

One Hundred Years of Sacred Science:

Gregg Lahood

Participation and Hybridity in Transpersonal Anthropology¹

ABSTRACT. The discipline of anthropology has been a major influence on transpersonal psychology. The transpersonal movement has now, in turn, influenced many anthropologists and opened new fields of research. In this article, the author explores the historical emergence and basic premise of transpersonally oriented anthropology and, in particular, its participatory and hybrid themes. He also examines the major innovation of the subdiscipline: the potential for data gathering by anthropologists participating in altered states of consciousness.

Keywords: anthropology, hybridity, participatory, transpersonal psychology

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Participation in transpersonal events can give anthropologists lived experiences of the (felt to be) autonomous alterity of the host culture (Price-Williams 1992). I call this process *transpersonal co-penetration* after Clifford Geertz, who argues that deeper penetration of the host culture allows that culture to penetrate the anthropologist more deeply (Geertz 1988, ctd. in Goulet 1994, 17). However, *co-absorption* may be an equally useful term. These liminal moments (Turner 1969) suggest a joining of the fieldworker and the culturally constituted, hyperspatial, hypertemporal alterityscape. This moment is akin to what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls “‘the unstable element of linkage,’ the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions for ‘newness to come into the world’” (227).

During the past few years, I studied transpersonal events of consciousness in birth-giving mothers and fathers in Western culture (Lahood 2006a, 2006b, 2007). By outlining the Western anthropologist’s intentional or accidental ingressions into novel (for the fieldworker, not the host culture) nonordinary states of consciousness as either overt or tacit ritual participants,

I aimed to groove a cognitive matrix that allows the reader further understanding of how procreative men and women can also enter such states, because they, like anthropologists, are participants and observers in ritual. Therefore, they have participated in ritual and transpersonal events and may have gathered important experiential data. This article grew out of my struggle to find theoretical models for their experiences.

Beyond belief: The origins of transpersonalism in anthropology

I begin by turning to early examples of transpersonalism in anthropology before the existence of the transpersonal movement, which became a formal discipline in 1968. Lucien Levy-Bruhl formed the *law of participation*, or ecstatic states in which the subject is fused to the object. This concept is a forerunner of *participatory knowing*, which is significant among contemporary transpersonal theorists in the participatory turn (e.g., Ferrer 2002; Heron 1998; Tarnas 1991). This moment was anticipated in anthropology by Michael Jackson (1989) and Stanley J. Tambiah (1990).

Levy-Bruhl developed his participatory theory with regard to the totemic relationship and describes a transpersonal participatory relationship when he writes:

The object is presented to the subject as in a certain sense distinct from himself; except in such states as ecstasy, that is border states in which the representation, properly so called, disappears, since the fusion between subject and object has become complete. Now in analyzing the most characteristic of the primitive's institutions—such as totemic relationship, *intichiuma* and initiation ceremonies, etc.—we have found that his mind does more than present his object to him: it possesses it and is possessed by it. It communes with it and participates in it, not only in an ideological, but also in a physical and mystical sense of the word. The mind does not imagine it merely: it lives it. (Levy-Bruhl 1910/1985, ctd. in Turner 1992, 11)

Levy-Bruhl lived in an epoch in which a racist, cultural–evolutionary theory reigned, one that saw the native mind as dwelling in a naive form that Western minds had outgrown. Levy-Bruhl's influence can be found in the work of Carl Gustav Jung, an important ances-

tor of the transpersonal movement. In an early example of anthropology's contribution to transpersonalism, Jung borrowed Levy-Bruhl's idea of *representation collective* for his theory of “archetypes of the collective unconscious” (Morris 1991, 169).

Franz Boas is also an important ancestor on the transpersonal family tree. He lived among the Inuit and experienced what he calls a “conversion experience” (Morris 1991, 162). This experience fueled his attack on cultural–evolutionary theory and its racist biological determinism and furthered the discourse of cultural relativity, which influenced the African American civil rights movement and other movements worldwide (Bennett 1996). Civil rights, along with similar forms of human flourishing, were and are at the heart of the transpersonal movement (Chinnen 1996).

From ambivalence and anonymity to a science of the sacred

An alternate history of events that seem strange to Westerners have been “routinely” reported by anthropological field workers (Laughlin 1988, 4). However, given the West's secular, positivistic, and medicalizing history, many such events may have remained intentionally hidden. Edith Turner (1992) observes that such moments have been left at the margins of the anthropological page, and anthropologists have shied away from representing spirit encounters.

David E. Young and Jean-Guy Goulet (1994) suggest that this anonymity stemmed from fears of being ostracized by the academic community: “Because of fear of ostracism, an entire segment of cross-cultural experience common to many investigators is not available for discussion and scientific investigation” (8). Young (1994) suggests that an “existential shock” can accompany unusual psychic events and can take fieldworkers so far outside their normal experience that they struggle to find the “relevant explanatory models” or contexts in which to place them; they end up repressing the experiences and thus consign them to professional anonymity (166–67).

Nevertheless, such moments do exist in the anthropological record. Laughlin (1988) cites a spontaneous transperson-

al phenomenon in the anthropological field from Geoffrey Gorer's (1935) *African Dances*:

He found himself in a large gathering of people that included a famous Dahomeyan shaman. At one point he met the shaman's gaze: “I felt that for some reason it was necessary for me to meet his gaze and I continued staring at him across a space of about thirty yards till all the surrounding people and landscape became an indistinct blur and his face seemed preternaturally distinct and as it were detached from his body and nearer to me metaphysically than it was in reality. I wondered whether I was being hypnotized.” (131)

Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin (1994), citing Rosalie Wax, write that since the early 1970s, anthropologists have spoken of their “confessional tales” (423) and the changes wrought in themselves by their engagement with sacred questions. Young and Goulet (1994) write about the extraordinary nature of these changes and the process, problems, and limits of “going native.”

Even so, few anthropologists have intentionally entrained themselves for experiential participation in altered states, yet paradoxically, “Anthropological research involving alternate phases of consciousness has been extensive and has, in fact, provided much of the cross-cultural material upon which transpersonal theoretical work in other disciplines had been grounded” (Laughlin, McManus, and Shearer 1993, 190). Transpersonal psychologist Roger Walsh (1995) writes about another example of the feedback loop between anthropology, transpersonal studies, and nonordinary states of consciousness:

The prevalence and importance of altered states of consciousness (ASCs) may be gathered from Erika Bourguignon's (1973, p. 11) finding that 90% of cultures have institutionalized forms of them. She concluded that this was a “striking finding and suggests that we are, indeed, dealing with a matter of major importance, not merely a bit of anthropological esoteria.” (25)

This is a clear case of anthropological research serving as credential to transpersonal studies, yet I should also note that Bourguignon's work emerged several years after the formal founding of the transpersonal movement in 1968 and concerned itself, in part, with the phenomenon of the burgeoning psy-

chedelic inquiry of the American counterculture (Bourguignon 1973, 2003). Transpersonal theorist John Heron's (1998) work is another example of this feedback relationship. Heron (1998), outlining his dipolar (as opposed to non-dual) praxis for engaging in a participatory cosmos, cites Lincoln and Denzin's (1994) review of qualitative methods:

The human disciplines since the turn of the century have been on a journey to join science and the sacred, citing many writers from Durkheim to Mary Douglas. They point to a range of sacred "happenings and rituals" [that] suggest that concerns of the spirit are already returning to the human disciplines. (8)

This is another indication that transpersonal currents run through anthropology's research stream and particularly the relationship between rituals and sacred states. I also note a process of *hybridity* (i.e., the "journey to join science and the sacred" [Heron 1998, 8]) and the potential for researching transpersonal happenings from the insider's orientation (in this case, from inside Western culture; Heron 1998; Heron and Lahood 2007; Reason 1993; Reason and Rowan 1981; Rothberg 2000).

Lincoln and Denzin (1994) conclude that "a sacred science is certain to make its effects felt within the emerging discourses of qualitative research" (583) and include Peter Reason's (1993) call to "consider the more elemental spiritualities of these [anthropological] inquiry processes" and how "shamanism, magic and the world of spirit" connect with science and our own spiritual development as persons (583). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) point to the future and a "seventh moment" concerned with the "development of sacred textualities" (3) and the creation of "sacred ethnography" (1055). It is important for anthropol-

ogy to move in this direction, but given Lincoln and Denzin's stated ends of ecological survival and human flourishing, their statements are confusing. Transpersonal psychology as a sacred science emerged in the late '60s, and transpersonal anthropology emerged as a formal subdiscipline in the mid-'70s (Laughlin 1988; Lee 1980). Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln do not mention transpersonal science in their *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994, 2000).

We should not ignore the offspring of two important parent disciplines—social anthropology and transpersonal psychology—and its reflexive innovations that focus on the way different cultures shape and participate in transpersonal consciousness. This omission seems to fly in the face of Lincoln and Denzin's assertions of support of human and ecological flourishing, given their role as authorities on qualitative methods and information providers to research students and consumers. Whatever their reasons for this omission, they should upgrade their chapters on the fifth movement (1994) and seventh moment (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) to include forty years of the fourth force (transpersonalism).²

Many anthropologists are aware of the feedback loop between the two disciplines. Michael Winkelmann (2000) writes, "The experiences produced within religious traditions were characterized by earlier anthropologists as awe, trance, or ecstasy; now these phenomena are referred to as altered states of consciousness (ASC) or transpersonal consciousness" (6). This reframing is important because many religious cultures, movements, and spiritual groups and their rituals, beliefs, worldviews, practices, and numinous happenings that anthropology studies can now

potentially be understood as transpersonal systems or events (Ferrer 2002), and ASCs or transpersonal encounters can be studied empirically.

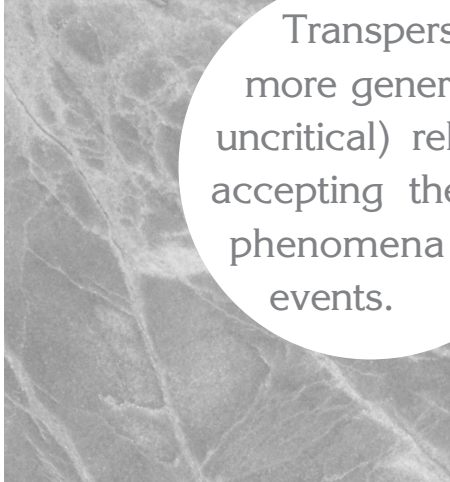
Another important and controversial fusion of science with the sacred is that of empirical science with spiritual events and experience (Ferrer 2002; Rothberg 1993; Wulff 2000). This hybridizing frame of reference has further validated the culture and practices in question (because of the Western valuing of empirical science) and is an almost polar reversal of the antireligious experience strain in early anthropology and the social sciences in general.

Transpersonal researchers tend to have a more generous and informed (although not uncritical) relationship with visionary states, accepting them as genuine psychocultural phenomena and important data-bearing events. Other movements and institutions as diverse as neopaganism, Alcoholics Anonymous, New York–Haitian Voodoo, Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, underground ayahuasca churches, spiritual feminism, and Jamaican midwifery cults can be viewed as transpersonal systems of healing, knowledge, and cradles for the shaping of religious identity. The downside is that empiricism is a product of the Enlightenment's Cartesian worldview.

Some critical issues

Transpersonalism, as a movement in Western critical science, is open to revision from all major intellectual trends (e.g., depth psychology, philosophy of science, feminism, postmodernism) and is as fiercely self-conscious and self-critical as anthropology has become (Ferrer 2002; Heron 1998; Rothberg and Kelly 1998). Transpersonal theorists have elaborated psychocultural pathologies associated with transpersonal transformation and spiritual practice (e.g., Grof 1985; Scotton, Chinen, and Battista 1996; Wilber, Engler, and Brown 1986). Not surprisingly, many divergent fires burn in the transpersonal camp, and hotly contested issues are at the heart of the discipline. As a subdiscipline, transpersonal anthropology must also grapple with these issues.

An example of the territory under contestation is the historical relation between perennial philosophy, transper-



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sonal theory, and current participatory revisions in transpersonalism (Ferrer 2002; Heron 1998; Kremer 1996; Tarnas 1991). Another is transpersonalism's historical and somewhat uncritical fealty to Hindu and Buddhist thought, an issue that has also caused debate among commentators theorizing about transpersonal selves because of the gendered, authoritarian, and world-denying aspects of these institutions and their idealized importation into Western culture (Heron 1992; Morris 1994; Winkelman 1993).

With these conflicts in mind, I return to Lincoln and Denzin's failure to represent transpersonal science in their discussions of sacred science and the potential for some researchers to dissociate from

Abraham Maslow, the founder of transpersonal psychology, "Wish[ed] to dissociate such [mystical experiences] from their traditional religious contexts and to make them available for scientific investigation. Maslow called them *peak experiences*" (Wulff 2000, 422–23). Jorge Ferrer (2002) suggests that Maslow's "peak experiences may be seen, at their best, as *secularized spiritual phenomena*" (38). However, dissociation from their religious contexts does not necessarily reduce these experiences to secularity. It potentially unhooks them from the hegemonies and genealogies of power co-present in religious institutions (Asad 1993; Heron 1998). To complicate things further, Reason claims that the participatory model (after Heron 1992) "avoids the 'transpersonal' fallacy that the person is no more than an illusion on the way to Nirvana" (277). Reason conflates transpersonalism with Ken Wilber (as many do) and, therefore, transperson-

an 'extraordinary experience' is in fact the normal outcome of genuine participation in social and ritual performances through which social realities are generated or constituted" (8–9).

I agree that spiritworlds are psychosocially constituted, as Young and Goulet (1994) suggest. However, multidimensional accounts of reality are not limited to New Age thinking and can be a central aspect of nonordinary disclosures in traditional cultures. An example from Islam is that, during the Night of the Miraj, Muhammad was spirited by the archangel Gabriel through nine levels of hell and up through a sequence of ecstatic heavens, culminating in an ecstatic encounter with the throne of Allah. Each year on 27 Rajab, the seventh lunar month, Muslims celebrate Muhammad's Night of the Miraj (Armstrong 1991). Another example comes from a Judaic spiritual practice incorporating a tiered cosmology. In the *Merkabah* or chariot practices, "practitioners



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the transpersonal movement in favor of the participatory turn. This may be a product of transpersonal science's early commitment to the perennial philosophy. David Wulff (2000) writes, "But with the perennial philosophy explicitly posited as its foundation, transpersonal psychology has become 'an openly religious psychology' . . . bringing it into fundamental conflict with strictly scientific views" (424). In other words, transpersonal psychology is too religious, or too sacred, to be a science. Yet, Peter Reason (1993) claims that transpersonal psychology is "fine and beautiful but essentially secular" (273) or, in other words, too worldly and not religious enough. Transpersonalism, depending on one's vantage point, pivots heretically from sacred to science, secular to sacred, both, or neither.

alism with Wilber's concept of Buddhism. Not all perennialists (e.g., Grof 1985; Huxley 1945; Maslow 1971) or transpersonal theories of personhood suffer from this conflation with Wilber's evolutionary version (e.g., Ferrer 2002; Heron 1992).

Young and Goulet (1994) similarly distance themselves from what they call *New Age cosmologies*: "We would like to distance ourselves from New Age approaches [that] tend to view reality in terms of different dimensions, and enlightenment as a movement to ever higher dimensions, either in this life or in lives to come. Because it has to do with ultimate meaning of life, the New Age movement qualifies as a religion" (8). They affirm that their anthropology of extraordinary consciousness is more about the "social-psychological study of religious experience" rather than religion: "We want to entertain the notion that what was/is seen at first as

tried to recreate Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot. After rigorous prayer and discipline, practitioners would experience themselves as ascending through the seven heavens and confronting fearful guardians until they were finally granted a vision of the throne of God" (Walsh 1995, 36).

Transpersonal anthropologists must also consider Ferrer's (2002) claim that a "subtle Cartesianism" (21) has historically and uncritically pervaded and distorted the transpersonal movement's vision in the form of intrapsychic reductionism. The subdiscipline of transpersonal anthropology (or anthropology of consciousness) can make a further contribution to transpersonal theory in these areas, especially postcolonial anthropological theory concerned with witchcraft, sorcery, and the subversive enactments of *cosmological hybridity* (Heron and Lahood 2007; Kapferer 2003).

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha

uses the concept of hybridity to show “fractures in the sovereign, unified . . . Cartesian subject at the heart of the colonial enterprise” (ctd. in Vasquez and Marquardt 2004, 58). An example of this subversive hybridity is found in James Slotkin’s (1955/2001) study of the Native American church, in which a Comanche informant, when speaking of his peyote visions, said, “The white man talks about Jesus; we talk to Jesus” (132). Christianity is blended with the peyote vision and therefore coexists, subverts, and contests via a claim to greater experiential contact with Jesus through the traditional religious plant medium.

Bhabha (1994) writes, “Hybridity is heresy” (225). For the anthropologist, these moments of co-penetration are heretical to secular materialism, but they also suggest a form of blasphemy threatening to replace that religious and cultural tradition’s “claim on purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription. . . . [I]t is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular, it is a moment when the subject matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation” (225). Bhabha’s comments relate to fundamentalist Islam’s reaction to Salman Rushdie’s (1988) *The Satanic Verses*.

When a culture’s alterity brushes off on anthropologists as they participate in its spirit, the anthropologists become religious hybrids, or something betwixt and between the categories of scientific objectivity and “going native.” Anthropologists become a liminality in which sacred aspects of culture hyphenate and flow subversively across boundaries in their changed mindworlds.

Another problem discussed by Ferrer (2000) is that transpersonalism’s early and uncritical commitment to experientialism veils a modernist, intrapsychic construction of subjectivity—a cramping import from psychoanalysis and the materialist view of the world—and individual experience, creating an alienated and inflated spiritual integration. However, loosening them from their intrapsychic and individual moorings allows them to become participatory transpersonal events, or multi-located and shared social events of consciousness.³ Ferrer writes, “The epistemic approach

conceives transpersonal phenomena as (1) *events*, in contrast to intrasubjective experience, (2) *multilocal*, in that they arise in different loci, such as an individual, a relationship, a community, or a place” (224). If we accept Ferrer’s account, then the participatory turn in transpersonal psychology brings us back to the traditional stomping ground of social anthropology because these sacred events are described as partially located in, springing from, or corresponding to social processes, power, relationships, and culturally constructed sites of transformation (i.e., socially embedded transpersonalism).

Anthropology has a wealth of resources to use to study the sociocultural aspects of transpersonal events, such as Max Weber’s (1965) studies on the social construction, economy, and routinization of charisma; Turner’s (1969) studies on thresholds, communitas, and liminality; the study of ritual and belief; cross-cultural study of the dynamics of ritual spirit possession (often involving women and childbirth, and a category of religious practice understudied in transpersonalism); the examination of contested religious sites and sacred places; and the revision of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft in postcolonial and postcolonial theory (e.g., Kapferer 2003; Taussig 1987). *Transpersonal anthropology* is simply defined as the cross-cultural study of transpersonal states of consciousness (Laughlin 1988). An innovation pursued by anthropologists of consciousness that departs from early anthropology’s monophasic bias—what Turner (1992) calls anthropology’s “religious frigidity” (11)—is their willingness to enter states of consciousness anomalous to scientific rationalism as a demanding form of participant observation and data gathering.

The challenge to cognocentrism

According to Laughlin (1988), earlier Eurocentric positivistic researchers maintained and developed an uncritical commitment to a “systematic bias borne of conditioning to what we call ‘monophasic’ consciousness characteristic of the enculturation of [W]estern observers” (5). Such is the bias in Western culture, according to Charles Laughlin,

John McManus, and Jon Shearer (1993), that we created a research orientation in which we fail or refuse to consider other forms of consciousness in which data may be gathered. They compare this research bias with polyphasic cultures, citing the example of Tibetan Buddhism, in which gathering information in nonordinary states was legitimate and culturally sanctioned. Dreams, waking states, and meditation are consulted in relation to their native reality and cosmography (191).⁴ Transpersonal researchers seek to reduce this cultural bias. The Western bias may be similar to the prejudice anthropologist Michael Harner (1980) points out when he writes, “[I]t is extremely difficult for an unprejudiced judgment to be made about the validity of (non-ordinary) experiences” (xvii) from the contrasting ordinary state of consciousness. He refers to this judgment as

the counterpart of ethnocentrism between cultures. But in this case it is not the narrowness of someone’s *cultural* experience that is the fundamental issue, but the narrowness of someone’s *conscious* experience. The persons most prejudiced against a concept of non-ordinary reality are those who have never experienced it. This might be termed *cognocentrism*, the analogue in consciousness of ethnocentrism. (xvii)

Keeping a Janus face in alterity

Participant observation—the stock-in-trade of anthropological fieldworkers—binds two divergent research approaches, or faces. One face, *unobtrusive observation*, is “rooted in the positivist tradition” and the emulation of natural science (Young and Goulet 1994, 312). It requires “a particular kind of distancing, affective neutrality and abstraction to events in the world” (Tambiah 1990, 105). The observations of natural science should take place in a world in which a progressive atomization of information should break down into molecules and atoms, and then atoms should break into subatomic building blocks whose interactions should be measurable and predictable (Tambiah 1990). Conversely, the *participatory* face of the anthropologist’s inquiry apparatus is “grounded in the phenomenological interpretive tradition in the philosophy of social sciences [and] is directed towards ‘com-

prehension” (Young and Goulet, 312). Tambiah writes that “the discourse of participation can be framed in terms of sympathetic immediacy, performative speech acts, and ritual action” and will emphasize “affective communication and the language of emotions” (108).

These two orderings of reality are simultaneously available to anthropological fieldworkers and, when coupled with informed subjectivity (i.e., critical subjectivity or intense reflexivity), can lead to the “royal road to an authentic, rather than fictitious, objectivity” (Devereux 1967, xvi–xvii). When anthropologists are no longer satisfied to fill in “the process of interpretation” with alienated “surmises” (Young and Goulet 1994, 312) and instead come down from their objectivist trees and participate, different worlds can become available.

A brush with the lore

One anthropologist getting out of her tree, so to speak, was Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1975), who used her personal experience of conversion to the Church of John Maranke as her central ethnographic method. This conversion, or metanoia, was “dramatic, resulting in a moment of shock in which even the physical terms of existence seemed to alter” (61). It was a “reality shaping” procedure that, for members, was “authoritative and irreversible” and admitted them into a “new spirit world” and “another order of reality” (61–67). Victor Turner notes in the book’s foreword that her fieldwork, in a “traditional sense,” ended with her conversion (Jules-Rosette 1975, 8). Then, a form of transpersonal observation in the deep play of participation began. When describing the church’s trance-inducing chants, which were used to promote spiritual transcendence, Jules-Rosette cites Charles Tart (1971), an early contributor to the transpersonal movement, who advanced the important and useful idea of state-bound or state-specific learning. She writes, “It is simple to recognize and understand a trance–chant state when one is experiencing it, but difficult to transmit it in a convincing way outside of the sung medium itself” (152). Anthropologists can have trouble translating state (bound, specific, rela-

tive) learning into a different cognitive sphere (i.e., book learning).

William James and multiple real worlds

The participatory approach in anthropology owes much to the American psychologist William James, who argued that reality was subjective and that waking consciousness was one mode of being among other modes, which he called *sub-universes*. The worlds of science, art, and dreams, the “idols of a tribe,” and even hallucination or madness was each “real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with attention” (James 1890, 283). Furthermore, the “will to attend to what is real within a sub-universe” is a “psychology of belief and disbelief” (Young and Goulet 1994, 316). James represents the second-generation American Romantic movement, and his work was also a major influence on transpersonalism in the turn of the millenium (e.g., McDermott 1993; Taylor 1996).⁵ He writes:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing with our accounts with reality. (James 1902/1980, 388)

Working from James’ basic premise of sub-universes, Alfred Schutz (1962/1973) developed the idea of *multiple realities* by placing phenomenology at the heart of research into social reality—an idea later developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967). Schutz unhooked James’ insight from its restrictive psychological moorings and, coupled with phenomenology and intentionality, developed his theory of “finite provinces of meaning” (Schutz

1962/1973, 230; see Bellah 1970, 242; Tambiah 1990, 101–10; Young and Goulet 1994, 316). According to Schutz (1962/1973), pragmatic, everyday, ordinary reality is the prevailing lifeworld, or “the epoch of the natural attitude” (229). Belief in this everyday world is maintained by suspending “doubt in its existence” (229); however, when one suspends one’s investment in this world, it is possible to engage intentionally in other realities, including the “various supernatural worlds of mythology and religion” (207).

Finite provinces of meaning have their own peculiar cognitive styles, accent of reality, and tensions of consciousness. Each has a unique epoch, self-experience and form of sociability, and relationship with cosmic time (Schutz 1962/1973, 230–31). Passing from one province to another requires a leap into a new cognitive style (Tambiah 1990). Schutz uses the word *shock*: “[W]e are not ready to abandon our attitude toward (the paramount reality of everyday life) without having experienced a specific shock [that] compels us to break through the limits of this ‘finite’ province of meaning and shift the accent of reality to another one” (231). Robert Bellah (1970) uses Schutz’s ideas to argue for the reality of multiple religious domains:

Basic to Schutz’s idea is that reality is never simply given, it is constructed. The apprehension of reality is always an active process involving subject and object. Multiple realities arise because of the variety of modes of consciousness and schemas of interpretation that link the two. Schutz pointed out that besides the world of everyday life, which is the social world par excellence, there is the world of dreams, the world of art, the world of science, the world of religion. By showing that these worlds are partially autonomous and irreducible one to the other Schutz gave another powerful argument for the openness and multiplicity of the human spirit. (242)

To investigate these modes of consciousness and multiple realities, James (1909/1978) developed the method of *radical empiricism*, which states that only that which is directly experienced can be included in one’s account of reality. James introduced a radical strain of research in which one’s own experience becomes a valid form of data (a serious

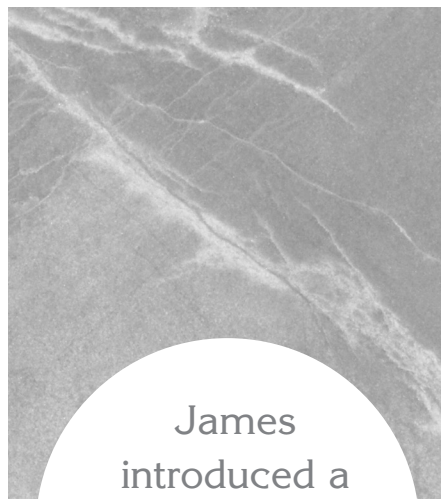
challenge to detached objectivity) and an approach applicable to anthropologists. For example, Michael Jackson (1989) presses the method:

A radical empirical method includes the experience of the observer and defines the experimental field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data. (4)

In Jackson's (1989) hands, James's radical empiricism appears to move beyond pedestrian social participation and the "ethnographer's interactions with those he or she lives with and studies" (3). Jackson's participatory anthropology draws from theoretical physics, which collapsed the boundary between observer and observed in the 1920s: "The physicist participates in the reality under investigation; his or her methods alter or even constitute it. As Werner Heisenberg wrote, 'We can no longer speak of the behaviour of the particle independently from the process of observation'" (Jackson, 3).

In a similar discussion of "multiple orderings of reality," Tambiah (1990) points out that participation has an important role in modern physics. "In that special sense, 'participation' has become part of, and incorporated into, the scope of 'scientific rationality'" (Tambiah 1990, 110). He writes that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity (the wave/particle paradox) "construct a participatory reality" in which "no elementary quantum phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is a registered [observed] phenomenon, and . . . this act of registration or recording has an inescapable consequence for what you can say about the electron" (110).

These ideas sound a death knell for Cartesian dualism and its clunky, alienated universe and give credence to radical participatory approaches in anthropological research (we are always already participating). However, Jackson (1989) notes that anthropologists do not study electrons; they participate with human beings in an interplay of intersubjective and interactive reciprocal relationships, adding infinite degrees of complexity to the task of human research. Nevertheless, "participation is very much in place" in the world of qualitative science and is



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preeminent "as a mode of relating to and constructing reality." This preeminence finds its zenith "when describing aesthetic or religious orientations" because of its "holistic and configurational grasping of totalities as integral to aesthetic enjoyment and mystic awareness" (Tambiah 1990, 106). Tambiah writes that the "bridge" to this mystical participation is found in the "interconnectedness between persons" and nature:

When the Trobriand Islanders relate their myths of origins in terms of emerging from holes in the ground or being associated to primordial rock . . . when Americans young and old, terrified by nuclear devastation and industrial waste turn out in droves to protect their environment and their ecology, their flora and their fauna; when Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, waxed eloquent in the presence of, and communion with, nature . . . in all these instances, we have manifestations of "participation" among, people, places, nature and objects. And people participate in each other as well: the bonding and relation between parents and children, between kinsmen and the ties of blood and amity; the transmission

of charisma . . . between a Buddhist saint and his followers; or between the Thai royal family and their subjects; the Indian concept of *darshan* of a deity whose eyes fall upon the worshippers as much as the worshippers view their deity—all these are intimations of participation. (107–8)

Early Western theoretical physicists used Hindu and Buddhist religious imagery to describe their quantum participatory universe. This reordering of the Western materialistic universe into a participatory cosmos tinged with a pan-Hindu gloss dripped down to the psychedelic counterculture and became an important feature of early transpersonalism. A quantum, holistic, participatory universe clothed in Eastern mystical terms and knowable through participatory nonordinary states of consciousness was a radical cosmogenic rebirth out of the Cartesian epoch. In *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra (1975) parallels and hybridizes the new physics with Eastern mysticism:

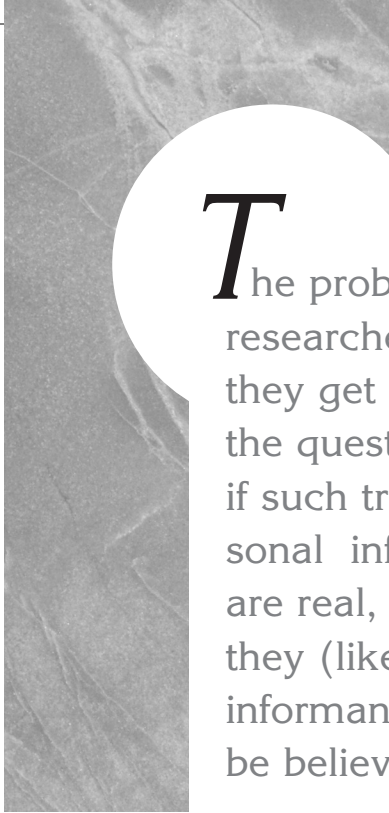
The general notions about human understanding . . . [that] are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of things wholly unheard of, or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and in Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What we shall find is an exemplification, and a refinement of old wisdom. (Julius Robert Oppenheimer, ctd. in Capra 1975, 18)

For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory . . . [we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha or Lao Tzu have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence. (Niels Bohr, ctd. in Capra 1975, 18)

The great scientific contribution in physics that has come from Japan since the last war may be an indication of a certain relationship between philosophical ideas in the tradition of the Far East and the philosophical substance of quantum theory. (Werner Heisenberg, ctd. in Capra 1975, 18)

Ethnobotanical inquiry

Another notable participatory innovation emerged in anthropology when fieldworkers began to purposefully ingest the botanical substances people from their host cultures used in traditional religious practices. There had been reports of explorers, ethnobota-



The problem for researchers, after they get past the question of if such transpersonal informants are real, is if they (like human informants) can be believed.

nists, and pharmacologists engaging in this form of inquiry since the nineteenth century (e.g., Furst and Schaefer 1998). Ethnobotanists explore the relationship between culture and plants, including psychotropic substances. Richard Evans Schultes, director of the Harvard Botanical Museum, conducted ethnobotanical research on peyote and *ololiuhqui*, the Nahuatl word for morning glory seeds (Furst and Schaefer).

Many early reports focused on peyote, and several anthropologists began to explore the hallucinatory trance and its relationship with myth, symbolism, and cosmology (e.g., La Barre 1938; Slotkin 1955/2001). Barbara Myerhoff (1974) ingested peyote, and her shaman friend Ramon, as a hybrid “half-man, magic bird” creature, introduced her to the following peyote “booth”:

He led me to the next episode which presented as an oracular, gnome-like creature of macabre viscosity. I asked it *the question*, the one that had not been out of my mind for months. “What do the myths *mean*?” He offered his reply in mucid tones, melting with a deadly portentousness that mocked my seriousness. “The myths signify—nothing. They *mean* themselves.” Of course! They were themselves, nothing equivalent, nothing translated, nothing taken from another more familiar place to distort them. They had to be accepted in their own terms. I was embarrassed as that as an aspirant anthropologist I had to be told this basic axiom of the discipline. (42)

It is challenging and invigorating that a respected anthropologist such as Myerhoff can gather data on the nature of myth from an informant fitting the description of a “gnome-like creature of macabre viscosity” speaking in mucousy tones. The problem for researchers, after they get past the question of if such transpersonal informants are real, is if they (like human informants) can be believed. Other researchers use a similar approach to study several cultures and their religious, psychotropic plant use. Harner (1973) writes that the reason anthropologists long “underestimated the importance of hallucinogenic substances in shamanism and religious experience was that very few had partaken themselves of the native psychotropic materials (other than peyote) or had undergone the resulting subjective experiences so critical, perhaps paradoxically, to the empirical understanding of their meaning to the peoples they studied” (vii).

Stanislav Grof (1988) writes that the anthropological exploration of the ritual use of psychedelic plants in the 1960s and '70s seems to confirm the belief systems of “aboriginal cultures, while at the same time undermining many of the fundamental assumptions of Newtonian–Cartesian science” (282), which is where empirical science is grounded. Harner (1973) writes:

When I first undertook research among the Jivaro in 1956–57, I did not fully appreciate the psychological impact of the *Banisteriopsis* drink upon the native view of reality, but in 1961 I had occasion to drink the hallucinogen in the course of fieldwork with another Upper Amazon Basin tribe. For several hours after the brew, I found myself, although awake, in a world literally beyond my wildest dreams. I met bird-headed people, as well as dragon-like creatures. I enlisted the services of other spirit helpers in attempting to fly though the far reaches of the galaxy. Transported into a trance where the supernatural seemed natural, I realized that anthropologists, including myself, had profoundly underestimated the importance of the drug in affecting native ideology. (16–17)

Harner (1973) points out that a “surge of interest” (vii) in Western cultures regarding these psychotropic plants generated a renewed interest among anthropologists in the role such substances played in other societies. There

was widespread interest in shamanic practices in the early '60s counterculture (Bourguignon 1973; Lewis 1971; Myerhoff 1974; Noll 1992; Rothberg 1993). Ioan Lewis (1971) writes that, in this subculture, “far from being dismissed as excessive crudities of questionable religious value, the trance and possession experiences of exotic peoples are seriously considered, and often appropriated as exciting novel routes to ecstasy” (17). Stacy B. Schaefer and Peter T. Furst (1996) believe this desire to experience another reality among youth culture was related to America’s war in Vietnam:

But something else was going on in the same decade. There developed a burgeoning interest, mainly among young people, and not only in the United States, in exploring “inner worlds” and “alternate realities” through the use of psychedelic substances.

It was in the '60s, at a time when, coincidentally, America was losing an innocence it may never have possessed but which many people bought into, by involving itself in what was to become its most divisive and unpopular war, that the inner journey and the search for instant chemical Nirvanas became a growth industry. (507)

These hallucinogenic peak experiences are axiomatically clothed in Buddhist terms by Schaefer and Furst (1996) as *chemical Nirvanas*, which is testimony to the marriage of Eastern religion with peak experiences, humanism, and Buddhism in pre-transpersonal counterculture. However, “[t]he affinity the ‘hippie’ counter-culture feels with the American Indian is well known. Its ephemeral psychedelic ‘churches’ have posed as recoveries of the spirituality of the Amerindian” (Elwood 1973, 18). Camille Paglia (2003) compares the countercultural ferment to the “transnational mystery religions” of the Greco-Roman-Hellenistic period and roots hippie religious drug use to the Eleusinian mystery cults (21; see Dodds 1965; Elwood 1973; Morris 1994). Bourguignon (1973) suggests an amalgam: Buddhist-Hindu cosmology (already hybridized with the new physics) and Native American sacramental drug use, or a fusion between ancient and modern cosmologies and innovative rituals. This hints at a cosmological hybrid emerging in the American context and sprouted by

the psychedelic counterculture. In this moment of strange fusions and cross-overs, the transpersonal movement comes into being.

Biogenetic structuralism and symbolic penetration

Another important participatory research approach in anthropology developed in the 1970s is biogenetic structuralism (e.g., d'Aquili 1985; d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus 1979; Laughlin and d'Aquili 1974). This interdisciplinary and experiential approach combines "interpretive anthropology with the contributions of the neurosciences, the cognitive sciences, and transpersonalism" (Young and Goulet 1994, 304). Charles Laughlin is involved with a group that researches ritual, altered states and "symbolic penetration" (1988, 21) and transpersonal states from a biogenetic structuralist approach (e.g., Laughlin 1988; Laughlin and d'Aquili 1974; Laughlin, McManus, and Shearer 1983). This group is "interested in how symbolism operates in the neurocognitive mediation of religious experience" (Laughlin 1990, 160). From this perspective, Laughlin has explored Tibetan Buddhist *Dumo* meditation (1994) and written articles about the methods and training of transpersonal anthropologists.

The basis of symbolic penetration is that "direct experiences may be evoked by the symbolic stimuli in the environment" (Laughlin 1988, 21). Such direct experiences play an important part in ethnographers' understanding the mindworlds of their host cultures. "[T]ranspersonal anthropology is required for a full description of the experiences upon which the cosmologies of many non-European cultures are grounded" (Laughlin 1994, 102). Laughlin (1988) advocates a transpersonal phenomenology whereby the fieldworker "can use his or her own mind as a laboratory experiment with the symbolic processes that appear to be operating in the institution being observed" (22). Certain universal cognitive structures lend themselves to this process and allow ethnographers to experience similar cognitive processes as the natives when they engage in hosts' cognitive

restructuring practices, such as dance, meditation, and ritual (1988, 22).

Much of biogenetic structuralism concerns itself with the operations and processes of stimulating the subsystems in the autonomic nervous system, which appear to accompany many religious and sacred altered states (d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus 1979). Meditative and ritual practice creates a vague sense of oneness; "what this oneness signifies and unites is expressed by the mythic system of meaning in which the religious ritual is embedded" (d'Aquili 1985, 26).

This experience is coupled with the intensely affective, "oceanic" experience which has been described during various meditation states as well as at certain nodal points of ritual. During intense meditative and ritual experiences . . . the experience of the union of opposites is expanded to the experience of the total union of the self and other, or, as it is expressed in the Christian tradition, the Union of self with God. (d'Aquili 1985, 26)

Participant comprehension

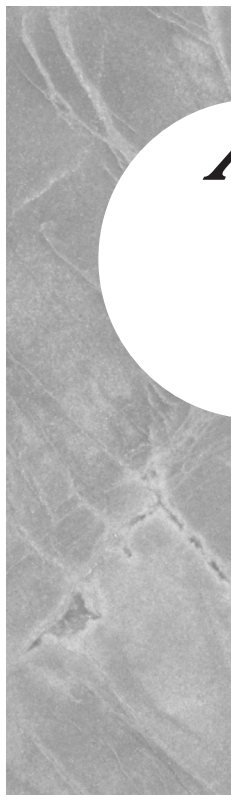
Anthropologists engaged in participatory approaches can experience unusual states of consciousness that are catalyzed when they intentionally entrain themselves through a host culture's ritual and healing practices. Greater participation in cultural practices can lead to "transpersonal participant comprehension" (Laughlin 1994, 102). Anthropologists plying their trade in these fields of waking dreams include,

as data, moments of transrational co-penetration of or absorption by a host culture's autonomous imaginal world and the anthropologist's novel penetration of, or absorption by, the host's alterity. Price-Williams (1992) writes that "the imaginative world is experienced as autonomous" and that the anthropologist is "getting involved in an already created process" (248).

Examples of this approach include the *big dream* that Larry Peters (1981) experienced as an apprentice to Nepalese shamanic procedures; Carol Laderman's (1991) bodily experience of the *inner winds* of Malay shamanism; the ingestion of psychotropic substances within a prescribed cultural setting as a form of data gathering (e.g., Myerhoff's [1973] description of being impaled on the Mayan Tree of Life after ingesting peyote with the local Huichol); active participation in healing rituals, such as seeing a spirit emerge from the back of patient in West Africa (Turner 1992); the conversion-as-inquiry experience of Jules-Rosette (1975), and engagement with Buddhist meditation training as a form of phenomenological anthropological inquiry into Buddhist mindworlds (Laughlin 1994).

Some anthropologists report unintentionally slipping into other worlds. For example, Bruce Grindal (1983) reports unaware and accidental participation in ritual:

On 23 October 1967, in the town of



Anthropologists engaged in participatory approaches can experience unusual states of consciousness that are catalyzed when they intentionally entrain themselves through a host culture's ritual and healing practices.

Tuma, Ghana, I attended a “death divination” performed by the praise singers of a Sisila funeral, the *goka*, over the corpse of the chief of Tumu. Near midnight came a moment in which I saw before my eyes and felt within my body a phenomena totally unnatural to my previous experience. . . . I “witnessed” the raising of the dead. (60)

The *goka*, “praise singers,” were bent over the corpse beating upon their hoes of iron and singing *baylila* (“man songs”). As they sang they danced forward and back, approaching the corpse they lowered their heads, as though to speak into the ear of the dead man; then they would jerk their heads and move a few steps backward.

Then I saw the corpse jolt and occasionally pulsate, in a counterpoint to the motions of the *goka*. At first I thought my mind was playing tricks with my eyes. . . . The anticipation left me breathless, gasping for air. In the pit of my stomach I felt a jolting and tightening sensation, which corresponded to moments of heightened visual awareness.

Then I felt my body become rigid. My jaws tightened and at the base of my skull I felt a jolts as though my head had been snapped off my spinal column. A terrible and beautiful sight burst upon me. Stretching from the amazingly delicate fingers and mouths of the *goka*, strands of fibrous light played upon head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in frenzy. As I watched, convulsions in the pit of my stomach tied not only my eyes but also my whole being into this vortex of power. It seemed that the very floor and walls of the compound had come to life, radiating light and power, drawing the dancers in one direction and then another. Then a most wonderful thing happened. The talking drums on the roof of the dead man’s house began to glow with a light so strong that it drew the dancers to the rooftop. The corpse picked up the drumsticks and began to play. (68)

Conclusion

There has been a gradual shift over the past one hundred years in the recognition and value of researching such phenomena by participating in them. This trend is concomitant with sweeping changes in Western notions of reality (Laughlin 1988) and a movement away from conformity to an external “higher truth” and toward a subjective turn in the wider culture (Heelas et al. 2005). A growing cadre of anthropologists have moved a long way from discounting or pathologizing such states, and Berger’s (1969) caution to the would-be

visionary or emic anthropologist on the political dangers of going cognitively “native” and its penalty—dropping out of the “universe of discourse” altogether (23) and slipping into academic anomie—have become largely redundant.

Conversely, the penalty for not dropping the modernist mindworld is to restrict oneself to the slim pickings gathered in one cognitive sphere. Suspending this sphere allows anthropologists to participate in other realities and access vital ethnographic information, insights into transpersonal realities, and a reassessment of the boundaries of the human and more-than-human condition. Most of these participatory approaches (e.g., purposeful conversion, plant ingestion, ritual participation, meditation, shamanic training) emerged with what Bourguignon (2003) calls the *psychedelic revolution* that, coupled with the 1960s American counterculture, begot the transpersonal movement. This movement in Western science provided a legitimizing academic forum for the research of sacred states from a user-friendly standpoint and for criticizing the shortcomings of the Cartesian mindworld. The transpersonal journey continues into the second phase of its intervention with the participatory turn, the uprooting of subtle constrictions from previous epochs, and thus remains true to its liberationist impulse.

NOTES

1. I acknowledge two invaluable sources for this article: Charles Laughlin’s *Transpersonal Anthropology: Some Methodological Issues* (1988) and David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet’s *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters* (1994).

2. An early expression of the subdiscipline appeared in *Phoenix: The Journal of Transpersonal Anthropology* (Lee 1980; Laughlin 1988) and morphed into *Anthropology of Consciousness*, a journal and society affiliated with the American Anthropological Association.

3. A similar relocation occurred when sociologist Alfred Schutz depsychologized William James’s insight into subuniverses by lifting them out of their intrapsychic housing and relocating them in socially active spheres; see the *William James and multiple real worlds* section.

4. I applaud their commitment to exploring polyphasic realities but also note that Buddhism is a strongly gendered religion, and their techniques leading to Nirvana likely complement the exploration of a masculin-

ised alterity by male monastics. Therefore, the final revelatory apex of this alterity is prohibited by gender. This could be argued to represent a gender-driven, women-denying, transpersonal gatekeeping and transcendental sexism.

5. The New England transcendental movement appears to be the religious expression of several migrant flows, blendings, and amalgams among Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, nature worship, Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s German romanticism, and Swedenborgism.

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