to protect her from the lustful god Indra’s sexual predations (Smith 2012: 246). In other cases, instances of possession are decidedly maleficent as when the good king Nala is possessed by the jealous and malevolent demi-god of Strife, Kali (Smith 2012: 242-245).

The mechanism for possession involves using the subtle channels of the body, known as *nāḍī*, as Smith notes, at times connected to the downward breath (*apāna nāḍī*) (Smith 2012: 274, also 276). In addition, Smith notes the necessity for using the three highest limbs of yoga, concentration, meditation and ecstasy (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, respectively) as the mechanism for attaining higher powers (Smith 2012: 275), though as we see with Kaviraj below, the higher meditative states may not be as operational with athletes. Smith also points out the possibilities for limited or partial possession, though his suggestions here do not touch on the kinds sports experiences of transcendence and instead are associated with taking over another person’s dream state, for instance (Smith 2012: 275). We find some suggestions of possessing inanimate objects. He tells us, for instance, the 8th century Jain thinker Hemacandra’s prescription for a practice which moves breath from the respiratory system up to the top of the head (*brahmarandra*) to then guide it into specified objects, such as fragrant plants, camphor, small birds, larger animate and inanimate objects, and that a yogi

⁵ Patañjali, Yoga Sūtra 3.38: bandhakāraṇaśaithilyāt pracārasaṃvedanāc ca cittasya paraśarīrāveśaḥ

can remain in another person's body for up to a day before returning to one's own proper body (Smith 2012: 276). Curiously for our purposes, Smith also notes that the idea of possession has a approximate connection to shape-shifting (Smith 2012:192). Possession is a presumed prefiguration to shape-shifting (Smith 2012: 195), which is in our context, something that we see in a number of the instances of athletes manipulating the elements of their craft in sports, shifting their own bodies often in the process. One important point we can take away from Smith's remarkable study is an emphasis on a kind of intense emotional absorption that *āveśa*, the yogic practice of possession, entering into some person or object calls forth.

The resonances with Murphy and White's explanation of the profound striving involved in sports as connected to the genesis of mystical experience should not be lost here. This sense of union, especially as an expansion of self beyond the mental is also one that abounds in Murphy and White's catalogue, for instance, in judo, where 'you and your opponent will no longer be two bodies separated physically from each other but a single entity, physically, mentally, and spiritually inseparable' (Murphy and White 1995: 32). Similarly, for instance, we see this in the idea of surrender described, as a kind of oneness, where the person becomes 'part of the environment,' not separate from it (Murphy and White 1995: 24). So, the anecdote of the football player in the locker room is a not uncommon description and it appears to represent an experience of awareness transcending self in an expansive and abstract way.

However, the practice in Tantra (and to some degree yoga⁶) that generates this sense of union does not always extend so far as a cosmic union; at times it is limited. And here, Tantra in particular offers more precise possibilities for a sense of limited union. For our purposes here, the sense of limited union has a helpful explanatory power for types of extraordinary sports experiences that involve specific objects, like golf balls, or footballs or the opposing baseball team's pitcher. So the model proposed here connects both the kinds of mystical transcendent experiences of the football player in the locker room who says, 'I am you' as well as the psychokinetic experience of altering the course of the football in the air, as Brodie discusses with Murphy.

How might we understand Tantra's difference from classical Pātañjala yoga in terms of a Western cognitive science point of view? Classical Pātañjala yoga offers eight steps, which offer a trajectory of yogic mastery of various stages, ultimately leading to the final eighth stage of deep meditation, *samādhi*, which itself leads to enlightenment, here as particularly a disengagement from one's particular personal embodiment. In *pratyahara*, the fifth limb of yoga as withdrawing inwardly, the idea is that the mind-stuff withdraws from sensory input. This is a preliminary stage preceding a stage of deep focus. While it is nearly impossible to determine at this very early stage of brain research, the first-person reports of yogis describing a state devoid of sensory elements seems to suggest that the early visual cortices, while they may be activated in visualisations, they may not be activated in the stages of yogic meditation, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, which involve a separation of awareness from bodily consciousness.

For Tantra, the intensive focus on sensory modalities, visualisations for instance, and auditory focus on a mentally repeated mantra, takes a slightly different path from yoga

⁶ we see this particularly in the Vibhūti Pāda, with particular experiences related to specific practices—the attainment of which the text critiques at the end of the chapter.

as cessation of thought and the attempted yogic disembodiment involved in the deep meditative state termed *samādhi*, which by its practice leaves the body behind. So the point here is that while yoga and Tantra share much, the Tantric preoccupation with magical powers tends to keep it moored more readily to the tangible physical world. Thus, as Padoux points out, even as Tantra is inextricable from a particular practice of yoga, nevertheless, its focus on *siddhi*, tangible powers in a worldly context tends to keep it more engaged in a body. While the yoga of the *Yoga Sūtras* (3.37) cautions the reader to ignore the magical powers, the *siddhis* that come with yoga practice, Tantric traditions dally more readily in the stages of yoga still connected to the world, stages which generate tangible yogic effects for the material world, for our purposes aligning more easily with the types of extraordinary sports achievements that these athletes accomplish. And it is this continued engagement with the body and the world that renders Tantric praxis more aligned with limited, partial forms of union with specific objects and persons, rather than a sense of union with the totality of creation. The point of interest here is that the continued sensory capacities exercised in Tantric forms of meditation seem to be linked to the experience of *siddhis*, the magical powers. So the continued focus on sensory parts of awareness and in brain operation, in contradistinction to withdrawal from the senses aligns with limited forms of union, more connected to the body's senses and to the types of extraordinary powers of the athlete in a heightened state.

This might, for instance, apply to the kind of experience that Kathy Switzer reports (Murphy and White 1995: 35) where her senses are more connected and heightened in sports states. In her case there is a limited sensory heightened awareness, even if, unlike other cases of specific union with, say, the golf ball, her experience is generalised.

This idea of union I suggest is a key component for a large variety of extraordinary sports experiences. Specifically, we can point to the kinds of experiences where the player seems to have an effect on inanimate objects, on the football, the golf ball, and so on. Particularly of interest are the special skills that arise where players use a sense of oneness to enact a capacity to deftly, successfully manipulate objects in their sport. These incidents are especially striking primarily because the experience of the player goes beyond a simple subjective experience and appears to also affect objects in the external world. The strength of these incidents lies in their implication for causal effects in the external physical world. Even as this type of evidence is certainly limited by its recalcitrance to any sort of double-blind experimentation, and as such, will tend to be relegated to the bins of 'anecdotal,' nevertheless, the possibilities for demonstrating causal effects in a physical domain, in terms of the parameters demanded in Popper's understanding of what makes science, that is, as falsifiable, does make this phenomenon interesting, worthy of some attention. It also demonstrates something like a universality of the principles involved since the external world is affected; it is not simply confined to internalised mental states. In particular, this is especially important because it bridges the gap between mind and body, demonstrating that the mind can indeed affect more than simply one's subjective experience, even more than one's own physical body.

Examples of this abound, as Murphy and White point out, race car driving, golf, football (Murphy and White 1995: 23). Murphy and White hone in on this in their discussions of psychokinesis. Here golfers like Jack Nicklaus have a capacity to 'will the ball into

the cup' (Murphy and White 1995: 87), and football players like Brodie can seem to control the football so that it jumps right over the hands of the opposing team player who would intercept it (Murphy and White 1995: 89). Similarly, some martial artists like Bruce Lee can send an opponent flying without even actually physically touching the opponent (Murphy and White 1995: 90, 92, 147 in table). It is this sort of limited experience of union, not a cosmic transcendence, but a precise limited connection with objects, that I think Kaviraj is especially helpful for explaining as we see in the next section.

In any case, before moving on to Kaviraj, we can briefly note how the model of union Kaviraj describes applies to a number of other sports experiences that Murphy and White catalogue. We see it again with basketball player Wayne Estes who uses oneness, unity with the ball to control the basketball; baseball player George Shuba also discusses a sense of oneness where the bat is guided by some greater force.

And as noted earlier, Murphy and White discuss a practice in Judo, to become one with opponent to defeat the opponent (Murphy and White 1995: 32). In this case again, the union is not on a cosmic scale, simply a union with the opponent. Jimmy Clark similarly controls the race car by becoming one with it. We can also read examples of ESP, where for instance Lou Brock talks about empathy with the pitcher as a way of knowing when to steal a base as again a kind of unity with another person (Murphy and White 1995: 48-49) or Bill Russell with basketball, forming a deep unifying connection with the other players (Murphy and White 1995: 50), or John Walker's grandmother experiencing a unity with him and predicting his successful win of the 1500 meters at the Montreal Olympics (Murphy and White 1995: 62).

4. Kaviraj

Gopinath Kaviraj was a Bengali scholar and Tantric practitioner who lived from the latter part of the 19th century up through 1976. He became principal of the well-known Sanskrit College in Varanasi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit Visvavidyalaya, however what is especially fascinating about his life is the interest he took in Tantra and Tantric practices, which inform a great deal of his writing. His family name was Bagchi. Kaviraj was a title conferred in honor of his great learning, and he won a number of awards in his life including the highly respected Padma Vibhushan, and even had a stamp issued in his honor by the Government of India after his death. He was a disciple of a well-known Tantric adept, Swami Vishuddananda as well as a disciple of the famous pan-Indian saint and mystic, Anandamayi Ma, who died in 1982, whose ashram he lived in for the last part of his life. In Varanasi, a lore surrounds his life as an adept himself whose practices included the infamous *pañcamuṇḍa āsana*, a meditation practice on a seat of five skulls. His writing displays a deep erudition. I draw particularly here from an untranslated article he wrote in Hindi, titled, 'Yog aur Parakāya Praveś', ('Yoga and Entering Another Body'), in a two volume work, *Bharatīya Saṃskṛti aur Sādhana*, published in 1964. Note here again the use of the root 'viś,' to 'enter.'

In this article Kaviraj discusses a practice of entering another body. As he describes this practice he notes that it allows a practitioner to enter another person or another thing. When the practitioner accomplishes this union with another body, a steady, strong-minded practitioner then becomes capable of controlling that body. For our purposes, Kaviraj makes it clear that 'body' can refer to both other people or simply to

objects—in our case, objects like basketballs and golf balls.

Here, I suggest that we can draw from Gopinath Kaviraj's understanding of this specific practice of *parakāya praveśa*, literally, 'entering another body' as a way of thinking about how *siddhis* might connect mind to both body and to the wider world beyond one's own body, which is a phenomenon we see described again and again in the extraordinary sports experiences that Murphy and White describe. In this case of entering another body, the sports player taps into an innate human capacity to concentrate mind-awareness (*citta*) to separate off from his own body and enter into the body of the football or golf ball he wishes to direct, beyond the physical, mechanical, manipulation of the ball.

So how does it work? Kaviraj tells us that the practice of entering another body involves mastering what he calls *videha dhāraṇā*. Literally this translates as 'disembodied concentration.' This is concentration happening without the body.

Here, the *citta*, the mind-awareness, located inside the body is sent outside the body to some desired place. The mind then at this other place generates a sense of union with this other object and is able to use it as one would use one's own body. I am reminded here of the explanation that Murphy and White give from some psychologists discussing various psychokinetic phenomena—the psychologists propose that the person controlling the movement of dice, controls the dice just as he controls his own body (Murphy and White 1995: 101).

Kaviraj describes this by way of a literary analogy, one certainly not amenable to a Western scientific sensibility. He says that the mind-awareness (*citta*) leaves the body in the same way that the unified rays of the eye leave the eye and get linked to the external object to be perceived, conform to its form; so rays from the mind also act upon external objects. However, it takes particular practice to allow one's sense of concentration to occur outside the body proper, the *videha dhāraṇā*, which Kaviraj notes is the key step in learning how to enter another object.

Ordinarily, a person's mind-awareness (*citta*) is always linked to one's body proper. It does not leave the body until the time of death. However, the yogi practices leaving the body, and the way the yogi does this is through the multiple mind-bearing channels, *manovāhā nāḍī*. They are inside the body and also fan out to the whole cosmos, *virāṭ viśva*. By this net of channels, *nāḍījal*, every person links to every other thing. This of course, follows the famous Tantric maxim that everything is connected to everything else.

More precisely, in his discussion of yoga, Kaviraj points out that in the development of the self (*ātmavikāś*), the practice of leaving the body is a particular stage of development. This, he notes, arises from what is called the inner limbs of yoga, the inner limbs being the final three of Patañjali's 8-limbed system, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. While the first five limbs are explicitly tied to the body, even into the fifth, *pratyahara*, which entails pulling consciousness away from its bodily sensory inputs, still the idea that this is part of the external limbs of yoga rather than the internal limbs ties this 5th stage to the body's external, sensory modalities.

Kaviraj notes that the 6th stage of Patañjali's yoga, *dhāraṇā* typically entails a bodily

foundation.⁷ However, he notes, that a person who has mastered a capacity for concentration (*dhāraṇā*) without a bodily support (*nirādhār dhāraṇā*) is capable of allowing the mind-stuff (*citta*) to leave the body and enter another body. This other body can be another person, as we see in the well-known story mentioned earlier, of the famous 7th century philosopher Śaṅkara who leaves his body and enters into the body of a dead king, in order to understand sexual relations so that he can win a debate with Maṇḍana Miśra.⁸ The idea here is that the king's soul has already left his body, so Śaṅkara is entering an inert corpse, though the practice is also associated with types of possession as well.⁹ Kaviraj notes that there is a natural barrier preventing the mind-stuff from leaving the body, however a yogi through practice and initiation can learn to allow his mind-awareness (*citta*) to leave one's own body and enter into some other object (*vastu*) that one wishes to enter. He also notes that without mastering the skill of concentration outside the support of the body, a person can never attain the deeper stages of meditation, including *samādhi*.

It is important for the process, as Kaviraj notes, to maintain a sense of separation from the object that is entered, to keep a sense of distinction between his own consciousness (*citta ke svarūpa*) and the object he has entered (Kaviraj 1964: 25). This is important so that the person can find the way back, but is more of a risk in entering a conscious body than in an insentient object (*vastu*). Kaviraj describes the process by analogy with vision, however, again, he uses terms that do not easily resonate with our contemporary Western understandings of how vision works. He says that just as the eye can with its rays touch via vision to be joined with some external object (*dr̥śya padārth ke sāth yukt*) and conform to the form of that object, so in the same way, the mind-awareness (*citta*) exits through external channels (*raśmiyāñ*), which are conduits for the mind (*manovahā nāḍī*), that connect consciousness extending outward to the universe. In this sense, the underlying premise entails a kind of panpsychism, where mind connects to the external universe through its rays, which can occur because the mind is not fundamentally different from the external universe. This is how the mind-awareness can enter another object. This is accomplished through practice in separating the capacity of the mind's ability for concentration away from the body to locate in some external object. He also connects this ability to move concentration outside of one's own proper body to other *siddhis* as well, including having knowledge of external objects.¹⁰

⁷ Gopinath Kaviraj, *Bharatīya Saṃskṛti aur Sādhana*, vol. 2 (Patna, India: Bihar Raṣṭra Pariṣad 1964), p.25. Kaviraj writes, 'yah jo dhāraṇā kī bāt kahī gayī hai, vah apanī deh ko āśray banākar hī kī jāī hai'

⁸ This story is best known perhaps from the 15th century Śaṅkara Digvijaya, by Vidyāraṇya Svāmi.

⁹ For a benevolent example of a yogi entering the body of another person, see *Autobiography of a Sadhu: A Journey into Mystic India*, by Baba Rampuri (Merrimac, MA: Destiny Books 2010). In this recent case, the American disciple Rampuri becomes possessed by his Indian Naga Baba guru, who continues to irrupt in and control the actions of Baba Rampuri in a somewhat permanent fashion, even after the guru's death. Parakāya praveś, the term for entering another body, is the practice for entering another live body as well, though here Kaviraj talks about it in terms of entering things (*vastu*) generically: 'yahāñ dr̥śya vastu ke cetanatva yā acetanatva kī koi bāt nahī rahatī' Kaviraj, p. 27. He explains this by noting that in reality, the object in relation to any subject is lacking sentience (*acetana*).

¹⁰ Kaviraj, p.25 'videh dhāraṇā ke binā bāhya padārth ka aparokṣ jñān nahīñ ho sakatā'

He also notes that this practice does not generate nonduality (*abheda bhāva*), though it does lead to a transcendent experience (*āloka anubhūti*). Here is where we see that Kaviraj's explanations differ from what we see earlier in texts like the Yoga Sūtra, which presuppose the use of not only concentration, but also meditation and deep sustained meditation, what Smith calls ecstasy (*samādhi*). This practice does not generate nonduality, that is, it does not engender a sense of the unity of everything, nor does it entail a complete liberation from conceptions of subject and object operative in our daily lives; this preserved sense of limitation and duality are conceptually important for the process of entering other objects and maintaining a functional physical efficacy. It is also the case that this practice is not the same as when we use our senses in relation to an object in order to understand the object. The difference in this latter case lies in that when we use our senses to gain knowledge of an object the mind remains separate from the object, whereas when one gains knowledge through disembodied concentration, (*videha dhāraṇā*), the mind-awareness (*citta*) travels through the mind channels to become one with the object. In this situation, the mind-awareness and the object take on a single form. As the mind moves to a transcendent state, the mind is freed, and no longer operates on its typical mental trajectories. However the just previous desire that was held in awareness leaves its imprint in the transcendent state.¹¹ This is how the practitioner enters a specific object or person. In our case, an Arnold Palmer concentrating so exclusively on the golf ball can allow his mind-awareness to leave his own body, and locate within the golf ball.

Sometimes the person engaging in this extensive deep concentration outside the body also tracks the transcendent components of *videha dhāraṇā*, being outside the body, by slipping into a greater *dhyāna*, meditation, or *samādhi* even. In these cases, the transcendent mystical apprehensions can be part of the experience. However, this is not always the case and not necessary in *videha dhāraṇā* as disembodied concentration in another object which simply causes union with the other object, the golf ball and a capacity to move it psychokinetically.

Again, what facilitates this philosophically is the idea that everything in the universe is connected. The channels that mind-awareness can take are infinite. However, if the yogi can concentrate on and remember a particular channel, that channel cannot facilitate connection with an infinite variety of different external objects (Kaviraj 1964: 26). What happens in these cases is that the yogi then comes to enter into the thing that was just desired. Also we should keep in mind that fundamental for this whole process is that the yogi/practitioner is capable of loosening the link between the body and the mind. Even if, as Kaviraj notes, so long as a person is living, the link between the body and the mind is such that the mind cannot fully ever exit the body. So a practitioner keeps a link to one's own proper body and still can concentrate awareness outside the body. This is also why keeping connected to the particular mind-channel (*manovahā nāḍī*) is important, because it is the path (*mārga*) that links both to the object and back to one's own proper body. This last point is important only for Kaviraj's discussion of entering another living person's body, which can be fraught if the person whose body one enters has a stronger mental presence which can overcome the person entering (and not always necessarily in a benevolent fashion).

¹¹ Kaviraj, p.27: 'Is āloka kā uday ho jāne par icchā hote hī pūrva-nirdiṣṭa vastu is āloka me prakāśita ho uṭhatī hai'

Another extremely important point Kaviraj makes, especially for our discussion of sports, is that when the mind leaves the body in disembodied concentration, the sense organs also accompany the mind.¹² My conjecture is that it is precisely the retention of a sensory presence, on the level of mind and brain activity, that facilitates abilities to manipulate objects (and people as objects) in the external world. Again, my suggestion here is that when sports players engage in the kinds of activities that Murphy and White describe, we can read these as spontaneous examples of *parakāya praveśa*, the Tantric *siddhi* of detaching one's mental awareness to enter into some other external thing.

We can note also that in this article Kaviraj also uses this mechanism as an explanation for how a yogi can lessen the karma of another person and how the yogi can use his own *tapasya*, austerities to make the entered person shine.¹³ This is the essence of *āveśa* and the *samāveśa* I noted earlier in the article in reference to Abhinavagupta.¹⁴ What Kaviraj suggests is not fundamentally comprehensible for our current materialist paradigm. This is not just the case with thinkers like Dennett who confine mind to an epiphenomenon, but also with thinkers like Chalmers, Nagel who, even with panpsychism, suggest that one's own inner subjective reality, 'what it's like to be a bat' is inaccessible to another subjective entity.

5. Alternate Cosmologies: Tantric Models of a Subtle Body

All of this, of course, hinges on a different model of the relation between mind and body—different not only from our current materialist cognitive science model, but also different from our mostly unarticulated, but widely pervasive Western theological models of the soul in relation to the body. The models of the subtle body that we find in yoga and Tantric traditions offer a different model that can incorporate a conception of awareness and consciousness with a capacity to exist separately from the body, even as one is still linked to the body, as Kaviraj's *videha dhāraṇā* proposes. In this sense, the idea of personhood is bolstered by an awareness, which we might clumsily call something like consciousness, however this awareness of self is not strictly tethered to any particular, single body. Moreover, the body itself always offers a more porous ontological status. These Indian models are useful in part because the supposition of a subtle body that exists in tandem with a physical, living body, even while a person is alive, allows for a greater range of mystical phenomena, out-of-body phenomena, than does a mostly Christian theological dualist conception of a soul that leaves the body at death. In Kaviraj's Tantric model, we do not need to entertain conceptions of an eternal soul, separate from the body. Rather, all we need is (indeed, a more naturalistically) oriented capacity for mind to both link and delink with particular bodies as objects, including one's own physical body and golf balls and footballs. This

¹² Kaviraj, p. 29: *indriyoṅ bhī man kā anusaraṇa kartī haiṅ.*

¹³ Kaviraj, p.30.

¹⁴ One more notable point here in terms of possession, is that Kaviraj notes that the lesser mind, being possessed, cannot remember anything *laukika*—that is, on our worldly, articulate, mental level here, but a trace of the *alaukika* (transcendent) remains. This indicates that when the experience is transcendent and the practitioner cannot describe it in words, for Kaviraj, this points to a kind of absorption into some higher mental space and explains the idea of why when people go into trance state they don't remember their state of mind. P.30.

certainly entails a currently discredited panpsychism, but not conceptions of a god, or any type of permanent soul. The greater range of possibilities for how the physical body relates to mind, relates to subtle body, relates to spirit has a deeper explanatory capacity for many of the types of experiences that we find in Murphy's and White's work.

6. Conclusion and Further Thoughts

In conclusion, transcendent experiences in sports offer an interesting case for examining the mind-body interface in relation to classical Indian understandings of practices of yoga and Tantra. Yoga and Tantra purport to influence objects outside the body solely through mental, yogic efforts, subverting our general understanding of causality among physical objects as confined to physical causes. Within the context of yoga and Tantra, a primary mechanism for understanding non-physical causality within a physical context relies on a model of moving awareness outside of one's own body to inhabit another object, through a kind of possession, *āveśa*. Kaviraj's Tantric explanations of entering another body in particular offer a precise mechanism by which a skilled yoga practitioner can generate causal physical effects through mental efforts. This model presupposes that minds can be detached from bodies and inhabit foreign bodies and manipulate them, and offers this as a way of thinking about transcendence in sports. With respect to cognitive science paradigms, this type of experience aligns with reports of Out-of-body experiences, however, much of the work on Out-of-body experiences to date is confined to clinical, pathological cases, particularly involving seizures and brain dysfunction.

If we expand the category of Out-of-body experiences to include some striking examples from sports, we may be able to broaden how we think about the operative principles in Out-of-body experiences. Kaviraj's notion of concentration of awareness outside the body (*videha dhāraṇā*) poses a way of thinking about Out-of-body experiences and suggests we take a deeper look at cases of OBEs as likely comprising a wider range of phenomena, and not merely the pathological instances related in particular to seizures and pharmaco-resistant epilepsy. Moreover, if we subscribe to materialist reductionist conceptions of OBEs, as Metzinger helpfully supposes that they indicate neuronal configurations which alter the sense of self, the capacity for external causal effects will necessarily help to spur a more complex understanding of the relationship between the mind and the body. Tantric understandings of selfhood, are especially useful, insofar as they keep a sense of self moored to bodily relations and bodily experiences. Finally, all these cases require a shift from reductionism to something more akin to panpsychism, as exhibiting some sort of mechanism by which to connect the material to the mental.

There is more to mine from this study of sports capacities which I will not address here at this time, specifically, to connect Murphy's final chapters that look at methods of mind-body training, decidedly with links to Indian meditation practices in both Tantra and Yoga, to some neuroscientific work, like that of Benjamin Berger's which discusses the power of visualisation in terms of brain function perfecting muscle memory without one's muscles. This is also exemplified in some of the experiences that players report (Murphy and White 1995: 111, for instance). It would also be possible and helpful at some point to link some of what Murphy discusses here on mind-body methods for training to recent analyses of the connection between early

visual cortices, along with Damasio's work on the connections between the early visual cortices and emotional centers of the brain, including the amygdala and the limbic system, particularly as these suggest that mental efforts in visualisation in a sport action helps the execution of that action on the physical plane.¹⁵ Along these lines it would be interesting to pursue some of what we find in teachings on yoga and meditation in close conjunction with Murphy pointing out that many athletes experience a sense of stillness plus a low heart rate while in the 'zone,' in a transcendent sports experience.

¹⁵ Apart from Damasio's work, we can look also at <https://academic.oup.com/cercor/article/21/4/949/290367/Grasping-in-the-Dark-Activates-Early-Visual>.

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Clairvoyance and Conceptualism: Rudolf Steiner's Higher Modes of Cognition as a Higher- Order Theory of Consciousness

Loren Fetterman

Department of Religious Studies, University of Chester

lorenfetterman@gmail.com

While it is widely accepted among scholars that mystical experiences are entirely culturally and/or linguistically constructed, in this article I argue that mystical experiences are distinct neuro-physiological events generated through a process of conceptual development. Rudolf Steiner's experiences of shifting into higher modes of cognition are interpreted as experiences of accessing the higher-order representations proposed by higher-order theories of consciousness. I suggest that clairvoyant perceptions and esoteric symbol systems may be representations of the distinctive phenomenology associated with higher-order representations, as predicted by higher-order perception theory. This article proposes that esoteric systems of spiritual development such as Steiner's are not arbitrary creations, but technical languages pertaining to the development of higher states and stages of consciousness. It is suggested that these esoteric systems may play an important role in the future if experiences of higher states and stages of consciousness become more widespread.

Keywords: Steiner; conceptualism; clairvoyance; cognitive; higher-order

Introduction

Over the last two decades researchers in the academic study of esotericism have shifted their methods away from primarily historical and sociological approaches and increasingly emphasise cognitive scientific explanations of esoteric phenomena (Asprem 2017: 1). The cognitive sciences include psychology, linguistics, anthropology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, robotics and the philosophy of mind (Asprem and Davidsen 2017: 2). Scholars such as Sebastian Voros (2013) and Brian Lancaster (2005) have argued that the study of mystical traditions may provide useful insights for the cognitive sciences, as they include rich phenomenological descriptions and practices for experientially accessing preconscious cognitive processes (Voros 2013: 391-395). In this article I examine the mystical experiences of the Austrian esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, with the aim of improving our understanding of the potentials of human cognition. Specifically, I will argue that higher-order theories of consciousness (Gennaro 2012, Lau 2008) offer models of our cognitive architecture that align with Steiner's teachings on the attainment of 'higher modes of cognition' (Hammer 2004: 423), claims that are further supported by neuroscientific research demonstrating the existence of distinct,

higher levels of consciousness (Schartner et al 2017: 1).

This approach remains uncommon in the academic study of religion. It is widely accepted among scholars in the field of religious studies that all religious or mystical experiences are entirely culturally and/or linguistically constructed (Shushan 2016: 73). Consequently, insights drawn from mystical experiences are commonly dismissed as nothing more than elaborations of the mystic's own belief system (Hammer 2004: 347). Yet this view is undermined by the fact that mystics with differing belief systems often report strikingly similar experiences, and secular thinkers with no religious conditioning have also been known to undergo spontaneous mystical experiences (Forman 1990: 20).

In the case of Rudolf Steiner, the limitations of the constructivist approach are particularly clear. As scholar Peter Staudenmeier writes, 'the explosion of creativity that marks Steiner's post-1900 esoteric works has no precedent in his earlier works. It is not just a sudden shift in tone and style and format, but a profound innovation in content' (2015: 106). Staudenmaier urges scholars to recognise these discontinuities in Steiner's thinking, arguing that efforts to harmonise Steiner's earlier and later work into one integrated whole fail to demonstrate the complexity of his thinking (2015: 98). The historian Helmut Zander (2007) has also emphasised the discontinuities of thought that appear in Steiner's work around the turn of the century. What happened to Steiner at the turn of the century? According to his autobiography, in 1899 'Rudolf Steiner had a distinct and life-transforming Christ-experience' (Bamford 1998: 15). This spiritual awakening inspired the core of his later teachings, based on 'the Mystery of Golgotha' (Steiner 1998: 48). With the transformative effect of this experience being so clearly evidenced in Steiner's writing and lecturing thereafter, it would seem that a cognitive scientific approach is needed to supplement the socio-cultural explanations for this sudden shift.

Those scholars of mysticism that have moved beyond the constructivist paradigm have often tended to limit their studies to mystical experiences of unity or emptiness (Forman 1990: 8), while excluding experiences of clairvoyant visions and encounters with divine beings such as are found throughout Steiner's writings. However, because both mystical states of emptiness and visionary experiences can often arise as a result of a single spiritual practice (Jones 2010: 4), this approach is ultimately unsatisfactory, and means that we still lack an explanatory model that can account for the wide range of reported mystical experiences. Rather than perpetuate this exclusionary approach, in the latter portion of this article I aim to show that the varieties of mystical experience are united in that they each depend upon a process of conceptual development that can take place either consciously or unconsciously. I argue that Steiner's work is important for its presentation of higher-order concepts that may be capable of advancing our collective culture towards higher levels of introspection, and aid in the creation of powerful new symbolic languages representative of an expanded and more inclusive sense of self.

1. The Varieties of Mystical Experience

Mysticism is a term that has been used to refer to a wide variety of extraordinary experiences reported by individuals throughout the centuries, from the visions of Julian

of Norwich or Mechthild of Magdeburg, to the states of emptiness sought through Zen meditation or discussed in the *Cloud of Unknowing* (1961). For the purposes of this article, the varieties of mystical experience can be divided into three main categories. The first two have been referred to by scholars Robert Forman (1990) and Richard H. Jones (2010) as introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences. The introvertive experience, also known as the depth-mystical experience (Jones 2010: 5), or the Pure Consciousness Event (PCE) (Forman 1990: 8), is defined by Robert Forman as 'a wakeful, though contentless (nonintentional) consciousness' (1990: 8). Forman identifies the states of samadhi or mushinjo in zazen as examples of the PCE, which is characterised by as a state of awareness that is empty of phenomenal content, including thoughts or physical sensations. Extrovertive mysticism, which Richard H. Jones calls the 'mindfulness state of consciousness' is related to experiences of 'nature mysticism' or 'cosmic consciousness' (Jones 2010: 5), and is characterised by a sense of connectedness or unity to all that we experience (2010: 7).

Both authors exclude the visionary or ecstatic experiences of a Mother Theresa or Rudolf Steiner from their definitions of mysticism, which fits the purposes of their studies. Jones reminds us that often paranormal powers and ecstatic visions are regarded with suspicion by many mystical traditions, with mystical visions, sounds and sensations being rejected in Zen as 'demon states' (makyo) (2010: 5). However, such warnings also point to the fact that experiences of seemingly paranormal phenomena often inadvertently accompany the pursuit of introvertive and extrovertive mystical states through spiritual practice. Any attempt to develop an epistemological framework that accounts for the wide spectrum of possible mystical experiences will therefore be strengthened by including a consideration of these states, which will be referred to broadly as forms of 'extra-sensory mysticism' (ESM), in addition to those of extrovertive mysticism (EM) and introvertive mysticism (IM).

Steiner serves as a rare case study upon which to build this framework, since all three varieties of mystical experience are cultivated and explicitly described within his spiritual system. Examples of extrovertive mysticism are clearly evident in certain stages of his Rosicrucian Path, with Steiner stating that 'a feeling of oneness with the entire cosmos develops quite naturally', as 'our own organism expands into an organism that encompasses all of space...a sensation that is called godliness, or beatitude' (2000: 92). Steiner also guides his students toward an experience of introvertive mysticism, but Steiner regards this as a stage to be transcended through training, asserting that the lack of content experienced by students in this state is due to their lack of subtle perception or understanding of this new level of consciousness. According to Steiner, without undergoing training that develops our inner sense organs, freeing ourselves from all thoughts and physical sense impressions leads only to 'the "nothingness" of unconsciousness', experienced by a soul and spirit that 'has no tools for observing the spiritual world' (1997: 300). Finally, Steiner's writings are overflowing with examples of the third, extra-sensory form of mysticism, with such experiences becoming a part of everyday life for the new initiate, who begins 'to perceive realities and spiritual beings in the surroundings, just as we perceive the physical world through our physical senses' (1997: 306).

Having categorised the various forms of mystical experience, it is also worth briefly distinguishing what is meant by the term 'transcendent'. What is important here is that it is always an experience that is being discussed, and so philosophical issues relating

to dualism or non-physicality can be set aside. The 'transcendent perspective' referred to here represents a transcendence of one's previous modes of perception and cognition. If a chimpanzee was to suddenly experience a human mode of consciousness, for example, it would be having a transcendent experience, and accessing an objective level of logical thought and self-awareness that was previously unknown to it.

While this definition should be sufficient in relation to IM and EM states, ESM states raise the challenge of the 'transcendent other'. Many mystics report encounters with spiritual beings or entering spiritual landscapes, yet even if they are taken to be 'real' these clairvoyant phenomena may still only represent previously undetected natural phenomena. As the psychologist William James noted, we may be like cats in a library, seeing books and hearing conversations but unable to understand their meaning (Barnard 1997: 196). Written and spoken language are natural phenomena yet require an advanced form of cognition to perceive intelligibly, and an encounter with a powerful expression of language is capable of inducing distinct physiological changes, from rapturous moments of insight to sensual arousal. Likewise, it is conceivable that a mystic may be swept up into an ecstatic or visionary state simply through perceiving certain intelligible patterns which remain unintelligible to others, yet are no more supernatural than written language.

2. Rudolf Steiner's System of Spiritual Development

Described as 'arguably the most historically and philosophically sophisticated spokesperson of the Esoteric Tradition' (Hammer 2004: 329), and 'possibly one of the most indefatigable people who ever lived' (Watson 2010: 676), Rudolf Steiner was an intellectual and occultist who founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1912 in Cologne, Germany. Functioning inwardly as an esoteric school for the spiritual development of its members, and outwardly as a community working towards cultural reform, Anthroposophy remains 'the foremost esoteric movement in German-speaking Europe today' (Staudenmaier 2010: 107). Steiner left behind a literary legacy of over six thousand recorded lectures and more than thirty published monographs, covering topics as diverse as education, art, agriculture, medicine, philosophy, politics and religion (Ullrich 1994: 556). Trained as a scientist and philosopher, Steiner interprets his mystical experiences with a level of philosophical and theological rigour rarely equaled in the work of other esotericists.

At the core of Anthroposophy is a system of spiritual development which Steiner refers to as a 'path of initiation' (Steiner 1997: 281). While Steiner recognised the validity of various spiritual paths, he identified as a Rosicrucian and claimed that the system of spiritual development that he imparted to his students was developed by Christian Rosenkreutz to serve as the path most suitable for modern, rational humanity (Steiner 2000: 84). The Rosicrucian path is primarily a path of thinking. Steiner distinguishes between what he calls abstract thinking, the idle or arbitrary spinning of thoughts, and living thinking, (Steiner 1994: 178), which he equates with the 'praeambulum fidei' ('preamble of faith) of Thomas Aquinas (Wehr 1990: 249). Steiner argued that he arrived at his spiritual insights through an enhancement of his critical faculties, not by bypassing them. He taught that this living thinking could be cultivated to such an extent that it became spiritual seeing, spiritual hearing, and even a sense of spiritual touch,

stages of development which he termed Imaginative, Inspirational and Intuitive cognition (Hammer 2004: 423). His description of the path leading to these higher modes of cognition can be found in many of his key books, such as *How to Know Higher Worlds* (1904), *Theosophy* (1904), and *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (1910). Unlike the trance mediums common to the Spiritualist circles of his day, from which he was keen to distance himself, Steiner considered his system to be a spiritual science, a science capable of arriving at objective facts about the spiritual world solely through the powers of human cognition (Steiner 1997: 4).

In Steiner's system, development of these subtle forces begins with a preliminary stage of preparation, which involves studying works of spiritual science so as to acquire disciplined thinking as well as the concepts necessary to understand their experiences in the spiritual world (Steiner 1994: 176). This preliminary training may then be followed by advanced meditation exercises aimed at guiding the student to the stage of Imaginative cognition. These include learning to concentrate fully on a single mental image, such as a black cross wreathed with seven red roses, in order to rouse the soul to 'a kind of activity in which physical sensory impressions have no meaning' and to 'awaken dormant inner soul faculties' (Steiner 2004: 195). Steiner also offers a multitude of mantras and prayers to be recited and reflected upon during meditation (Steiner 2004: 167), as well as exercises which focus on perceiving the spiritual nature of seeds, plants, animals or humans, often in the form of auras (Steiner 1994: 2004). Once these abilities are attained, the student is then able to 'enter into a conscious relationship with certain supersensible beings and forces' (Steiner 1994: 179).

Steiner taught that a sequence of spiritual trials must be overcome as each new stage of higher cognition is attained. These trials seem to represent a conscious process of learning to understand and navigate the confusion caused by having shifted one's sensory ratios through spiritual practice. In Steiner's system every enrichment of one's sensorium is assigned an elemental grade and brings with it a new set of conceptual challenges. The first trial, associated with the development of Imaginative cognition, is the fire trial, during which the imagination is gradually externalised, and 'What was customarily regarded as going forth from things "outside in space," or "clinging to them" as properties - colours, sounds, odors, etc., - now float free in space' ('The Stages of Higher Knowledge' 1931). As Imaginative cognition matures, these free floating properties begin to organise into new forms; 'whereas it floated unattached at first, it now becomes the expression of a being' ('The Stages of Higher Knowledge' 1931). As his then student Valentin Tomberg describes in his lecture *The Occult Trials* (1992), the fire trial, 'is a matter of recognising one's own lower nature standing before oneself in undisguised form' (1992: 89) and ultimately represents a test of courage. This courage empowers the imagination and is needed in order to learn to 'paint in spiritual space' (1992: 90).

At the next stage, during the development of Inspirational cognition, 'the soul enters into a state of no longer having firm ground upon which to stand...the human soul is surrounded by endless possibilities of movement' (Tomberg 1992: 90). This trial is known elementally as the water trial, when the student must learn 'to renounce the abundance of spiritual influences' and 'a power must therefore be created that keeps the soul steadfast and gives it a sense of direction' (1992: 90). This is developed through what Steiner calls 'learning to read the occult script' (Steiner 2000: 89). This

ability is attained when the process of imagination reaches such depth that its subjective characteristics give way to the experience of seemingly objective entities appearing before the initiate (Hammer 2004: 424). Students then learn to perceive not only the expressions of spiritual beings in the form of imaginative images, but to recognise their inner qualities and the relationships that exist between them (Steiner 1997: 333). At this stage, spiritual beings are understood to be like spiritual letters, whose relationships to each other form words and sentences that reveal the spiritual structure of the cosmos (Steiner 1997: 334). Without inspirational cognition, according to Steiner, 'the imaginative world would remain like writing that we stare at without being able to read' (Steiner 1997: 335).

Finally, the student attains Intuitive cognition through undergoing the air trial. This trial differs from the preceding challenges in that, rather than facing an abundance of new spiritual impulses, the student instead 'enters into an utter loneliness and wilderness of soul life' (Tomberg 1992: 91), with no motivation to think, feel or act. Rather than surrender to passivity, however, the soul of the student 'must find the strength for an impulse-to-action within itself' (1992: 91). Steiner sometimes refers to the stage of intuitive cognition, or spiritual touch, as 'preparing the philosophers stone'. This preparation is achieved in part by 'rhythmizing the respiratory process' in order to 'evolve our own sexuality into a higher form' (Steiner 2000: 91). Steiner's explanations of these exercises are reminiscent of the internal alchemy breathing techniques found in some schools of Taoism (Eskildsen 2004: 79). At this stage the initiate is able to gain knowledge of a spiritual being not only through recognising expressions of their qualities, but through learning to unite themselves completely with the inner nature of the other being (Steiner 1997: 338). Having attained intuitive cognition, the initiate is able to remember his previous incarnations and read the Akashic record (Hammer 2004: 424) 'a record of every event and every thought that has ever occurred' (2004: 146). Steiner not only claimed to remember his own past lives, as well as the past lives of others, he also claimed to remember events occurring in the spiritual world between death and rebirth ('Life Between Death and Rebirth' 1930). Access to the afterlife realms granted him the ability to communicate with the dead (Steiner 2004: 226), as well as the nine hierarchies of angelic beings depicted by Dionysus the Areopagite (Steiner 2008: 33), and the elemental beings of the salamanders, sylphs, undines and gnomes familiar to Paracelsus (Steiner 1994: 159).

Development of these progressive stages is said to be reflected in the soul of the student, visible to clairvoyant perception, in the form of awakened chakras (wheels) or 'lotus flowers' (Steiner, 1994: 110). According to Steiner, these chakras are present in everyone, but remain in a dormant state, and appear 'of a darkish colour, quiet and unmoving' (1994: 110), until an individual undertakes dedicated spiritual practice, at which point they first begin to glow, and later rotate. While these terms are to be understood as figures of speech, Steiner refers to them as 'the sense organs of the soul' (Steiner 1994: 111). After many spiritual trials, these chakras are fully awakened, marking the conclusion of the Rosicrucian path, which Steiner describes as 'godliness, the blessed rest within all things' (2000: 58).

At each level a new experience of the world arises, a new sensory data set is revealed by having undergone the previous trial (whether experienced as an abundance or seeming lack of input), and the means to correctly perceive and function within this new world must be developed. The following section will examine cognitive models

that depict a similar process taking place at the level of unconscious processing, before discussing higher-order theories that share many similarities with Steiner's model at the level of conscious awareness.

3. Predictive Coding and the Occult Trials

In recent decades cognitive scientists have extensively analysed our cognitive feedback loops of perception and judgment through what is known as a hierarchical predictive coding (Seth, Suzuki and Critchley 2012: 1), or Bayesian (Corlett, Frith and Fletcher 2009: 515) framework. Bayesian models are now very widespread in the cognitive sciences, and are founded on the notion that incoming information is interpreted based on prior expectations (Corlett, Frith and Fletcher 2009: 516). The term 'predictive coding' refers to the way in which the brain processes bottom-up signals, or sensory data, through a series of nested cognitive levels of sensation, perception and action, by matching them with top-down predictive hypotheses. Each level functions as both a top-down predictor of the signals coming from a lower level, while providing bottom-up signals to be processed by a yet higher level (Hohwy, Roepstorff & Friston 2008, in Asprem and Taves, 2016: 5). This means that we perceive and interpret sensory data at multiple cognitive levels that have evolved over time, and if a lower perceptual level is incapable of offering an adequate explanation of certain incoming signals, these are reported to a higher perceptual level capable of more complex interpretations.

Predictive coding models are not only useful descriptions of neurological processes; it is now generally accepted that theories of predictive coding describe hierarchical models that are actively constructed by the brain itself as an explanation of its sensory inputs (Bastos et al. 2012: 695). Bastos et al. (2012) present evidence for what they term the Canonical Microcircuit, a type of cortical column replicated throughout the brain that contains the circuitry required to implement a form of Bayesian inference computation. The model is based on extensive evidence from neuroimaging studies, supported by case studies in neuropsychology which demonstrate, for example, the existence of excitatory cells that communicate to higher areas in the brain hierarchy, and inhibitory cells that send signals to lower areas of the brain (Bastos et al. 2012: 699), correlating with the Bayesian model of bottom-up error signaling and top-down predictions (Hashkes-Pink, et al. 2017: 5). Related studies have also indicated that top-down predictions are transmitted by lower alpha or beta frequencies while error signaling is communicated through faster gamma frequencies (Hashkes-Pink, et al. 2017: 5).

In the Bayesian model of perception, higher levels of cognition offer explanatory hypotheses for experiences that cannot be accounted for at a lower cognitive level. These hypotheses are based on concepts drawn from the individual's own experience, but if found to be appropriate, will enable them to navigate the new experience effectively. The level of cognition is in some sense objective, since there is a level of processing complexity and neural signal diversity that could potentially be measured by brain activity, and yet is interpreted subjectively, based on an individual's particular set of concepts. This body of research therefore indicates a potential bridge between constructivist and perennialist explanations of mystical experiences, and demonstrates that Steiner's notion of a hierarchy of distinct modes of cognition is an

appropriate representation of both the brain's perceptual processes and physical structure. In my opinion, the occult trials described by Steiner and Tomberg closely resemble a process of generating new top-down hypotheses to account for new bottom-up sensory signals. Yet while perception theorists insist that the processes described by predictive coding models are unconscious and do not refer to conscious acts of hypothesis testing (Asprem and Taves 2016: 6), current theories of consciousness indicate that a similar appraisal process may occur at the level of conscious introspection.

4. Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness

In his article *A higher order Bayesian decision theory of consciousness* (2008), Hakwan C. Lau argues that Bayesian models of perception are a crucial feature of theories of consciousness known as higher-order representational (HOR) theories of consciousness (Lau 2008: 35). Whereas predictive coding theories refer to an unconscious perceptual process, higher-order theories postulate that individuals are able to purposefully shift to higher levels of cognition, just as Steiner states that 'we can transpose ourselves into the state for higher perception whenever it is appropriate' (1994: 164). There are several major varieties of HOR theories. Rocco J. Gennaro's *The Consciousness Paradox: Consciousness, Concepts and Higher-Order Thoughts* (2012) provides an excellent overview of the various types¹. Higher-order perception theory (HOP) in particular closely resembles Steiner's own model of consciousness.

Higher-order theories are significant to this discussion for two main reasons. Firstly, they present an explanation of how unconscious sensory data can become conscious due to an individual acquiring new concepts. This ability is not explained by many competing theories of consciousness, and yet is essential for understanding not only Steiner's developmental model, clairvoyance, and the occult trials, but the effect of learning in general. I may acquire subtle concepts on a wine tasting course, for example, which then cause me to notice the dryness or heaviness of a wine, and consequently alter and complexify my conscious experiences of tasting wine (Gennaro 2012: 29). Secondly, HOR models of consciousness not only posit the existence of multiple levels of cognition that we are able to consciously shift between at will, but allow for our potential to develop yet higher levels of cognition, as Steiner asserts is possible.

The major claim made by HOR theorists is that that we become conscious of the world through the act of forming a higher-order representation of the world for ourselves (Gennaro 2012: 13). This means that we are only ever consciously aware of those aspects of the world that we 'describe' or represent to ourselves. This would explain why we are inevitably conscious of some aspects of our field of experience and unconscious of others. A commonly cited example is of someone driving 'on autopilot' while consciously thinking of something else, who then cannot remember getting home. Their ability to navigate proves that they were able to perceive the road, but with little conscious experience of doing so. A related phenomenon has been well

1 Current theories of consciousness can largely be divided into first-order representational (FOR) theories and higher-order representational (HOR) theories, though there are numerous variations of both models, as well as competing non-representational theories.

documented in studies of blindsight patients, individuals with lesions in the primary visual area of the brain who report a lack of visual consciousness in particular regions of their visual field, yet can successfully guess the characteristics of a stimulus they cannot consciously see up to 80-90% of the time (Lau 2008: 36). These studies indicate that conscious experience and perception are two different things, highlighting the need for a theory of why we are conscious of some experiences and not others if consciousness is not necessarily required for perception or navigation.

Theorists opposed to higher-order theories, such as Ned Block (2011) have failed to offer an adequate alternative explanation of this issue, and instead claim that it is connected to the hard problem of consciousness and is therefore beyond the ability of theorists to explain for the foreseeable future (2011: 423). Conversely, Lau (2008) proposes that individuals establish criteria of whether a stimulus is present or absent based on a Bayesian appraisal process, and that as a result of their brain defects blindsight patients establish abnormally high criteria for signal detection in certain areas, causing them to fail to represent, and thereby become consciously aware of, stimuli present in their visual field (2008: 38). This explanation of blindsight may also explain the role concepts play in our perceptual processes. Each new concept may shift our criteria for signal detection, and so acquiring the concept of dryness from a connoisseur can cause us to represent flavours of wine to ourselves that previously went undetected.

4.1 Higher Order Introspection

According to HOR theory, introspection occurs when a higher-order representation of a mental state, such as the state of tasting an apple, is itself represented by a still higher HOR. While I am aware of the flavour of the apple due to the second-order representation, I am able to reflect on my memories and associations of eating apples due to the third-order representation. This means that until the second-order representation has itself been represented by a third-order representation, I am fully 'in the moment', enjoying the apple; it is the third order of representations that enables me to reflect on my experience. Introspection therefore requires at least three levels – the unconscious mental state, the higher-order representation of that state, and then the HOR of that representation, forming a three-tier cognitive feedback loop (Gennaro 2012: 30).

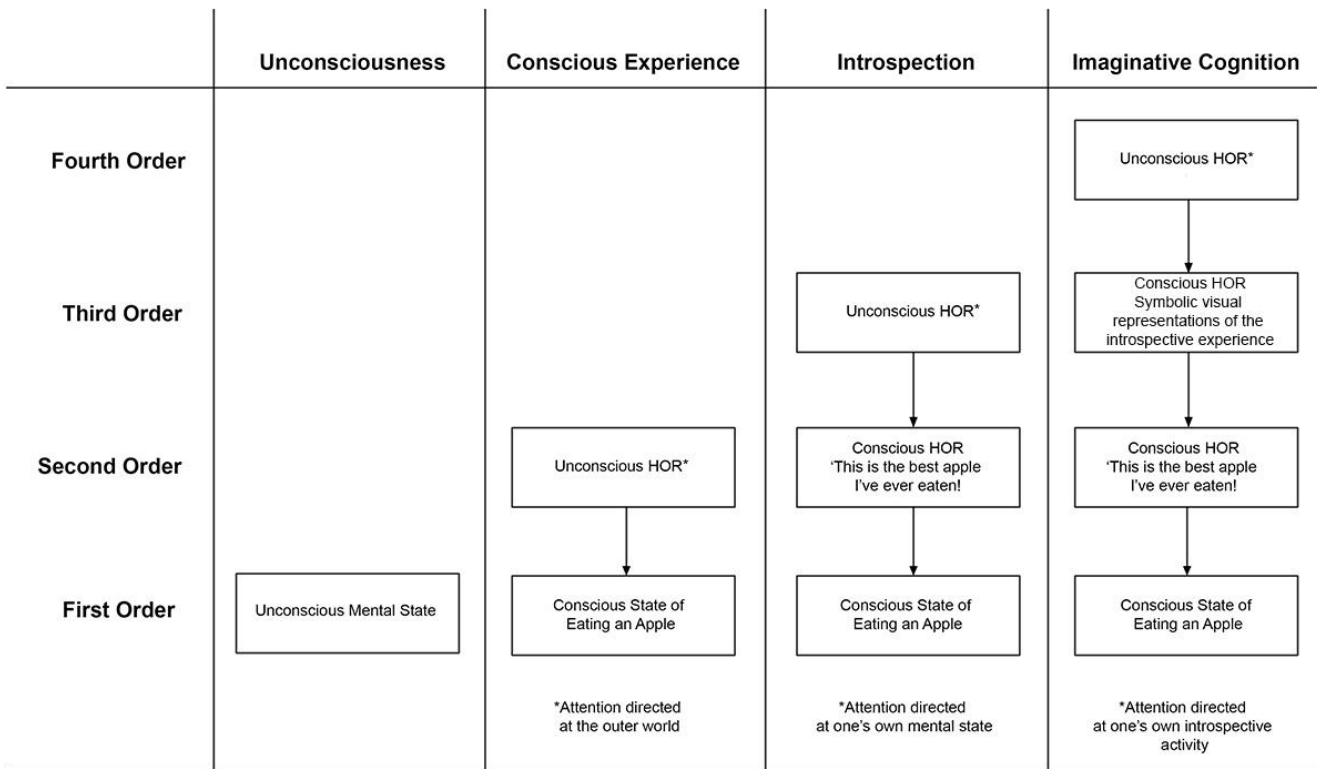


Figure 1: Based on Robert Gennaro's diagram of introspective activity according to HOT theory (Gennaro 2012: 30).

While discussion of HOR theories typically stop at the three-tiered model necessary to explain introspection, HOR theories leave open the possibility of a person learning to attain a perspective beyond their own typical introspective activity, and to thereby develop four or five-tier representations of their own mental states. In his philosophical study, *The Philosophy of Freedom* (2008), Steiner describes his 'pure thinking' as a kind of thinking that 'arises when we contemplate thinking itself (2008: 122). Taken in context, Steiner is referring to his becoming aware of the kind of introspection illustrated by the three-tiered HOR model, meaning that Steiner is discussing at minimum a four-tiered HOR model of introspection. This raises the possibility that each shift, from imaginative to inspirational and intuitive cognition, may be achieved through learning to represent our highest-order representations to ourselves at a still higher level.

In HOR theory, the highest HOR of our experience, which we could crudely call 'the observer', is always unconscious. This means that if we are only aware of one representative level, such as our representations of eating the apple, the part of ourselves observing that higher-order representational level is an unconscious, higher HOR. This means that there is always a level of higher-order representational activity occurring of which we are unaware, and so accessing a higher level of representations can be seen as a process of becoming conscious of our current highest level of cognition. This is another way in which HOR theories resemble Steiner's model. Steiner distinguishes between what he calls the 'real I or ego', and 'ego-consciousness' (2008: 124). For him the real ego is to be found in the faculty of pure thinking, of which we remain unconscious, but ego-consciousness 'arises through the traces which the activity of thinking engraves upon our general consciousness' (2008: 124). This distinction between an unconscious higher faculty, the I, which is

consciously expressed at a lower cognitive level as the ego, strongly resembles the distinction between unconscious upper HORs, and conscious lower HORs.

4.2 Higher-Order Perception Theory

Arguably the model of HOR theory that most closely resembles Steiner's own view is commonly known as higher-order perception (HOP) theory. Some trace the idea of HOP back to the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), who said that 'consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind' (Gennaro 2012: 13). HOP theory is sometimes called inner-sense theory, because it postulates that it is inner-senses, or 'internal attentional mechanisms' (Lycan 2004: 99) that perceive lower order mental states.

One of the benefits of inner-sense theory is that it is able to account for the fact that someone might experience a sensation of pain, or the impression of a certain colour, in the absence of any external stimuli causing the experience. Unlike other HOR theories, HOP theory allows for the possibility of experiencing our second or third-order representations in the absence of first-order experiences. This model aligns with Steiner's previously mentioned descriptions of the development of clairvoyant perception, when phenomenal properties such as colours, sounds and odors usually experienced in association with objects begin to 'float free in space' ('The Stages of Higher Knowledge' 1931), before gradually organising into expressions of spiritual beings. Yet Steiner is keen to point out that he is not discussing hallucinations. In his description of sensing auras, Steiner emphasises that the colours seen with the organs of the soul are not like colours seen with our physical eyes, rather 'through spiritual perception we experience something similar to the impression made by physical colors' (1994: 59), and warns that we will become confused 'in the worst way' if we expect 'the spiritual world to be a replica of the physical world' (1994: 60). Just as in the occult trials, Steiner seems to be describing a process of projecting new top-down interpretations onto the experience of a higher-order level of representations of which he was previously unaware.

One major objection to HOP theory is that inner-senses which perceive thinking should give rise to a phenomenology distinctive of inner sense. Critics claim that no matter how hard you concentrate on your outer (first-order) experiences, 'you won't find any further phenomenological properties arising out of the attention you pay to them, beyond those already belonging to the experiences themselves' (Carruthers 2016: 15). This may be a key area in which, as Sebastian Voros (2013) suggested, cognitive science may benefit from incorporating the claims of mystics and esotericists into its models. The objection is based on the assumption that thoughts do not exhibit phenomenal properties, which is a hotly debated topic in philosophy of mind (Jorba 2016: 45). If one sides with the defenders of cognitive phenomenology, then the experience of thought, expressed as inner speech, intentionality, categorical perception and other qualities, can be interpreted as the perception of the first level (2nd tier) of higher-order representations. We could therefore say that our experience of having 'a voice in our head' is one aspect of the phenomenology distinctive of inner sense. Steiner claims that his clairvoyant experiences arise from learning to contemplate thinking itself, which in this model would mean becoming aware of his second level (3rd tier) higher-order representations, and just as HOP theory predicts, this new perspective gives rise to a new phenomenology distinctive of inner-sense,

this time in the form of an externalised and seemingly objectified visual imagination. As Steiner states, 'in the spiritual world, colours are higher than sounds and words' (1994: 165).

An additional criticism of inner-sense theory is based on the fact that the postulated internal monitors, reminiscent of Steiner's 'sense organs of the soul' (Steiner 2004: 97), would need to be immensely powerful physical devices in order to generate higher-order experiences that represent first-order experiences in all their detail and complexity. Philosopher Peter Carruthers argues that these internal scanners would need to be almost as complex as the visual system itself, and that there is no 'plausible story to tell about the evolutionary pressures that led to their construction' (2016: 17). Again the Bayesian framework is useful here, since it presents evidence that the brain processes sensory data through a multitude of cognitive levels before that data is translated into conscious impressions, at which point, according to HOR theory, it can then be processed consciously at further levels. To the extent that each level gives an appraisal of signals transmitted by a lower cognitive level, it can be said to be acting as an internal monitor.

Some insight into this issue may also be gained from the field of psychedelic research. Reports of psychedelic experiences could be interpreted as extreme examples of experiencing higher-order representations in the absence of related sensory input (Strassman 2001, Hill 2013, Cole-Turner 2014). While Steiner never discussed psychedelics, he does claim that techniques exist through which temporary experiences of higher worlds can be forced without spiritual practice, and the phenomenology of psychedelic journeys certainly aligns with Steiner's own claims (Grof 2008: 17). In his mescaline-inspired texts *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* (1994), Aldous Huxley speculated that psychedelics lowered 'the biological efficiency of the brain' which seemed 'to permit entry into consciousness of certain classes of mental events, which are normally excluded' (1994: 63). Huxley compared his model of the brain to a 'reducing valve' (1994: 104), a comparison that has since been found to be appropriate by researchers examining the neural correlates of the psychedelic state induced by psilocybin (Carhart-Harris et al. 2012: 2142). According to the researchers, 'the results strongly imply that the subjective effects of psychedelic drugs are caused by decreased activity and connectivity in the brain's key connector hubs, enabling a state of unconstrained cognition' (2012: 2138). A more recent study correlated the psychedelic phenomenology of ketamine, LSD and psilocybin experiences with an increase in neural signal diversity, which represents 'an elevated level of consciousness' (Schartner et al. 2017: 1). These findings strongly imply that rather than requiring a distinct, specialised, internal monitoring 'device' in the brain, visionary states are produced through what neuroscientist Thomas Metzinger would call a 'spatially distributed, but functionally distinct neural correlate' (Metzinger 2009: 257) of the subjective state. Therefore, this latter objection cited by Carruthers appears to be based on a false conception of the biological requirements of the theory.

Higher-order theories of consciousness not only parallel Steiner's hierarchical model of spiritual development, they also share the notion that concepts play a central role in our ability to access these higher levels of consciousness. The following sections will explore the roles played by concepts and language in the induction and interpretation of mystical experience.

5. Conceptualism and the Void

According to Steiner, our inner senses, or spiritual organs of perception, are developed through the acquisition and synthesis of concepts ('The Science of Knowing' 1924). These concepts are acquired through the exercise of sense-free thinking, which Steiner compares to mathematical reasoning. Steiner's insistence that an individual's spiritual experiences are entirely dependent upon the concepts they possess can be understood as a kind of spiritual conceptualism. Conceptualists maintain that the perceptual content of an experience is fully determined by the concepts possessed by the subject of that experience (Gennaro 2012: 135). This view is supported by the fact that the acquisition of new concepts clearly changes our perceptual experience, as in the obvious case of learning a new language, in which arbitrary marks become symbols imbued with meaning, as well as in the previously mentioned example of wine-tasting.

However, scholars of mysticism such as Robert Forman (1990) have argued that it is possible to have experiences that are entirely devoid of conceptual content. In his previously mentioned work *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (1990), Forman explores the implications of a form of IM experience that he calls the Pure Consciousness Event (PCE), defined as 'a wakeful though contentless (nonintentional) consciousness (1990: 8). The PCE is an introverted mystical experience, which Forman considers to be synonymous with the Hindu guru Ramana Maharshi's description of the experience of samadhi (1990: 8). Forman agrees with Stephen Bernhardt (1990), who argues that 'it just does not seem that there is sufficient complexity during the pure consciousness event to say that any such conceptually constructive elements are involved' and that such mystics do not seem to be 'employing concepts...drawing upon memory...language or accumulation of prior experience, or discriminating and integrating' (1990: 232). Since it seems that a truly contentless experience must by definition be the same for all mystics who experience a PCE, Forman concludes that his model 'swings the pendulum back toward the perennial philosophy camp' (1990: 39).

In his masterpiece *The Book of Five Rings* (1645), the mystic Japanese sword saint Miyamoto Musashi writes 'The void is nothingness...People in this world look at things mistakenly, and think that what they do not understand must be the void. This is not the true void. It is bewilderment' (Musashi 1974: 95). Both Rudolf Steiner and conceptualist Robert Gennaro (2005) would seem to agree. Gennaro argues that PCEs, contrary to Forman's claims, contain the minimum conceptual content of 'I am in mental state M now' required for a state to be conscious according to HOR theory (2005: 9), which contains the three concepts 'I', 'mental state M', and 'now'. For Gennaro, the assertion that PCEs feature no mental concepts at all is exaggerated, and PCEs are not strictly devoid of content, but are simply devoid of the 'typical content' (2005: 12). He points out that terms like 'emptiness' or 'absence' are comparative concepts employed in contrast to 'something' or some content (2005: 12). Also, there seems to be a contradiction between Forman's claim that during his own PCE experiences 'there is no particular or identifiable object of which I am aware', and his conviction that 'I just know that I was awake without a break, that there was a continuity of myself (however we define that) throughout' (Forman 1999: 20). Gennaro contends that references to 'an awareness of self' imply the conscious employment of the concept 'I', and that 'it is difficult to understand how practitioners can later

remember and describe these events without having employed conscious I-thoughts during the alleged PCE' (2005: 11). PCE reports also seem to involve a temporal component, since if the concept 'now' were not applied during a PCE, then it would not be possible to distinguish the PCE from a memory of the past or a vision of the future (2005: 14). Finally he asks, 'If there were nothing it is like to have a PCE, why would so many people wish to be in that state and be able afterwards to describe the experience?' (2005: 23).

Forman's claim that the PCE is a non-conceptual experience seems to be based on an overly narrow definition of the term 'concept'. It has been proven that infants acquire spatial concepts such as depth and an accompanying fear of falling, before they acquire language (McShane 1991: 63-64), and experimental work in the cognitive neuroscience of attention demonstrates that 'conceptual knowledge shapes perception as early as the lateral geniculate nucleus' (Gennaro 2012: 137), a relay centre in the thalamus that is present in rodents and other lower mammals. While the study of concepts in cognitive science remains largely anthropocentric, there is extensive evidence suggesting that non-human animals, from pigeons to monkeys and apes, display 'convincing evidence of their conceptual abilities' (Zentall et al. 2008: 38). Research therefore strongly suggests that our higher concepts are built upon more fundamental concepts that have evolved over millions of years, and it has been established that just as our concepts and language are hierarchically structured, so they are hierarchically processed by the brain (Mehler et al. 1998: 368, Ding et al. 2016: 158). For example, the concept 'efficiency' will mean different things to different people, but anyone who possesses the concept must already possess some concept of 'effort', and also of 'reward'. These basic concepts are built upon still more fundamental concepts that appear to have been carried over from our early mammalian ancestors, such as pleasure and pain. While it is not overly challenging to suppose that the recitation of a mantra or other spiritual techniques which deflect attention from habitual thought patterns may induce the experience of transcending linguistic conceptual structures related to one's ordinary identity and circumstance, it is far more difficult to imagine such a practice transcending the experience of fundamental conceptual content that has been part of our perceptual apparatus since the days of our lower mammalian ancestors. Even Musashi, having declared the void to be nothingness, states that 'there is also timing in the void' (Musashi 1974: 48).

5.1 Transforming the Astral Body

From a conceptualist perspective, the ability to access these mystical states can only be brought about through the acquisition of new concepts. The preceding discussion implies that IM experiences result from interpreting our sensory experience from a lower, pre-verbal conceptual level while maintaining awareness of our higher 'I' concept. Steiner referred to these pre-verbal conceptual structures underlying our linguistic, ego-consciousness as the 'astral body', which represents our animal nature (Steiner 1994: 159). In Steiner's system the spiritual concepts that give rise to imaginative cognition are not simply built upon concepts relating to our everyday ego-consciousness, but are transformations of the pre-verbal concepts acquired from our evolutionary heritage. The 'higher organs of perception', sculpted through conceptual development, 'are created out of the substance of the astral body' (Steiner 1997: 325). This newly transformed astral body is then considered to represent an additional fifth subtle body, which serves as the basis for imaginative cognition. This can be seen as

a new conceptual level linking one's linguistic, ego-consciousness to their pre-verbal, 'animal' consciousness.

Yet one might object that even if Forman's PCE includes conceptual content, it does not follow that it only arises as a result of conceptual development. However, IM and EM experiences cannot merely be the result of sinking below the level of linguistic concepts into a state of pre-verbal conceptual awareness; to the extent that one becomes able to repeat the process of attaining IM and EM experiences a concept of how to enter such states must have been developed based on a familiarity with a sequence of mental states. These concepts may be explicitly understood within a technical meditation tradition, or they may be non-linguistic, comparable to the pre-verbal development of the concept of depth in infants, but representing a kind of inner depth of concentration or insight. Just as an infant can be said to possess the concept of depth before they are able to explain it, a mystic may possess the concept of inner depth required to access IM and EM states without explicit understanding of their own abilities. Also, these concepts would not correspond to the content of either conceptual level, but would stand in a category of their own, referring only to the relationship between these conceptual levels.

One might further object, however, that surely these mystics could not fully possess the concepts necessary to have IM, EM or ESM experiences before having these experiences for the first time. This objection is related to what is called the 'fineness of grain' argument against conceptualism, which is based on the assertion that one can experience many properties or objects without possessing the corresponding concepts relating to those specific properties or objects (Gennaro 2012: 173). However, conceptualists argue that we are capable of having these experiences due to our ability to form demonstrative concepts, such as 'that shade of red' (2012: 173), or comparative concepts, such as 'that shade is darker than this one' (2012: 176) in order to identify new experiences with some level of accuracy. As already noted, we have many levels of concepts, just as we have many levels of perception. An alien object can therefore be demonstratively identified by its parts, as in 'these look like wings', before an overall concept of the object and its function is acquired. Similarly, demonstrative concepts such as 'more relaxed', or 'less distracted' can be employed in the appraisal of new mental states during spiritual practices. With repeated successes, familiarity with these states may then lead to the development of higher concepts that enable mystics to re-enter the mystical state more efficiently by employing multiple strategies simultaneously during meditation, such as deep breathing, strong posture and deep concentration on an object, for example. In this way, demonstrative and comparative concepts are combined to form specific higher concepts.

This model would help account for Forman's observation that 'it is not unusual to hear of an untrained and uninitiated neophyte who has a mystical experience without any deep preconditioning' (Forman 1990: 20). Conceptualism suggests they may develop this ability unconsciously or by accident, perhaps while attempting to develop some other skill that requires great concentration. The fact that these concepts can be acquired unconsciously also implies that it is possible for animals and infants alike to have mystical experiences of their own. These concepts would then represent a new conceptual category or cognitive mode, one relating our higher, linguistic concepts to our lower, pre-verbal concepts. Therefore, in the case of IM, EM, and ESM states alike,

each can be said to result from accessing or developing a higher-order conceptual level beyond that of the ordinary level of introspection that we associate with self-awareness. Transpersonal developmental stages would then arise as a consequence of gradually coming to identify with this higher-order cognitive level.

5.2 *The Imagination as a Conceptual Language System*

Steiner's spiritual system can be seen as being driven by a 'talismatic' development of concepts (Idel 1992: 44). He taught that, as the student acquires ever more subtle concepts, 'the concepts join themselves into a united system of concepts within which every one has its particular place' ('The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity' 1894). At the stage of inspirational cognition, 'All that previously appeared only in isolated figures, sounds and colours now appears as one great interrelated whole' (1994: 73), enabling the student to then 'read in the higher world' (1994: 73). He likens the stage of imaginative cognition that preceded it to 'learning the letters of the alphabet in order to spell' (1994: 73). Like the kabbalist, who builds an inner house, 'which is the combination of letters, filled by illumination and perfection [and] to prepare a Tabernacle for God' (Rabbi Moses Eliaqim Beriah 1875, fol. 8a, in Idel 1992: 42), Steiner instructs his students to work to understand their concepts as a unified system in preparation for a higher synthesis.

An example of one of Steiner's talismatic conceptual systems can be found in a short cycle of four lectures given in 1914, collectively published under the title *Human and Cosmic Thought* (1991), in which Steiner argues that there are essentially twelve key philosophical standpoints, one for each sign of the zodiac. The constellation Cancer, for example, represents the philosophical perspective of Materialism. On the opposite side of the zodiacal wheel, Capricorn represents the Spiritist perspective, which maintains that the material world is only a revelation or manifestation of the spiritual world (1991: 30). These two perspectives represent the extreme polarities between which the ten other standpoints are arranged, such as Mathematism or Monadism, according to what degree they are spiritually or materialistically based. In Steiner's view, 'all twelve standpoints are fully justifiable' (1991: 40) and all 'parties are correct in their respective spheres' (1991: 31). However, all perspectives are not equally valuable in the analysis of different phenomena. A Materialist worldview is exceptionally useful in an examination of the physical world for example, 'but in speaking of the Spirit they may utter nothing but foolishness' (1991: 31). The same could, of course, be said of Spiritists speaking of matter. Steiner asserted, therefore, that 'the world cannot be rightly considered from the one-sided standpoint of one single conception, one single mode of thought; the world discloses itself only to someone who knows that one must look at it from all sides' (1991: 39). For Steiner, this perspective-from-all-perspectives represented the natural position of the Anthroposophist.

In spite of Steiner's dualistic language, his metaphysical model actually represents a form of dual-aspect monism. Dual-aspect theory can be traced back to Spinoza's Ethics and is the idea that physical and mental properties are two aspects of the same one thing, in an equal and non-reductive way (Benovsky 2016: 341). This idea is closely related to panpsychism, the view that all things have mind or a mind-like quality (Skrbina 2005: 2). While there are possible emergentist conceptions of dual-aspect monism in which only entities of sufficient complexity are said to possess mental

aspects, Steiner was a clear panpsychist who rejected the emergentist view and held that consciousness is fundamental and is present in the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms ('The Elementary Kingdoms' 1907). Steiner's spiritual beings have material aspects (Steiner 2008: 84), meaning that, according to Steiner, they consequently must also have mathematical aspects, sensational aspects, psychic aspects, and so on, according to each of his twelve philosophical perspectives. Their material aspects are simply less significant than their spiritual aspects, just as the mathematical aspects of a love affair are far less significant than its emotional aspects. Therefore, it is important to note that when Steiner spoke of spiritual beings, he was referring to patterns in nature, in thought, in culture, which, if interpreted imaginatively, took on certain reliable representations.

Steiner's transpersonal concepts can therefore be understood as a kind of specialised language developed for specific purposes, just like mathematics or systems of formal logic. It is a system of symbolic correspondences that can be applied to the world to reveal new information about ourselves and our environment. The key abilities the clairvoyant claims to possess, those of seeing auras, sensing and conversing with spiritual beings, and even seeing into the past or future, can each be understood as experiences of knowledge that would previously have remained unconscious. Consequently, a claim to be able to read someone's aura can be seen as a phenomenological claim, rather than as a physical claim regarding undetected energy clouds emanating from our bodies. By tapping into the sensory experience of the body, which has evolved keen senses for reading energetic and emotional states of attraction and aggression over millions of years, and learning to represent this bodily wisdom imaginatively, it may be possible for the clairvoyant to gain greater insight into the realities of their interpersonal relationships, as Steiner claims (1994: 179). This ability may extend to accurately perceiving the state of other living organisms such as plants and eco-systems, or the moods of crowds, which may be imaginatively represented not only as auras but as active spiritual beings.

However, Steiner is typical of many esotericists in claiming that his particular system of correspondences is universally true, while also employing the strategies of pattern recognition and eclecticism identified by Olav Hammer to support his 'perennialist belief in an underlying spiritual unity behind religious diversity' (Hammer 2004: 161). Yet, throughout history many similar claims have been made regarding spoken language itself. For Origen, St. Augustine, and Guillaume Postel, the universal, original language was undoubtedly Hebrew (Eco 1997: 74-75), yet for the Irish grammarians it was Gaelic (p.16), whereas the baron de Ryckholt claimed that 'Flemish is the only language spoken in the cradle of humanity' and 'it alone is a language, while all the rest, dead or living are but mere dialects or debased forms more or less disguised' (Droixhe 1990, in Eco 1995: 97). If we can expect the cultural understanding of symbol systems relating to higher modes of cognition to follow a similar trajectory to cultural conceptions of spoken language, then Steiner's claims to complete objectivity are unsurprising given how relatively uncommon his mode of thinking remains. Just as multiculturalism gradually eroded beliefs in the one true language, so we might expect an eruption of vocal esotericists, each grounded in their own personally objective imaginative systems, to erode the strong perennialism so common in the early days of a new language.

Conclusion

By comparing Steiner's descriptions of his own mystical experiences with current findings in the cognitive sciences, Steiner's higher modes of cognition have been modeled as forms of higher-order conceptual development. Evidence has been presented which strongly suggests that basic human faculties of perception, introspection, language use and psychedelic visionary experience are all founded on hierarchical structures both generated by the brain, and reflected in the structure of the brain itself. I have argued that these findings support Steiner's claims that these faculties can be further developed to enable mystics to perceive new patterns of information, to introspect at a higher level by learning to observe introspection itself, and to 'discover' new forms of language pertaining to these new perceptual abilities. Based on higher-order perception theory, Steiner's clairvoyant abilities may be seen as the distinctive phenomenology that arises as a result of accessing higher-order perceptions, just as our inner monologue can be seen as the distinctive phenomenology associated with our current capacity for introspection.

From a conceptualist perspective, IM, EM and ESM experiences must each be dependent upon a process of conceptual development. I have supported Robert Gennaro's (2005) argument that IM and EM states cannot be non-conceptual states, but are more likely to be experiences of states of awareness founded on more fundamental, pre-verbal concepts. This ability to access pre-verbal conceptual structures and thereby experience a state of awareness outside of one's customary conceptual identity may stimulate the development of a higher conceptual identity beyond that of the ordinary ego, leading to the permanent stage shifts or 'awakenings' reported by transpersonal psychologists. This would align with Steiner's model of higher modes of cognition being developed through the top-down transformation of our own animal nature in the form of the 'astral body'. I have therefore argued that Steiner's clairvoyant experiences may be the result of him having learned to consciously conceptualise the unconscious knowledge of the body within a religious framework.

While constructivists such as Olav Hammer have dismissed the validity of esoteric conceptual structures by exposing the differences between these supposedly universal spiritual truths, in my opinion the importance of this esoteric material is found not in its form but in its function. No one knows how language developed among our early ancestors, but many suspect that we learned to sing before we spoke (Brandt et al. 2012), that our developing linguistic capacities first served as entertainment. It was only through learning to associate spoken sounds with objects in the external world, and by extension, memory, that the power of language was unleashed. For a time it must have served the simple purposes of early hunter gatherers, the naming of plants and animals, of people and tools, before we mastered the art of storytelling. Later, with the development of abstract reasoning came a reflexive awareness of the underlying structures of language itself, through the classical study of logic, grammar, music and mathematics. If we consider much of esotericism to represent the development of the imagination as a conceptual language, it seems to follow a similar trajectory. During a time when the imagination primarily serves as a source of fantasy entertainment, comparable to humanity's first songs, a few individuals begin to locate their own imaginative imagery within the external world through a more or less conscious process of association. The association of colours to objects is referred to as 'seeing

auras', and spiritual beings, once merely 'imagined', become elementals associated with rocks, rivers, wind, fire, and so on. As one becomes increasingly familiar with these associations, an underlying grammar or logic begins to emerge. Associations evolve into astrological mandalas and tables of correspondences; as Steiner writes, 'All that previously appeared only in isolated figures, sounds and colours now appears as one great interrelated whole' (1994: 73). Understanding these associations leads to the development of new occult languages and the discovery of relationships underlying various phenomena through what Steiner refers to as learning to read 'the occult script' (1994: 72). And just as classical cultures often claimed to possess the one true language, so clairvoyants such as Steiner claim to perceive one objective, spiritual world.

While for some the reading of auras or the act of conversing with spirits might seem like inconsequential cognitive achievements, to our early hominid ancestors the association of sounds with objects may have seemed similarly inconsequential. Likewise, just as it is hard for most of us to imagine living in a state where our own imaginations are manifested externally in our surroundings at will, as Steiner claims is possible, early humans could never have suspected that they would one day have an inner monologue running almost constantly as a result of their embrace of language. And just as our linguistic abilities eventually enabled us to make profound discoveries regarding the age and evolution of the planet, the cosmos, and of biology, so too our imaginative abilities may enable esotericists to make related discoveries, to read the akashic record (with questionable levels of accuracy) by observing processes and testing theories related to their particular modes of perception. When we consider how many millenia it took for our species to develop mythology, medicine, architecture, mathematics, and modern science after the dawn of our introspective capacities, it is no surprise if Steiner's claims are not proven to be correct, any more than we might expect the early mythologies of hunter gatherers to be accurate depictions of reality. This does not disprove the claim that they are able to access a higher level of cognition, however, nor does it mean that their teachings do not contain wisdom. Perhaps Steiner's 'spiritual science' can be thought of as the mythology of a new cognitive level.

Whether or not these imaginative associations have an objective basis or are subjectively applied to the external world is largely irrelevant to an evaluation of esoteric practice. As Einstein famously asked, 'How is it possible that mathematics, a product of human thought that is independent of experience, fits so excellently the objects of physical reality? Can human reason without experience discover by pure thinking properties of real things? (1921, in Kline, 1982: 340). Steiner would answer with a resounding 'yes'. Put another way, was mathematics invented or discovered? There is no easy answer, yet while philosophers debate the issue, mathematicians continue to make breakthroughs in mathematics. This pragmatic approach to truth seems equally applicable in the domain of esotericism. Are these spiritual beings and visionary landscapes invented or discovered? We only know that they continue to be experienced and studied by those who apply the methods of mysticism.

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‘Gods, Wights¹ and Ancestors’: The Varieties of Pagan Religious Experience at Ancient Sacred Sites

Jennifer Uzzell

Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham

j.s.uzzell@durham.ac.uk

This article explores anomalous experiences reported by people identifying as Pagan whilst visiting places of ancient religious significance in the UK and the US. The article seeks to establish the extent to which these experiences conform to William James’ (2016, pp. 380–381) descriptors of mystical experience as ineffable, noetic, transient and passive, and suggests that while some of the experiences described do conform to the traditional categories, others describe a different sort of experience, possibly arising from a very different world view, which is neither monotheistic nor monist and as such is not concerned with concepts such as transcendence in the way that James used these terms. The article suggests that an alternative definition of ‘transcendence’ is required to accommodate these accounts. Experiences such as those described here are real and meaningful to those who have them but have, to date, been under-represented in research into religious experience. The article concludes that more research is needed into religious experiences within the context of the ‘new animism’ (Harvey, 2006).

Keywords: Paganism; animism; ancient sites; religious experience; transcendence

Introduction

This article arose out of a wider piece of research into funerary and memorial practices among contemporary British Druids. One interesting aspect of this research concerned the construction in recent years of a number of long and round barrows, similar in outward appearance to Neolithic and Bronze Age constructions, but designed as a repository for modern cremated remains. Whilst these seem to have a wide appeal for a surprisingly diverse group of people including Christians and those with no particular religious identity, they are also proving very popular with those identifying as Pagan. This led to a consideration of the role that burial mounds have played in the popular imagination in Britain over the ages, and the relationship that contemporary Pagans seek to develop with them. Much has been written on the contested ‘ownership’ of such sites and of the conflicts between Pagans and archaeologists, particularly over the treatment of the ancient dead recovered from them (e.g. Rathouse, 2013). These

¹ ‘Wight’ is a term used predominantly although not exclusively by Heathen Pagans. It comes from an Anglo Saxon term meaning a living being and for Pagans it denotes a being that has never been human and yet is not a deity. They are sometimes referred to as ‘spirits of the land’ or of place, although ‘spirit’ in itself is a problematic term for some Pagans. ‘Wight’, therefore, seems an appropriate term to use here (Blain and Wallis, 2007).

conflicts have arisen in part because some Pagans view human remains from sites such as these as being the ancestral dead that 'belong' to the Pagan communities in a way that is analogous to the claims of indigenous peoples in the Americas to the remains of their ancestors (Williams and Giles, 2016). Connection to the ancestors is of central importance to some of the Paganisms currently active in the UK, notably Druidry and Heathenry or Asatru (Matthews, 2015). In an online survey conducted as part of my research (see below) 81% of respondents claimed that the ancestors formed a regular part of their religious, ritual or magical practice, and for many this included the ancient, pre-Christian ancestors as well as the more recently deceased friends and family of the respondents. This suggests that for many Pagans living in the UK the burial places of those ancestors would be places of particular religious power and significance and that some might have experiences in such places that might be described as religious or mystical.

Methodology

This article arose out of my doctoral research into death ritual and the development of a funerary tradition and ethos among contemporary British Druids. The ethnographic information used for the article came from two sources. The first is an online survey² constructed through 'Online Surveys' (formerly Bristol Online Survey Tool) and available between 17th October 2017 and 8th May 2018. It contained 30 questions in total and was mostly qualitative in nature, allowing respondents to give as much or as little detail as they chose for each topic. It covered aspects such as belief about deity and life after death, preferred funeral practices and attitudes to 'The Ancestors'. The survey was posted to around 20 Face Book groups connected to Druidry and Paganism and was shared by a number of individuals to their own networks. I was also interviewed by The Wild Hunt, an online magazine and newsfeed for all topics related to Paganism, and the link to the survey was posted there. When this article was completed there had been 867 responses, which had risen to 1042 when the survey closed on 8th May, making it the largest data base currently in existence dealing with Pagan beliefs and attitudes towards death, funeral and death ritual and relationships with 'Ancestors'. Question 16 asked if the respondent had ever had an experience that they would describe as spiritual, religious or supernatural whilst visiting an ancient sacred site. Question 16a invited them to give a detailed account of such experiences if they so wished. 61% answered in the affirmative to question 16, although some of them specified that their experience had taken place within nature rather than at a man-made site, however ancient. Several also specifically rejected the label 'supernatural' to define their experience, 'Not supernatural, because everything's in nature, but dowsing for energy lines at ancient sites is a mystical experience for me.', and, again: 'I wouldn't use the term supernatural, all experience is within nature. Paganism isn't a transcendental (sic) practice'. Many of those who had answered 'yes' to question 16 commented that they either could not, or did not wish to give further information about their experience. The information used in this article is taken, almost in its entirety, from the accounts of those who did describe what they had experienced. Quotations from respondents are given exactly as they appeared in the survey. A small amount of additional information is taken from free-form interviews with a number of

² The survey was accessible to anyone who followed the link and was available between 17/10/17 and 08/05/18 at <https://durham.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/pagan-attitudes-to-death-funerals-and-ancestors>

individuals as a part of the wider research for my thesis. These interviews were recorded during the Autumn of 2017 and quotations in this article are taken from transcriptions.

The survey was initially aimed at Druids living in the UK, as this is the main focus of my doctoral research. However, the response was far greater than I had anticipated and participants were drawn from all over the world, with a large proportion based in the United States. I initially considered removing these responses from the data set but upon reflection decided that they would provide an interesting counter-narrative; and so it proved. This gave me the opportunity to look at a far wider range of views than I had anticipated. Respondents also came from a variety of Pagan traditions. The largest single group identify as Druids, but there were also a high proportion of Wiccans, Heathens, and Pagans claiming no particular affiliation. A small number also came from reconstructionist groups such as Hellenic, Kemetic or Sumerian traditions. The number of responses I received and the wide variety of Pagan traditions from which respondents were drawn, led to a unique and unprecedented opportunity to study the ways in which those who identify as Pagan interact with the ancient human landscape.³

The American Problem – Negotiating Sacred Space

One obvious issue confronting Pagans living in the Americas, the majority of whom are of European descent, is the question of the ownership of the land in general and of sacred spaces in particular. Most Pagans living in Western Europe can claim that the barrows, henges and megaliths of the ancient past were constructed by peoples that could reasonably be regarded as ancestors (despite recent genetic evidence suggesting that only 10% of modern human ancestry can be traced to the Neolithic population). This is not the case in the US where archaeological sites, where they exist, were generally constructed by indigenous peoples who claim a more or less exclusive right to them. Furthermore, the relationship of the blood ancestors of the American Pagans to the indigenous population is problematic to say the least. This is clearly a difficult question for Pagans, whose spiritual practice is often deeply connected to ideas of landscape, 'spirits' of land and place and to ancestors. In the case of American Pagans there can be the idea that all of these things to some extent 'belong' to others and that these relationships therefore need to be carefully negotiated. One respondent explained: 'I live in the US, where the ancient sites are not really "for" me. Using them is tricky at best and exploitative at worst'. Another says: 'the ancient sites near me (Minnesota, USA) are likely to be Native American. I'm

³ Paganism is a notoriously difficult term to define in the context of modern religious or spiritual belief. It is best understood as an 'umbrella' term covering a number of religious or spiritual movements. That these movements have certain values and ideas in common is almost universally accepted. What, exactly, these common elements are is far harder to find consensus on. In Pagan Dawn magazine in December 2016, Prof. Ronald Hutton suggested that Paganism could be defined as 'A complex of religions calling on ancient images and ideas, but addressing some of the greatest needs of modernity.' For the purposes of this research I have included anyone who consciously self-identifies as Pagan (Large, 2016) .

white, and would be unlikely to visit one unless directly invited, not wanting to offend any further than white people have already managed (to put it mildly!)

Not all respondents felt like this, however. For some there was no obvious issue with connecting to the land spirits or to ancient indigenous dead. One possible explanation for this is that within Druidic Paganism in particular, there is a very wide interpretation of the word 'ancestor'. Ancestors are, in short, the sum total of every influence, human and otherwise that has combined to make a particular individual what they are (Restall-Orr, 2012). Various sources (e.g. Brown, 2012) suggest three categories of ancestors with whom it is possible to interact. These include the most usual interpretation of ancestors as those from whom one is genetically descended. These are 'ancestors of blood'. There are also 'ancestors of place' and 'ancestors of tradition'. Ancestors of place include all those, human and otherwise, who have lived in the same landscape. This provides an obvious framework within which American Pagans of white European descent can interact with the indigenous ancestors provided they do so respectfully. It is interesting that this category would also include the animals that have inhabited a particular location in the deep past. Several respondents described experiences that were inspired by seeing dinosaur footprints:

Traveling through Utah with my mother I remember seeing the footprints of dinosaurs and I felt the spirit of their presence. Going to the natural history museum in my childhood in Denver and seeing fossils of beings that once lived where I live. Being in Santa Cruz at a retreat in a grove and feeling the peace that dwells there. Seeing the Pacific Ocean at any time, listening to birds sing and wondering if dinosaurs sang. Knowing that sacred sites are all around us and that all beings are sacred.

I have absolutely felt powerful energies from ancient sites or burial places. One example is a trip I made to the Oregon Caves. Inside is a well preserved Cave Bear skeleton, found just in that location. Being so close to fossilized beings, anthropological sites, or the impressions of dinosaur footprints gives me the most intense feeling of excitement and happiness. Being fully aware, and being around other people who are also, that the human existence is merely half a blink of an eye in the history of the universe is where I get excited most. Being around the fossilized remains of a massive and foreign-looking animal that lived 200 million years ago is awe inspiring, let alone gathering knowledge on rocks and other geological processes that are billions of years old.

The one which comes to mind: When I lived in Oregon, my ex-wife and I visited Fern Cave, in the Lava Beds National Monument, in Northern California. The beds are the site of the Modoc Wars, in the 19th century. Fern Cave is a sacred site to the Modoc. Access is limited, as it's a fragile ecological site. It's a partially-collapsed lava tube, into which fern seeds have been blown and taken root, where the sun can reach. The cave has petroglyphs, and a stone wall which can be played like a drum. Lovely site. I had the sense of several folk being present -- ghosts, for lack of a better term -- and that the cave did *not* want me or anyone else to pass beyond a further point into the cave. Later, I described them to my (then)wife, who's something of a scholar concerning the place. She replied that some of them were commonly 'seen,' and one or two I described were rarely seen, and considered by the native folk an indication that the cave approved of the person 'seeing' them. She also stated that the point I felt uncomfortable with passing corresponded to the point at which the native folk stated one shouldn't

pass beyond, because it was spiritually dangerous to do so, and that people who did so tended to come to harm, either in the cave or shortly afterward.

On our way out of the monument park, we were swooped by a red-tailed hawk, who then circled, flew ahead of us, and landed in the center of the road. We stopped, as it didn't move. When we left the car, it cried, flew up, swooped us again, then hovered in the air. Soon it was joined by others, forming a full dozen. They...all hovered. Forming an incredibly intricate aerial ballet of continually changing geometrical patterns. With nobody else around to see but ourselves. It was astounding and breathtaking. We were gobsmacked. We watched openmouthed. It was all hovering. Not a wing moved throughout.

Eventually, the ballet ended, and the hawks drifted off, one by one and then flew away. Only the original hawk was left. He flew off, down the road, then turned, flew back, swooped us again, crying, and flew-off. We didn't know quite what had happened, but we both knew it'd been incredibly, amazingly special, and that it'd obviously been done either for us, or we'd been invited to watch it happen, and that we'd been honored by it, even if we didn't know the precise nature of the honor bestowed. Perhaps the hawks knew. In any case, it was the experience of a lifetime. I really must go back, someday. Always meant to, but never managed it. Always thought I'd have time.

The latter account is also concerned with the human ancestral spirits of the place and with the preservation of a respectful distance from certain areas. There is a sense that 'approval' was both needed and given in order for the respondent to be present and that he needed to respect the boundaries and limits imposed.

Ancestors of tradition include those who might be supposed to be forerunners in an intellectual, or institutional sense. Those who are not related by blood but who have, nonetheless, been instrumental in making a person what they are. For Druids, they might include figures such as Iolo Morganwg or Ross Nicholls while for Wiccans Gerald Gardner is an obvious example. Since many Pagans consider indigenous American religious traditions to be similar in kind and intent to modern Paganism, the indigenous dead may well be regarded as ancestors of tradition and, as such, a legitimate source of inspiration and guidance. There is, as yet, insufficient information regarding how this relationship is viewed by indigenous peoples.⁴

There is then, for some, the feeling that indigenous sites are a legitimate locus of mystical experience for white European Pagans, although respect and caution are required and access is neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Preparing for a wedding here in Mexico at a pyramid. I asked the nature spirits and ancestors of those lands to give me permission to open a gate there...I actually received the answer in a strong feeling and in the Mayan language.

In Australia, our sacred places are not places with human structures. They are song-lines and natural forms. I have heard a tree speak to me in traditional language. It took me a while to get a translation. I also became very ill when I camped at a place where 3 rivers met. I learned that places of power are not always good places to sleep.

When I was in grade school we went to a Native American Museum. Part of the museum was an out door burial mound. With the curator, we climbed the mound. Once

⁴ Having said this, Phillip Shallcrass (Greywolf), head of the British Druid Order, is a regular visitor to a tribal drumming circle where he is regarded as a full member.

at the top I felt a great weight pressing down on me, I could smell fresh turned soil, and could hear drumming. This went on for a few minutes before I passed out. That has stayed with me even today.

Most recently, at a local hilltop site on a full moon night, as my partner and I climbed towards the top of the hill, which is covered with massive granite boulders, we were both assailed by fear - I mean absolute terror. Neither of us are timid people and we're both given to adventuring, but this was like a veritable hurricane of fear. I was even scared of my partner. It's not the first time either of us have experienced that sort of testing, or gatekeeping, and, while really unpleasant, it feels different from the times when sites are just telling you to Keep Out, so we paused to catch our breath, and showed ourselves to the spirits of the place. We were buffeted some more and then the most incredibly profound feeling of welcome enveloped us both. We made the rest of the climb as if pulled gently to the top, and I flopped onto one of the giant stones that held me like a mother.

I later found out that this was a sacred ritual site for the local indigenous Aboriginal people, and that another (druid) friend had had a very similar experience at the same place.

I have meditated at Native American mounds often before.

I have had contact by spirits and deities at several sites. On one occasion I was asked to leave by a spirit as I had planned to stay at the site overnight but they told me it wasn't appropriate for me to do so.

For other respondents there was no clear connection to ancient human sites and the mystical connection was, instead, to be found within nature itself. One respondent explained, 'I feel a lot more connected with the woods, the ocean, the mountain than I would ever feel in a human structure, no matter how ancient or important it might be'. This was a common theme:

I live in a land that has only been settled by Europeans in the past 200 years. California. Ancient sites are composed of Earthquake Faults and Volcanoes. Even the land is new in Geological terms to the rest of the North American Plate. But I do find giant Redwoods impressive.

All sites are ancient, the world itself is far older than any man made monument. Touching the soil, the sea, rocks and plants is a mystical experience – it's the culmination of everything nature has achieved to date. Concentrate on that and there is a peace and certainty of the power of the world and the carbon cycle. Nature and its science embracing the continuum.

The problem with your statement is that it assumes that everyone has access TO ancient sites. In the US, we do not have that many. However, I have had plenty of mystical or spiritual experiences at ancient natural stone features, waterways, shores that have been there for millennia.

This preoccupation with the natural world is hardly surprising since the sacredness and even divinity of the natural world is one of the central ideas in most forms of

Paganism.⁵ It is interesting to note that William James also found that for many, being in nature was once of the most direct ways in which to experience the divine or to bring about a mystical experience. Almost invariably, this experience was monist or pantheist in nature, with the individual sense of self dissolving into a greater 'Self' where no divisions are to be perceived (James, 2016, pp. 394, 397). While this dimension was not absent from the Pagan responses it was, interestingly, not the dominant narrative. I will return to this idea below.

Some respondents acknowledged the indigenous presence and sense of past indirectly, as something that was there but remained 'other' and not directly related to the experience itself.

I don't know if it counts as an "ancient site", as it's not delineated as such, but the woods I walked through as a young adult on the way to college had an area with an intense feeling of spirit. It was as though there had been a Native American village or seasonal camp there a long time in the past, before the land was enveloped by the suburbs and turned into the park. If I sat there and meditated, I never felt like I was alone.

One account is particularly interesting in view of the ongoing controversies regarding the treatment of the indigenous dead in the context of archaeology:

Not really at an ancient site, but dealing with the remains of one. I worked at an archaeology laboratory that had the remains of hundreds of Native Americans, as well as burial goods. These were related to the Etowah Mounds. I would often hear conversations that I couldn't make out, even though I was the only one there. I would see shadows moving down the storage halls, and there was one time where it sounded like someone was thrown against the metal racks. My boss and I ran back to see what had happened and nothing was amiss. Aside from this, I have had experiences at more modern sites.

It seems then that for modern Pagans of European descent living in the Americas, a number of mechanisms are developing whereby 'sacred space' can be negotiated in a contested and controversial environment. For some, the indigenous dead are ancestors of place and tradition and can legitimately be approached with respect. For others, this remains too problematic in the face of the genocide perpetrated by their own blood ancestors and the solution is to seek encounters with the numinous in nature.⁶ I did not encounter in the survey responses any discussion of the supposed relationship between the land itself or land spirits and the descendants of its conquerors. This would be a fruitful area for further research.

William James and the Varieties of Pagan Experience

In his chapter on Mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), William James proposes four characteristics of genuinely mystical experience: Ineffability, or the inability to satisfactorily describe the experience; a noetic quality, in which the

⁵ The website of the Pagan Federation defines Paganism as 'a polytheistic or pantheistic nature-worshipping religion'.

⁶ Although this was by no means the only reason giving for finding connection primarily within nature. For many respondents in the UK as well as the US the natural world was their main source of religious experience.

recipient learns something of which he or she was previously ignorant; transiency of the experience, which rarely lasts more than an hour; and passivity, in which the recipient feels they are 'grasped and held by a superior power' (James, 2016, p. 381). In this section I will examine the extent to which the experiences reported by Pagans conform to, or differ from these characteristics. I shall leave the most significant category, that of noetic quality, until last as the other three can be covered more easily and with less discussion.

Ineffability

This characteristic of religious experiences as they have traditionally been defined and studied was widely represented in my findings. Many respondents expressed difficulty articulating or explaining their experiences and were aware of this as an issue:

I'm sorry I don't know how to describe these experiences.

Hard to put into words. Just felt I HAD to sit and light candles and light incense and drum. It felt so natural and right

Had an out of body experience in Rome. Can't explain it well other than to say it felt like my soul recognized it.

I'm not really sure how to explain this.

Words do not describe the experience. If you've had one, then you know.

Like said before, in some sense, sometimes I can feel a presence of 'something old' when I'm at a burial mound/other ancient sites. But nothing supernatural. More the presence and energy of the history of the site. I know I'm kinda' vague at this, but it's hard to explain this feeling. It's a very subjective experience.

Beyond being unable to articulate their experiences, a significant minority of respondents were unwilling to do so, as the experience was 'private', 'personal', 'only for myself and those close to me' or 'intimate'. One respondent commented 'Now come on, you know we can't talk about these things, it would be disrespectful!' That many would be unwilling to talk about their experiences was, perhaps, unsurprising; what was striking, however, was that so many felt a need to say that they were unwilling to talk about it. In the survey, question 16 asked if they had had an experience that they would describe as supernatural or mystical. 16a asked them to elaborate further if they wished to. There was no need to write anything at all in this box and yet around 20 respondents wrote specifically that they did not wish to respond. This was not the case with any other question. This suggests that the experiences were not only difficult to express but also felt to be intensely personal and intended specifically for them to the extent that it would be 'wrong' or 'disrespectful' to share them with a third party.

Another interesting feature of several of the responses was the anxiety that they would be disbelieved. One respondent who declined to comment did so because 'it would seem crazy to all but another polytheist'. Others were keen to make clear in their reports that they had not been drinking or taking mind altering substances.

I get an instant vibe or connection to a more primitive existence - A feeling of harmony and calm - Life falls into perspective more easily. I have, on occasion, seen colors and energy represented in the sky. - (No drugs involved.)

This concern that the account will not be believed and that the recipient will be thought to have been mad or drunk if they talk about what has happened to them is a common feature of many reported experiences such as Near Death Experiences.

It is worth noting, however, that while James includes ineffability in his list of characteristics, he goes on to include in his chapter several extremely detailed and eloquent accounts of religious experiences. Clearly, then, ineffability is not a universal feature of mystical experience even if there is an acknowledgement that words cannot do full justice to it. This is borne out by my research, which also included a number of very detailed accounts of experiences, which respondents were very happy to be able to explain.

Transience and passivity

James regards these qualities as secondary and 'less sharply marked' (James, 2016, p. 381). They are less central to the quality of the experience and we can pass over them here relatively swiftly.

Transience is a fairly inherent quality of an experience at an ancient sacred site since visits to such places are of limited duration. A number of respondents took part in the ancient practice of incubation, sleeping at or in an ancient monument, most usually West Kennett long barrow in Wiltshire. The length of visit at these times was longer but the duration of any particular experience was still relatively short.

I sometimes sleep in chambered cairns and similar sites and have had some interesting visitations - not being certain if I was awake or asleep does not invalidate the experience. Also I have twice been led into a site I was looking for by a hare, once at night and once in fog. Can't prove any of it of course.

A deep sense of communion with my ancestors when I slept in W. Kennett Long Barrow.

Passivity is rather more difficult to assess. James acknowledges that people may do things to 'invite' the experience 'as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances, or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe' (2016, p. 381); and yet the experience itself, when it comes, is beyond the will of the subject. There is insufficient information in the survey accounts to make any firm judgement on this. Certainly, many go to ancient sites actively seeking an experience. Several respondents reported that their experiences took place while they were meditating or drumming. One interview subject explained that when visiting a site, she opens herself to whatever is there, inviting the wights of a particular site to communicate with her. This is a potentially dangerous activity as it involves opening oneself up and making

oneself vulnerable. In this sense, the experience is sought. Few of my respondents reported that during the experience itself the individual will was lost, but then again few mentioned the issue at all. One account was clear that the experience was unsought and unexpected, but this was an exception. 'I met the Morrigan at a holy well. It surprised me because I wasn't reaching out to her, and she wasn't like I'd expected either. I actually thought she was of this world to begin with'.

Noetic Quality

Perhaps the most significant defining factor of a mystical experience, according to James is its noetic quality. It imparts knowledge to the receiver. This is, however, not merely an intellectual or rational knowledge; rather it is:

Insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. (2016, pp. 382–383)

Later in the same chapter, James elaborates on what he regards as the true knowledge that is imparted by such experiences. They all lead, he suggests, to a realisation of the oneness of the cosmos. They lead, in short to a monist worldview in which there is only one proper subject. During a mystical experience, it is possible to experience the world as it truly is, devoid of duality or individuation. This knowledge, which he compares with the Upanishadic concept of 'That thou art' is the true knowledge that is conveyed by an experience that can genuinely be described as religious or mystical.

Looking back at my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles were melted into unity....it is a monistic insight in which the *other* in its various forms appears absorbed into the One (2016, pp. 388–389).

This feeling was not absent among the Pagan respondents, one describes a feeling of 'being held', and 'being connected to something bigger'; while another experienced being 'mentally/spiritually spun out into the oneness of everything' while touching the central standing stone in Bryn Celli Dhu burial chamber in Anglesey Others describe 'just a feeling of being part of everything', or 'Feeling in contact with the Earth, universal love, empowered'. One account in particular is reminiscent of James' expectations of a mystical experience:

I was in Arizona with a soulmate/twin flame and we had multiple experiences while in each other's presence -- once in Phoenix and once in Sedona. The experience we had together in Phoenix was one of the worlds melding, the stars spinning, and time swirling out of the illusion of past/present into all that has ever been.

However, this feeling of 'oneness' was not the dominant narrative. Far more common was the experience of being in communication with a particular being or beings who were, like the recipient, both individual and limited. Most usually these beings fall into one of four categories. These may be the ancestral dead who may be, or have been

buried there. For Phillip Shallcrass, head of the BDO⁷ the presence of the ancient dead at a particular site for millennia imbues the rocks and land itself with the essence of those people even if any physical remains have now been removed so that it is still possible to connect with any ancestors that had been there. There were many such accounts. Generally, though, the experience consisted primarily of feeling the presence of ancestors rather than receiving any particular knowledge from them. A common theme is feeling the weight of ancestors and a powerful feeling of deep time.

At Fosbury hillfort. Being up there, suddenly having a feeling of being watched & that someone was standing with me. Being completely alone and hearing children playing, hearing whispering.

Sticking to the theme of ancestors as the dead, relatively few. One outstanding one occurred at Heysham. I'd never been there and a friend took me to the remains of an old Celtic Christian church. St Patrick's, I think. It has graves carved into the rock. I experienced the feeling of many spirits of the dead, accompanied by 'seeing' many different faces, in my mind's eye. I followed a trail that was blocked by a wall. A tree had filled the gateway so it was impassable. I gave up and returned to my friend, who was waiting. she took me back to the main route down the church in use - St Peter's. She meant to show me an ancient Heathen artefact in the church, but I felt a compulsion to enter some scrubland several yards away. I followed a path through the woods... to the same gateway, from the other side. I returned to my friend but experienced another compulsion to visit a large grave marker. It was far larger than normal and I don't recall reading anything on it. I just felt it was right to stand there, for a while. My friend told me later it was the mass grave of some Vikings.

Had a strong feeling of the Ancestors being with me, when initiated at Avebury

I have seen visions of ancient landscape in my mind's eye, albeit informed by a knowledge of ancient landscapes. I have felt the power coursing through my body at stone circles energising my spirit and soul and making me almost feel overwhelmed. I feel a glow inside and a buzz in my solar plexus. I have felt the weight of millennia of ancestors at barrows and the cold dark claustrophobia of an ancient tomb.

West Kennet Long Barrow last year. I went to walk in and felt 'pushed back out', I had forgotten to pay my respects and ask for permission to enter. When I did, I walked in easily.

Generally, encounters are with a generalised and homogenised group identified only as 'the ancestors'. This is hardly surprising as nothing is or can be known of the individuals interred in ancient burial mounds. Occasionally though, there is an encounter with an individual ancestor. One interview subject recounted several occasions on which he had encountered ancestral dead at ancient sites. On one occasion during a Druidic ritual at Stonehenge, an invitation had been extended to the ancestors to take part (as is customary). The leader of the ritual (who was the subject of my interview) was surprised to find himself in the company of an equally perplexed

⁷ British Druid Order

Victorian cycle club. On another occasion, he encountered an Anglo Saxon who was trapped within the stones at Avebury and in need of help to move on.

A different interview subject explained that she had only very rarely encountered ancestral beings at ancient sites but that on one occasion she had come across one who she felt had volunteered to stay there as a guardian and gatekeeper. She suspected that his (or her) remains were within the stone circle. She had a strong impression that she was required to walk across the circle from one part to another, where there was a recumbent stone, and that this was an enactment of the soul's journey into the underworld and back. Her impression was that this initiatory journey was, and had always been the purpose of the site; she has never had that sort of impression at any other site.

Very occasionally there is a relationship developed between the visitor and the ancestors that may have benefits for both parties:

As a founding member of the Rollright Stones Appeal group and then a founding Trustee/ de facto site manager for many years these are too numerous to relate. They include being led by a spirit guide who I believe had her mortal remains discovered a couple of years ago, time slips, hearing sounds with no source and receiving warnings. Finally being gifted my heart's desire in the form of a baby girl born a year after dedicating myself to the place - after years of trying without success

Another group of beings that Pagans regularly encounter at sacred sites are the 'wights' or land spirits. These are generally understood by Pagans to be beings that have never been human and yet are not deities; they are usually limited to a small geographical area and are common in and around barrows and stone circles. An interview subject explained that in her opinion most people are 'tuned in to' either ancestors or wights, but rarely both. She herself almost always encountered land wights. These were encountered by opening up her mind on approaching a site and 'feeling' what the wights wanted her to do. At times, she was refused permission to enter. At other times, she was told to approach from a particular direction or to make a particular offering. The wights presented with 'personalities' as varied as humans. Some were friendly and welcoming, others hostile. At one site where an artificial concrete roof had recently been placed on a burial mound she described the wight she encountered as 'mad', screaming over and over inside her head. At other sites, particularly those frequented by large numbers of tourists, the wights may be sleeping or inaccessible.

Encounters with deities were far less commonly reported by respondents than those with ancestors or land spirits. Pagans have very varied attitudes towards the divine but a number of respondents were polytheistic and described meetings with named deities at ancient sites. Those named included the Morrigan, Ceridwen, and Thunderbird. Others are not named, but are described in terms that suggest a deity rather than a more localised land spirit. One describes meeting 'the Bone Mother', who he describes as a chthonic deity at West Kennet. Two describe a goddess like figure associated with the Chalice Well at Glastonbury. Often these encounters are accompanied by unusual animal behaviour, or are experienced in animal form.

I'm going to preface this with the fact that one of my Prime Divine is The Morrigan. I was at Stonehenge with some friends. I stepped away from them towards the stones to show respect to the obelisks. I knelt down on one knee to be able to press my fingers

to the earth. I saw a crow land on the stone nearest to me as I invoked the Morrigan's name in honor and thanks. As I bowed closed my eyes and bowed my head to thank her for the guidance she has given me, it cawed, but I continued my mini-ritual. As I finished, I looked up and the bird was gone. No sound of wings, nor any other caw. And the part that was the most strange was that my friend and her kids never saw a crow to begin with.

I met "The Lady of Mists & Sheep" on Cadair Idris. I have experienced the presence of the Genius Loci of Primrose Hill who is best described as a large "Talbot" [a red-eared hunting dog somewhat akin to an Irish Wolfhound & about the size of the largest Great Dane you could imagine]

Finally, the encounter may be with an element of the landscape itself, unmediated through a 'being' of any sort. Trees and stones may be encountered as sentient beings with which it is possible to communicate.

I have met two very ancient trees with whom I felt connected for a few precious seconds. I felt they were aware of my presence, and I was aware of theirs. I assume I was connecting with their essence of the divine.

I visited a lone standing stone in the Midlands. I meditated with her and got the impression of how much she misses her "sisters"- the other stones that used to stand with her but have since gone. I also saw where they originally were, but I haven't found any sources to verify that what I saw was accurate.

If I can touch the stones at an ancient site, I usually get either a static type feeling, pins and needles sensation or a repellent 'don't touch' sense. Also at some sites I cannot shake off the feeling I'm being watched or there is an unseen crowd near me

Occasionally there is an encounter where it is uncertain if the contact has been with ancestors or some other kind of being. One particularly interesting account involved an encounter at Weyland's Smithy that was clearly quite disturbing. The nature of the beings with which the respondent's husband met remains elusive but clearly it was a powerful experience.

My husband (and Magical partner) and I went to Wayland's Smithy, a place I always wanted to go to, but had never managed. He was fine with this and was wearing his usual pale jumper and jeans. When we got there, he hung back, outside the perimeter wall and I went ahead. No problem - in I went, looked around, felt fine, said Hi to those who had been part of its building and use, but he didn't follow. I went out, bright sunlight through the trees, and he was shaking his head. What's up? I can't go in there, or rather, I don't want to go in there, but I'll go. You don't have to. Ah, but I do, and I don't feel good about it. I'll come with you. No, it's fine, and he walked forward to the 'gate', ducked and suddenly turned completely green and disappeared inside. I hurried up to the gate and looked inside. There were people (definitely not in modern clothes) shadows, and then he came back from the far end looking somewhat dazed, but back in his 'modern' form and his light jumper and jeans. What happened I asked. Lots of people, very old, very odd. I'm really glad to be out of there. I didn't tell him about his change in colour until we were talking about it later. He said I felt surrounded by and swallowed by vegetation. And no, we hadn't been drinking (we were driving) and don't use 'interesting substances'. The walk back to the car along the Ridgeway was bright and we both felt that we had dropped a weight off that we hadn't known we were carrying.

In all cases described here the 'point' of the experience was the meeting of a different kind of being rather than a feeling of monistic wholeness in which the individual self is

subsumed. Clearly these were very significant experiences to those who received them, but the point was the meeting itself rather than any particular knowledge.

On occasions, though, some specific knowledge is communicated through the experience, this tends not to be the sort of personal gnosis described by James, as an insight into a different timeline, or a knowledge of other, presumably ancient languages. Many respondents described a strong feeling of having been in that place before, possibly in a past life, and of having a knowledge of the layout and use of the site in antiquity. One claims to have seen how Stonehenge was built, although he was not willing to explain. Another describes how her two year old son, whilst being driven past Stonehenge, exclaimed 'I helped to build that!'. A common feature was that of being able to understand ancient languages that they heard spoken, although none of the respondents said whether or not they continued to be able to speak or understand that language after the experience had ended.

For a few respondents, the sites can be a source of inspiration in which they are given a 'vision' of a completed piece of music, poem or novel. This is not described in terms of being inspired by a contemplation of the landscape or its history, but of being given, as if from an outside source, a complete and entire artistic creation.

At the Roman-era ruins of a house in Slovenia, I was gifted with a complete novel: characters, story, and finish. It has since been published. I have had more mystical experiences in natural settings such as the wild Northern California coast and Badlands of South Dakota.

When I pass an ancient site, I have frequently had the experience of being a person in a bygone age and have experienced what it is actually like to live in that era. My novel 'Where Rowans Intertwine' is really a feeling for the Druid site on which I lived for many years and my response to it. I believe Ceridwen channelled information to me as she wanted to rebalance the Roman 'spin' about the Druids. She would often take over writing the novel as I worked.

How far then, can the Pagan experiences reported in this research be described as 'noetic'. Often, but not always, information is gained through the encounter (although this may be of a kind that is unverifiable. Clearly inspiration is commonly gained, but rarely the sort of life-changing gnosis required by James. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine James' views on religious experience and conversion. He does, however, refer to the authority of mystical experiences and their ongoing significance in the life of the receiver. A small number of accounts reveal that the impression made was so great that it resulted, directly or indirectly, in a change in direction which ultimately led the respondent to Paganism.

On 4 August 1994, shortly after visiting the Chalice Well in Glastonbury, England, I met Mother Earth and Father Sky at the base of Glastonbury Tor, while on an archaeological tour of the British Isles. Seemingly, simultaneously from somewhere deep underground, and also from somewhere far above, I heard two distinct voices, one male and one female, saying:

"Just because mankind has not presented you with an image of deity that you can believe in, does not mean that We do not exist."

As a lifelong atheist, I was very disturbed by the encounter, and at first attributed it to a graduate-school-stress-induced nervous breakdown. But, just in case I was wrong, I

read, prayed, studied, and meditated every day for a year, seeking guidance on what to do about it. Whom to worship? What church or group to join?

The insight that returned to me, again and again, was that I was not to look to the words or workings of men for guidance, but to the workings of deity. I therefore focus my devotions and attention on Nature, and on the source of those two voices, which I came to call Mother Earth and Father Sky.

As a mystic, my calling is now to forge the deepest, most direct connection with Deity that I am able to forge. That process requires independent study, direct observation, prayer and meditation, and a process of opening myself up to the direction and instruction of Deity.

It was a trip to Avebury that took me back, enraptured me, and why I joined OBOD⁸.

I went to Avebury in 1991 two months after my youngest child was born. I was living in England at the time. I had been reading about Druidry during the year that I was living there. I remember it was a very rainy day in May. I was living in Luton in Bedfordshire, but we took a trip to Stonehenge. I was kind of disappointed at it being all roped off. But in the gift shop I came across about different sacred sites in Wiltshire and asked my then husband if we could go to Avebury. It had stopped raining when we got to the parking lot, but the kids were asleep so I went by myself down the path into the village where the stones were. It was late afternoon and the sun just came out, and the way it was shining through the wetness made the stones and the grass glow with a golden light. As I walked amid the stones and touched them, I had a very unique spiritual awakening. Then energy was so intense and different than anything I had experienced before. And even though I didn't become a member of OBOD back then, that experience stayed with me and eventually led me to make that step into Druidry.

The evidence, then, is mixed. While some of these experiences might satisfy James' primary criteria for a 'mystical experience' the majority would not. This does not, however, make them unworthy of study as they can still give us valuable insights not only into the Pagan experience, but on the wider and deeper varieties of human religious experience.

Conclusion

William James gives a relatively narrow definition of what he regards as 'genuine' religious experience, relegating those experiences that do not conform as being of less value. Later in the chapter he asserts of experiences that he regards as genuinely mystical:

It is possible to give the outcome of the majority of them in terms that point in definite philosophical directions. One of these directions is optimism, and the other is monism...we feel them as reconciling unifying states. They appeal to the yes-function more than to the no-function in us. In them the unlimited absorbs the limits and peacefully closes the account. Their very denial of every adjective you may propose is applicable to the ultimate truth – He, the Self, the Atman, is to be described by No! No! (2016, p. 416).

On this model, much of the later research into religious experience has been based. Viewed in these terms, the majority of the Pagan experience would be rejected as not

⁸ Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids

pure mystical or religious experience but as something entirely inferior and not worthy of further study. However, James' categories are, by his own admission, based on a subjective view of the nature of absolute reality and therefore of what the experience of it must involve. In order to reach his conclusions, it is necessary for him to discount much of the reported account of what humans believe to have been their experiences of the mystical or the 'other'. This is something that he himself acknowledges.

In characterising mystic states as pantheistic, optimistic etc., I am afraid I oversimplified the truth. I did so for expository reasons, and to keep the closer to the classic mystical tradition. The classic religious mysticism, it must now be confessed, is only a 'privileged case'. It is an *extract*, kept true and to type by the selection of the fittest specimens...It is carved out from a much larger mass; and if we take the larger mass as seriously as religious mysticism has historically taken itself, we find that the supposed unanimity largely disappears (2016, pp. 424–425).

In other words, James is aware that his definition excludes a significant proportion of the human experience. In his opinion, 'true' religion is monist and so 'true religious experience' must conform to this model. Monism, or even monotheism is not, and has never been, the only religious model practised by humanity. For many Pagans (although by no means all, as evidenced by the variety of experiences attested here), the world is not to be understood in terms of a single reality, or even a single, all encompassing divinity. Many of my respondents describe themselves as animist. This does not necessarily imply Tylor's definition of animism as the belief that inanimate objects have 'souls' (Tylor, 2012) so much as what Harvey has described as the 'new animism'.⁹ Religion in this sense is best understood as people building negotiated relationships with the other 'persons' in their networks; familial, local, national and even global. Some of these persons are human, some are plants or animals, and others are different kinds of beings altogether including ancestors encountered in a number of ways. The purpose of religion is to negotiate a place within a world that is both wider and deeper than human persons (Harvey, 2006). This research has examined some of the ways in which Pagans, including animists, relate to other than persons through ancient sacred sites. It reveals a coherent pattern totally in tune with a world view that is neither monist nor monotheistic, and yet is entirely comparable to the lived experience of much of the world's population. James asserts that genuine mystical experiences are transcendent in that they point to an understanding of the universe that is essentially monist. Ezzy (2014, 170) proposes a different definition of the religious experience of transcendence, 'This is a form of transcendence, although not typically in the sense of contact with something that is in a higher realm. Rather, it is a form of self-transcendence in the sense of an understanding and experience of the self in a relationship with others, nature, spirit, life or deity that transcends the individual.' This is very much the way in which my respondents experienced the sites that they visited. Rather than a feeling that everything was one, there was a feeling that everything was in community and that this contributed to a sense of belonging, wellbeing and self-worth. It is my contention that the wide range of 'religious experiences' that do not conform to James' highly selective definition remain largely understudied and I see this as a fruitful area for further research.

⁹ New, not in the sense that it implies a change in belief; rather a different and more accurate way of understanding the way in which indigenous animistic peoples have always related to their world.

I will leave the final words to one of my respondents:

At ancient sites, I've had experiences of a greater connection to divinity, a greater sense of the numinous, a stronger connection to the land spirits. These have been incredibly meaningful but not at all, as I see it, supernatural. I feel this is because ancient sites make it easier and quicker to connect to a sense of divinity (the cliché 'the veil is thinner') rather than they being inherently more divine. They prime the mind to being open to numinous experiences. I believe you could achieve the same experience in your living room, it just requires a lot more mental energy and effort!

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Children Who See Fairies

Simon Young

University of Virginia Program Siena (Italy, CET)

simonyoungfl@gmail.com

By taking eighty-eight fairy experiences of English-speaking children aged from about three to ten, from the last eighty years, we look at the characteristics of fairy sightings among the very young. Children have more sleep-related fairy experiences than adults. In natural settings children focus their experiences on trees: there is little interest in the flowers so common in contemporary adult fairy experiences. In some cases, meanwhile, fairies become a fixture in the life of a child, and here parallels with the psychological literature on 'invisible friends' are intriguing. We also look at the role of memory in the encounter as the child integrates and elaborates the experience; and the consequences for the grown child's spiritual development.

Keywords: children; fairies; memory; popular culture; supernatural.

1. Introduction

A five-year-old girl, in England, lying in bed between her sleeping parents, sees fairies dance on the dresser (§335). Fairies join in the games of two children playing under a fig tree in New Zealand (§488). A boy in the United States watches, while swimming underwater, a 'leprechaun' walk across the bottom of his grandparents' pool. He rapidly surfaces, and when he returns to examine the creature it has disappeared... (§319) Fairy encounters are experienced by men and women of all ages. But there is a modern tradition that children have a greater capacity to see and to interact with fairies (Doyle 1921, 126-131; cf. Samuel 2011, xiii).¹ A recent survey of fairy sightings, the *Fairy Census*, gives some substance to this notion: almost 40% of experiences had been had by those aged 0-20: and 22% by children under ten years of age. These encounters were recalled, often decades later, by grown children, sometimes as a

¹ It is interesting that there is not a corresponding tradition in British or Irish folklore of children having a greater sensitivity to the supernatural, at least not one that the present author has been able to identify. The contrast with animals, which were believed, particularly in prior folklore, to have the ability to see the supernatural is striking.

turning point in their own lives. In this short study we examine children's fairy experiences and the cultural, physiological and cognitive processes that help shape them.

We particularly look at three types of childhood fairy experiences, which for shorthand I will term here: 'bed fairies', 'nature fairies', and 'friend fairies'. In this survey I will particularly compare what I will call 'children's fairies' (namely fairy experiences of children aged ten and under) with 'adolescent's fairies' (fairies experiences of those aged 11-20) and 'adult's fairies' (fairies experienced by those twenty-one and older). Fairy experiences, note, are not necessarily only visual: they might include sounds, physical proofs or simply a vague supernatural feeling. These experiences are clearly extremely subjective and depend on the perceptions of those who reported their encounters. There is no attempt here to undertake the hopeless task of proving the existence or the non-existence of fairies: I offer instead a typology of children's fairy experience in the English-speaking world for the second half of the twentieth and for the early twenty-first century. The aim is to establish how children experience the supernatural and fairies' role in the psychological and imaginative life of the young and the very young. I am particularly interested in the power of memory and how cultural representations shape children's fairy experiences.

2. *The Fairy Census*

The *Fairy Census* was an international online survey. It was carried out from 18 Nov 2014 to 20 Nov, 2017: a second phase of collection is now underway.² The *Census* took inspiration from two previous projects. First, there was Walter Evans Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911): in three years of fieldwork in Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales, Evans Wentz recorded hundreds of fairy experiences. Second, Marjorie Johnson's *Seeing Fairies* (2014), a book again with hundreds of fairy experiences, gathered, rather more haphazardly, between the 1930s and the 1990s. Evans Wentz published with Oxford University Press as an anthropologist, albeit a very unconventional one; Johnson wrote as a fairy seer, a suburban mystic. However, both had the same central aim: they wished to demonstrate that fairies existed; the drive for proof often lurks behind collections or surveys of the supernatural (e.g. F.W.H.M. 1894; for an important modern exception Bennett 1987). The *Fairy Census* emphatically did not have this aim. It, instead, was focussed on witnesses rather than fairies. What kind of people see fairies and under what conditions? All too many folklorists (Bennett 1987, 13-17) and psychologists (Bem and Honorton 1994, 4) ignore the supernatural as a field of study.

² The Fairy Census can be found at https://www.academia.edu/35591008/The_Fairy_Census_2014-2017.pdf. with five hundred fairy experiences: all references in the article refer to the number experience, e.g. §34. The survey itself is now in its second phase and can be found at: <http://www.fairyist.com/survey/>.

To achieve this the *Fairy Census* had forty questions: completion typically took from ten to thirty minutes. These ranged from standard fare – gender, age... – to rather more unusual queries – ‘Do you have problems with your hearing or eyesight?’; ‘How often do you have supernatural experiences?’ There was also ample space to write freely on the fairy experience: ‘Please describe your fairy experience in as much detail as possible’: answers ranged from seven to several thousand words. There were, then, supplementary questions to tease out more details: ‘How big were the fairy/fairies?’ ‘What sex were the fairy/fairies?’; ‘Why do you think your experience was a fairy experience, as opposed to a ghost or an alien or an angel or some other type of anomalous experience?’ The survey taker was asked for permission to use the material given and also asked whether he or she would mind being contacted in the case of follow up questions: some left their email addresses. Respondents had learnt about the *Census* in articles in the press, on the radio, social media (the survey got over 2000 likes on Facebook) and, of course, by word of mouth. In this the *Fairy Census* took inspiration, albeit in a greatly changed media environment, from the strategies used by Marjorie Johnson a generation before (Young 2013, 145-146).

In the three years that the questionnaire ran some 500 people from around the world, but predominantly from the Anglosphere answered questions about a specific fairy experience. In these experiences they suspected or believed that they had come into contact with a supernatural entity that they identified as a fairy. These 500 experiences have since been epublished as a 160,000 word pdf *Fairy Census, 2014-2017*, with the most important data from the survey. This pdf is freely available online with more details of the survey in its preface and a sample questionnaire.³ Of these 500 individuals, 444 fully answered the online questionnaire about a fairy experience. There were, then, also a number of unsuitable answers (off topic, incoherent, folklore observations ...); incomplete answers; and third-person accounts where a respondent wrote about another’s experiences. When possible and when the information they gave was interesting these were included in the *Fairy Census*, but they were left out of any statistics.

For the study of children’s fairy experiences the dataset has been further cropped. As noted above the vast majority of respondents, 415, came from the English-speaking world: Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States. It was decided to remove all non-Anglosphere references, of which there were 29. This was done because, it was reasoned, experiences from the Anglosphere would make for a more uniform set that had been shaped by a similar culture of childhood and the supernatural.⁴ The respondents were self-selecting. These were not 415 people from the general population, but 415 individuals who believed or suspected that they had had a fairy experience and who were prepared to put the experience down, getting to

³ https://www.academia.edu/35591008/The_Fairy_Census_2014-2017.pdf Note that the author is very happy to provide, upon request, the excel versions of the data used for this article.

⁴ As it happens the experiences of children from continental Europe would have barely changed the results, but they were, nevertheless, ignored for the purposes of this article.

the end of a long questionnaire to do so. The figures have, then, no value as a cross-section of the various English-speaking countries. However, they do allow for an analysis of fairy experiences and for internal comparison. In this paper I have particularly looked at the results for children (0-10). But to put these in relief I have frequently compared children's experiences to those of the adolescents (11-20) and adults (21+) who responded to the *Fairy Census*.

There are 88 children (0-10), 69 adolescents (11-20) and 258 adults (21-) in the sample used here. Age was expressed on the questionnaire by decades: 0-10, 11-20, 21-30 etc. But internal references to age suggest that the youngest childhood encounters probably took place when the respondents were about three (§66, §67, §100). One of the most striking features of this sample is the gender imbalance. 84.1% of childhood encounters were sent in by females: compared with 'only' 68.11% of adolescents and 'only' 67.82% of adults. That women have more interest in the supernatural is well established (Clarke 2014, 63-65; Samuel 2011: 71, 134): not, of course, the same thing as saying that they necessarily have greater supernatural 'gifts' (Samuel 2011: 44-46). There must also be the suspicion that women are more interested in fairies, which frequently, and have long had, feminine qualities (e.g. Hall 2007, 157-166). Fairies are particularly feminized in the world of very young children: young girls are given fairy dolls and go to parties as fairy princesses, fairies on children's television and in children's films are invariably female. Even so that only 15.9% of those children that saw fairies were boys is remarkable. Are male encounters perhaps less likely to be remembered or retold in later life: we look at some of the problems with memory below? The only way to understand whether this bias is real or not would be to actually interview a series of children about their recent experiences: for present purposes this is impracticable.

3. Fairy Models

Before looking at specific features of children's fairy experiences it will be useful to give a very general overview of fairies in western culture. Fairies have been defined as 'magical, living, resident humanoids': they are supernatural, but they are not the undead, and these human-looking beings are usually tied to a particular location: a hill or a wood (Young and Houlbrook 2017, 12). Fairies have been recorded in the English-speaking world since the birth of the language in the early Middle Ages (Hall 2007). However, fairies, like all supernatural creatures, have evolved, in that time, in the human imagination (for a general guide Purkiss, 2000). For example, medieval fairies lived in a community, next to a given human community, in an uneasy symbiotic relationship with their human neighbours. Medieval fairies proved difficult and dangerous: humans were injured, kidnapped and killed for slight infractions of apparently arbitrary fairy codes. In the early modern period this vision of fairies began to change and by the late nineteenth century there was increasingly the idea that fairies were an aspect of natural processes, and particularly of vegetation: medieval

fairies had only been tangentially linked to fertility. These ‘nature’ fairies are usually delightful and friendly and particularly associated with children. They rarely hurt or harm. Italian scholar Carlo Donà has rather cruelly called them ‘la fatina cretina’ (the cretinous fairy, 2012, 4). The two types of fairies are not only different in character but also in appearance. Classical fairies were, generally speaking, described as being of infant or adult size: they were frequently seen in groups. They wore clothes, often old-style clothes, and carried out very human occupations: battles, feasts, funerals, hunts... The nature fairy is more typically seen alone or in small hive like groups, where individuals act robotically in unison. These fairies were small, frequently butterfly-size, with wings (an innovation that only became commonplace in the nineteenth century) and they often took on aspects of the element or plant that they represented: e.g. a rose fairy would be red or have a petal dress.

The chronological break between these two types of fairies – nature fairies and what I will refer to here as ‘classical’ fairies – has, of course, never been clean. The two types have often co-existed with each other or simply blended. For example, classical fairies were still present in 1930s Ireland;⁵ while, it might be argued that elements of the nature fairy begin with Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night Dream* (Latham 1930, 176). There is, then, a further complicating factor: the determination of ‘reactionary’ authors, in modern fiction and film, to bring the traditional fairy back. The beginning of this process can perhaps be found in Kipling (1906, 14) who has Puck describe modern fairies as ‘little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats, and shiny stars in their hair, and a wand like a schoolteacher’s cane for punishing bad boys and rewarding good ones’. Puck compares these human fantasies to the real ‘People of the Hills’. Other such modern fairies in traditional guise can be found in, say, *True Blood* (2008-2014) and the works of Tolkien (the elves).

In a modern fairy encounter there are, in any case, different models in the background. Here are two very different descriptions from the *Fairy Census*: the first conforms to the classical, the second to the nature fairy. ‘Two [of the three fairies] were taller than the adults I knew, one was shorter. They shimmered in the light, so I couldn’t see their faces, but it was obvious they were wearing strange clothes’ (§325). ‘[They were] [s]mall, maybe four to five inches tall, feminine, winged. Soft colors, pearly and opal-like’ (§222). To these two models we can, then, add a third. There has long been a connection made between balls of light (BOLs) and fairies: fairies were sometimes said to carry these lights or sometimes to be these lights (e.g. Clobery 1659, 72-73). It is striking that in the *Fairy Census* BOLs are frequently described as fairies, even those with no anthropomorphic elements. For example, in 1960s in Ohio a boy watched a fairy that ‘looked like a sparkler sitting on top of a lamp’ for several minutes as it buzzed around his holiday home (§349).

⁵ Classical fairies are found again and again in the Irish School’s Survey, 197-1939 <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes> (accessed 22 Jan 2018)

However, these three categories by no means exhaust all possibilities. Often some very surprising entities are classed as fairies in the *Census*: for example, a football-sized walking lemon disturbed the sleep of one respondent (§315). Here we are probably witnessing the failure of modern categories. Something that would have been routinely classified as a demon in earlier times, is now not so easily labelled. It is a fairy because... what else could it be? 'Obviously what I saw was no gauzy-winged Victorian fantasy. But the fair folk purportedly come in many shapes and sizes... it seems appropriate to consider my encounter applicable to this realm more than another' (§315). In other cases, awkward visions seem to be assimilated to the fairy models mentioned above through secondary elaboration. An English boy in the 1970s saw what he 'described as' 'little nasty wolves' coming out of a wardrobe in his bedroom (§37). However, 'after drawing them for my mother, which I remember very clearly, I can now say they looked more like fairies'. These 'fairies' were '[s]mall men with lots of hair in brown suits, almost dirty looking (imagine miners).' Here a child's initial impressions were perhaps altered through a conversation with a parent: wolves became gnomes?

A question that is fascinating, but, at least in a study like this, impossible to resolve, is to what extent popular culture affects supernatural encounters (e.g. Clark and Loftus 1996, 141-142). When a young Californian writes 'I thought [the fairies] were like Disney's Tinker Bell' does that mean that the fairies resembled Tinker Bell or that Tinker Bell inspired the fairies or their appearance? We could ask similar questions of an Australian tooth fairy: 'I guess now looking back, [she] looked a lot like Walt Disney's Cinderella but real and glittery' (§466). Likewise the New Zealander who chased fairies: 'I had only learnt about them [i.e. fairies] from children's books and nursery rhymes. The fairies I saw were very [similar?] to those in the Cottingley photos' (§491). Sometimes a popular culture reference is almost certainly just a way to situate the experience: so a BOL witnessed by a child and two adults, 'moved around the room like Tinker Bell': it had no human features, though. On other occasions we might wonder whether an idea in popular culture was not responsible for an entire experience. A girl in Virginia, in the 1980s, opens a wardrobe in her sister's room and discovers a magical world there... (§388 – Lewis 1950). One remarkable experience from 1950s London has a young girl meet a 'wicker-basket affair with a balloon on top' in her garden. The fliers are dressed in top hats and black jackets and try to convince her to go away with them. 'I would swear', she wrote as an adult, 'that this truly happened and was not a dream or any sort of imagination. I cannot recollect reading anything before or after with any illustration of such a strangeness in it either' (§80). But the encounter does recall, in some ways, William Pène du Bois's *The Twenty-One Balloons*, published in 1947, in which a man with a suit and top hat flies on a platform powered by twenty-one hot air balloons.

4. Children's Fairies

A central aspect of children's fairy experiences is the role of family. Family approval is clearly not indispensable for seeing fairies: [my mother] 'didn't see any fairies and told me I was silly' (§283), but a little girl in 1950s Kentucky continued to play her fairy games, indifferent to censure. There must be the suspicion that fairy-tolerant parents will be more likely to raise children who have or, at least, who share fairy experiences: 'Most laughed at me, my mother believed me as there was no reason not to' (§3); or consider the mother who used to take her child to leave scraps for the fairies in the wood even if 'that was probably just something she made up' (§277). This tendency will presumably have been even greater in fairy-believing families. One respondent asserted that '[f]airies have followed my family for years' (§377); a mother confided that she, too, had, as a child, seen fairies in the same Arkansas wood as her daughter (§219); and an American grandmother in the 1960s 'didn't want me to sleep with the window open for fear of the little people stealing me' (§349).

In some cases a family's decision to foster fantasy perhaps led, sometimes inadvertently, to fairy visions. One eight-year-old Australian girl remembered waking up to see the tooth fairy who brought her 'my favourite toy growing up' (§466). The memory is entangled with her mother's involvement with this gift: 'My mum swore she didn't know where it came from but was quick to dispose of the wrapping and note attached'. In one charming case grandparents daily left sweets for a five-year-old English girl at a well, telling their granddaughter that the fairies had put the sweets out as gifts. The little girl was aware of the deception, but on the final day, while saying goodbye to the fairies, she came face-to-face with a real fairy that looked like a small doll (§33): she compared it, interestingly, to Cindy (a British 'Barbie'). A girl from Minnesota, meanwhile, had a conversation with a fairy in a tree: 'At first the voice was not clear, so I asked it to repeat what it said. Then I heard clearly. "Hello down there!" "Are you a fairy?" I asked. "Yes!" The voice replied.' Was this rather atypical fairy experience a parental intervention? The little girl 'had been starting to lose belief shortly before this experience, but it helped to quickly bring me back to believing' (§277).

An important consideration before looking at the sub-types of children's fairy visions is how they are remembered. Relatively few respondents completed the questionnaire while they were children. Just 6.81% recorded the event as taking place in the 2010s. These were, then, not, for the most part, contemporary or even near contemporary reports. To the problems always associated with the recording of supernatural experiences, some of which we have described above, we must add, then, the problem of memory. Most respondents were describing an event that took place many decades before: in the 1990s (12.5%), the 1980s (18.18%), the 1970s (20.45%) or the 1960s (18.88%). Two respondents recalled a childhood fairy experience from the 1930s. This should mean, of course, that there were problems remembering the experience. In some cases the respondents admitted as much: 'the details elude me after thirty-one years' (§171); '[s]ince it happened a while ago I can't remember the

exact noises' (§201). There is also a general and very understandable vagueness about surrounding details. For example 10.23% of childhood respondents could not remember the approximate time of the day the fairy experience took place: compared with 1.45% and 2.33% for, respectively, adolescents and adults.

However, most respondents claimed to have good recall of what had happened: '[the fairy] was very clear and has stayed with me' (§17); 'I remember it to this day (fifty years of age) and am CONVINCED that what I saw was real' (§344); 'this event I remember just like yesterday, vividly' (§398). Indeed, 63.64% of young respondents claimed that they had 'unusually vivid memories of the experience': compared with 60.86% of adolescents and only 46.9% of adults. Here it is instructive to read the description of a young girl, writing up an incident that cannot have taken place more than four or five years before she filled out the *Fairy Census*: 'I don't really recall what happened now, but I kind of remember little floating lights dancing in the street on my cul-de-sac' (§415). Allowed to evolve will this memory harden, over time, into something more certain? If it becomes important, then, very possibly it will; there is also the possibility of false memories (e.g. Otgaar *et alii*. 2009); and the role of fantasy in memory (Principe and Smith 2007). Some respondents were all too aware of the tricks that memory could play: 'Given my age, and my love of faeries thereafter, it's possible that I imagined clothes from what I saw in storybooks. I remember an outfit very close to the Disney Peter Pan, but as I only saw the faery in silhouette I think that was my imagination dressing him' (§75).⁶

5. Bed Fairies

I was sick in bed with swollen glands in my throat. I was six years old and the fairy came to me she was beautiful dressed in yellow her wings were also yellow I will never forget my time with her. Isle of Wight, 1940s, §60.

This short account is typical of many in the *Fairy Census*. A young child encounters a fairy while in bed, or in bedrooms and environs, usually at night time – this was one of three children who reported being ill or recuperating (§60, §195, §344). Of course, night time is traditionally associated with the supernatural and sleep and associated mental states favour supernatural encounters including hypnagogic visions, sleep paralysis (Hufford 1982; Watanabe and Furuya 2012) and dreams later re-elaborated as memories (Clark and Loftus 1996, 141-2). Humans, it should be noted, often have dreams of supernatural beings (McNamara and Bulkelly 2015, 2-4); and children aged four to twelve seem particularly prone to this (Muris *et alii* 2000: 46, table 3, compare with Foster and Anderson 1936, 81 table 8). Children are, on the evidence of the *Fairy Census*, more likely to have fairy experiences in their bedroom than their parents. Children, presumably because of their reduced freedom, often experience fairies in

⁶ Before we explain away all sightings as tricks of memories we must remember that many adults have fairy experiences that they report immediately.

their own house: 37.5% against 30.43% for adolescents and 22.48% for adults. Some 31.81% of child respondents, meanwhile, reported that they had ‘just woken up or were just about to go to sleep’, when they saw their fairies: among adolescents the number was 10.14% and among adults 17.05%. It is worth remembering that for many children, perhaps particularly those who grow up sharing a room, bed is their one unambiguously private space.

Traditional folklore does not have fairies appearing to children in bed: save by implication when babies or infants are stolen by fairies in changeling legends – the nightmare (Hufford 1982) is not part of the fairy complex. The only time, indeed, that children’s cots feature in British and Irish tales is as a battleground between fairies and human protective devices (Piaschewski 1935, 67-117). However, from the early 1900s accounts start to crop up of middle-class children having fairy experiences in bed (e.g. Fraser 1936): Peter Pan is an interesting literary reflex (Harris 2008, 77-81). Why are there no equivalent records prior to this? First, there is certainly a long tradition of sleep being a time when humans encounter supernatural beings: very likely for some of the considerations given above. Second, there must be the suspicion that middle-class infants were assimilating the small ‘nature fairies’ of late nineteenth-century children’s literature to their supernatural experiences, at a time when demons and angels were slowly being washed out of Anglo-Saxon culture (Marshall 2011). Put in the simplest terms, children and adults have always had supernatural experiences in bed, which they will have understood according to the supernatural culture in which they were living. A category shift in the 1800s made fairies a supernatural entity that middle class children could see in the night.

How do these night-time fairies look and act? Children are more likely to see groups of fairies at night and these fairies are frequently, more so than in daytime visitations, small. There were the tiny fairy cowboy settlers glimpsed in Oregon (§356) with wagons and lamps; the three-inch men who swarmed over a bed playfully pinching a boy in Washington State until their beatnik leader, told them to stop (§398); the Robin Hood and Merry Men fairies from postwar Glasgow (§167); the fairy parade across the bedroom floor – ‘all dressed in finery... [with] musical instruments and tiny animals’ (§364); the adult-sized fairy procession out on the street (§330); the miniature wolves that came out of a wardrobe in 1990s Devon (§37); the gnomes who lived in a wooden play box in England in the 1970s (§94); or the fairies dancing around a Christmas gift in 1960s Scotland (§170). One is reminded here of ‘numerosity’: the feature of seeing, in some neurological conditions, ‘rows or phalanxes of people, all dressed similarly and making similar motions... hallucinatory figures often seem to be wearing ‘exotic dress’, rich robes and strange headgear’ (Sacks 2012, 22). One is, also, reminded again with the cowboy, Robin Hood and even beatnik fairies of the way in which popular culture seems to shape supernatural visions (Clark and Loftus 1996, 141-142).

As to character we run the whole gamut. There are malevolent fairies: for example, the Devon wolves were ‘nasty’; and the playbox gnomes reported from England were clearly unpleasant. There are also frightening experiences: a boy in 1950s North

Carolina was 'TERRIFIED' of some dancing fairies (§344), though he does not elaborate why. Another child, a little girl, had a conversation with fairies who had flown in her window, then, '[s]cared I screamed for my mother' (§61): the girl thought that the fairies wanted to take her away. A Manitoban was surrounded by malevolent fairies who threatened to stab her with spears (§197). It is quite possible that some of these experiences were connected to sleep paralysis. The Manitoban wrote 'I could not move, and did not cry out.' One girl from Scotland, Perth was 'frozen with fear' when she saw a small man at the foot of her bed (§173). These are the only references to an inability to move in bed (though see also §330): might we not have expected more? In other cases fairies were friendly or benevolent. For example, a great green man (one of the rare big fairies in children's night-time visions) guarded a child sleeping in a cot: 'I felt the Green Man was there, of his own free will, to look after me.' Often fairies seemed 'playful and friendly'. Others consoled: '[t]he fairy said that all will be ok and talked to me' (§13). 'They were there to entertain me or to show me something' (§224).

6. Nature Fairies

Walking home in woodland after building den with friends. Was nine at the time. Came around a tree and saw two small creatures two-feet high sitting on a stump. Appeared to be carrying small canes and dressed in brown cloaks. Watched them for short time, they saw me then vanished (§1).

This short account could stand for many of the experiences of young children and, indeed, adults meeting fairies in nature. Part of modern fairy belief is the notion that fairies are the spirits of growing things. This belief (which has its origins in Neo-Platonism and early modern magic) leached out of theosophy in the late nineteenth century and became a commonplace of fairy writing, both erudite and popular (Gardner 1982 [1966], 48-53): today it is frequently found in fairy films, e.g. the *Tinkerbell* film series (2008-) or *Epic* (2013). It was evidently present in the minds of many of the children who had fairy experiences: 'I used to imagine the scattering of flowers and leaves around the garden was [the work of the fairies].' 'To me [the fairies] were about my size, and they were connected to certain parts of nature' (§317). An elderly woman in Delaware told her grandson, meanwhile, that he might 'have seen one of the fairies that keep gardens healthy' (§249).

However, there are some interesting differences with adult sightings in nature. First and perhaps most importantly, children tended to have their experiences in gardens 35.22%: as opposed to 14.49% among adolescents and 22.09% among adults. Conversely they were less likely to have fairy experiences in woods, 13.63%: compared with 33.33% among adolescents and 32.17% among adults. Here we are likely seeing the circumscribed world of children, who, particularly from the 1980s onward, play in closely supervised areas with adults always within sight or screaming distance (Rutherford 2011, 60-88, for the US). Some children did venture out away

from home: but these were the exceptions. One child in Yorkshire 'lived in the countryside and often wandered over the hills and woods where there were streams' (§134). A child in Arkansas had adventures in the nearby woods: though she later marveled that her mother had given her this freedom (§219).

It is a common-place in folklore that fairies take on the characteristics of the landscape around them. By this logic the fairies of lowland England will be much tamer than the fairies of, say, the Scottish Highlands. There may be something to this, thinking of the fairy traditions of these two areas. Children's fairy experiences seem generally to have been more positive than those of older respondents: might this have to do with them encountering fairies in safer places (particularly the home and garden)? 45.45% of children's fairies in the *Census* were described as being 'friendly': compared to just 24.64% of the fairies of adolescents and 35.27% of adult fairies. 29.55% of children's fairies were 'joyful': the numbers for adolescents and adults were, respectively, 13.04% and 23.26%. There were, meanwhile, only two cases of a child respondent claiming that fairies were 'angry' (§26, §37). There is often, though, an underlying unease about encounters: a fear about what the fairy really represents and distrust on the part of a child. For example, a girl who met a gnome in a garage remembered: 'I did not believe that the gnome had any particularly terrible intentions, but I felt uncomfortable, like he was not truly friendly' (§375). A girl in London (§80): 'I felt it wanted to do mischief. This was not a friendly experience at all'. On several occasions children are worried that the fairies want to take them away (§61, §80, §479): is this a distant echo of changeling traditions; or stranger-fear drilled into modern children from an early age?

In adult fairy experiences in gardens and woods fairies are frequently connected to flowers and to trees. Interestingly, children see flower and plant fairies relatively rarely (§14, §268, §374), despite spending more time in gardens. Trees, though, appear again and again: usually garden trees. There are many accounts where children come into contact with the spirit or resident of a tree: a lemon tree in New Zealand (§491); a peach tree in Arkansas (§218); a dogwood tree in New Jersey (§325); trees in Manitoba (§197); and a cedar tree in British Columbia (§195). Children also meet the spirits of tree stumps as in the example quoted above (§1): see also §125 for a stump in Suffolk; and §342 for a stump in North Carolina. Children seem to be particularly interested in holes under trees. We might reason that these are intriguing but also amenable to examination for infants. Fairies disappear down a hole under the lemon tree (§491) and under the peach tree (§218): '[I]ater I stuck my arm down it, even tried digging it out till my grandmother told me to quit and leave the little people alone' (§218): see also §200 where tuxedo-ed fairies fly out of a hole in Canada; and §90A, a third person account of a British pre-school teacher about children and a tree's roots.

There are, then, many more fairy experiences where a tree or bush features, incidentally, in a fairy experience. There is an ancient oak in Sherwood (§100), bushes in Derbyshire (§31); some glowing trees in Texas (§376), a bush in Texas (§378), a weeping ash in Essex (§46); a box bush in Delaware (§249) a tree in a London park

(§83); a honeysuckle bush in Nebraska (§317); an apricot tree in Colorado (§243), a pine in Minnesota (§308), Australian trees (§471), a lilac bush in Ohio (§353), a mimosa tree in Texas (§375), a fig tree in New Zealand (§488); and an apple tree in Lincolnshire (§76). It is striking, how respondents so often remember the tree type after many decades. Perhaps these were trees that had already made an impression on the children in question, priming them for a connected supernatural experience? Trees, as anyone who plays with children in a garden know, are quickly integrated into games: they have a very real presence.

Another feature of nature fairies (one shared by children and adults alike) are encounters with what might be called ‘insect’ fairies. These are insect-sized fairies that, one suspects, might have actually been an exotic insect or a commonplace insect seen in an unusual light. For instance, a Californian respondent remembered being on a drive with her grandparents a decade before. Looking ‘out the window and [!] saw a small insect-like thing glowing red and blue flying outside my window. It only stayed there for a couple [of] moments before flying away’ (§227). Some of these accounts perhaps represent the triumph of hope over reason. As one English respondent wrote, bravely, after recalling her own insect-fairy experience some twenty years before: ‘The recent Rossendale exhibition of fairy photos [where may flies had been photographed to look like fairies] made me realize that [my experience] was almost certainly an insect lit up by the sun. But I still choose to believe it was a fairy. I’m ok with that’ (§98). These insect fairies are also, then, a reminder of how keen many children are to see fairies: how something out of the ordinary, glimpsed often only for a second, can be remembered as a precious supernatural experience.

7. Fairy Friends

As a small child, I played in the woods near our house. On multiple occasions I interacted with what I know now to be fairies. They appeared to me as tiny people who would run along beside me and [spoke] to me telepathically. They would tell me where to walk, which logs to avoid because of snakes §219.

Sixteen children in the *Fairy Census* (about a sixth of the 0-10 sample) described not just a one off encounter, but a relationship with fairies over months or years. In some cases the fairies were an evil force on the edge of the child’s life: we have already described the wardrobe wolves (§37) and the box gnomes from English bedrooms (§94). At other times fairies were play friends: a little girl made clothes out of hollyhocks for some fairies in Kentucky (283); fairies came to play with two sisters under a tree in New Zealand – ‘small pale colours, floaty clothes soft gentle appearance delicate wings’ (488). Some fairies looked after their charges: the Arkansas fairies, noted at the head of this section, warned a little girl about snake-infested logs (§219); the ‘guardian angels’ who quaffed champagne in California (§222); and a fairy in Nottinghamshire who introduced herself as a young girl’s ‘fairy mother’ and who shared her secret name (§100). Some fairies were, meanwhile, presences rather than

personalities: the ‘mist and movement’ fairies in a wood in British Columbia, ‘[t]hey stood quietly and gracefully adult-sized if not taller’ (§195); and the New Zealand fairies glimpsed repeatedly in a garden in Auckland ‘[t]hey were very wispy and long-haired, quite ghostly, almost transparent in form’ (§479).

In some cases we seem to have examples not just of imaginary friends but of private mythologies. The young girl in Manitoba who was attacked in the night wrote: ‘I believed that my home in the country was surrounded by good fairies, who lived in the trees, but these [fairies at my bed] were malevolent, and I thought [the attackers] must be brownies’ (§197). There was the boy in Oxfordshire who would bid farewell as his family drove him off on holiday to a phalanx of fairies who were ‘[t]all, with long hair, and very beautiful faces’: ‘they were like distant ‘guardians’, seeming almost to do a job, but neither liking or disliking it’ and they are described as ‘*genii loci*’ (§105). There was the Canadian boy who had mapped out his local world and who had identified two fairy locations: one an ancient giant Cedar Tree and the other a brick walkway (§195). One extraordinary account from America has, meanwhile, a young girl who, up until her tenth birthday, flew with a series of ‘fluid like beings that were dressed in material that barely covered and was white and thin and always flowing as they too never touched the ground although [they] had legs and feet’. After a secret signal had been given she and these fairies would fly around the rooftops together: the girl would decide where they would go and the flights were a ‘treat’ (§338).

There is an impressive psychological literature on children’s invisible friends and serious studies dating back to before the Second World War (Svendsen 1934; Singer and Singer 1990, 89-116; Taylor 1999; and a sometimes perplexing approach to the question Hallowell 2007, for whom invisible friends are real). However, the most recent and authoritative publications suggest that children are fully conscious that their ‘friends’ are make believe or pretend (Taylor 1999, 86-117). In the *Fairy Census* adults remembering these childhood friendships believe, instead, in their reality. In fact, there is only one of the sixteen identified here where grown children express doubts in that respect: ‘I’m still convinced, even after all these years, that I saw them, but whether they were a part of our reality or a creation of my own mind, I don’t know’ (§167). Are we dealing with tricks played by memory? Over rationalization on the part of psychologists interested in invisible friends? Or are we simply looking at a different if related phenomenon? Relationships with invisible friends, it must be said, are often also rather deeper than many of those described here: can a box of hostile gnomes, who remain out of sight most of the time (§94), or some anthropomorphic wisps of mist really be described as ‘friends’ (§195)? Note also that frequently the child in the *Fairy Census* enters a relationship with a collective: a group of fairies playing in the flowers (§283), or the fairy fliers who navigate with a child around the skies of New York state (§338). This is untypical of documented invisible friends, though apparently not unprecedented (Hallowell 2007, 43).

In other respects there is some overlap with the experience of invisible friends. The most convincing explanation for invisible friends is loneliness and isolation and, in a

number of cases, fairy friends appear under these conditions. 'I was about seven years old. (1953). I had been sharing a bedroom with my elder brother, who was about eighteen at the time, but he left to join the army. So, I was left on my own in the room.' 'I went to sleep as normal, but woke after a time to find a group of the little people dancing around on the floor at the head of my bed.' 'This went on for some months on a more or less nightly basis, but gradually the interval between appearances became longer and longer until it stopped altogether' (§167). Here it could be argued that the fairies were a balm for a child who was now sleeping alone, and a balm that gradually became less and less important. We have, likewise, a Canadian boy. 'It was a repeating experience. One which occurred to me as a young child recovering from polio. I was rather a lonely kid, both shy and fierce' (§195). Or the recent emigrant perhaps missing home: 'We had not been long in Australia. I was walking with my father and we saw the fairies in the trees. They were smallish, very bright and you could see their forms within the lights... I thought they had come from England to see us' (§471). A girl in her very early teens after describing an infant fairy experience writes: 'Please show me how to meet a fairy in a week. I need to know. I need to have someone to talk to about my problems that isn't fully human. Someone that I can keep as a secret friend' (§415).

I will finish this section with a particularly striking encounter. Here we do not have a fairy friendship in the sense of a long-term relationship, but a six-year-old American girl who socializes, in the 1970s, with some local fairies.

...I was playing in the empty lot next to my house and suddenly, I was in a forest. The fairies were tall and they fed me a drink and cakes that were very sweet and seemed to be made of light. It was dark, but it wasn't because it seemed like light emanated from the trees. After a couple of hours a woman told me I had to go back. I didn't want to go back and complained. She told me I had to because I had a purpose. Suddenly, I woke up on the floor of my living room. I don't remember getting there or leaving the open lot where I was running around and playing. I felt like I had lost time (§376).

This account, remembered some forty years after it happened, by a woman who claims to have 'regular' supernatural experiences, is remarkable in several respects. There is the eating of fairy food: a fundamental symbolic act in fairy tradition (Cutchin 2015) and there is the lost time, which is so often found in folklore and anomalistic experiences (Briggs 2003 [1976], 398-400). Similar descriptions are found in relation to the White Sabbath, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where, men and women described going to join the fairy revels (Goodare 2012). It is jarring to find such an account in Texas, of all places, in the 1970s. Did the respondent somehow pick up these themes from popular culture (reading, or films or radio)? Chris Woodyard has pointed out to me the parallels with alien abduction lore. Was it a reconstructed memory from later in life?

Conclusion and Spiritual Development

Eighty-eight fairy experiences of children aged from about three to ten, from the second half of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century, have furnished us with some data on fairy encounters among the very young. On the evidence of this collection fairy encounters tend to be had, or at least remembered and shared by girls or women recalling childhood. Most of these memories involve fairy experiences in bedrooms or in natural settings, particularly gardens: adults have a far wider range of locations for their fairy experiences, and this probably reflects their greater freedom in the world. Children have more sleep-related fairy experiences than adults: these typically involve small fairies in large groups. In natural settings children focus their experiences on trees: there is little of the interest in the flowers so common in contemporary adult fairy experiences. In some cases fairies become a fixture in the life of a child, and here parallels with the psychological literature on 'invisible friends' are intriguing. Let me conclude now with some thoughts about the role of these fairy experiences in the spiritual lives of those who replied to the survey.

Fascinatingly, these childhood fairy experiences continued to be important for many of the respondents: something particularly interesting given the way that fairies are often ridiculed in western societies (Young 2018b).⁷ 21.59% of these grown children thought of their fairy encounter as marking a turning point in their lives: lower, interestingly, than adolescents and adults who had encounters, respectively, 26.08% and 27.13%. On several occasions the respondent returned to the site of the encounter as an adult. 'I went back to the alley of my childhood a few years ago, but my [fairy] friends were no longer there' (§283). A woman returned to the scene of her fairy encounter in Scotland: 'Five years ago, some twenty-nine years after this happened, I went back to the house that this happened in' (§173). She discovered that the house was haunted. One woman had dreams about the place where she saw her fairy: and later took photographs, in the area, in which she could pick out fairies (§100). In other cases the memory remained a happy one: 'a fond vivid memory of my childhood' (§335), as one respondent put it. The fairies left 'me cheered up and with a memory for life' (§111); 'I treasure that memory, it is very, very, special to me' (§170); '[o]ne of the most magical experiences of my life' (§285).

Does the experience actually help form later religious beliefs and convictions? One might have thought that fairy experiences were most easily reconciled, in religious terms, to some form of neo-paganism: 'I believe and respect the fae... now as a practicing Wiccan' (§61) was the comment of one grown child who had experienced fairies. Another contributor referred, instead, to syncretic beliefs in his family: 'As a child I was a Christian who was raised to believe that fairies could keep plants alive and healthy' (§249). However, for the most part the very lack of references to

⁷ A correspondent wrote in response to Young 2018b, 7 Apr 2018: 'I attend local pagan meet ups and whilst there's a lot of discussion on everything from Anglo Saxon herbal texts to Viking mythology, ancient druids to Neopaganism... I feel thoroughly embarrassed to bring up fairies! It's just not a subject taken seriously and I think there's always that slight fear someone will immediately presume that you're interested in cute winged Victorian fairies and flower fairies and spend your weekends wearing glittery pink tutus!'

conventional religious beliefs is striking. Clearly, many contributors had a rich spiritual life, which included many supernatural experiences. But these seem to have been part of private patchwork mythology.

I have no idea if this is related [to my experience], but I am forty years old and still appear to be in my early twenties... Good genes, a result of my encounter, or something else, I don't know. There is also a bit of strangeness about my conception, I have often wondered if my parents are entirely my parents (§388).

As I live, I feel this certain type of feeling, like a vibe or an aura, with almost everything I do, and that's how my memories are kept as well. There is a different type of feel to a fairy encounter vs. an alien encounter vs. a ghost encounter (§366).

23% of those writing in about childhood experiences claimed that they have 'regular' supernatural experiences and 48% said that they have 'occasional' supernatural experiences. In some cases, these early fairy experiences marked the beginning of a life-long series that proved fundamental to the subject's identity. Take, for example, the adult who considered the fairies that flew in her window in the 1970s when she was eight or nine: to be 'possibly my first calling to the occult' (§61). A six year old Texan girl was, it will be remembered, briefly kidnapped by fairies in the 1970s and was happy with them: 'I didn't want to go back and complained. [The fairy leader] told me I had to because I had a purpose' (§376). This woman, also, went on to have 'regular' supernatural experiences. In other cases, a fairy experience marked a child's imaginative life: 'I'm a bestselling, award-winning author of fantasy, horror, science-fiction, paranormal, and action-adventure short stories, novels, comic books, and screenplays. My personal encounters with faeries, and other non-human beings have been a huge defining force where my writing is concerned' (§353).

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The Body and the Spirit

from Anthropology and the Paranormal symposium / Esalen Institute
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by Edith Turner

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People actively seek for a connection to a spiritual realm. They sometimes feel as if they could enfold all things within their arms, they feel it with their body, with a shiver or an expansion of the heart. Prayer also is a bodily matter particularly concerned with the body, as in song, through the expressive vocal chords. What is interesting is that neuroscience has now discovered that the human fleshly brain has always been sufficiently complex and interconnected within itself to be aware of its own physical presence within the mind. We note that almost everywhere on the planet there is a term for this sense such as “the soul.”

Wandering freely through all of its interconnectedness, the brain is unbelievably capable of encompassing “spirit” itself, of holding and containing it, to the fullest extent of its greatest physical capacity. Now this is a mystery, including the mysticism of sex. Also, the body may dwell in the love of the entire material universe. This is “heaven.” It is mysticism.

This bodily and spiritual union also occurs in spiritual healing, and there are countless examples where we may trace it. It has become a moment of shimmering clarity, clear as daylight, suddenly, as it did to Arjuna, Nanak, Mahomet, Paul at Damascus, Black Elk, the Apache shamanic singers of Arizona, Billy Graham, Louis Pasteur the renowned biologist with his great personal revelation of God, the Zen Buddhists with their sudden Samadhi, and many of the other the luminaries of the old religions, now including the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro of the Amazonian forest in his 1998 lectures on perspectivism, telling how he lived with the foresters, “being” them in empathy, to bring into focus their full existence. All these visionaries recognize there is no separation between the spirit and the body. In other words we can indeed approach the objective truth of our being here, all of us. Nature works beside us with an unflinching energy. It has its own means of going about it. Its positive energy reminds us of the Chinese *chi*, the energy of life, and the heat of one’s hands when healing. Around these studies exist a whole fields of awareness and experience, based on knowledge and a delight in religions and their rituals--objects of empathy throughout spirituality. We see where help comes to us in liminal situations, as the Hebrews found when they were able to escape from Egypt because of the blessing of their doorways—which became a tense emotional story. The blood of their holy sacrifice helped them. People are conscious of that kind of help. Their helping angel knew their peril.

Anthropology is discovering that, before the times of the theologies, before civilizations, the function of what we call "angel" was fulfilled by an animal or human shamanic being, helping us across a threshold.

Look up inside the Sistine Chapel in Rome and see the creator with his finger outstretched to the inert human form of Adam, who is appealing for that finger. The painter Leonardo da Vinci had his 15th century (1508 and 1512) vision at that time. That Sistine touch--the touch of that finger--with a splendid irrationality, had switched on the multitudes of self-energizing elements in nature. Similarly that finger had sought that other era and had released the children of Israel from Egypt. Today the finger raises specialized companies which will "vet" and draw together inquiries to focus on false and evil-intending corporations. We all know of other checks and balances.

Humanity is part of a *communitas*, the *social*, the interdependent spirit and body, constituting an overall totality, able to share soul and bodily feelings. Humans are permeable and malleable. Humanity is more alive than ever, in 2013. We are conscious of the planet's spiritual life in Asia and Africa and the Americas. Many Christians have become aware of new spirit worlds with new clean air. The touch of that finger is recognizable.

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Reflecting on Edith Turner's Work and Influence

Jack Hunter
 PhD University of Bristol
discarnates@googlemail.com

I first encountered Edith Turner and her work as an undergraduate student in a module on 'Religion and Cosmology' taught by Fiona Bowie at the University of Bristol. Fiona introduced our class to Edie's classic paper 'The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?' (1993) - a short article that has had an enormous influence on my own writing and research. I was amazed at the openness with which Edie spoke about her own extraordinary experience as a participant in the Ihamba ceremony of the Ndembu in Zambia, it was unlike anything else I had yet encountered in anthropology and spurred me on to delve deeper into anthropology's long relationship with the paranormal. The clarity of her discussion and the vividness of her account of seeing a spirit form at the climax of the Ihamba ceremony was particularly inspiring to me – I hadn't realised that it was ok for anthropologists to go *that far*. I was hooked from the very beginning:

And just then, through my tears, the central figure swayed deeply: all leaned forward, this was indeed going to be it. I realized along with them that the barriers were breaking...Something that wanted to be born was now going to be born...Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere. I was amazed...I still laugh with glee at the realization of having seen it, the ihamba, and so big! (Turner, 1998, p. 149)

Late in 2012 I was fortunate enough to be invited by Jeffrey J. Kripal and David J. Hufford to help organise a week-long private symposium on 'Anthropology and the Paranormal' at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California to be held in October 2013. I was asked to help 'talent scout' for anthropologists engaged in paranormal research, and naturally my mind jumped directly to Edie Turner. It was a long shot – Edie was 92 at the time - but we invited her to attend and thankfully she accepted. Fiona, who we had also invited to the conference, flew out to Charlottesville in advance of the conference to spend some time with Edie and to travel with her back to California. It was amazing to have her with us.

All of the participants at the Esalen conference sat in awed silence while Edie was talking. We loved it! It was like listening to an oracle speak. Her words were filled with a kind of joy and wisdom grounded in experience, and the clear light of *something*

more shone through her words as she spoke. As we gave our own paper presentations in the Lodge House (in a room that has accommodated many great and influential thinkers over the years), we sat at the head of a circle flanked by Edie Turner on our left hand side and the equally legendary Stanley Krippner on our right. It was fantastic to be amongst such giants of the field. I will always remember having breakfast with Edie, Fiona and my partner Rosie in the Californian sunshine, perched on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. It was an incredible experience that I will never forget, and I was honoured to be in attendance.

Looking back over the short summary of her paper for the conference I am amazed by its range and scope – from tribal healing to the Sistine Chapel, and from neuroscience to mysticism. Edie's perspective on religion was expansive, and above all rooted in *experience*. It is precisely this rootedness in experience, and in particular her willingness to take heed of the possible implications of experience (i.e. the possibility that spiritual experiences might actually give insights into a spiritual *reality*), that gives her approach to the anthropology of religion its radical and distinctive edge:

Again and again anthropologists witness spirit rituals, and again and again some indigenous exegete tries to explain that the spirits are present, and furthermore that rituals are the central events of their society. And the anthropologist proceeds to interpret them differently. There seems to be a kind of force field between the anthropologist and her or his subject matter making it impossible for her or him to come close to it, a kind of religious frigidity. We anthropologists need training to see what the Natives see (Turner, 1993, p 11)

Edie's approach calls for anthropologists to move away from a focus on religious *belief* towards an emphasis on religious *experience* and religious *phenomena* (things and events), around which beliefs later crystallise. Experiential participation provides a gateway into other worlds that more traditional and reserved ethnographic approaches fail to open. Experiential participation levels out the playing field between ethnographer and informant, and cuts to the heart of what we are dealing with in the study of religion and the paranormal. Moreover, it reveals that religious experience always exists within a much wider context – social, cultural, emotional, somatic, performative, and so on, but that it cannot be reduced to these – that must be engaged with in order to be understood. My own approach, which I have termed 'ontological flooding' (Hunter, 2015), is an effort to build on Edie's emphasis on experiential participation in the study of religion and the paranormal to push forward into new domains for ethnographic investigation (e.g. the reality of spirits), and into new ways of thinking that transcend the currently dominant models of the social sciences.

Over the week that I spent with Edie at Esalen I was filled with admiration for her work and her continuing active interest in research and developing her own thinking – even at the age of 92! In retrospect it was an incredible opportunity to connect with a bygone era of anthropology, but more importantly perhaps was also a springboard to push anthropology into the future with a new generation of open-minded participant observers. Edie was always looking forward, and always pushing against boundaries, and this was a massive inspiration to us all. To wrap up this short reflection on Edie's work and influence, I will quote an extract from her last book, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (2012), which seems to me to encapsulate much of Edie's approach – seeing the spiritual in the material, and a commitment to the science of anthropology:

We see that our world is real, in company with the spirits who are comrades in proposing ideas and marching ahead of us. Here I have allowed the spiritual dimension into the material one, which social scientists are not supposed to do. I am stating that I have one heart, and I have found that this does not disqualify me from speaking in the friendly forum of anthropology. For these are *findings*, findings encountered in research (Turner, 2012, p. 218).

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Edith Turner: Memories of Africa from Her Children

Frederick Turner
Irene H. Wellman (nee Turner)
Robert Turner

Memories of Africa

Frederick Turner

Back country Zambia in the early 'fifties was not much changed from the days of the nineteenth century African Raj. Where we lived there were no schools or hospitals within a day's journey; there was a rather pleasant and vague district commissioner, Denning, who mostly left our Ndembu hosts to their own devices.

Watching the Durrells in the BBC miniseries of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* gave me a definite feeling of déjà vu; Edie was very like Louisa Durrell in the series, my brother Bob the botanist was much like Gerry, Rene was a young Margo, and I was the Larry of the family. Vic was the quintessential anthropologist, with his open neck shirt, his disreputable trousers, his ability to drink and talk all night with the village mystic genius Muchona, his wicked sense of humor, his utter love of people, and his inner romantic.

For me the memories are too desperately nostalgic to be entirely real. I'll try to keep to the ones of Edie, since she's the one on the current menu. Edie schooled us in the mornings, subverting the correspondence courses we used into sheer magic. Vic was away most of the day, interviewing, driving on the dirt roads to rituals, surveying cassava fields, or banging away at the typewriter, but he told us stories he made up in the evenings or read us dozens of books by installments. Edie helped Vic in the afternoons, while Rene hung out with her weird little deaf friend Dora, Bob botanized, and I hung out with a bunch of naughty Ndembu boys led by an eleven-year-old hunter called Sakeru, my hero.

Edie had some training in first aid and hygiene, and used to have a queue of rather horrible disease and injury cases most days. Even with the most primitive medical supplies she must have saved quite a few lives. She was a definite lefty, and boiled inside about the malnutrition, infant mortality, and untreated infections of the village. She tried to get them to farm rice, and so have a cash crop and better nutrition than they could get from their cassava mounds. She rented two bullocks, Pendeka and Ndeleke (I think they were called), and plowed up a stretch of grassland. My job was to discourage the big purple ticks they acquired by rubbing them with a gasoline-

soaked rag on a stick. Nothing came of the rice-farming, though; they weren't used to it.

As an anthropologist Edie hung out with the women in the village, and they used to chatter for hours, giggling cynically at the doings of the men and, I think, making dirty jokes. She got to be in on all the women's rituals, which we bad boys were not allowed to see. When we tried to sneak into the seclusion hut area, we were driven off by evil gap-toothed old hags who threatened us with horrible curses and insults. One of my favorites was "Wanda weil", which meant "You have dirt under your foreskin," and was exceptionally cruel, with its contemptuous dismissal of the as yet uncircumcised.

We boys would swim in the brisk brook nearby, hunt or trap small animals like moles, get into rumbles with another gang, and arrange bloody ant wars by knocking off the top of a termite nest and dumping it on an ant nest. Despite the huge pincers of the warrior termites, the ants, even the small ones, usually won. For the big inch-long Nzewu, the black driver ant, the termites were a walkover; and for the deadliest ants of all, the red ants, the Nsarafu, the termites were simply lunch. Nasty boys. We climbed up the tall termite hills during the swarming season and ate the big juicy queens as they came bustling out of the portals of the mound, testing their wings before they flew off to create their own tribes.

What amazes me is how unterrified Edie was, utterly without the web of support everybody has in a modern city. We kids got malaria, and survived with enduring memories of ghastly fever-dreams (home-made horror movies). Bob and I ran into each other one evening, zooming around opposite sides of one of the village huts; it was bloody. My front teeth were knocked out of alignment and Bob bears the scar on his forehead to this day. I was up a tree one time when I realized that there was a green mamba on the trunk beneath me. Musona, our cook, distracted it with a stick while I went out on a long drooping branch, hung onto it with my arms, and dropped down in safety. Edie cheerfully put up with all of this, and even tolerated my hanging out with Samatamba, who was a famous witch-doctor with syphilis and two beautiful wives who fed me honey beer and made much of me. I was very fond of Samatamba, but he had a dreadful reputation.

We lived in a little cluster of grass huts on the edge of the village. We also had a permanent green canvas tent for our supplies, whose wall I used to lie against while I read and reread *The Swiss Family Robinson*. The kitchen hut caught fire on Rene's birthday, an event that has remained with the usually philosophical Rene ever since, sending her into a mild panic when Christmas or birthday candles are involved.

Every weekend we would take a long drive on the red dirt roads to one of our favorite picnic spots. The best was the Zambesi rapids, where the young vigorous river poured, in several clear cold branches, across a black granite outcrop, creating vast descending terraces of racing blue and white water into deep clear pools with little shady islands covered with a riot of orchids. There's a picture of Bob, Rene, and me sitting in the altogether in one of those long ramps of thin torrent, the force of the water making wings around each of us. And Edie, whom you can't see, taking the picture with her faithful Leica, her skirt hitched up, had wings too, around her ankles, like the god Mercury.

Memories of Africa, 1953

Irene H. Wellman (nee Turner)

I have only small flashbacks of Mwinilunga as I arrived there when I was only age 4. However I do remember that both Vic and Edie encouraged Fred, Bob, and myself to participate in many of the village activities, just as they too were immersed in all that went on. I remember making friends with a little deaf girl, Dora, who, like me, couldn't communicate well with the other village children. She and I spent many hours playing games in the red dirt between the village huts, among the roosters, chickens and their chicks. One chick imprinted on me and followed me wherever I went, but one day, I accidentally stepped on it. I still remember crying piteously over its limp body.

I also remember being encouraged by Edie to learn to dance the Nkanga, imitating the other little girls who were in early preparation for their puberty ritual. Another form of preparation for womanhood was the planting of a gourd that would be dried out to turn into a calabash for carrying water drawn from the river. I planted mine carefully and went often to water it and watch it swell. I was very proud of it, but sadly, left the area before it was fully ripe. I was also proud of the fact that I could balance a small pot on my head, with aid of a circular cloth, demonstrating this achievement in front of Edie, who also tried it, laughing as it fell from her head. And I remember Edie helping me gather black and red seeds to string together for necklaces to wear for dancing.

Sometimes, on festive nights when the deep drums began, Edie allowed me to join in the dancing with the other children. But mostly, I fell asleep to the drums' resonant sound in the dark distance. My bed consisted of an army cot draped with a mosquito net to ward off the large mosquitos that got in through the cracks in the mud and grass walls. Other nights, I remember Vic reading Shakespeare plays to us, using his acting skills inherited from his mother, an actress, to bring the voices to life. The books emerged from our time there with large round holes in the pages from the bites of hungry insects. Moths buzzed and burned against our paraffin lamp but my father kept reading to us through it all. And I remember once or twice waking in the middle of the night to hear far, far away the roar of lions in the grassland beyond the forest. Our household consisted of at least two huts, one being a kitchen hut where our hired cook, a tall quiet man, attempted to make English dishes that Edie had recommended at first with goat meat and tough chickens and store-bought butter and flour. I had expanded my diet by then and was quite happy eating the grubs of flying ants, boiled caterpillars, roasted grasshoppers, and balls of dipped cassava with the other children. However, on my fifth birthday, the kitchen suddenly went up in flames, very likely because of the strange demands made on the small oven our cook had devised. The whole village gathered around to watch the flames rise and die down while I cried, "My birthday's all gone!" I thought my birthday cake was lost in the fire, but Edie had somehow rescued it and suddenly produced it, replete with five candles, and all was well again. But after that, we all ate more like the people of the village, and shared food and drink often.

Fire was a real hazard in that area, and, one day, a huge fire came rushing through the forest towards the village. I remember sparks flying everywhere and the red glow coming ever closer. I had malaria at the time, despite our daily quinine pills, and I recall the strange sensation of being freezing from a fever, but growing hotter and hotter from the growing fire. After the flames passed, jumping over the village commons, the air smelled for days of charred wood and the leaves that had survived

had turned golden as if it was fall.

My favorite memory of all was of sitting between my Edie and Vic in the old Ford lorry, staring at the round dials on the wooden dashboard, while my brothers rode in the back, leaning against the cabin with Africans brought along for the ride. Through the open window, above the rattle of wheels and roar of engine, I could hear their rich harmonic singing and wished I could be behind there too. On one journey, we ended up stuck several times in mud from a big flood and arrived at our destination, caked with dirt, but relieved, to be greeted by white officials who gave us very curious glances. So-called civilization seemed odd to me then. I'll never forget arriving in Lusaka for the first time for many months and how amazed I was by the flat paved streets. I'd lived so completely among trees and bumpy earth that I'd forgotten the smooth asphalt-covered world I was born in. I had indeed become a tribal child.

These memories, like the memories of my brothers, are not the usual ones of childhood. Edie and Vic had brought us there in the spirit of adventure and inspiration, fully knowing the importance of being fully connected to the people we lived among. Like other children of who have been taken into the field, I hold a special place in my heart for this early experience and still feel it resonating in my very bones.

Mwinilunga Memories

Robert Turner

Such memories as I retain of my time in the bush village, Kajima, as a boy of 5 until 8 years old, are almost entirely happy ones. At home there, we lived in grass huts, swiftly built for us by local men using hewn branches, bark string and bundles of tall dried savannah grass as walls and thatch. The three of us children—Fred, me and Rene—slept in one hut, our parents Vic and Edie in another. A third hut, just a roof without walls, served as kitchen, where our cook and translator, Musona, held sway, making occasional valiant efforts to cook British-style means. Musona was very kind and forbearant with us children.

I remember long evenings with Vic reading to us children and Edie from a wide range of exciting novels, from John Buchan, Rider Haggard, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, to Shakespeare plays, by the hissing light of a Tilley pressure lamp, with its glowing white mantle. Vic had a huge gift for personification, a different and appropriate voice for every character, which went along with his fluency in the local Ndembu language.

I remember teaching myself to swim in a small clear stream, in places just deeper than the length of my six-year-old arms. I would push myself off at these points, and learned to doggy-paddle. It was in this stream I later discovered a Stone Age hand-axe, beautifully shaped by flaking from a shiny pink stone. When I showed it to Vic he recognised straight away what it was. Now it is on display in the museum in Livingstone.

I remember the many village rituals, often accompanied by exciting drumming, but I cannot remember the explanations of them. Sometimes the drumming continued late into the night, while we children were going to sleep in our camp beds—we could feel the drums through the hard earth which formed the floor of our hut. I remember the day I went exploring on my own, and came through the forest to a village perhaps

three miles away, with a ritual going on. I made a mental note of as much as I could follow, and ran home to tell Vic. He was pleased with me, not at all concerned that I could have got lost. He knew I could look after myself.

I remember the village spring, the source of the Nyarufanta stream, which rose abundantly in a clay hollow. Fred and I found that simply by pushing a finger into the clay we could make tiny springs. We took over a section of the clay wall and connected our springs to form a miniature river, with tributaries and tiny waterfalls. We even drew a map of it.

I remember Vic's friend Samatamba, who seemed very old and wrinkled, but kindly. He gave us honey beer to taste, powerfully aromatic with wild local honey and alcohol, with the occasional dead bee floating on the surface of the calabash. I remember the village hunter, with his ancient gun, for which Vic supplied him with bullets in return for an occasional antelope he shot. We all remember the hunter's dance, with its chant of "Yezhinai wo, yezhinai wo". I remember the taste of boiled duiker meat, and the biltong we made from what we could not eat at once. Around the village people kept chickens, guinea fowl and goats. I will not forget watching a goat being slaughtered, then being skinned and eviscerated, while Vic described the process, precisely, to his budding scientist son.

We got cow's milk once a week from a white farm five miles away. I don't know how they managed with rinderpest and the tsetse fly. We drank it fresh for an afternoon, and then boiled it to keep for another day or two.

I will never forget the tiny orchids in the grass, with their vivid velvety purple or yellow colours, all so different and distinct. Or the brilliant red blossoms on the flowering flamboyant trees, or the wild plums and other unique wild fruit. Or the tender colour of the new leaves emerging from the charred stumps of trees burnt in the forest fires, sometimes set in order to clear land for planting. Or the edible root, the inshindwa, with its extraordinary tang, and the delight in finding them, with their purplish tops protruding from the soil.

I remember joining the local children in catching and eating flying termites when they emerged, full of sweet glycogen, from their anthills at the mating time. Delicious and nutritious. I remember being occasionally welcomed at the chota, the little hut at the centre of the village, where the men sat, smoked, chatted, and snacked on cassava mush and whatever savoury relish could be provided. Sometimes it was roasted caterpillars.

I remember the rainy seasons, when the rain came down in torrents and the lightning and thunder were extreme. Lying in our camp beds during night storms, we revelled in the awesomeness of the elements. The dirt roads became waterways, with red mud.

I remember paddling and swimming in the rapids of the Zambezi, already quite a powerful river, although not yet far from its source. The rushing water made wings round our shoulders. On another occasion we visited the Zambezi's source, a quivering domed pool surrounded by a dusky cathedral-like 'itu' of tall rainforest trees. One of our favourite picnic spots was the Luakera Falls, now a tourist sight, but then we had it all to ourselves.