Extraordinary Experience in Modern Contexts

Edited by

Deirdre Meintel
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***Kosmos*: les collections du monde**

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éditions@anthro, Montréal, 2020
https://anthropo.umontreal.ca/departement/editionsanthro/
Photo de couverture: *Labyrinth*, Agatha Campan, 2016 (used by kind permission of the artist).

ISBN : 978-2-9818195-5-0

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Introduction

Deirdre Meintel, Véronique Béguet and Jean-Guy A. Goulet

Vivid dreams, visions, hearing voices, premonitions, kinaesthetic sensations, relationships with invisible entities have long been the subject of anthropological inquiry, as for example, in studies of shamanism and spirit possession. Most such studies are carried out in societies unlike our own located in faraway locales. This book looks at such phenomena as they are experienced in contemporary modern settings where they are not generally considered legitimate sources of knowledge. Those who experience them often never share them with anyone but close friends or family. In modern contexts – understood as those where rationalism and a scientific world view predominate – they have received relatively little attention from anthropologists; indeed, some have found that studying them close to home may be risky for their reputation as researchers (Meintel 2007; Neitz 2002). However, the winds have shifted in recent decades, and we believe that the time is ripe for bringing anthropological perspectives to bear on experiences of the extraordinary in contexts, that by their very modernity, resemble those in which anthropologists normally dwell.

In this book, we speak of "extraordinary" experiences without limiting them to a particular domain, such as religion or for that matter, mental health. As several of the chapters to follow show, the extraordinary in the form of spirits, voices, etc., may present itself in contexts where it is completely unexpected. Historically, though, until the Protestant Reformation and the Long Reformation within the Catholic Church (McGuire 2008), extraordinary experiences were part and parcel of religious life. After that, Protestantism associated ghostly apparitions with the devil and generally ceased to acknowledge them (Hufford 2005). The Catholic Church hung onto the notion of miracles, but only as authenticated by institutional authority. Saints were capable of miracles, but now had to be

recognized by a long formal process of the centralized Church rather than by popular acclaim. Nonetheless, a tradition of popular piety kept alive the devotion to homegrown saints and belief in their miracles.[1]

As science based on a naturalist ontology became ever more hegemonic, religion and extraordinary experience came to be seen as non-cognitive and irrational (Hufford 2005). Evans-Pritchard noted that the prevailing rationalism of the discipline in his day was so strong that his own conversion to Catholicism in 1954 was seen as something of a betrayal by his anthropology colleagues at the London School of Economics, as was the case with Victor and Edith Turner's in 1958 with their friends and colleagues at Manchester (Larsen 2014). More recently, Ronald Hutton, an historian and tenured professor at the University of Bristol, published a history of Wicca in England (2001), only to find himself professionally ostracized for some years.

> This disparaging response did not derive from concerns about Hutton's methodology or the accuracy of his conclusions and arguments, none of which raised serious concern among his peers. Rather, it stemmed from the fundamental prejudice against Wicca and other forms of alternative spirituality that permeate much of the academy. This sentiment holds that beliefs in magic or forms of occultism are essentially irrational and that those who study them must therefore share in this fundamental irrationality (Ferraro and White 2019: 9).

However, as the authors add, things have changed, and Hutton's work has since been given the recognition it deserved (2019: 9-10).

[1] We note that Pope Francis has given recognition to popular piety in recent years, for example: http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-theology-of-the-people-according-to-pope-francis-83384/

At present, few anthropologists feel compelled to declare the falsity of religious beliefs as does Lett (2003). It seems more common to approach the beliefs of others in a rationalist framework while "bracketing out" the issue of the truth or falsity of their beliefs – only to find that such beliefs "work" in their context and that misfortunes from invisible sources may even affect the anthropologist himself or herself. Such events are often profoundly challenging to the fieldworker's sense of self and his/her notions of the real, at least temporarily; as Bowie notes (2006: 7-8), the anthropologist usually manages to find rationalist explanations for her/his experience; e.g., Favret Saada (1977, 1981). We take inspiration, rather, from anthropologists such as Stoller (2004) and others whom we mention further on who are ready to learn from, not just about, the multifaceted lifeworlds of others.

In an interesting critique of the axiomatic secularism in our discipline, Charles Stewart (2001) points out the biases it carries and notes that it is common these days for anthropologists to invent strategies to enter the experience of belief without in any way committing themselves. For example, it is acceptable to be "initiated as a shaman or other sort of religious practitioner so long as one does not really believe in such a religious system, or so long as one renounces such belief later" (p. 327). To do otherwise, he adds, is to invite suspicion, citing van Binsbergen (1991) as an example. As André Mary has noted (2000), those whom anthropologists study often read their works. They take offence when an anthropologist who had seemed to share their point of view during fieldwork then uses of quotation marks (or other discursive strategies) in publications so as to signify distance from such beliefs.

Studying extraordinary experiences close to home makes such distancing manoeuvres much more difficult to sustain. Tanya Luhrmann's (1989) pioneering study of modern-day witchcraft in London, England inspired considerable resentment in Wiccan circles. Though she had been initiated into a coven, she declared in her book that she had never believed in magic (p. 18). A later researcher, Jo Pearson, found that Wiccans felt betrayed by Luhrmann's disavowal, and were wary about trusting another

anthropologist (Pearson 2001).[2] More recently, Ferraro and White (2019) noted that Wiccans were also offended "by her book's suggestion that, due to "interpretative drift[3]," magicians and Wiccans underwent a form of self-delusion …" (Ferraro and White 2019: 8). Indeed, Luhrmann sees witches as "recreating a childhood world" (1989: 18). Significantly, later scholars of Wicca and similar currents (e.g., Pearson 2001; Salomonsen 2002), situate themselves in ways that are less distanced, more nuanced and more respectful of their subject's beliefs and practices than what Luhrmann's ethnography conveyed.

The postmodernist current that has marked anthropology since the 1980s has shaken up the classic polarity between science and religion, while bringing to the forefront the fact that scientific models are constructed in particular social and political contexts (see Droogers 2002: 60). In recent years, the notion of a postsecular anthropology has gained significant traction; for example, Fountain (2013) and Merz and Merz (2015, 2017). Fountain holds that a postsecular anthropology does not yet actually exist. However, he believes that its contours are beginning to emerge in critiques of methodological atheism and in discussions of secularism and its effects on how knowledge is constructed in anthropology. Some now argue that religiously engaged scholars have an important contribution to make to the study of religious faith; among them Robbins (2015); others see that they can also contribute to debates around other themes such as violence (Meneses et al. 2014). Willerslev and Suhr posit that reason alone is an insufficient basis for anthropology:

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[2] Pearson criticizes Lurhmann on other grounds as well; i.e., giving the impression that the Wiccans she studied in London were representative of Wiccans in all of England; moreover, she holds that Luhrmann "perpetuated the customary reductionist approach used to portray the occult, magic, witchcraft, Paganism, indeed, even religion, as irrational" (2001:53).

[3] Luhrmann defines this as "the slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of interpreting events as they become involved in a particular activity. As the newcomer begins to practice, he becomes progressively more skilled at seeing new patterns in events, seeing new sorts of events as significant, paying attention to new patterns" (1989: 312).

> Sometimes a qualitative shift in perspective is required by which the fieldworker is forced to embrace what otherwise appears to be logically impossible or absurd" (2018: 65).

While their own research focuses on "disruptive" (read: "extraordinary") experiences of those such as themselves who study religious, magical or spiritual practices, the authors suggest that they may be important for those working on themes other than religion (p. 65). This is relevant in the present context, since, as we have noted, extraordinary experience can be found in non-religious contexts. In various ways that are too complex to unpack in this context, postsecularism has marked such fields as urban studies (Beaumont and Baker 2011), gender and feminist studies (Vasilaki 2015) and philosophy (Blond 1998).

The emergence of a postsecular anthropology, at least in the study of religion, coincides with an ongoing focus on experience and subjectivities in other fields of anthropology, such as migration (Giordano 2008), tourism (Sather-Wagstaff 2008) and archaeology (Joyce 2004). Moreover, social and cultural anthropologists are increasingly directing their attention to their own societies. All this suggests that taking a fresh look at extraordinary experiences in contemporary contexts offers the potential of contributing to a fruitful rethinking of some of the foundations of our discipline that is already underway.

Contemporary spiritualities in late modern contexts generally focus on experience, often with a bodily dimension, personal transformation and healing, rather than on dogmas and doctrines; experience is now a prominent focus in the study of religion in such contexts. It is noteworthy that as early as 1973, in *God is Red*, Vine Deloria Jr. characterized Native religions as experience-based as opposed to Christianity's privilege of dogma. Western esotericism is now constituted as an academic field of study in several European universities (e.g., the University of Amsterdam, the University of Exeter, the Warburg Institute, associated with the University of London, the Sorbonne). There is an emerging body of

anthropological literature on extraordinary experience in contemporary Western Europe and North America; for example, Favret-Saada (1977) on modern-day witchcraft in the Bocage (Normandy, France), Hunter and Luke (2014) on spirit contact, Hufford (2005, 2010) on sleep paralysis, near-death experiences and bereavement visits, Laplantine (1985) on clairvoyance, Bowie (2011) and Meintel (2011) on contact with the spirits of the deceased.

This recent literature presents a series of new challenges stemming from the fundamental differences between the epistemology and ontology to which academic disciplines have long subscribed and those generated by the experience of the extraordinary. How can we take such experiences seriously? How can we render them ethnographically? How to do them justice? Those questions are addressed in varying ways by a number of authors, including some contributors to this book (Béguet 2006; Bowie 2013, 2011, Dubisch 2008; Glass-Coffin 2009, 2010; Goulet 2007; Goulet and Miller 2007; Hufford 2010; Koss-Chioino and Hefner 2006; Koss-Chioino 2010; Meintel 2007, 2011; Tedlock 1991, 2011; Turner 1992, 1996; Young and Goulet 1994). We would also mention the Afterlife Research Centre, an international network of researchers committed to developing ethnographic methodologies "without explaining away" the effects of beliefs and practices around the afterlife, such as trance, mediumship, spirits and so on.[4]

Ultimately, researchers studying extraordinary experience face an ethical issue: "In the end, we owe it to ourselves and to those we try to represent, to produce an ethnography that makes 'sense' not only to us but to *them*" (Wilkes 2007: 76). This book is an effort to highlight some of the challenges of giving account of extraordinary experiences among those living in societies like our own, if not our own, where such experiences are not usually granted legitimacy. In so doing, we seek to contribute to a shift of paradigm that is already underway. The chapters that follow offer an array of approaches to

[4] http://www.afterliferesearch.co.uk/

the issues that arise when ethnographers attempt to understand and give account of the extraordinary experiences of those they study.

Béguet examines extraordinary experiences among Canadians who have experienced contact with the invisible, and whose accounts reveal distinct configurations of the world and ways of inhabiting it. The ontological approach was initially applied in studies of indigenous hunters and gatherers, with few exceptions, such as works by Clammer (2004), Schwimmer (2004), Béguet (2006). Certain authors hold that it imposes "radical alterity" on the ethnographic Other and makes their experience incommensurable with our own (Bessire and Bond 2014). However, in Béguet's hands, the ontological approach makes the extraordinary experiences of her Canadian informants comprehensible to the reader and brings them closer to everyday sensory perception.

Hufford's chapter tackles the modernist chasm between spiritual belief and science and in the process attacks the conventional polarity between modernity and spirit belief or (worse), spirit presence. He calls for dissolving the hermeneutic boundary that encapsulates spirit beliefs in other (non-modern) cultural traditions through what he terms "methodological symmetry", calling for both "first person" science and "third person science". As he puts it, science is not the problem; rather scientism is. He calls for rational, non-biased investigation of spirit encounters, and leads by example, using his own experience of sleep paralysis and that of many other North Americans, showing that in this case, "belief" arises out of actual experience, not the other way around.

The challenges that extraordinary experiences pose for the rationalist mind are the central theme of the chapters by Hanks and Habkirk. Scott Habkirk looks at how well-educated skeptics in Taiwan and Canada (including the anthropologist himself) reconcile spirit beliefs and experiences with scientific perspectives. He argues further that there is a need for developing clear intersubjective measures for sharing experiences with spirits. In a similar vein, Hanks explores the epistemological struggles of paranormal investigators in England who are striving "to convert their embodied experiences of ghosts

and hauntings into what they understand as verifiable, objective knowledge". On the one hand, they are imbued with scientism (the notion that science can explain everything in the world), and are skeptical of scientists' objectivity as well as that of mediums. At the same time, they are also the victims of scientism in that no matter what they do, there is no evidence they can gather that will satisfy its demands.

Methodological and epistemological issues concern several of the chapter authors. Mossière discusses "embodied" participant observation among Pentecostalists in Montréal and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Drawing on Scheper-Hughes and Lock's concept of embodied knowledge, she observes that "a phenomenological perspective that puts senses, emotions and affect at the core of embodied knowledge" allows the anthropologist to grasp unexplainable experience. As her chapter shows, ethnographers' personal openness can allow them to access and share in an embodied way – not necessarily in an identical way to their informants - experiences that are culturally labelled as extraordinary.

Jack Hunter shows by example how taking extraordinary experience seriously can lead to fundamental questioning of basic anthropological categories. In his close examination of spirit contact among Spiritualist mediums, he shows that it entails an experience of the self that our culture has no framework for understanding except as the outcome of intoxication or pathology. Thus, neophyte mediums, including the author, are somewhat shocked initially when they experience the expansion and porosity of the self in contact with spirits that runs counter to conventional cultural notions of the self as bounded and impermeable.

This also recalls Habkirk's example of Michelle, a Canadian woman who found her early experiences of spirit contact upsetting, as she had no framework for understanding them except as a stigmatizing occurrence. Hunter brings us back to Hufford's position that beliefs can arise out of experience rather than the reverse. Paying attention to how mediums experience the self shows how they develop notions

of the self that are different from the dominant model and allows us to raise the question as to what kind of self-conception should be considered ‘normal’.

Meintel pursues the question of intersubjectivity and looks at how participating in some of the subjective experiences of those she studied affects the totality of her fieldwork on the religious experience of Spiritualists in Montreal. As she points out, even the participative researcher is imbued with the skepticism fostered by the predominant scientism of our era as are, to some degree, Spiritualists themselves.

Finally, Jean-Guy Goulet’s epilogue offers a synthesis of the issues raised in the various chapters and outlines directions for future research and theoretical discussions opened by the work presented in this book. Here he returns to questions of epistemology as they appear in three different anthropological traditions (structuralist, interpretive and experiential) while taking up other themes such as the encounter with the Other, reflexivity and membershipping.

The epilogue opens up a series of questions that inevitably return us to classical issues in anthropology that run through all the chapters of this book: how we do fieldwork, how we produce knowledge, and how we represent this process – including the Other and ourselves – in our writing.

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Extraordinary Experience as Ways of Being in the World

Véronique Béguet

Introduction

Extraordinary experience is a term that covers a broad range of experiences, including voices, visions, kinesthetic sensations, vivid dreams, strong intuitions, out-of-body experiences, and relationships with sentient, invisible entities, to name a few. This range of experience has been called many things: exceptional, spiritual, mystical, esoteric, extra-sensorial, parapsychological, hallucinatory. All these designations put this experience outside the realm of normality and reveal the uneasiness that it provokes.

Indeed, deeply embedded in a dominant mechanistic, materialistic and naturalist ontology that excludes the possibility of their existence, the invisible, spiritual dimensions of the world reveal themselves to some people through visions, voices, feelings, intuitions, premonitions. Such experiences have led some to psychiatric facilities while, for others, they have become the foundation of an alternative contemporary spirituality, understood here as loose and complex networks of people, many of them associated with the New-Age movement—which in turn is part of the continuity and the transformation of 1960s counterculture, Western esoterism and Eastern and Indigenous traditions. For these people, unseen—spiritual—dimensions of the world offer themselves up to be seen, perceived, smelled and felt, even foreseen, through extraordinary experiences. In this chapter, I am focusing on this second group of people.

Typically, these experiences are considered as social, cultural or psychological products in the post-Enlightenment intellectual and academic culture when they are not associated with brain

dysfunction. Hufford's critique of the "cultural hypothesis" associated with spirits applies to extraordinary experiences as well:

> … in the "disenchanted" modern world, belief in the existence of spirits came to be seen as a nonrational and nonempirical product of culture. Psychological and anthropological theorizing explained naïve, non-modern spirit encounter experiences as culturally loaded imaginative events. Among modern populations such experiences were assumed to be pathological and relatively rare. [...] It has been assumed that a belief in the reality of any sort of spirit encounter could not be held by any well-educated and sane, modern person (Hufford 2010: 142).

In a study I carried out on Iban animism (2006), I declined to read spirits as a product of Iban culture, as the villagers I interviewed did not provide a monolithic view of invisible beings. However, none of them considered the said spirits as a cultural product. Whatever the relationships with them, they were talked to as part of the real (although I should note that this was 20 years ago and might have changed). Treating spirits as a sociocultural product is a subtle way to dismiss their existence and to reinstate the material world as the only true reality. It is very much part of a political battle about what is real and what is not.

In anthropology, there were for a long time only two positions around the issue of the reality of spirits. At one extreme, Lett (1997) brings up the basic qualities of science (its rationality, process of verification and falsification) and considers it an ethical duty to denounce the irrationality at the heart of religious beliefs and their lack of scientific basis. Lohman (2003a, 2003b) is largely sympathetic to this position but holds that this kind of irrationality is too widespread to simply be brushed aside. He seeks to scientifically explain what he calls supernaturalism. Other authors have provided a combination of biological or psychological and cultural explanations, using neuroscience and modern theory of cognition (for instance Laughlin with neuroscience, 1994, 2011; Greenfield 2003, with his transduction of cultural expectations via the nervous

system, and Lurhmann's "sensory overrides", 2011, to explain non-pathological hallucinations).[5]

Cultural relativism has predominated in anthropology. Those subscribing to this approach criticize the rationalists for their alleged ethnocentrism, and refuse to judge the truth of religious propositions or decide on their "rational" (and thus unverifiable by science) character. Instead, they take a middle ground that sees these propositions as social and cultural products with their own rationality. This rationality should be brought to light by researchers, along with their importance and meaning for local cultures. This posture, though *à priori* more empathetic toward local cultures, is generating increasing malaise. Behind its apparent neutrality, it often holds an implicit judgment as to the empical impossibility of such phenomena. This judgment is flagrantly obvious in certain writings, in the "if", "like", "because they believe, hold that", whenever practices or phenomena that challenge rationalism and materialism appear.

Such skepticism also flourishes in the rewriting of such practices and phenomena in terms different from those given by the groups concerned. For example, by treating what is real for those who experience them as symbolic or cultural products (B. Tedlock 2011; Béguet 2006; Henare et al. 2006; Rose 2007; Turner 2006). When analysts treat such experiences as illusions, they psychologize them or rationalize them into more acceptable form (Dubisch 2008; Glass-Coffin 2009). Hufford and Bucklin (2006) point out that spirituality is approached from a very psychological angle, as a "feeling" of the divine, whereas for many Americans (and Canadians, we might add), it is a matter of belief and personal experiences with spirits. For the Dene Tha, the source of waking dreams is exterior to humans; Goulet (1994: 32) sums up the gap between what these dreams mean

[5] I am not suggesting that Tanya Lurhmann (2011) defends a rationalist position as put forth by Lett or Lohman. However, she is caught, as are many anthropologists working with people of their own culture, with the impossibility of using cultural relativism as a convenient way to avoid the issue. In this predicament, she provides a rational explanation.

for them and how doctors see them: “With my mind I know,’’ say the Dene Tha. ‘‘With your mind you hallucinate,’’ answer the physicians.” Crépeau (1997: 7) sees a similar gap between Lévi-Strauss’ interpretation of the shaman’s efficacy and that of Quesalid, a principal informant of Franz Boas. For the former, Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he healed the sick who came to him; he healed them because he had become a great shaman. In Quesalid’s own view, he became a great shaman because he had an animal guide who helped him heal his patients. Koss-Chiono (2010) and Hufford (2010, 2005) remind us that what anthropologists treat as beliefs comes out of the experience of these groups. A re-examination of ethnographic work in general would show how the unease evoked by “irrational” practices, phenomena and beliefs is distorted, masked, rationalized, obliterated and always at the expense of local propositions to which very little credence is given.

This unease also arises from ethical considerations. Miller (2007) gives the example of an Amerindian intellectual who felt betrayed when, long after his fieldwork, an anthropologist declared himself an atheist and presented a number of practices of his community as improbable fantasies. A village inhabitant in northern Alaska pressed Edith Turner (1996) to say that his community’s practices and spirits were real. By what right, asks the author, do anthropologists decide whether a phenomenon is real or not?

I faced this ethical issue while writing my thesis about Iban animism and I decided to avoid any rewriting or reinterpretation about the existence of invisible, sentient beings. I located the existence of invisible beings at the core of my interpretation of animism: my thesis raises the vexing question of the real, instead of shovelling it under a convenient, paternalistic cultural relativism. This attracted many negative comments, but my ethical argument stands at the very core of the entire anthropological endeavour. I received some hints that I should perhaps disclose any experience of my own that might have led me to believe in the existence of invisible beings. But the flat truth, apparently extremely hard to believe, is that I didn’t. My position was entirely based on the necessity to do justice to the people, to the data that I collected. At first, I was writing an analysis

that went from feeling wrong, to taking another direction, only to be faced with this same feeling; again and again. Until one day (and I can describe exactly when and where), it suddenly hit me: my interpretation was not truthful because it relied entirely on a hidden, implicit assumption about the non-existence of invisible beings. This was very much my unquestioned personal assumption, but most importantly an integral part of the basic conceptual toolbox of anthropology; i.e., the notion that spirits (and all irrational practices and beliefs) are a social and cultural construct, i.e. not part of "real reality". I removed this assumption and could finally write my thesis, which ended up taking a cosmocentric approach. That is, an approach that posits the cosmos (including invisible beings) as the unit of analysis.

I brought this background to the study of extraordinary experiences in non-indigenous, Canadian context. I was now faced with another challenge: I could not simply endorse any particular position of people on invisible beings (or other highly controversial notions) as being the norm. In a highly materialistic, rationalistic dominant context, extraordinary experiences never ceased to exist. But they are certainly not easily dealt with, neither among our institutions, media, psychiatry or more broadly, health disciplines, nor within the social sciences. People who have such experiences have to deal with this general denial, and occasionally, outright hostility. I think that at the very core of this tension lies a political battle over what is real. It is an ontological issue. My intention is neither to solve this issue (who could?), nor to take sides. Here I acknowledge my debt to cultural relativism, although I am appropriating it in a different way, without brushing aside the vexing question of the real. Rather, I seek to explore it.

When working with such a topic, the anthropologist is summoned to clarify his or her position. Or more precisely, to consent to a position that most of the time is actually assumed to be true. When an anthropologist is drawn to this topic through personal experience, it should be made clear. This has happened to some eminent anthropologists whom I respect, but is not my experience, nor my position. I do not have a particularly clear position to defend; beyond

this, I do indeed believe that the materialistic world of natural sciences, although extremely useful and fascinating in many aspects, is limited. Beyond this, I have many questions—far more questions than answers!—that I would like to explore in a serene way, outside of political battles.

I thus enter the field of extraordinary experiences with a sympathetic, albeit perplexed approach. Hanegraaff (2013) approaches Western esoterism with perplexity; he recommends suspending judgement in an anthropological way. In my case, this means being perplexed and open to questioning, as well as sympathetic to what people's experiences might tell us and how they might enrich our world. In this chapter, I will propose that we consider the extraordinary experiences lived by the Canadians I interviewed – most of them Québécois – not as belief systems, systems of representations, or visions of the world, but as ways of being in the world and accessing different dimensions of that world. In short, to consider them as an ontological experience, which calls into question the nature of the real.

In the following section, I will draw upon ontological anthropology, a current that has been developing over the past two decades and is known mainly for revisiting animism. I will apply it to the field of extraordinary experience and will support this with concrete examples from two research projects conducted between 2009 and 2013 where I examined extraordinary experiences, the meaning given to them, and the ways in which they are integrated by the Canadians, most of them Québécois whom I interviewed. Following this, I will address the question of the real.

The Ontological Turn in Anthropology

In the last few decades, we have seen the emergence of an "ontological turn" in anthropology (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastel 2006). This "turn" derived initially from studies of hunter-gatherer societies and from the necessity of re-thinking animism; Schwimmer's 2004 and Clammer's 2004 works are exceptions; mine

(2006) is about shifting agriculturists of Borneo. As defined by Clammer et al. (2004: 4):

> … No ontology is simply a system of knowledge; it is equally, as the term itself implies, an account of a way of being in the world and a definition through practice (and not only through cognition) of what that world is and how it is constituted.

In other words, it is both a configuration of the world and a way of being in the world. In this chapter, I am mainly focusing on the first component of the definition of ontology: ways of inhabiting the world through extraordinary experience.

The "ontological turn" (Henare et al. 2006) is in keeping with the re-examination of the nature-culture dichotomy and its corollaries (dualisms of society-nature; animate-inanimate; humanity-animality; natural-supernatural; body-mind; subject-object; reason-instinct; perception-representation etc.) that was prominent in the 1980s, notably in the work of feminist authors (for instance Ortner 1974; Strathern 1980, 1991; Haraway 1991). It problematizes the first term of the nature-culture dichotomy and takes a radical shift in perspective as regards the second. "Nature" becomes an object of inquiry, and some authors call into question the predominant epistemological stance of "culture." There is then an opening to explore "ways of being in the world". Nevertheless, most of these approaches exhibit an uneasiness with any "spiritual" dimensions of "nature", a far stretch from Western dominant ontology.

A radical distancing from epistemology
and a questioning of "nature" and its corollaries

In general, the ontological turn posits itself against an anthropology centred around "worldviews", which constitutes the contemporary anthropology of culture (Clammer et al. 2004). Viveiros de Castros (2009) expresses his frustration with the dominant trend whereby many ontological issues are treated as epistemological questions, as points of view or perspectives.

Two authors put forward a very similar critique of the trap of cultural relativism, again, the dominant position in anthropology in relation to the nature-culture dichotomy. Ingold's (1996, 2000) argument is now well known. It posits that a relativist, epistemological position presents itself as a way of respecting cultural diversity, while in fact ratifying Western naturalism. It champions the idea of a single nature – the object of study of natural sciences - on the basis of which a cultural plurality – the object of anthropology – has developed:

> It is apparently necessary, therefore, to distinguish between two kinds of versions of nature: 'really natural' nature (the object of study for natural scientists) and 'culturally perceived' nature' (the object of study for social and cultural anthropologists). [...] In the formula 'nature is culturally constructed,' nature thus appears on two sides: on one as the product of a constructional process, on the other as its precondition (Ingold 1996: 118-119).

Hence, cultural relativism "does not undermine but actually reinforces the claim of natural sciences to deliver an authoritative account of how nature really works" (Ingold 2000:15).

Mol (2002) puts forth a similar argument in a different field. She reminds us that the social sciences of medicine first granted medicine exclusivity over the body and disease, carving out a space of specific competence: illness; that is, the representation of the disease by the patient. Later on, researchers began to investigate disease as a medical construct, placing it in the realm of representations. This second step is what leads us to the current state of social studies of medicine, dominated by meanings and organized around what Mol calls perspectivalism[6], the multiplicity of perspectives on disease. In perspectivalism, the words "disease" and "illness" are no longer used to contrast physical facts with personal experiences. "Instead, they differentiate between the perspectives of

[6] This should not be confused with Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism, i.e. the different points of view of the world from various human and non-human subjects/persons (in connection with their bodies).

doctors, on the one hand, and those of patients on the other" (Mol 2002, p. 10). But, as the author explains:

> In a world of meaning, nobody is in touch with the reality of diseases, everybody "merely" interprets them. There are different interpretations around, and "the disease" — forever unknown — is nowhere to be found. [...] In talk about meaning and interpretation the physical body stays untouched. All interpretations, whatever their number, are interpretations of. Of what? Of some matter that is projected somewhere. Of some nature that allows culture to attribute all these shapes to it. This is built into the very metaphor of "perspectives" itself. This multiplies the observer—but leaves the object observed alone. All alone. Untouched. (Mol 2002: 12)

The first, fundamental shift in perspective introduced by ontological anthropology could be to question the unmarked and untouched pole of the nature-culture dichotomy and all it involves: nature, the body, illness…Several authors add a theoretical proposition to their position in regard to the nature-culture dichotomy. Clammer et al. suggest that ontological references (to nature, to the human being's place in the universe, to notions of the self and the body, etc.) underlie the cultures that they inform, and are more fundamental than these cultures themselves (2004: 5-7). Thus, distinct ontological premises are the foundation for different systems (societal or cultural) and configurations of the world that are potentially conflicting. The work of the anthropologist is to shed light on these premises and open a space of dialogue between them (*op. cit.*). In the domain of re-readings of animism, Viveiros de Castro (1998) puts forward *perspectivism*, Ingold (2000) develops his dwelling perspective and Descola (2005) offers a typology of four ontologies based on their treatment of interiority/physicality. Mol (2002) suggests a praxeological ontology in the social sciences of medicine, whereas Straight (2007) proposes a semiotic ontology of miracles and extraordinary experiences. Hanere, Wastel and Holbraad (2006) argue for a methodology they call radical essentialism, which adopts local ontological premises. More recently, Latour (2016) proposed envisioning Gaia as animated by multiple agents. In short, a variety of streams form the core of this "ontological" anthropology. Beyond their diversity, all emphasize the necessity of questioning "nature"

and its corollaries as a space that is mechanistic, neutral and inert, "a realm beyond human influence, a realm where, from a human perspective, events occur spontaneously" (Tanner 2004: 206).

However, even though re-readings of animism emphasize (and rightly so) the necessity of problematizing nature, none of them applies this reasoning to invisible entities. In my work on Iban animism (Béguet 2006), I raised this issue: even though invisible entities are considered cultural constructs in the eyes of the anthropologist, they are seen by certain populations as empirical phenomena of the real. This disparity raises the question of the real, which is, it seems to me, the necessary corollary of an ontological approach. Henare et al. (2006) are of the same opinion, and propose that we take local propositions literally, such as "power *is* power." Still, they tend to limit this suggestion to objects and categories of thought. Straight (2007) takes her own path via semiotics and offers an ontological approach that situates extraordinary experience in the real, beyond human cultural, psychological, and neurological products.

Thus, ontological anthropology gives us the conceptual foundations to address the "natural" pole of the culture-nature dichotomy. Here, I will specifically focus on the mind-body dimension. Even if this road is seldom taken, it allows us to confront the question of the real, and at the same time, tackle the problem of taking other ontological premises into account, without betraying them – in particular, those that destabilize prevailing Western ontology. This chapter builds upon these thoughts, beginning with the example of contemporary alternative spiritualities.

Ways of Inhabiting the World

As Clammer and his collaborators note, to adopt an ontological approach is to move away from epistemology, from cultural representations and from what people think in order to explore, through practices not just cognition, the world in which they live and the ways they inhabit it. Poirier (2004) illustrates ways of inhabiting the world where ontologies are lived out and open on to "varieties of

true experiences". She contrasts her experience of the wind in the Western Australian Desert, as an object exterior to her physical being, with that of her Aboriginal friend who "seems to be walking 'with' the wind," (a non-human entity), consubstantial to her as they both share a common ancestral essence. Poirier's argument is in line with Ingold's dwelling perspective.

Ingold is specifically interested in going beyond the nature-culture dichotomy and explores the organism-person (both biological and cultural) as it is constituted through "progeneration," i.e. "the continual unfolding of an entire field of relationships within which different beings emerge with their particular forms, capacities and dispositions" (Ingold 2000: 142). In this continual unfolding, contrary to the constructivist perspective: "Apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view of the world but of taking up a view in it" (Ingold 1996: 121).

The dwelling perspective is a fertile approach for exploring extraordinary experiences. The latter constitute modes of dwelling in the world indeed, as well as means of "taking up a view in it." But, as we shall see, in the case of contemporary alternative spiritualities, they are part of a continual engagement with invisible dimensions of the world, within a universe made up of energy and vibrations and inhabited by invisible beings.

Although they may not be anchored in an ontological anthropology, different bodies of literature can help tackle the question of inhabiting the world. The first is the literature on embodiment, which emerged as a response to anthropological theories overlooking the body (see Strathern 1991 for example), and proposes to reach beyond the body-mind dichotomy (Scheper-Hughes and Locke 1987). It proposes an approach to the body that is mediated by culture, and thus allows sentience and sensibility to be introduced into the notion of culture (Csordas, ed., 1994). The concept of embodiment even becomes an investigative tool for the anthropologist (see, for example, Desjarlais 1994; Turner A. 2000;

Samudra 2008). For more than twenty years, then, the body and incarnate experience have become a full-fledged field of study, bypassing the mind-body dichotomy. This interest in sentience and sensibility is normally limited to the usual senses – the five western senses, with the occasional addition of those considered significant in other local contexts. David Howes and his collaborators open a space of investigation for the "extra-senses".

Through a series of edited collections, David Howes sets out to "reclaim sensation as a domain for cultural inquiry" in order "to reveal the role all senses play in mediating cultural experience" (Howes 2009: 1). The *Sixth Sense Reader* is the sixth book in the series and, contrary to the others, it deals with that "extra-sense" that is not connected to any organ. It asks the questions, "What is the sixth sense?" "Is the sixth sense ESP, electromagnetic sensitivity, intuition, revelation, gut instinct, or simply unfathomable?" and this, in different cultures. It advocates a sensographic approach, grounded in sensory experience and expression:

> It begins by reintroducing the notion of the sensorium. Used interchangeably with the words brain and mind in the early modern period, sensorium straddles the divide between mind and body, cognition and sensation. The early modern usage both echoed the ancient doctrine of 'the common sense' and foreshadowed the attempt in the late modern period to overcome the classic Western split between mind and body through the forging of such concepts as 'the mindful body' (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) and 'embodied mind'. (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1992) (Howes 2009: 221)

The author defends the holistic capacity of this notion of the sensorium, which can include not only the five usual senses of the West (or the seven senses from Philo's model), but also the "extra-senses" as well as those employed in other cultures. This notion is very useful for my work. Let me emphasize, however, that it remains anchored in the mind-body dichotomy, a problem I will address at a later point.

My work draws upon all the approaches presented above. I will suggest that extraordinary experiences are central to contemporary

spiritualities. They can be read as ways of being in the world that give access to subtle dimensions of the world as well as humans. As such, they raise the issue of the real.

The Research

The life experiences presented in this paper were gathered as part of two research projects.[7] They explored what I then called "experiences of the invisible" in modern societies (i.e. voices, visions, kinesthetic or tactile sensations, odours, vivid dreams, relationships with spirits...), the meaning attributed to them and the ways in which they are integrated by those who live them. It compares two groups, those who have had a psychiatric diagnosis and those who have not.

I conducted a total of fifty-seven interviews with thirty-one people, of whom seven had had a psychiatric diagnosis and twenty-four had not. All were born and grew up in a "Western" cultural environment: twenty-six were Francophones from Québec, two were from Anglophone Canada, and three were immigrants from Europe (one from ex-Eastern Europe, one from the United Kingdom, and one from France). Twenty-seven were living in Quebec at the time of the interview, three in Ottawa, and one mainly in France, with frequent trips to her home in Quebec, where I met her. In this chapter, I will focus on the group that did not have any diagnosed psychiatric problems. It includes sixteen women and eight men, whose age ranged from thirty-two to seventy-seven at the time of the interview.

The criteria for selection were (a) that participants were Westerners (non-Indigenous) who had had extraordinary experiences regularly for at least three years, but (b) not under the influence of drugs, (c) who had given these experiences meaning (any meaning) and (d) had

[7] The first research project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am very grateful for their support. The second was funded by the Alliance internationale de recherche universités cmmunautés Santé mentale et citoyenneté, support for which I am also thankful.

integrated them into their lives. These premises made it clear that I was not aiming for an ethnography of any particular group, least of all a spiritual one – working on spirituality had not even crossed my mind at the time. It is astonishing, in fact, that I was directly led to contemporary alternative spiritualities with such a tenuous starting point. It is also, I think, very revealing of the centrality of "extraordinary experiences" in these spiritualities. As I will show, despite their strong individual qualities, the journeys of the participants, most of them unknown to each other, share marked similarities and a generally recognizable flavour that cuts across differences in sex, age, life history and socio-economic background.

Participants were mostly recruited through word-of-mouth. They were invited for an average of two semi-structured interviews of two hours each, retracing their life history from the point of view of these extraordinary experiences. The interviews mostly took place in their homes between October 2009 and November 2010, with a few more in the summer of 2011, and others between February and May 2013.

To supplement the interviews, I participated in several workshops, some given by research participants, others attended by them. In 2010 I also began a course in energy healing every second weekend over a period of eight months. I stopped taking the course halfway through, at the point when I would have had to begin giving treatments. Overall, I spent about fifty days in various training courses. I also regularly consulted the participants in my research project who offered alternative spiritual therapies. In this way, my participation reflects the multiplicity of modalities and their possible combinations in contemporary society.

Ethnography

In many ways, the journeys of the people I interviewed diverge significantly from those described by Tanya Luhrmann in her inspiring, beautifully presented ethnography, *When God Talks Back* (2012). These divergences can point to ethnographic differences (new religious movements for Luhrmann versus contemporary

alternative spiritualities here), differing anthropological positions, or a combination of the two.

Indeed, Luhrmann's aim is to "explain to nonbelievers how people [members of an Evangelist Congregation, the Vineyard] come to experience God as real" (2012: xv). She shows how the congregants strained to hear God and develop a concrete relationship with him by training their mind: first, by learning to hear the voice of God as something external, then by relating to Him as a person, and finally by feeling His presence and love and developing an intimate relationship with Him as a close friend. Prayers and other spiritual techniques are essential to this process.

A first contrast between the experiences of my interviewees and the process Luhrmann describes is the way these experiences start. Whereas Luhrmann describes a slow and gradual learning of the presence of God, supported by specific techniques, the people I interviewed describe a sudden opening of the invisible world, usually early on in their lives, without the experience having been sought, or even necessarily welcomed. I should point out that my criteria for participants did not require them to have had extraordinary experiences during childhood. And yet, this was the experience of thirty-two out of the thirty-four people interviewed, which is consistent with what Pike (2004) found. Only two of the participants had their first extraordinary experience as adults after becoming interested in esotericism or contemporary spiritualities. In all other cases, the extraordinary experiences predated any interest in these areas. Finally, it was generally much later in life (with two exceptions), after the age of twenty-five, that participants began a spiritual journey linked to their experiences or, as was the case for thirteen of them, started a related professional activity (in their late 30s or 40s).

In this chapter, I will focus specifically on the perceptual aspect of extraordinary experiences in order to emphasize the way in which it constitutes an alternative way of being in the world. These experiences fall along a continuum, from a sensoriality that could be qualified as subtle (involving the body but also subtle organs of

perception that parallel physical organs) to a sensoriality featuring the dissolution of material references of existence (body, time, space), which are replaced by other dimensions of the real – a vibratory and energetic world, rather than a material one. This continuum corresponds to different states of consciousness, tuned in to a greater or lesser degree to invisible realms, and it raises the question of the real and the constitution of the world. It is not for me to answer this question, of course, but simply to show the way in which it is apprehended by the people I met.

From sensoriality to subtle perception

The experiences recounted by participants are deeply embodied and linked to non-ordinary perception that involves subtle, non-physical organs. Sensoriality is very present in participants' reports, as a few random examples will show, taken from different categories.

Éloïse[8] speaks of her conviction that the ringing telephone will bring news of her grandmother's death, pointing to her belly, below her solar plexus. When I ask, she clarifies: "Yes, it was in my body." During his genealogical and historical research, Nathaniel finds a novel that contains reference to one of his ancestors.

> And I was about to leave the store and I went outside and I stopped and froze and felt I couldn't move. And I felt: "You have to go back into the store and you have to close the door. Because behind the door there is something for you." So I went in, closed the door behind me and I looked. And there was a corner cabinet and there was a copy of the novel. On the counter. For sale. I knew of the book but I'd never seen it.

Kevin describes the way in which he found the name for one of his companies:

> It was a Saturday morning and I was pouring myself a coffee. The inspiration came into me through the top of my head and went out

[8] All names are pseudonyms; excerpts from interviews have been edited for readability.

> through my feet. I felt shivers through my whole body [and it was then that the name came to me].

Magalie and her son communicate regularly via telepathy. One night, while the child was sleeping over at a friend's, he had an allergic reaction to the cat in the house. He came – energetically, not physically – to touch his mother as she slept, at her home, and woke her to tell her about what was happening. His mother explains: "I don't know why, but he always has to touch me on my back." The next day her son refused to talk about what had happened (with the cat), saying he had already done so during the night.

Liliane recounts an experience from her childhood, when her mother's boss's maid announced that her daughter had a boyfriend. She looked at the young girl.

> It was as though time stopped, time stood still. Then all of a sudden I heard – but it filled up my mind entirely: "Christopher!" Not necessarily shouted, but with intensity. "Christopher." You know. And I couldn't say it at that moment. Often, and this would be confirmed later, when it was necessary to say it, it would do this. And often it would even repeat the words, insistently, until I couldn't stand it anymore and I had to name the person. Whether I wanted to or not. And that's what happened that time. [The boyfriend's name was indeed Christopher].

Kevin experiences the same necessity to "give information" when he feels something "rise": "When it rises [in me], it's in my belly, it comes in through here."

When she was about ten years old, Éloïse had her first remarkable experience:

> One morning, I woke up with a start, I remember. And I sat up practically stiff as a board in my bed. Beside my sister's bed, I saw, um, what I took at that moment to be an angel. A being of light [this is the contemporary vocabulary]. Then I remember rubbing my eyes hard and saying, "but it can't be," and seeing it, still perceiving it.

Nathaniel sometimes reads objects, a capacity called telemetry. He does not have control over the experience, which comes to him occasionally, but he is able to hold an object or to go close to it and when he does, the whole of the object's history rises in him. He gets "hit by the object," he gets "a feel off the object."

Shortly after Liliane arrived in Canada from France, alone, without resources, and as the single mother of a young baby, she had an operation. While she was at the hospital, she had an "unusual" dream, though at the time she wasn't immersed in "that world". She found herself in an Asian temple before an enormous wooden door. She heard a question: "Will you open it?" All the other people in the temple looked at her, peacefully, but she was seized with terror as she realized that the question was addressed to her and that she would have to comply. She opened the door and saw an old woman, then watched as she regressed through all the ages – from elderly to middle-aged, to young woman, to child, to baby.

> And I know that it's death and that it has come for me. And at that moment I wake up and the energy leaves from my head and goes down through my body. And I think, when it's, like, below my knees [she gives a little laugh], that I knew I was going to die. Three in the morning at the hospital. And it's like I negotiated with God in that moment. Actually, I yelled. At the time, survival was: if someone wants something, someone who's tougher than you, you have to yell. So I yelled at God [laughs]. I said, "Oh, I can't go now. I have a child and she's alone in the world. You can't do this to me." And at that moment, instinctively, I started to fight, like this. [She hits her body, her limbs]. I didn't know what I was doing – now I know that it was a way to bring energy back, a bit like *doin* [a Chinese technique].

Alerted by the noise, a nurse came in and told her that she must have left her body not quite all the way and come back. She calmed her down, but the cardiologist did some tests the next day and found that her blood pressure was extremely low. Liliane knows she would have been gone if she hadn't reacted the way she did.

Anaïs's first apartment had a strange feel to it: she felt like she was never alone, and was always being watched. The feelings intensified in her walk-in closet. One day, she fell asleep and:

> When I wake up, I'm in the air. I'm floating. Both hands are caught like this, both feet as well. Then I'm pretty much in the air. I'm not touching the couch anymore. It's as though I were caught and put on a spit. You know, both feet and then both hands, then I was lifted up into the air. I couldn't open my eyes, but I could see the whole room. But it was hazy. And finally it was like in astral projection. Vision isn't the same in the astral world. [Panic seizes her.] And during this time, I feel myself being fondled. From every angle, on every side. Oh it's disgusting! Then at a certain moment, I remember, I try to call for help. I can't. [She cannot reach her cellphone either; she realizes she can only count on herself.] I remember thinking: "I'm going to call on all the power I have inside me and push it out. To be able to call on my inner Qi [energy] and then project it out like a weapon [inspired by Care Bears and Ninjas].

Anaïs cannot say whether she was physically or energetically in the air, but she fell and was finally free. The experience was as traumatizing as a rape. She spent two more weeks in the apartment, in a state of constant terror, sleeping with layers of clothes on, with the light on and in the acute awareness that "nothing can protect you from this."

> At a certain point, I was taking a shower with my boyfriend and I started to be fondled in front of him. He witnessed it and he saw, he sensed, he felt that there was a third presence there and that something was going on. He looked at me and I said, "I'm not crazy, right?" There, he was right there, as paralyzed as me. And then, I said, "Hold me. Just hold me and protect me. Just put love all around me. Protect me like you'd protect a child." I knew then that I had to leave that apartment.

Energy can also be perceived physically. Naëlle is very sensitive to the energy of places, and feels it through a variety of sensations. When she was little, she would sometimes refuse to go into certain places or rooms in a house because she didn't feel comfortable in

them. She does not describe the places physically, but remembers very well the feelings they evoked in her. It's an energetic thing, she says.

Anaïs visited the Vatican with her class when she was fifteen. When she arrived in St. Peter's square, she realized that the architecture was made in such a way as to create a star at the central point of the square.

> So, you go to the middle. But yeah, when I got to the middle, I felt like I was stepping into a stream of energy, a little like a fountain of water. And as soon as you step a little to either side, you feel the edge of the stream. […] I played with stepping in and out of it. And then I know that at a certain moment, it felt so good that I stayed in and took a deep breath. It's like it was replenishing me. Ahhhh [inhalation]. A little like when it's beautiful out and the air is pure. "Ah, I'm going to take a big drink of this." Then you [inhalation], consciously, you know. So yeah, that's what I did.

One of the first exercises in a training course Liliane was taking consisted precisely in feeling energy. They did it in pairs – one person closed their eyes and began to slowly separate their hands out to the sides until they were about a foot and a half apart, while the other moves their hands silently.

> My energy is fierier, I'd say, hotter. And she had a clearer energy, more like water. So it was also cold. Which is curious. So, when she brought her hands close, I felt the movement. Then I said, "You're near the left, you're near the right."

At a certain moment, at the teacher's silent indication, the person with their eyes open made a quick cutting motion with one hand between their partner's two open hands.

> And my eyes were closed and I went, "Oh!" [Shout]. So you see how I felt it energetically.

The frequency of extraordinary experiences increases considerably in the professional practice of those who work with energy. The

visions, voices, and sensations, etc. that they receive often concern their clients, and can lead to physical, psychic, and energetic ailments.

> If, for example, I start listening to what's happening in someone's body, I can feel it in my own body. I could say, for example: "So, did you hurt your left ankle? Because my left ankle hurts." Then: "Yeah, I sprained my ankle etcetera, etcetera." That happens often. But now I prefer to know at the start. I remember, among other times, a treatment I did – a young man. And then, it was like … I lost my breath, then had terrible pains in my back. You've just found the expression of a physical trauma, but sometimes it can take you by surprise. And I asked him after the treatment: "So, does your back hurt?" "Oh, I forgot to tell you, I was on a scaffolding and I fell, bam, my spine hit the edge of a wheelbarrow and I broke three vertebrae." I had felt it, but it's a bit unsettling when it's at that level of intensity.

These few examples – there are many others – illustrate the importance of the sensorium in extraordinary experiences: a sensorium with a broad palette, since all the people I spoke with had had experiences of several kinds (voices, visions, feelings, etc.).

> It never comes in through the same, through the same door. When I observe, I can place my gaze in one place, but I let information come in from all around. It doesn't really matter where it wants to come in from. So, it could be through my ear. It could be through here, through emotions, feelings […]. It's never the same. It depends on what I need in the moment when I need it.

This perception is not limited to the five usual senses. For example, the skin is an extraordinary organ of perception, according to Solange.

> It's because the skin is the same membrane that goes inside and surrounds the organs. That we call the fascia. And there's no separation anywhere. So, if I hear or if I pick up something, it comes directly to the inside. You hear it on the outside, on the inside.

Another aspect to note is that, even though people use the same vocabulary to talk about perceptions as they would about their organic senses, the perceptions are somehow different. When she was suspended in the air above her couch, the surroundings appeared hazy to Anaïs (see excerpt above), similar to what she would experience later, in the astral plane. In the same way, when I asked Éloïse to describe the angel she saw beside her sister, she emphasizes that the density and opacity were not the same. Anaïs explains these perceptual differences to me:

> And the difference with normal vision is a matter of density. The only thing, I'd say, is that you have the impression that matter is less dense. It's like when you look at a cloud. Or smoke. You see the smoke, but it's less dense.

When she was very young, Anaïs used to play several games:

> When I was young – I realize that when I was young, what fascinated me was when rays of sunlight came into the house – you could see dust in the empty space. So I played at trying to see the dust without the light. And that's when I realized that there were – in the air, invisible – different consistencies. And a mote of dust is actually solid. And yet, you and I look at each other and we don't see any of that. I'm sure that if I took the time to look here, after a while I'd say: "There's dust, there's a consistency." That's when I also learned to "unfocus" and to see the invisible. It's that at a certain moment, you start to pay attention to it.

She tried the same sort of exercise with gas fumes, with and without the sun, with the heat from the pavement, or the wind, which we can perceive by following the movement of leaves, for example. This was how she worked on what she calls "unfocusing," like a sort of ocular gymnastics, without even knowing that in doing so, she was developing her ability to perceive the invisible.

As I learned in the workshops I attended, similar exercises include staring at both index fingers held out in front of you, or looking at a vague area around people in order to see their auras appear. Thus, the eye learns to focus on a space that is *à priori* "empty,"

somewhere where it would not normally focus; for example, midway between yourself and a wall. Another way of saying it is to "blur" your gaze; according to a presenter in one of the workshops, this means synchronizing the two hemispheres.

These exercises begin to develop are the subtle senses, as distinct from those that associated with biological organs.[9]

> There is "seeing," which is organic. We have an organ called the eye. And it can transmit data from the outside to the brain and all that. It's the most amazing organ. It's the organ of light. Without light, we can't look at anything. And looking at things happens with the organ, but seeing means going beyond this. Hearing is organic. You might say listening is the most subtle of the senses. Higher, you might say.

To illustrate this idea, Solange relates about an experience she had in her early twenties with a young woman who had been deaf since birth, and who came sometimes to watch her play piano.

> I told her: "You have to stop watching me. You have to hear me, you have to listen to me. Take off your shoes. Go ahead, listen." It took her three weeks. I still get so emotional when I talk about this. After three weeks, she could sing "Frère Jacques." In a clear voice, in key. Because I got her to memorize the vibration of each note with her feet.

Also, by touching Solange's throat and her own for each note, the young woman, who had never spoken because she was deaf, learned to reproduce a sound that she could not hear.

With this example, Solange points to an essential passageway between the visible, audible world (that of sound vibrations) and the invisible world (that of subtle vibrations). It is beyond the scope of this article to address how this invisible universe is constructed and

[9] It is significant that the only participant with olfactory perceptions has a very ordinary sense of smell, and her nose is often blocked.

perceived: it is a complex subject, and the people I spoke with do not all have an articulate and coherent theory about it, nor do they necessarily have the same points of reference. Rather than seeing this as problematic, it seems to me that it confirms the primacy of experience over beliefs and ideas. I will therefore keep to a basic summary here, which links several participants' experiences without there necessarily being a consensus, in order to briefly touch upon the ontological premises these experiences point towards.

In this ontology, which is shared by most of my informants, the universe is made up of vibrations and energies of various densities – the former being the manifestation of the movements of the latter. These energies stretch out across a continuum, from most dense (matter, which is densified energy, the everyday world that human beings inhabit) to most pure (God, ultimately, or, in contemporary language, the Source), with gradations incarnated by invisible sentient beings of various densities. The continuum is also expressed in vibrational levels from lowest (that of matter) to highest (that of pure energy). Every being, every object emits a vibration, and every action, every event, leaves a trace (also a vibration) in the energetic world.

Thus, perceiving the invisible means going beyond light, sounds, odours, and physical sensations—beyond the physical world of naturalists—to pick up a vibration or an energy. These vibrations can be that of God, of an invisible entity, a place, a living being or an "inanimate" object (rocks, precious or semi-precious stones, objects, houses…), an event, present or past. All this is expressed in the form of a vision, a voice, a feeling, an odour, etc. according to the person's perceptual mode and goes hand in hand with different states of consciousness.

From Attention to a Different State of Consciousness

Perceiving the invisible is an attitude, a particular way of looking at the world and, ultimately, a different state of consciousness. Certain key words are recurrent in participants' accounts: "observing", "paying attention", "being aware of", being "open," "receptive",

"relaxing into it" – all of which qualify this particular way of looking at the world. They also lead us towards different states of consciousness.

Several participants emphasize the importance of observation. Solange describes herself as a meditative child who was often observing: "I was a little on the outside. I had a lot of friends but I was always a little on the outside because I was often observing. I understood many things, too, but I didn't talk about them." For example, when she was five years old, she observed as a neighbour drowned her cat. She explains nearly sixty years later that she saw what was happening on an energetic level, even if her memories are vague: "I probably also saw what happens when life is over, then. There was something else. It doesn't just stop there." This observation has to be without judgment, without prejudice. It becomes natural.

Another participant explains that extraordinary experiences don't happen for everyone; still, the invisible manifests itself to everyone in different forms through little "coincidences," "serendipity", certain events, etc. We just have to pay attention.

> Oh things like the little things. I mean, these are things that happen to everybody. It's just that some people pay more attention to it than others. Like, I don't have any special gift, I am just a normal being like everybody else who's more aware of what's going on.

Awareness is a broad view of life, as Nathaniel explains: "It's almost as if I felt that people were restricted. It's almost like people were watching life through a TV screen. I was watching it in a live theatre. There is so much going on." Nathaniel takes pleasure in this large theatre – he "relax[es] into it." Several participants express similar ideas, stating that when they put themselves in a good state of mind, a state of receptivity, the experiences come to them – the invisible manifests itself. It's also possible to ask questions and "make requests"; the answers always come, even if people do not know how to hear them or do not wish to.

Perception of the invisible is thus a state of mind, but a "grounded" one, anchored in the body and the subtle senses. Cécile explains, using movements of her hands for emphasis, that it is also a physical posture: "And my whole body is there in those moments. Because I hear voices. Each time I'm aligned on the earth-sky axis, vertical-horizontal (whenever she stands up). It's very intense." Being anchored in the tangible is important for several of the people I interviewed – they explain that they need to be able to search deep into the subtle aspect of the information they receive, then bring this information back into the concrete world. It is like an elastic stretched taut between the subtle and the concrete.

There are techniques that help facilitate this state, depending on the person, including meditation, walks in nature, exercises, relaxation. They do not create the experience: they simply help produce a state of receptivity and connection with the invisible. It is not a matter of mind techniques aimed at a specific result (for example, to hear the voice of God, as in the case of Luhrmann's ethnography), but rather techniques to calm the mind in order to let something else emerge: to allow the invisible to manifest itself, unimpeded.

Perceiving the invisible is thus a matter of attitude, openness and availability that goes as far as different states of consciousness. Anaïs says, for example, about the assault she experienced while on her couch:

> No, I was conscious of having experienced something in an altered state. In a way, I was completely here, but I was conscious of being in an altered state during the assault. So for me, there were really two [states of consciousness]. It was clear to me that this was true. [Other experiences highlighted this difference for her.] I felt the difference between the two states, as I felt Saint Peter's [square in Rome], when I went in and out [of the stream that coincided with the centre of the square]. I felt the same kind of vibrational difference there.

In the same way, she felt changes in energy within her on several different occasions. One happened when she was seven years old. Her mother, struggling with depression, decided to end her life, but

did not want to leave her three daughters behind. So she put them to bed, closed all the windows in the house and the garage, and rigged the vacuum cleaner to draw exhaust from the car as she sat in it with the motor on. Anaïs was asleep in her room when:

> A halo of light appeared on the edge of my bed and something spoke to me, woke me from my sleep. I woke up like a shot. And then I wasn't seven anymore; I knew we were in danger. And I became this force that I'm speaking of that is bigger than me, that knows more than me. I found my mother downstairs in the car and I opened the garage door to let the air in. I pulled the car door open and found my mother unconscious. I screamed at the top of my lungs "You're a bad mom." So I was conscious of what was happening. My mother came partially back to consciousness and I saw that she had turned the car off. But she couldn't walk. I went back upstairs and found my two sisters unconscious. I kicked the screens out of the windows. I took my two sisters to the window and put their heads outside, then pinched them hard in the back so they would take a breath. And they woke up.

She has no control over this force; she cannot summon it at will, but "this energy comes out" of her in certain situations. For example, she knew immediately what to do when her grandfather was hospitalized in a coma after an operation, his chances for survival uncertain.

There's a gradation in these different states of consciousness that Solange explains ranges from intuition to a state of trance. She goes into these states regularly through her work in the energy field. In the first case (intuition) she is entirely conscious of herself, of her body, of what she's saying: she is "shown" flashes; information is "communicated" to her. She speaks of it as being like channelling. In the trance state – that some people call channelling – she is perfectly articulate and acts normally, but she's not there, she is "gone, unstuck". She receives information that she has to transmit, but usually has no memory of what she has said. This state is visible to others through a change in the colour of her eyes. She herself has seen this different state in her teacher, through a similar change in her eyes. In this state, which can last for a teaching day, she loses consciousness of her body, of her physical needs (she makes notes

for herself to remind her to go to the washroom, to eat, etc.) and of time. She must not be interrupted when she's speaking because that can bring her back abruptly and "it makes me descend from a higher vibration too quickly, it's too much."

Finally, a third form, more radical still, consists in being possessed by an invisible entity – a phenomenon that, like the trance state, is well known in anthropology but is usually studied in other cultures. Solange does not want to go into this state because she sees it as too painful. Another participant accepts it at times, in certain circumstances. A third person feels she was pushed into it. In 2010, she decided to organize sessions inspired by family constellations therapy.[10] In the middle of one séance, she was violently pushed to the floor and then got up, sounding different, and announced a change in program. Three different entities had possessed her in order to allow for spiritual healing. In the interview, we came back to this event that I witnessed and for which she was not prepared.

> The [first] healing entity, well, it was Joshua who came. It was vibrating. I was having a hard time holding the energies. When the second one came, it was more so. But the energies were strong. When he left, the next one came in. I wasn't very conscious. It's like there was another person inside me, inside my body. This person didn't have a physical body, but had energy. Then they start thinking for you, right. How can I say it? They think. It's like they take control of your physical body and then of your mind. You saw the way I spoke, I was having a hard time. The brain has a hard time adjusting, speaking. Even the physical body. I had a hard time just moving.

This continuum of different states of consciousness – from maintaining consciousness of one's environment, to losing this consciousness because the mind is elsewhere, or even to being possessed by an invisible entity – is well known in anthropology.

[10] This is a method of transgenerational family therapy created in the 1990s by Bert Hellinger, based on uncovering and resolving unconscious family conflicts through psychodrama.

There are numerous examples throughout the world. What is significant in the Canadian context, and possibly different from many other non-Western contexts, is that the explanations common to those I interviewed always involve a continuum of different states of energy and vibration.[11]

In basic terms, according to this perspective, humans function and perceive the world at a certain vibrational level, which is higher or lower according to the person. "Beings of light" or guides, in contemporary vocabulary, are invisible entities with much higher vibrational levels. In order for communication to be possible, they lower their vibrational level in order to enter the world of matter and come closer to humans, potentially to possess bodies. The other option, for humans, is to raise their vibrational levels and "purify" themselves. Purification here consists in freeing oneself from suffering, from one's wounds, one's Ego, and one's transgenerational story, etc. This leads us to the importance of progress and personal growth, which I am not able to address within the limits of this article.

For the same reason, I will not go deeper into various techniques and regular practices that allow people to raise their vibrational levels. They fall under the same category as what Foucault (1982: 16, original in French) calls "spirituality" – that is, "the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be: purifications, ascetic practices, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc.". These constitute not knowledge,

[11] As Marie-Françoise Guédon remarked in a symposium I attended, this kind of explanation is not present among Canadian indigenous peoples who tend to experience such phenomena not in terms of energies, but as manifestations of spirits. Similarly, the Iban of Borneo have a notion of invisible, sentient beings, being more or less close or far away from humans, but this is never conceived as anything resembling what is called "energy" in Western spiritualities. Let us note, nevertheless, that the term "energy" made his appearance, alongside with "spirits", in some contexts, such as videos of internationally known Shipibo shaman, Guillermo Arévalo.

but the conditions for access to the truth, in philosophical language. In certain currents of contemporary spirituality, such practices help to elevate vibrational levels and, concomitantly, provoke an expansion of consciousness. The object of this is not the processes in and of themselves, but rather the link between them and consciousness.

Liliane explains that, very early on in her training, she began a professional energy healing practice: "This raised my vibrational level and all my fields of consciousness." The number and frequency of extraordinary experiences that she experienced exploded, but remained confined from then on to the context of consultations, for the most part. Quentin took a course with someone who is always at a very high vibrational level. He experiences this himself when he gives a spiritual healing session. When he is in a high vibrational state, the information about the person flows in (by way of voices, visions, sensations, and intuitions), necessary gestures and words come easily, and the immediate environment fades. This allows him to be completely present for the person and completely in the present moment. In this higher energetic state, the material, physical and temporal planes of existence give way to another experience of the real.

In sum, perceiving the invisible is an attitude, a way of looking at things, but also a question of the field of consciousness, which is directly linked to the person's vibrational level. Perception of the invisible thus happens on a continuum that stretches from profoundly embodied sensorial experience to a loss of consciousness of the human physical and material plane and one's environment. The common thread along this continuum is, in fact, subtle perception, carried out at higher or lower levels of energy and in varying states of consciousness. What they perceive then and their modes of access raise the question of the real right from the start.

The Question of the Real

Participants had very different initial reactions to their experiences. Some felt fear, doubt, perplexity, asking themselves if they'd gone

crazy; some tended to dismiss these experiences, usually by rationalizing them with psychological explanations; others – although very few - embraced the esoteric possibilities of these experiences right from the start, without necessarily speaking of them publicly, nor even "doing" anything specific with them. Whatever their initial reaction in relation to their extraordinary experiences, all eventually converge on this point: the real is not that of naturalism and materialism.

Laje insists on the fact that "I draw the other side; I know it exists." Liliane speaks of a peak experience as a crucial moment:

> And from the moment of that experience onward, I could never deny that there was something other than what we experience in everyday life. In our… our reality. That there was something else. Because that, that was truly experiential.

Anaïs is sure, after having seen and felt her grandfather at the church during his funeral, that life after death exists. After having lived several situations that confirmed the accuracy of his experiences, such as finding the book, as described earlier, Nathaniel concludes:

> If your intuition fills you, just as I told you about the book in the store, your intuition fills you that there is somebody in the room and you cannot deny it … it would now be almost rude to deny it. It's in your face and it worked before. So, you acknowledge the presence.

In other cases, when the accuracy of premonitions, visions or non-ordinary perceptual phenomena is borne out, it reinforces the trust in other possibilities.

Only two people use the term "belief" in the interviews – for example when they confirm that, "I do believe in guides." It is, however, their experiences that support their belief, not the reverse. All the other participants go so far as to reject this terminology: it is not a matter of beliefs; it is a matter of fact, of repeated experiences that give them access to the invisible. Two people stress that beliefs are limits that prevent us from fully grasping the extent of human capacities. In Simon's words: "It's right to work at removing beliefs.

Because for me, a belief is a limit. If you believe in one thing, it means you don't believe in another. You exclude the rest, thus a belief is a limit." In short, this world is not governed by belief but by experience and testing. Many of the participants insist on this, and even invite skeptics to have their own experiences. "Don't believe it, try it" is an important leitmotif for several of them.

In other words, these experiences are part of a way of inhabiting the world which, contrary to prevailing modernist norms, is not dominated by reason and human cognitive faculties. This does not mean, of course, that they are irrational, but rather that they draw upon different human dimensions: the capacity to raise one's vibrational level and enter different states of consciousness that favours observation, awareness, and the manifestation of subtle dimensions of the world. These experiences thus constitute a privileged access to a distinct configuration of the world, one that people integrate progressively, and which become different ways of inhabiting the world.[12]

Conclusion

Doing justice to these extraordinary experiences is a complex and delicate affair. Indeed, they raise the question of the real, a real that is different from that of naturalists, which even the most well-meaning authors obscure in their theories by implicitly reaffirming the dominant ontology. This is the case of Luhrmann, for example, for whom one central theme is explaining how educated people believe in something that is not materially there. Through a set of practices, "What is absent to the senses is present in the mind," and this allows people to "experience a real, external, interacting living presence" (Luhrmann 2012: xxii).

[12] Note that this affirmation does not imply a fixed and immutable world that would always be perceivable in the same way and could thus be substituted for naturalists' "nature."

> To say this is not to say that God is an illusion. I am pointing out the obvious: that the supernatural has no natural body to see, hear, or smell (Luhrmann 2012: xxii).

What I have tried to demonstrate in this article is that if the supernatural has indeed no "natural body", it can nevertheless be seen, heard, smelled, or felt through the subtle eye (the third eye), subtle ear (the cosmic ear) and any other subtle perceptions. This is precisely what I mean by a different way of inhabiting the world, or one could say, inhabiting a different world entirely – a world made of energies and vibrations that are perceivable. Thus it is not a matter of working on the mind in order to make present that which does not have material reality, but rather of making oneself available and attentive to subtle dimensions of the world, the reality of which becomes tangible to participants as they continue to experience them.

These subtle perceptions are anchored in the body and sometimes borrow its language; and yet, they also go beyond it. They go hand in hand with a different state of consciousness that cannot be limited to the mind – a consciousness that does not necessarily reside in the mind (Jaynes 2000). In other words, this phenomenon does not stem from a theory of the mind of the sort that Luhrmann suggests, but rather from a theory of consciousness. This complex field is the subject of numerous debates that I cannot address in this article. I will simply emphasize the point that interests me here in relation to the ontological question. This awareness, this consciousness, involves the body *and* the mind, without residing exclusively in one or the other, or even in one or the other at all. It only has meaning in a world that is much more than the sum of body and mind – one that includes other dimensions, such as energy and vibration – a world that is clearly very different from that of naturalists.

In other words, it is necessary but insufficient to try and reunite that which is separated by a foundational dualism in the dominant Western ontology – in this case, body and mind – whether through the notion of a mindful body, of an embodied mind, or of a sensorium. Rather, we must open a conceptual space for experiences

that encompass both notions without becoming limited to either one. This space, in the case of contemporary spiritualities, stems from consciousness, awareness to subtle dimensions of the universe. It is embedded in an alternative ontology, an ontology in which the world is made up of vibrations and energies that humans can pick up in various forms. In this context, the question is not to work on the mind, making present what is not, but rather of raising the vibrational field and the consciousness that goes along with it in order to perceive subtle phenomena that arise from another empirical reality.

For the overwhelming majority of participants, this reality is perceived through experience. It is not the result of pre-existing beliefs that might bring about the experience. For people who live it, this experience constitutes empirical proof of a different reality, as James (1901) pointed out, and as Hufford (2005 and infra) echoes.

In truth, the question is complex, because the term "belief" is widespread in contemporary spiritualities through the influence of psychology. But if we limit ourselves to manifestations of the invisible dimensions of the world, the issue is not believing in them, but opening oneself to them, perceiving them, becoming conscious of them. In other words, one passes from one ontological order to another; one passes from a naturalist configuration to a one imbued by energy and vibrations; at the same time, one passes from one way of inhabiting the world to another, using reason and reliance on what is measurable and duplicable, on the one hand, and going by perceptual experiences and connections with the invisible, on the other.

This way of inhabiting the world evokes Ingold's dwelling perspective. Indeed, it is extremely helpful for liberating our theories and concepts from the dominance of constructivism and intellectualism/rationality, and engaging fully with the world. To use his approach in the context of extraordinary experiences, it is possible to speak of engagement with the world through these experiences. However, to do justice to the engagement of those I interviewed, we must be able to consider a world that is imbued with

energy and vibrations and inhabited by invisible beings as empirical phenomena. In other words, to do justice to their experiences, it is not enough to transcend the nature-culture dichotomy through an attentive engagement with the world; one must also transport oneself into a world replete with the spiritual, not as a cultural product (or that of a popular subculture), but as an empirical phenomenon.

On the basis of these premises, their extraordinary experiences, ranging from the most socially acceptable (intuition, for example, or premonition) to those that are most destabilizing (relationships with invisible beings, voices…) are all forms of "connection", of "contact", of "access to", of "receptivity" and "consciousness" of "the other world," "the other side," of these empirical but invisible, intangible dimensions of the universe. (All terms in quotation marks are those of participants.) It is important to stress here that it is not a different world, but various dimensions of the same world in which we are all living.

Consequently, doing justice to contemporary alternative spiritualities requires more than getting past the nature-culture dichotomy and its derivatives. It is to reinstate spirituality not as a cultural product, but as an empirical experience of the world. In brief, as a cornerstone of an alternative ontology. The issue is not to determine who is right and who is wrong, nor, to even wish that one side were right and the other wrong. The issue is simply to bring these tensions to light, in order that we might stop imposing – usually unconsciously – materialist ontological premises on contemporary spiritualities. It becomes possible to see, then, as Clammer and his collaborators point out in other contexts, that the current tensions around these spiritualities and extraordinary experience reflect fundamental clashes between different ontologies.

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Modernity's Defences

David J. Hufford

"It appears to be Siva, manifesting himself as Lord of Destruction, but why he's in Hartsdale on a Thursday night is beyond me."

Prologue

My work, which constantly asks, "To what extent and in what ways might some supernatural beliefs be empirically based and rationally

elaborated?" just as constantly runs into misunderstanding by the average reviewer. For example, a recent reviewer said that my purpose is to show that "spiritual encounters are not only rational, but ontologically real and true." That is wrong. These errors arise from the controversial nature of the topic and the tendency for opposing points of view to be perceived as polar opposites. For many years I tried to avoid such misunderstandings by accompanying each statement that I thought might be misunderstood with statements of what I did not mean. That was cumbersome, so I now make my statements as clear as I can and let the chips fall where they may.

In this essay and all my work on the topic I assiduously avoid ontological claims or assertions about truth. It is specifically the empirical and rational aspects that concern me. For the beliefs that concern me here, such as near-death experiences (NDEs), there is ample evidence that there is empirical evidence that rationally implies that they are "ontologically real". There was also, a few hundred years ago, empirical evidence that rationally suggested the Sun orbits the Earth. That was rational and empirical, knowing that makes the belief understandable, but we now have alternative empirical evidence that can be rationally shown to contradict the older belief. This also helps us to explain the older belief. This example does not imply that NDEs can currently be shown to be misunderstandings. I am simply insisting that finding an empirical and rational basis for a widespread belief is important and useful, but it does not in itself prove the belief true. Without the empirical and rational understanding of NDEs that has accumulated over the past 45 years patients reporting NDEs were medically assumed to be delirious and hallucinating. That was neither an empirical nor a rational belief, and it was harmful.

The reviewer also noted that I describe "rationality's biases". But that confuses rationality with rationalism. Rationality is the proper use of reason and logic. The "biases" of rationality, which favour reason and logic, are good and broadly applicable. Rationalism, of course, is a set of specific theories that define and use rationality in particular ways, including specific, limited definitions of empirical that conflict

very directly with any rational model for understanding experiences such as NDEs.

In closing, the reviewer also complained about my attention to the definition of terms. The rationality vs. rationalism example shows why very thorough attention to terminology is of great importance on this topic. One cannot construct an analysis of belief (meaning "an idea held to be true" vs. the idiomatic use of belief vs. knowledge that implies that belief is less certain than knowledge) without that attention.

Introduction

My professors taught me that the spirit world is a cultural fantasy arising from tradition. In the disenchanted world, moderns believe they understand the encounters with non-material beings common to other societies. To the modern, spirits are no threat when in their appropriate place, amongst the 'other' of anthropology, the primitives who are ignorant of science. But when spirits appear out of place, visiting non-believers uninvited, they overturn our complacency. In 1963, I, a thoroughly modern and disenchanted American college student, was attacked by a presence that was both evil and foreign, alien to my worldview. I kept the experience to myself, until eight years later, when doing my doctoral fieldwork, I encountered this evil presence again, where I was not expecting it, in Newfoundland. It is there that I lost my modernity.

My professors taught me that the spirit world is a cultural fantasy arising from ignorance. Tradition causes ghosts and visions; believing is seeing. But Newfoundland's "Old Hag" (as they rudely called it) had come into my room from a cultural void. Later other spontaneous spirit experiences came into view confirming believers and converting doubters: the dead visit the bereaved, those near death share glimpses of the afterlife, and modern Christian toddlers recall past lives as well as Buddhist, Hindu and Druze children. Neither religious background nor education prevents spirit encounters (Greeley 1975, Gallup 1982; Pew 2009.) Cultural source theories have foundered on the data. The disenchantment of

modernity is itself an illusion. Ironically, when positivism's protection failed the disciplines most opposed to ethnocentrism became defenders of modernity's disenchanted world. Custodians of a collection of museums and zoos clustered outside the city walls, between the wilderness and the moat, historians, anthropologists, folklorists, religious studies scholars and many others demand respect for their charges while keeping the drawbridge up except on a few high holidays.

I am concerned here with the grounds ordinary people have for belief in spirits, and in the way that modern scholars have rendered those grounds invisible. This chapter touches only tangentially on direct scientific inquiry into the non-material. For that crucial aspect of the topic I refer the reader to *Irreducible Mind* (Kelly et al. 2007), a real tour de force of scientific evidence against physicalist theories of mind and for mind as transcending the material. Evidence regarding spirits runs through this monumental and indispensable scholarly work.

I use belief in its technical sense: an idea held to be true. This is belief in the cognitive sense (Hahn 1973). There are other useful meanings of belief, such as trusting: when I say, "I believe in my family," I am saying something more than "I believe that my wife and children exist." In belief talk, trust is usually belief in, while cognitive belief is belief that. But, such rules are only tendencies, and they have many exceptions. For instance, "Do you believe in ghosts?" is not about how much you trust ghosts. Knowledge and belief are usually distinguished, with knowledge being more certain than belief. In epistemology knowledge has often been used as an achievement term on the basis of very stringent criteria; for example, knowledge as "justified true belief" (Audi 1988:102-118). Even such stringent usages recognize knowledge as a kind of belief. Because what counts as justification and grounds for certainty varies enormously from one subject to another and from one cultural frame to another, the knowledge-belief distinction is not useful for a culturally situated examination of belief. In a cultural view, knowledge refers to belief that is locally held to be true and justified, without regard to whether the inquirer shares the local certainty.

From this perspective there is nothing inconsistent in the statement that before Copernicus and Galileo it was common knowledge that the sun and stars revolve around the Earth, and that today it is common knowledge that they do not. It follows, then, that describing a view as belief does not imply that it is uncertain, impossible to confirm, etc.

An Extraordinary Experience

One night in December of 1963 I went to bed early in my off-campus room. I had just completed my final exams for the term, and I was tired. I went to bed about 6 o'clock, looking forward to a long and uninterrupted night's sleep. In that I was mistaken. About 2 hours later I awoke to the sound of my door being opened. Footsteps approached the bed. I lay on my back and the door was straight ahead of me. But the room was pitch dark, so when I opened my eyes I could see nothing. I tried to turn on the bedside light, but I couldn't move. I was paralyzed. The footsteps came to the side of my bed, and I felt the mattress go down as someone climbed onto the bed, knelt on my chest and began to strangle me. I thought I was dying. But far worse than the feelings of being strangled were the sensations associated with what was on top of me. I had an overwhelming impression of evil, and my reaction was revulsion. Whatever was on my chest was not just destructive; it was disgusting and I shrank from it. I struggled to move but could not find the "controls". Somehow I no longer knew how to move. Then suddenly I did move, first my hand, then my whole body. I leaped out of bed, heart racing, and turned on the light to find the room empty. I ran downstairs where my landlord sat watching TV. "Did someone go past you just now?" He looked at me like I was crazy and said, "No." I never forgot that experience, but I told no one about it for the next eight years.

In 1966 I entered the graduate Folklore Program at the University of Pennsylvania to study "folk belief". I was taught that supernatural beliefs are fictions arising from cultural processes. Accounts of supernatural experience cannot be evidence for the beliefs that have produced them; that would be circular. Tradition says, "We believe

this because it has happened to us." Modern scholarship reverses this: "You think this happens because you believe it." Non-empirical and non-rational. I was skeptical of this sweeping dismissal, so I proposed to ask what empirical and rational elements traditional supernatural beliefs might include.

In 1970 I travelled to Newfoundland, Canada, for my doctoral dissertation fieldwork. There I found the "Old Hag", a tradition describing exactly what I had experienced in 1963, complete with footsteps, evil presence, and so on. I administered a formal questionnaire to a convenience sample of 100 young Newfoundlanders and followed-up with extensive ethnographic interviewing. I found that around 20% claimed the experience. This led me to formulate the experiential source hypothesis: that some "supernatural beliefs" arise from experience in a rational manner. This is counter to what I called the Cultural Source Hypothesis (CSH ; Hufford 1976, 1982, p.13-14) which proposes that stories of anomalous experience arise from narrative processes with no actual experience or from misunderstood experiences such as dreams or hallucinations. Unlike empirical encounters with the real world, the CSH asserts that these experiences are cultural products and that they appear to support traditional beliefs (e.g., ghosts) because it is those beliefs that have produced them. If this were true, then such experiences could not rationally be used as evidence supporting those beliefs. This does not suggest that some experiences are devoid of cultural influence.

Rather, the issue is whether some kinds of experience are more culturally shaped than others, and at what point the difference rises to a level that justifies saying that cardinal features of the experience have culture as their source. I have argued, on an empirical basis, that the distinctive phenomenological features of SP (I use phenomenological in the narrow sense simply to refer to the basic elements of mental appearances), including the presence, the shuffling footsteps and the sense of reality and of evil, do not have a cultural source. On the other hand, interpretations of the attacker as a witch, a demon or a ghost have a cultural source. But, that is a huge difference. And of great importance, taking the attacker to be real is

not culturally produced. Even most subjects who do not believe in such things nonetheless experience the attacker as real. Their belief arises from the experience, not the opposite. In 1974 I joined the Behavioral Science Department at Penn State's College of Medicine and began surveys and interviews in populations with no tradition of nocturnal paralysis, as well as studying the historical and ethnographic record for traditions containing the paralysis/intruder complex. I found that the phenomenology and prevalence of these attacks in naïve subjects were indistinguishable from those found in Newfoundland (Hufford 1982, 1985, 1995, etc.), and most experiencers considered the event real regardless of prior belief. My scientifically trained medical students provided excellent illustrations of this point.

First-year medical student:

> What woke me up was the door slamming. "OK," I thought, "It's my roommate...." I was laying on my back just kinda looking up. And the door slammed, and I kinda opened my eyes. I was awake. Everything was light in the room. My roommate wasn't there and the door was still closed....
>
> But the next thing I knew, I realized that I couldn't move.... I kind of like gazed over to the door and there was no one there. But the next thing I knew, from one of the areas of the room this grayish, brownish murky presence was there. And it kind of swept down over the bed and I was terrified!...It was like nothing I had ever seen before. And I felt – I felt this pressing down all over me. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't move. And the whole thing was that—there was like—I could hear the stereo in the room next to me. I was wide awake, you know....And I couldn't move and I was helpless and I was really—I was really scared....And this murky presence—just kind of—this was evil! This was evil! You know this is weird! You must think I'm a—....This thing was there! I felt a pressure on me and it was like enveloping me. It was a very, very, very strange thing. And as I remember I struggled. I struggled to move and get out. And –you know, eventually, I think eventually what happened was I kind of like moved my arm. And again the whole thing—just kind of dissipated away. The presence, everything. But everything

> else just remained the same. The same stereo was playing next door. The same stuff was going on. (Hufford 1982: 58-59)

I carried out a random telephone survey (N = 254) in a Pennsylvania town with no traditions of such events. Seventeen percent said they had awakened paralyzed, and 86% of those said that there was a threatening "something" in the room with them when this happened (Hufford 1992, 2005). Later a national survey of 5,947 by the Roper Poll (1992) found that 18% of Americans answer "yes" when asked whether they had experienced "Waking up paralyzed with a sense of a strange person or presence or something else in the room" (1992: 26).

For most cultures around the world, we have no quantitative data, but I have found salient traditions about the experience in every culture where I have looked; in older English it was called the *mare*, (Anglo-Saxon root merran, "to crush", eventually the nightmare, the crusher in the night); in southeast Asia, the *da chor* (Tobin and Friedman 2009), *dab coj, poj ntxoog* (Munger 1986), or *dab tsog* (Adler 1991); in China the "sitting ghost" or *bei Guai chaak* (being pressed by a ghost) (Emmons 1982: 144); in Japan *kanashibari* (metal bound, a Ninja spell). This is an extraordinary spiritual experience (ESE) (Hufford 2005; Hufford, Fritts and Rhodes 2010: 77-78), an experience that appears to the subject to be direct perception of a spiritual (non-material) reality; that is, not an "interpretive experience" (Davis-Floyd and Rapp 2010: 26-27).

Only in modern, Western society does one lack a recognizable analogue to Newfoundland's "Old Hag". While modern science has a related category it is not well known and it lacks the most distinctive details found in other societies—especially the intruder. This is sleep paralysis (SP): a period of immobility, usually brief, as one falls asleep or emerges from sleep. The paralysis is produced by the intrusion into wakefulness of rapid eye movement (REM) atonia produced by structures in the reticularis pontis oralis. This prevents a dreamer from acting out dream movements and interrupting sleep. In the sleep research literature, the descriptions of SP content are vague and ambiguous; e.g., "frightening hallucination."

SP has frequently been mistaken for a psychiatric symptom because when described fully, the experience sounds impossible to the modern ear, yet is firmly believed to be real by the subject. For example, Uhde et al. (2006) asked a national sample of psychiatrists to offer a diagnosis for a young man based on an accurate description of a real case of sleep paralysis. Only 33.3% of respondents classified the case as some kind of sleep disorder, while 55.9% considered it a psychotic disorder, most often schizophrenia. This is a typical problem with ESEs, and it is a prime source of the stigma attached to such experiences in modern society.

The SP experience illustrates important issues in belief studies: the traditional-looking experience can occur independently of prior knowledge; the phenomenon is salient in many cultures but invisible in others; physiological knowledge of SP does not conflict with the spiritual interpretation, because it does not explain the spiritual components; it is very often misinterpreted as a pathological symptom (severe sexual anxiety neurosis, narcolepsy, repressed memories of sexual abuse, "alien abduction", epilepsy and schizophrenia).

Relating Other Experientially Based Spiritual Experiences

According to the conventional modern view ESEs are obviously hallucinations, internally generated false perceptions with no real object. But, SP with a presence, like certain other ESEs such as "near-death experiences (Hufford 1982, 1985, 1995, 2005), contradicts this assumption. In contrast to ESEs, ordinary experiences (such as the beauty of nature or good fortune) spiritually interpreted are considered normal and are more commonly studied than ESEs (Hufford 2010; Underwood 2006). The scholarly preference for ordinary spiritual experiences facilitates the modern avoidance of evidence for spirit belief. Theories based on interpretive experiences find an endless variety of spiritual experience, none of which could constitute reasonable evidence for what they attest. The idea that there are specific varieties of ESE that relate to each other and to specifiable beliefs is central to an account of spirit beliefs as empirical and rational.

For a minority of SP experiencers, SP paralysis culminates in an out-of-body experience (OBE). I included several examples in my book *The Terror that Comes in the Night* (1982). Sometimes there is only a suggestion with no clear OBE sensation, as when a subject reported that she was being violently pressed into the bed but also felt she was being lifted up "at least two feet above the bed," only to be dropped back onto the bed "with considerable force" (Hufford 1982*:* 88). This kind of apparently contradictory description is common in SP accounts, representing phenomenological categories outside normal experience. One Newfoundlander said he felt a "very cold, dead weight — great fear with no apparent reason, couldn't move anything, only open eyes —had feeling of looking down at myself from separate place". A Pennsylvania subject said, "I woke up and felt very tired, but not able to move, felt weak. Didn't seem like I was in myself" (p. 91). Other SP OBE sensations are more fully developed. For example, for an Eskimo case reported in 1976 it was stated that "during an attack...she was not in her body, and that she was fighting to get back in. Apparently the paralysis relates to the body which had been left by its soul...."(Bloom and Gelardin 1976: 23). One of my Pennsylvania subjects said:

> I really felt that I rose up out of my body.... I had no control over what I was doing....I could not touch the ground...opposite my bed) there's a window....Well, it's just like I got pulled towards there. And I looked out the window and there was someone there…trying to get me to come through this window....That scared me pretty bad! (Hufford 1982: 240)

The SP OBEs relate to spirit experiences in complex ways cross-culturally. When SP attacks are attributed to sorcery, the intruder is often a spirit projection of the sorcerer. I found such accounts in Newfoundland, in Cotton Mather's *On Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692), and in contemporary West African sorcery (Stoller and Olkes 1987:148). Twentieth-century American witchcraft manuals describe the practice as "sending forth the fetch" (Huson 1970). In the astral projection literature there is discussion of SP while learning to project (e.g., Muldoon and

Carrington 1951, 1969: 155), called "astral catalepsy." Robert Monroe, in *Journeys Out of the Body* also describes the paralysis from his own experiences (1971, 1973: 22). During the past two decades the Internet has allowed those with SP to inquire and contact others in a way that modern stigma had prevented. One of the early experiencers' websites (http://www.trionica.com/) devoted to the subject ends with reference to "a gateway to Out of the Body and Lucid Dreaming", stating that "Beyond the Fear, There is a Gate".

Not all OBEs are associated with SP. The variety of OBE now called the "near-death experience" (NDE) constitutes a category of ESE unto itself. In 1974 Raymond Moody's Life After Life launched the study of NDEs. At about the same time W. Dewi Ree, M.D. published "The Hallucinations of Widowhood" in the *British Medical Journal*, establishing that experiences believed by the subject to be real "communication with the dead" are common and psychologically helpful among modern bereaved people (1971: 37-41). Both of these are "core spirit experiences" (Hufford 1995), referring to spirits (in the standard English-language sense of "The the immaterial part of a corporeal being" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), without inference or retrospective interpretation beyond the common meaning of the word. Leaving your physical body and being met by deceased loved ones or angels (NDEs), or having a deceased loved one visit (Rees's widows and widowers), are clearly about spirits. Both experiences are independent of prior belief and form distinct classes with stable perceptual patterns across different cultural settings. As such research emerged, my Experiential Source Hypothesis became my Experience-Centred Theory of Spirit Belief (1995: 11-45). The hypothesis has been confirmed, and the resulting theory builds on the extraordinary spiritual experiences to examine their ramifications using methods centred on experience.

Moody's 1974 book introducing the NDE led to the publication of a great deal of compelling peer-reviewed research, much of it by physicians like Moody (e.g., Greyson 1997). Prior to Moody's book NDEs were consistently regarded as delirium, even though the two have almost nothing in common (Gabbard et al.1982; Hufford 2010). However, by the year 2000 the Comprehensive Textbook of

Psychiatry 7th Ed. (2000) had a separate subsection on "Death, Dying and Bereavement" devoted to a respectful description of NDEs, including their most common phenomenological elements. And there is substantial evidence that NDEs are associated with positive, healthy changes both psychologically and socially (e.g., van Lommel et al. 2001). Yet, even today, there is a great deal of poorly reasoned negative criticism of the entire NDE topic (Facco and Agrillo 2012). Similarly, Rees' work led to a radical change in the psychiatric literature. In 1975 the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, vol. II, listed believed hallucinations of the deceased as a cardinal symptom of pathological grieving (Freedman and Sadock 1975: 1755), but by 2000 The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry described them as normal with a prevalence around 50% (Sadock et al. 2000: 810). Yet there has been relatively little new research published on these experiences, now often called "after death contacts" (ADCS), in the medical literature, and negative commentary from critics of "the paranormal" continues unabated.

NDEs and ADCs inherently relate to central issues of religious belief such as the human soul and the afterlife. Yet modern the theological and pastoral care literature generally ignores or disparages them (Fox 2003). Why?

Defending Modernity

Throughout history people have reported spirit experiences, including visits from deceased loved ones, journeys to the afterlife and, on the dark side, spiritual attack. That included "the West" until the modern era. As Max Weber said of modernity,

> The growing process of intellectualization and rationalization... means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle control everything by means of calculation. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends. This is the primary meaning of the process of intellectualization. (2004 [orig. 1917]: 12-13)

Weber had mixed feelings about this disenchantment, but thought it was an inevitable part of intellectual progress. A major element of the disenchantment process is the ironic alliance of western religion, beginning with the Protestant Reformation, and the skeptical materialism of the Enlightenment, against traditional spirit belief (Hufford 2008). This strange collaboration of opposing forces set the table for anthropology and other academic disciplines to erect powerful defences against the ubiquitous presence of the enchanted world.

Post-Reformation Christianity and Enlightenment Skepticism

Reacting against Medieval Catholicism's sacramental view of a world saturated with natural-supernatural interaction, Reformation theology moved away from particular beliefs as depictions of "spiritual facts," especially beliefs alleging an experiential foundation (e.g., miraculous healing or encounters with spirits). Along with repudiating Catholic sacraments as mere magic, Protestant reformers decried belief in ghosts as Catholic superstition. Stanley Tambiah (1994: 31) points out that "Seventeenth-century Protestant thought contributed to the demarcation of 'magic' from 'religion," magic being...false manipulations of the supernatural and occult powers." This dichotomization remains part of modern religion's rejection of spirit encounters. For example, in his landmark Religion and the Decline of Magic, Keith Thomas (1971: ix) says that belief in ghosts is today "rightly disdained by intelligent persons" but was "taken seriously by equally intelligent persons in the past." He places this change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, noting that in the sixteenth century the belief in ghosts "distinguished Protestant from Catholic almost as effectively as belief in the Mass or the Papal Supremacy" (Thomas: 589).

Reformation theologians took different paths in this move away from observable natural-supernatural interaction. On the liberal wing, Friedrich Schleiermacher defended religion against the intellectuals of early German Romanticism by dismissing supernatural eruptions into the material world. In his influential On

Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers (1799), marking the beginning of liberal Protestant theology, Schleiermacher rejected religious ideas he thought conflicted with "the universal validity of scientific and physical conclusions.... Religion...leaves your physics untouched, and please God, your psychology." (1958: 88) Rejecting the idea of supernatural miracles, he said, "Miracle is simply the religious name for event" (p. 88). In Schleiermacher's view authentic religion is religious feeling—a feeling of complete dependence and finitude—not observable evidence of the supernatural. Influenced by Giambattista Vico's insights into the historically situated nature of human knowledge, Schleiermacher developed a hermeneutic theology allowing authentic religion to be understood only by those who experience it, rendering religious ideas purely subjective, unrelated to scientific knowledge. It is in this sense that the Reformation's "authentic religion" became increasingly "non-cognitive" and, by implication, "non-rational" (Kellenberger 1985).

Schleiermacher echoed David Hume in his concession to science and rejection of reason as a basis for religious belief. Hume's essay on belief in miracles, published in 1748 (Section X of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding), lays out a series of arguments against a rational basis for religious belief. He then states that:

> I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure. (1963 [orig. 1748]: 408-419)

Although this passage seems ironic, sincere friends of religion, like Schleiermacher, have taken Hume's advice seriously. The onslaught of successful scientific explanations of the natural world and Enlightenment skepticism were major forces leading to Weber's disenchantment of the world, and theologians struggled to find a comfortable home for religion in this newly dis-spirited place.

Yielding reason and evidence to science and abandoning supernatural intrusions into the mundane world removed major vulnerabilities in traditional religion, as the number of opportune openings for the "God of the gaps" dwindled. Basing belief on feeling, given and supported by grace and faith, removed religion's remaining exposure to critical argument (Proudfoot 1985). This tense rapprochement between scientific skepticism and theology necessarily included the embrace of disenchantment and the rejection of spirit encounters as primitive. This helps explain why such disparate parties joined forces in crafting modernity.

In contrast, the conservative Christian view dismissed supernatural influences in the world as wicked, but not necessarily unreal; false as an affront to God. That is why the same believers who rejected "Catholic superstition" and ghosts were nonetheless enthusiastic in their persecution of witches. The witchcraft persecutions have strong connections to SP, OBEs and ADCs. SP has often been associated (in a confused manner) with the incubus/succubus (demons in male or female form believed to have sexual relations with humans; incubus one who lies on, succubus one who lies under), related to accusations that witches had sexual relations with demons, witches' travel to Sabbats was considered by some to be done "out of the body" (Hufford 1982: 54-55), and contact with spirits of the dead was the sorcerous practice of necromancy. By acknowledging the existence of ESEs as real—real but wicked and heretical—the conservative Christian disenchantment placed strict and narrow limits on the safe reporting of encounters with the invisible, adding another sanction to modernity's defences against enchantment. The liberal theological and skeptical Enlightenment positions labelled spirit belief as naive ignorance, and the conservative clergy decried it as demonic heresy. All three parties had major disagreements with each other, but those disagreements actually supported their mutual rejection of human-spirit interaction.

In the 19th century, theological existentialism further developed the subjectivity of religion leading to additional rejections of specific, cognitive beliefs as fundamental to religion. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a founder of religious existentialism, held that

rationality in religion undermines true faith by attempting to make "safe" that which should be accepted "by virtue of the absurd" (Kierkegaard 1941b: 47, 51). "Faith for Kierkegaard in the Postscript (Kierkegaard 1941a) is against reason, it is not above reason." (Kellenberger 1985: 8)

In religion, the concept of hermeneutics, originally referring to the exegesis of sacred texts, grew to include interpretation more broadly. Influenced by historian and philosopher Giambattista Vico, a constructivist whose famous verum factum principle (1710) described truth as verified through creation or invention, not observation, hermeneutics incorporated historical and social context as central to meaning.

Anthropology Enters the Fray

Before discussing anthropology's resistance to the idea of spirits, I must first acknowledge that many anthropologists have bravely confronted the concept. These are too numerous to mention, but two pioneers in particular must be named. Edith Turner's *Experiencing Ritual* (1992) was a true landmark, and together with her other publications she has been a real inspiration to many of us. Stanley Krippner, although a psychologist by training, has spent much of his career studying shamanism and related phenomena in a wonderfully open-minded manner. My criticism of anthropology does not deny that there are many such brave souls, but rather aims to urge more such work in a field central to understanding our humanity.

In the 19th century the hermeneutic approach became influential among outside observers seeking a respectful understanding of the religious viewpoint. This was in part a response to Enlightenment disdain and the emergence of modern positivism, a term coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) asserting his evolutionary "law of three phases": 1) the theological (religious and supernatural); 2) the metaphysical (Enlightenment philosophy); and 3) the scientific (also called positive). According to this view, humans proceed from the naïve to the fully rational mind, a view consistent with Hegel's (1770-1831) idea of evolutionary progress toward a (European)

pinnacle of rationality. These ideas were congenial to Victorian anthropology. For example, Edward B. Tylor, among the founders of social anthropology, considered "primitive man" intelligent and attempting to understand the world, but doing so with inadequate knowledge. He located the origins of religion in animism – the "belief in spiritual beings":

> The ancient savage philosophers probably made their first step by the obvious inference that every man has two things belonging to him, namely a life and a phantom.... [These] are doctrines answering in the most forcible way to the plain evidence of men's senses, as interpreted by a fairly consistent and rational primitive philosophy. (Lessa and Vogt 1972: 12-3)

For Tylor these "primitive philosophers" were rational and empirical, but obviously mistaken. They were also thoroughly naïve from the modern perspective, since those basic questions were already subject to scientific explanations.

During the twentieth century, anthropologists sought more respectful ways of dealing with spirit belief, and Hermeneuticism provided the basis for this change of heart. For example, historian and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) called for an engaged empathetic understanding that he called Verstehen, arguing that understanding requires us to merge our perspective with the perspective we wish to understand, to breach what Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) later called "the hermeneutic circle" (Heidegger 1962 [1927]).

Cultural relativism in anthropology, firmly established in the early 20th century by Franz Boas, was helpful in the hermeneutic effort. As Boas' student Melville Herskovits put it, cultural anthropology should make it possible to see "the validity of every set of norms for the peoples whose lives are guided by them." (1947: 76) Cultural relativism has been extended to a variety of domains including perception (cf., the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) and even truth, so it regularly entails efforts to understand belief. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard provided an influential example in his Nuer Religion (1956), especially his explanation of apparent inconsistencies, such

as speaking of a cucumber as an ox when it is substituted for an ox as a sacrifice, as consistent when viewed from within the Nuer world.

Evans-Pritchard nonetheless assumed that spirit beliefs were obviously false to the modern mind. In his 1937 classic *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, Evans-Pritchard described seeing a mysterious nocturnal light, what he called "witchcraft on its path," asserting that the light was physically impossible. The next day a messenger arrived telling of the death of a man judged by the villagers to have been the target of the witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard reckons that "[t]his...fully explained the light I had seen. [But] I never discovered its real origin...." (1976: 11) Significantly, Evans-Pritchard did not feel the need to explain how he knew the villagers' beliefs were false. In 1952 Evans-Pritchard said: "Religion is superstition to be explained by anthropologists, not something that any anthropologist, or indeed any rational person, could himself believe in" (1960: 10). This is perfectly consistent with his view of Azande 'beliefs'. "It is an inevitable conclusion from Zande descriptions of witchcraft that it is not an objective reality", Evans-Pritchard writes, before insisting that, "Witches, as Azande conceive them cannot exist" (1937:63).

There is, in this juxtaposition of the hermeneutic, internal consistency interpretation with the outright assertion that these beliefs are obviously false, something of the psychiatrist's willing but contingent suspension of disbelief speaking to a psychotic patient:" Of course I know this is real to you." This casts contemporary spirit believers as equally naïve, like their ancestors who did not understand how the world works.

The most common anthropological mode of giving respect to spirit beliefs has two parts: (1) "taking them seriously," reasonable from the "native" perspective; but (2) not reasonable to the objective anthropologist. The latter is typically assumed rather than argued (e.g., Lambek 1981, 2002; Mageo and Howard 1996; Malinowski 1926). Even some anthropologists who seem to have transcended the Western, "rationalist" worldview exoticize spirit beliefs as untenable

for the modern scholar, refusing to call spirit beliefs false but scrupulously avoiding any suggestion that they are true. This is often done by denying any objective standard for truth claims and positing all descriptions of reality as constructed, and perhaps equally valid.

In fact, the only genuine way to take extraordinary experiences seriously is to also take seriously the interpretations of those who have them. This does not require that we accept and believe those interpretations, but rather that we do not dismiss them without argument and evidence; "modern intellectuals don't believe that sort of thing" does not count as an argument or evidence! I have called this the Principle of Local Priority (2008: 302-3). This principle is central to the "Insider-Outsider Problem" in hermeneutics (Hufford 1995; McCutcheon 1999). The Principle of Local Priority raises the ontological implications of possibly finding a belief rationally and empirically superior to the available modern alternatives; the Principle of Local Priority risks finding our subjects' beliefs well founded.

How Can We Proceed?

The hermeneutic turn gradually moved anthropology beyond the conventional bounds of modernity, searching for ways to engage the enchanted worlds of those they study. Experiential anthropology (Young and Goulet 1994) marks dramatic progress in this attempt. But all hermeneuticism assumes a sharp boundary between modern and non-modern settings with regard to spirits. Experiential anthropology requires immersion in cultures that teach the reality of spirits for the anthropologist to encounter them and grants the modern resistance to the lessons of the field. As David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet point out, anthropologists reporting their spirit experiences from fieldwork must express them in terms foreign to the culture where they occurred. "This is necessarily so...because the anthropological journey leads back home where they must communicate anew with friends and colleagues in a shared language of understanding" (1994: 322).

As long as immersion is basic to the method, ESEs pose little threat to modernity, because they can be readily assimilated to cultural process explanations (through "set and setting"). As skeptic Steven Katz says, the life of a mystic is permeated with the concepts, values and images of his culture, which there is no reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience. Rather, these images, beliefs, symbols, and rituals define, in advance, what the experience he wants to have, and which he then does have, will be like (1978: 33). Seeing is not believing; rather believing is seeing, and reasoning from such seeing is viciously circular: this is basic constructivism/contextualism.

Reports from inside the hermeneutic circle are unconvincing to those outside. "The Experience-Centred Approach" (Hufford 1982) seeks to dissolve the hermeneutic boundary through a fair and rigorous process of description, communication and interpretation utilizing the ordinary procedures of observation and reason. To be effective this approach forbids privileging the beliefs of either the interpreter or the people being studied. I have called this Methodological Symmetry (2008: 296-98, 302).

Methodological Symmetry

Attempting to understand another's beliefs, that is, to understand why they take certain ideas about the world to be true, always raises the question of whether to privilege one's own beliefs. When attempting to construct a fair and "objective" description of competing beliefs, privileging any belief not shared or granted by both "sides" pre-empts balanced investigation. Whether one shares or disputes a belief, the reasons that its holder finds it credible must be sought. Each party's evidence and reasoning must be considered. Refusal to privilege relevant truth claims facilitates investigation of conflicting beliefs from the view of those holding them rather than from the view of an omniscient observer (the "bird's eye" view, as Thomas Nagel elegantly put it, the "view from nowhere" [1986]). Methodological symmetry is similar to Ninian Smart's "methodological neutralism" (1973: 94), but it reaches farther. Not only will I not assume the falseness of folk beliefs under

investigation, I will also not assume the truth of the competing scholarly disbeliefs. I want to reopen what has been treated as a closed account.

Methodological symmetry requires that no explanations or knowledge claims be either privileged or discounted without reasons, and similar reasons must be considered for all explanations (both scholarly and popular). Those who find the refusal to privilege certain knowledge claims to be a strongly relativistic position, insist that we must take as certain what Christina Larner calls "irreversible knowledge" (1984: 153-165) and Hollis calls "a 'bridgehead' of true and rational beliefs" (1982: 73). They seek to protect incorrigible truth from a relativism that denies the existence of any single, unique truth (Gellner 1992).

I disagree. I do assume that some evidence on disputed questions is better than some other evidence. But when basic assumptions are contested, prior acceptance of disputed claims seriously biases the investigation. For example, in his April 2013 'Skeptic' column for Scientific American Michael Shermer described interviewing Eben Alexander, the neurosurgeon and near-death experiencer who wrote the bestseller Proof of Heaven. Shermer notes that Alexander presents as evidence for the validity of his NDE that it occurred while his "cortex was completely shut down," and then goes on to say that if Alexander's cortex had truly been shut down no experience and no memory would have been possible. In essence Alexander claims to have had a genuine NDE and Shermer says he could not have such an experience because genuine NDEs are impossible. Shermer is using a common tactic that I have labelled the theoretical plausibility criterion (Hufford 2002: 16): 1) all valid knowledge will prove to be coherent (following consistently without gaps) with contemporary science; and 2) that which claims will eventually have this relation to science can be judged on the basis of present knowledge. This is close to what Paul Feyerabend called "the consistency condition," which he said is "unreasonable because it preserves the older theory, not the better theory. . . . It eliminates a theory or a hypothesis not because it disagrees with the facts; it eliminates it because it disagrees with another theory." (Feyerabend

1988: 23-24.) It is the purpose of Methodological Symmetry to demand “facts” rather than theory in evaluating contested beliefs (Hufford 2002).

The symmetry principle is methodological, not general. We do not need to assume each side is equally likely to be right. Investigating the beliefs of "Flat Earthers" we do not have to curtail our travel plans because we are no longer certain that the non-flatness of the Earth is well established. But neither do we accept “because the Earth is round” as proof that it is not flat; rather we show the evidence of roundness and ask how well the flat view accounts for that evidence. Incorrigible truth (in this instance, the earth is flat) protects itself by not being correctable!

Methodological symmetry is the core value of my Experiential Theory of Belief in Spirits (ET) (Hufford 1995) which proposes that many widespread spirit beliefs are both empirical and rational since they are based on observation and follow from ordinary reasoning without obvious errors. Most spirit-related observations are subjective. However, reasoning from subjective data is not a foreign concept to empirically based disciplines. In medicine, for instance, symptoms (subjective) are a valuable source of information despite the great value of signs (objective findings). In the study of spirit belief we need both first-person knowledge and third-person science, to use David Chalmers’ terms for the study of consciousness (1996). The task, as Chalmers notes, is to find the relationships between the two data sets. Chalmers’ “hard problem of consciousness” is similar to the “problem” of spirits; understanding them may actually be the same!

The ET posits that many widespread spirit beliefs are supported by ESEs independently of an experiencer’s prior beliefs, knowledge or intention (psychological set), and that these experiences form distinct classes with stable perceptual patterns: (core spirit experiences). The differences among belief systems result, in part, from factors that compete with systematic inference from these observations, such as emotion and latent cultural values, yielding a distinctive cultural stamp. Core experiences are consistent with (do

not contradict) each other and contemporary scientific knowledge. These ESEs also do not conflict with modern knowledge through parsimony, because modern explanations do not account for the crucial elements of core spirit experiences. In sharp contrast, conventional academic views of spirit belief assume that they have no stable empirical foundation, that they are not rationally developed, and that they contradict modern knowledge. Given current knowledge of ESEs I will show that this conventional view is incorrect in a remarkably systematic way.

The Cultural Construction of Disenchantment

The Experiential Theory helps to account for the frequent occurrence of spirit experiences in the modern, "disenchanted," world, events contrary to practically all relevant modern theories. But that does not explain how modernity managed to suppress our awareness of spirit experiences among normal, well-educated modern people even as those people continued to have them. I propose that modernity's systematic, poorly grounded, set of disbeliefs is a culturally constructed tradition arising from historical conflict between scholars and religious authority. The resulting modern theories of spirit belief comprise a highly ramified cultural system that assimilates core experiences in the service of modernity's socially constructed "traditions of disbelief" (Hufford 1987). For more than two centuries Western intellectuals, assuming spirit belief to be cultural fantasy, have worked at explaining the apparent presence of spirits in ancient and non-Western societies. But, given continued spirit encounters, the real problem is explaining the illusion of the absence of spirits in modernity.

A great variety of academic disciplines has created explanations for the imagined error of spirit belief: naiveté, pious fraud, psychoanalysis' defence mechanisms, latent functions, etcetera. Anthropology joined the enterprise, specializing in efforts to craft respectful explanations of the assumed non-rationality of spirit belief, ranging from Tylor's "best effort from a base of ignorance," to Levy-Bruhl's primitive mentality unrestrained by logic, to "their own logic" in cultural relativism. But respectful or not, all modern

explanations of spirit belief and experience rely on some formulation of the Cultural Source Hypothesis (CSH), the opposite of the Experiential Hypothesis. If similar spirit beliefs arise from some ESEs regardless of cultural background, the cultural source hypothesis positing that spirit beliefs and apparent experiences are produced by cultural background factors cannot provide a general account of spirit belief traditions. All reductive modern explanations founder on the reef of complex, patterned and ubiquitous spirit experiences.

Prevalence, Distribution and Stigma

In Newfoundland the Old Hag was well known; it happened to me in Pennsylvania, where it was unheard of at that time. This was a major conundrum. If Old Hag did in fact refer to sleep paralysis (SP), why did the SP literature contain no trace of her? If sleep paralysis was rare, as the sleep literature said, then why was it so common in Newfoundland? As Bloom and Gelardin observed in the Yupik and Inupik supernatural SP traditions,

> What is surprising is that sleep paralysis, which is described as a rare condition, seems from first report to be quite prevalent among Eskimos. The fact that the syndrome may be classified as a dissociative type of hysterical reaction may provide some clues to its seeming prevalence among the Eskimo population. (1976: 24)

This served to stigmatize the experience and the entire group simultaneously. The attribution of hysteria to Eskimos comes from the literature on pibloktoq or Arctic hysteria, one of the “culture bound syndromes” (CBS) crafted jointly by psychiatry and anthropology.

The CBS are part of modernity’s defence, and all are subject to controversy. Pibloktoq is a good example of one that may be pure cultural fiction arising from modernity’s concerns. In their landmark book The Culture-Bound Syndromes: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest, Hughes and Simons describe pibloktoq as a "catch-all rubric under which explorers lumped various Inuhuit

anxiety reactions, expressions of resistance to patriarchy or sexual coercion, and shamanistic practice" (1985: 275, 289; Hufford 1988; Dick 2001). This is a typical example of anthropology helping to classify spiritual experiences as mental illness, partly because of its ignorance of SP's actual features, prevalence and distribution. The result has been both misdiagnosis and empirically unfounded theories of cultural 'construction' that serve to perpetuate misunderstanding. There are many examples. Here, I will offer two taken from *Sacred Realms: Essays in Religion, Belief and Society* (2009), a widely – used textbook in the anthropology of religion, that reveal classic oversights and misunderstandings of SP.

Section eleven of *Sacred Realms*, 'Bewitching,' contains three reprinted articles. In two of these, SP is a central feature, but is not recognized. In both essays and the accompanying head notes the phenomena of SP, unwittingly mixed with other material, are incorrectly diagnosed. The introduction to the section states erroneously that the cases "can be understood as manifestations of psychiatric problems such as depression, acute anxiety, and schizophrenia" (Warms et al. 2009: 319).

In Ronald Johnson's "Parallels Between Recollections of Repressed Childhood Sex Abuse, Kidnappings by Space Aliens, and the 1692 Salem Witch Hunts" (Warms et al. 2009: 321-26), there are clear and important parallels among the three categories and many of them can be accounted for in terms of SP. In *The Terror* (1982: 220-21), I gave examples of SP in the Salem witchcraft trials, taken from Cotton Mather's accounts. For example, "Richard Coman testified that "as he lay awake in his bed...the Apparition of this Bishop and of two others...came and oppressed him so that he could neither stir himself, nor wake anyone else." The connection of SP to 'alien abduction' is even starker.

When I wrote *The Terror,* alien abduction was little discussed, but there were precursors in the UFO literature, such as "bedroom invaders" in John Keel's Strange Creatures from Space and Time (1970). Keel described interview subjects who awoke to find a strange presence in their room, "the witnesses experienced total

paralysis of the body. The witness awoke but was unable to move a muscle while the apparition was present." (Keel 1970: 189) Keel observed that some of these subjects had also reported seeing UFOs, a chance connection of the kind responsible for much confusion about SP.

Interest in alien abduction grew through the 1980s. In 1992 I was invited to a conference on the subject at MIT. By this time I had found several subjects who assumed that their SP experiences must be "screen memories" for UFO abductions, based on what they had read. As with sexual abuse, alien abduction memories often begin with a conscious memory of SP interpreted as a "screen memory." If an investigator ignorant of SP is consulted, "memory recovery" is likely to follow with elaborated results that differ markedly from the actual basics of SP (Hufford 1995). This fact does not challenge the reality of sexual abuse or even alien abduction. But it does challenge the use of memories of SP as evidence of abuse or abduction, or as a starting point for memory recovery.

Johnson based much of his analysis of 'repressed childhood sex abuse' on Lawrence Wright's detailed report in The New Yorker (1993), "Remembering Satan." One of the memories recounted from this case is that of Chad, Paul Ingram's son who, Johnson says, "eventually recalled being plagued by a witch, being bound and gagged, and being forced to commit fellatio" (p. 336). In Wright's account Chad's initial memory was of a repeated experience where "A witch would come in my window … I would wake up, but I couldn't move. It was like the blankets were tucked under and I couldn't move my arms." "You were being restrained?" Peterson asked?" "Right, and there was somebody on top of me" (Wright: 63). Numerous examples, in my own fieldwork and in print, illustrate that, not surprisingly, if one is looking for memories of childhood sexual abuse and does know of SP, it is easy to leap to the wrong conclusion: "I heard someone come into my room. I was terrified. They climbed on top of me. I couldn't move. It was terrible." That has an eerie resemblance to sexual abuse accounts. Add to this resonance a willingness to interpret in a loosely symbolic

manner, and it is easy to see how investigators consistently draw erroneous conclusions.

The parallels that Johnson found among alien abduction, repressed sexual abuse and the Salem witchcraft accounts are largely accounted for by SP. Ignorance of SP results in complex and unnecessary theorizing arising from the assumption that the experiential accounts in each case cannot be as they are reported. But if we eliminate the elaborated accounts produced by "memory recovery" and related practices, the experiential accounts are perfectly typical of SP.

An essay by Jay Tobin and Joan Friedman (2009) was originally published in 1983, shortly after Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS) became known as a public health issue among Southeast Asian refugees. Their "Case of Vang Xiong"' is classic unrecognized sleep paralysis:

> As he lay in bed, a tall, white-skinned spirit came into his bedroom from the kitchen and lay on top of him. Her weight made it increasingly difficult for him to breathe and as he became frantic and tried to call out he could manage but a whisper. He attempted to turn to his side, but found he was pinned down. (Tobin and Friedman: 342)

Tobin and Friedman state that a Hmong shaman explained Vang's episodes as spiritual attacks, which she treated successfully with Hmong rituals.

The authors describe Vang's problems as culture-bound fantasies, saying that "Being unlike the Hmong in not believing in spirits, but like them in our need to explain [we interpreted Vang's problems as] a result of emotional stress." They translate the shaman's reference to "spirits" into their belief in "unconscious processes" (2009: 329). Like many authors unfamiliar with SP (e.g., Lemoine and Mougne 1983) Tobin and Friedman interpreted Vang's experience as a kind of culture-bound PTSD, which they offered as an explanation of SUNDS. There are many reasons to reject this connection to

SUNDS: the epidemiology of SP (common, equally among males and females, found in all ages) and that of SUNDS (rare, males only, adults under 50) are entirely different, and SUNDS is now explained physiologically (Brugada syndrome). This same error was made previously in Hawaii (Hufford 1995: 39).

Confusion arising from modern ignorance about SP, partly a result of efforts to dismiss the idea of direct spiritual experiences through a combination of anthropological and psychological theories, has negatively affected both psychiatry and anthropology. One might argue that the easy availability of crude notions of schizophrenia (once a staple of anthropological explanations of shamanism) and other mental illnesses allowed anthropologists to ignore crucial issues of spiritual belief throughout the past century. At the same time, the linked anthropological theories allowed psychological interpretations to develop the concept of "culture boundedness" with very little empirical support. What allowed both disciplines to do this with little evidence was the modern assumption, unargued and unchallenged, that such experiences must be produced by prior belief.

For those of us who are scientifically minded, the notion that one individual can bewitch another

> ... seems fanciful or absolutely irrational. Yet our current scientific understanding of disease is quite recent.... How many of us have ever seen a germ? How many can claim to understand why disease or bad luck plagues one individual but another person seems to go from success to success? (Warms et al. 2008: 319)

As Tobin and Friedman freely admit, they use cultural explanations that contradict local belief because they personally do not believe in spirits. The fact that accurate SP accounts sound like spirit (or possibly alien) attacks collides with being "scientifically minded"! The absence of any clear and well-supported alternative to the spirit explanation forces the concoction of elaborate and tenuously supported theories derived from the authors' own cultural

background. It is, in fact, the analysts' interpretations that are culture bound.

Marginalizing spirit experiences as rare psychopathology is a crucial aspect of modernity's defence, reinforcing the stigmatization that suppresses reporting. This dynamic is a common tactic for much that is despised in a society. The stigma brings sanctions making that which is despised covert. Because the stigma and sanctions attaching to spirits is distinctly modern, suppression is especially powerful among well-educated middle class Westerners, but there is little or no suppressing effect in non-modern settings.

For modern researchers, the discovery of spirits in ancient and non-western settings is rewarded. Exceptions within Western modernity appear more common in marginalized groups: ethnic minorities, poor and isolated rural groups, "cult members," etc. Thus, prevalence of spirit belief and experience has been consistently assessed as low in modernity, and the distribution of "primitive" spirit experience and belief seemed to match the salience of spirit belief traditions. This association seems almost too obvious to mention: spirit belief is found where there are salient spirit belief traditions; spirit experiences are found where people say they have had them. But salience is governed by valorization and negative value reduces salience. The discovery that spirit belief and experience are common but hidden where we least expect them, among educated moderns, demands new understandings and explanations.

The assumption that spirit belief is a cultural product is bolstered in the literature by a strong scholarly emphasis on traditional stories and descriptions of beliefs over first-hand experiences. From the modern perspective it makes more sense to ask subjects what they and their peers say about spirits than to seek subjects who have encountered spirits; moreover the belief-produces-experience assumption reduces the difference between the two approaches. First-hand experiences of spirits as they appear in the literature have been encountered within traditional contexts—the only place they have been sought. The Cultural Source Hypothesis, operating as an

un-argued assumption rather than a hypothesis to be tested, has been a self-fulfilling prophecy. Modernity's defences have been primarily aimed at preventing or suppressing accurate knowledge of the phenomenologies, their distribution and their prevalence of the Old Hag, NDEs, after death contacts, and other core spirit experiences, all of which would have changed fundamentally the explanatory challenge of spirit belief.

The central issue in the stigmatization-suppression of spirit belief/experience reports is the assertion that they are not rationally tenable for educated Westerners (as argued by Hume), though understandable in relatively naïve ancient or non-Western cultural settings. "It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations..." (Hume 1748: 413). When found in modern persons, against expectation, spirit belief and claims of spirit encounters have been automatically explained on the basis of ignorance, naive religiosity (heresy or spiritual immaturity), or psychopathology.

Even the recent psychiatric recognition of such experiences as common and normal has not eliminated their cultural source connection which in turn stigmatizes contemporary Western subjects. For example, in 2000 the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th edition, text rev.; [DSM-IV-TR]) still said the following:

> A clinician who is unfamiliar with the nuances of an individual's cultural frame of reference may incorrectly judge as psychopathology those normal variations in behaviour, belief, or experience that are particular to the individual's culture. For example, hearing or seeing a deceased relative during bereavement (emphasis added) may be misdiagnosed as manifestations of a Psychotic Disorder. (American Psychiatric Association 2000: xxxiv)

Implicitly this effort at cultural appropriateness marginalizes and stigmatizes modern experiencers. The notion of modern disenchantment endures, and it continues to mislead diagnosis, as

noted above in Yaroslav and Uhde's 2005 "Physician Recognition Study."

I have published an analysis of the ways that even conventional current findings contradict long-standing clinical assumptions about the three spirit experiences discussed in this paper: sleep paralysis with a threatening presence, ADCs and NDEs (Hufford 2010). These three, along with several others, share the following characteristics:

1) a history of being used to diagnose psychiatric illness (but not pathognomonic for any disorder);
2) a greatly underestimated prevalence in modern subjects (but now known to be common, indeed ubiquitous, in humans);
3) complex, cross-contextually stable phenomenologies that are nonetheless described in vague and general terms in the literature;
4) are taken to be real by most who have them, regardless of prior belief, education, etc.

If these are hallucinations, they are not accompanied by insight. That is very strange since they are not symptoms of psychiatric disorder: ESEs do not have the common characteristics of known hallucinations.

Category Inflation

Issues of prevalence, distribution and stigma affect what I call "category inflation". Accurately estimating the prevalence and distribution of anything, from poverty to spirituality, requires clear definition. If poverty were defined as "not having enough money" it would be very prevalent and found in some surprising places. If poverty means $15,510 for a couple (the Canadian 2013 Poverty Guideline), it will be less prevalent and its distribution will be more as one might expect. Spirituality is even more complex in this regard, so core spirit experiences must be defined precisely. For example, if Rees had not excluded dreams of the deceased in his survey of widows and widowers, his result would have been inflated.

If a core spirit experience category is well known, its apparent prevalence may be exaggerated. In Newfoundland the prevalence of "the Old Hag" before my survey appeared to be very high, somewhat more than 50%. However, if such a core spirit experience category lacks a cultural identity its prevalence will seem to be zero, as was true of "Old Hag attacks" in most of mainland North America before my research. Where there is a well-known term assessments of prevalence and distribution must employ a carefully worded concept rather than a label. For my survey, I asked the same question in Newfoundland as I did on the mainland: "Have you ever awakened unable to move or cry out?" Had I asked, "Have you ever had an Old Hag attack?" the answers would have suggested a higher prevalence in Newfoundland than on the mainland, because the meaning of "Old Hag attack" had been extended in tradition. The "unable to move" question yielded similar results in both Newfoundland and on the mainland because it did not depend on traditional knowledge.

Surveys related to the experience of ghosts provides a broader example. The Pew Survey (2009) reported that 17% of Americans said they had been "in touch with someone who had already died," but only 9% said they had been in the presence of a ghost. I have encountered this often in ethnographic interviews. People who say they "do not believe in ghosts" may say that they have had a real visit from a deceased loved one. When asked about the apparent discrepancy they say something like "That was no ghost. That was my mother!" Cultural labels are often broader or narrower than the ideas to which they seem to refer. In this case, the term "ghost" has been stigmatized in modern discourse, losing its original utility. The ghost category has deflated in modernity.

However, the same Pew report shows that subjects saying they have been "in touch with someone who had already died" grew between 1990 and 2009 from 17% to 29%. Does this suggest that the dead are more communicative lately? Probably not. Clearly, during the past two decades discussions of ADCs and NDEs have penetrated American awareness, and they have migrated from tabloid status to serious, respectable discussion. Stigma, though still present, is reduced. Now more things count as contact with the dead such as a

picture falling or a clock stopping. "Communication with the dead" has inflated.

Dynamic changes in traditional categories and the valorization of labels for them cause category inflation and deflation creating self-fulfilling prophecies for modernity's Cultural Source explanations: the more people believe, the more they report spirit experiences, the less they believe the less they report. This apparently obvious conclusion is falsified by the observation that the prevalence of core spirit experiences never drops below a minimum set by the parameters of minimally defined experience as illustrated by my SP with a presence data in the U.S. (Hufford 1982, 1995, 2005TP).

However, it is important not to cast the factors affecting category size and salience as mere impediments to research. They are a natural part of cultural process serving many different functions, and they may support reasoned belief as well as undermine it. For example, once we know about the actual prevalence and psychological healthiness of after death contacts narrowly defined, we ought to reconsider the experiences that were excluded, such as dreams of the dead. If we find empirical grounds that rationally support the idea of after death contact, then we should challenge the assumption that dreams of the dead are always mere imagination. We might call this the rule of "a different light": systematic knowledge of core spirit experiences puts other experiences that do not meet the core criteria in a different light.

However, there are ways that category inflation is problematic. As a core spirit category naturally inflates due to growing cultural salience, inevitably part of the inflation will be made up of false positives. For example, after lecturing on the Old Hag I have had subjects tell me that they have had the Old Hag only to report an experience that is clearly not what I was talking about, such as a dream of trying to run but feeling like you are "running in molasses." That is a common dream, but for Old Hag it is a false positive. False positives, along with more ambiguous experiences such as dreams, guarantee that there will always be some unconvincing reasons for spirit belief—just as there will always be

some poor reasons offered for well-established beliefs such as that the world is round. Modern researchers have generally looked systematically for poor reasons for beliefs they assume to be false. Category inflation assures a good supply of these. However, understanding category inflation also suggests ways of avoiding weak study designs. Whether a belief is true or false one will always learn more by looking for the best reasons people have for holding the belief than by seeking foolish reasons.

Bad Reasons and the Issue of Bias

Category inflation is only one source of bad reasons for belief. Poor reasons and poor reasoning should be observed and taken into account, but some investigators preferentially seek bad reasons for contested beliefs. That is intellectually unacceptable.

Bias is an inclination in a particular direction. Although usually used in a negative sense as prejudice, bias may be positive, as in the scientific inclination favouring rational inference. Bias is omnipresent in human thought. The idea that it can be eliminated makes it covert, whereas acknowledging and controlling for biases is always good method. Therefore, discovering bias in an inference does not negate the conclusion, but may call it into question.

I proposed Methodological Symmetry in an effort to control bias in the study of stigmatized belief. The errors in assessing prevalence and distribution, overlooking the effects of category inflation/deflation and “language capture” are sources of unintentional bias in belief study. But the assumed spirit-science contradiction has led some scholars to propose certain biases (beyond the standard inclinations of the scientific method) as explicitly necessary to good methodology.

For example, Christina Larner criticizes the open-mindedness that she calls the “neo-relativist position,” asserting "I see methodological atheism as a necessary starting point for any sociological exploration of the concept of God," a position that she says “makes the latent functions of a belief more easily detectable.”

(1984: 11) But this does not just make latent functions "more easily detectable," it guarantees creation of grounds for a latent functional interpretation. In contrast, Ninian Smart called for "methodological neutralism" (1973: 94) or "methodological agnosticism" (p. 108), avoiding the assumption that a belief under investigation is false to "keep options of interpretation open and so that we can actually use data to test theory" (p. 148).

Latent Functional Analysis

As Larner's position demonstrates, latent functions represent a kind of powerful covert bias that helps assimilate beliefs that are puzzling to the outsider. Although the analysis of latent functions can be useful, its typical formulation is implicitly biased.

The concept of manifest and latent functions was developed by Robert K. Merton. Manifest functions are conscious and deliberate (like purposes). For example, the manifest function (purpose) of psychoanalysis is to improve mental health. Latent functions are unconscious and not deliberate: Freud theorized that spiritual belief has the latent function of (neurotic) defence against the fear of death.

Latent functions may give rise to beliefs, but because they are unconscious they cannot be a rational basis for the subject's belief. Thus latent functions are often used by outside analysts as evidence of the non-rational nature of belief. Typically manifest functions are assumed to be rational and effective while latent functions are ineffective and rationally unfounded. An unusually explicit example of this dichotomization is found in the comments of Bryan Wilson writing on the subject of rationality: "Clearly functionalism has greatest cogency as a mode of explanation where latent functions can be revealed. It is not distinguishable as a form of explanation where rational action occurs in accordance with internal beliefs" (1970: xvi-xvii). Essentially, latent functional analysis asserts that people mistakenly believe they know their reasons for what they do, but that an objective functionalist scholar can tell both that they are mistaken, and what the real reason (the latent function) for their actions is. Wilson further implies that actions performed for proper

reasons that are known to the actors do not have latent functions or that those functions are not significant.

These assertions are highly questionable. Obviously manifest functions may be wrong, and the intended purpose may not actually be served. Many now believe that is the case with psychoanalysis. More certainly, the manifest function of keeping a firearm in the home is often protection—to lower the risk of injury or death; but the data show that this practice is actually associated with increased risk of someone in the household being a homicide victim (e.g., Dahlberg et al. 2004). When manifest functions prove wrong, one may search for latent functions as an alternative explanation. Both psychoanalysis and support for gun ownership serve a variety of latent functions, and would do so whether the practices are well founded or not. But other explanations also exist, including simple error.

It should also be obvious that latent functions may actually serve useful purposes, even if these are not a primary motivation. Given the multi-causal nature of human behaviour, manifest functions may be supplemented by latent functions in effective practices and true beliefs: prescription control of medical drugs reduces dangerous misuse (manifest function). This control also has the latent function of increasing the authority, power and profitability of the medical profession. This latent function does not negate the manifest function of the practice, but it does help to account for its support by doctors. Similarly, many who believe in life after death because of an NDE or ADC are unlikely to agree that they "believe in life after death because it reduces their fear of death." But neither would they disagree that their belief has this consequence.

The typical selective use of latent functional analysis, as illustrated by Wilson and encouraged by Larner, embeds a potent covert bias. Identifying latent functions is assumed to undermine any claim to a rational basis for the belief or practice in question. That assumption is unwarranted! Functional analysis needs to be re-examined and reformed to be useful in the study of contested beliefs. Debunking

without argument is, at present, the latent function of latent functional analysis!

Language Capture

Anthropology has a long-standing interest in the role of language in shaping worldview (e.g., the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis), and that interest has been instrumental in crafting a disenchanted modernity. Terms relevant to spirit beliefs and encounters, and their interpretation, are besieged by modernity and often captured, pressed into service to advance disenchantment, in many academic disciplines. The issue of belief-versus-knowledge discussed above is one example, embedded in the Humean dichotomy of science/rationality-versus-religion/faith (scientia vs. credo). Spirituality and rationality are two more crucial examples.

Rationality

The disenchantment project rests largely on the assertion that belief in spirits is not rational. This idea was used to justify the Enlightenment division between science, in charge of rational knowledge, and religion, based on faith, feeling and intuition. By the 20th century this notion was so entrenched that even sympathetic anthropologists like Boas sought to protect non-Western belief by undercutting the idea of a universal rationality through cultural relativism. The need for this hermeneutic protection has been based on the belief that modern rationality (generally meaning modern science) contradicts spirit belief. But widely held spirit beliefs arising from common spirit experiences usually do not contradict any well-supported scientific knowledge. There are certainly religious beliefs that contradict scientific knowledge, such as Creationism versus geological time and evolution. But Creationism is not an experience-based belief! It is a religious doctrine based on interpretations of revelation. This is one reason that the distinction between religion and spirituality, discussed below, is so crucial.

Modernity has implicitly redefined the term rational to mean material. Examples abound from the early Enlightenment to contemporary Internet chat: "The most skeptical researchers believe

that all ghostly phenomena have rational explanations. Those who try to prove the existence of ghosts, however, claim that while some events have rational explanations, others can only be supernatural in origin." (http://science.howstuffworks.com/science-vs-myth/afterlife/ghost3.htm)

The issue is no longer whether a particular spirit belief is rationally tenable; it is whether the belief is rational or spiritual; game over, spirit belief loses rationality.

However, according to the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, "rational" means "having the faculty of reasoning; endowed with reason" (Brown 1993: 2482). Simon Blackburn's *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* states:

> 'Reasoning'. Any conclusion or drawing a conclusion from a set of premises may be called a process of reasoning … such processes may be good or bad; if they are good, the premises support or even entail the conclusion drawn; if they are bad, the premises offer no support to the conclusion. (2005: 310)

Blackburn defines a "premise" as "one of the propositions from which together the conclusion is derived" (2005: 289). Thus a belief is rational if it rests appropriately (reasonably) on premises that support it. Rational beliefs are not all true—pre-Copernican belief that the sun went round the Earth was rational but not true—and not all true beliefs are equally rational. But all beliefs (rational and irrational) are intelligible and in principle open to rational discussion.

The rationality of beliefs cannot be judged on the basis of whether one considers them true or likes them. They cannot be judged not rational by appeals to authority but, rather, only on specific analysis and argument. Rational beliefs stand in contrast to rationally unfounded beliefs that are nonetheless intransigent, as in the "fixed ideas" called delusions. But a "fixed belief" is not fixed in this sense just because its holders refuse to change their minds (we who believe the Earth goes round the sun refuse to change our minds). The

delusional status of a belief's fixity depends on the adequacy of alleged reasons that one should change one's mind, placing the issue of the rationality of spirit belief in the same logical context as other beliefs rooted in experience. This distinction is essential to reforming the discourse of scholarship regarding spirits.

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality is even more lexically complex than rationality. Academic interest in spirituality has grown rapidly in the past twenty years (Hufford 2005). But in the process academic efforts to define spirituality have been made arduous by the refusal to confront the issue of spirits (Hufford 2010). For example, one leader in the field defines spirituality as "that which allows a person to experience transcendent meaning in life...whatever beliefs and values give a person a sense of meaning and purpose in life" (Puchalski 2000: 129). Such meaning-centred definitions of spirituality arise from Christian Existential theology, especially the influence of Paul Tillich, (1886 –1965), who saw spirituality as the totality of human qualities (1953: 51). This entirely avoids the embarrassing matter of spirits, and eliminates the universalizing spirituality of animism and panentheism. This defines spirituality without spirits—unless one believes that all human qualities arise from a non-material soul. In that case, spirit is implicit and the definition smuggles in a particular theology.!

Ironically, a wealth of data on the meaning of spirituality in English is easily available in the lexicology literature, and the meanings are concise and clear. Spirituality means the quality relating to spirit. The *New Oxford English Dictionary* defines spirit as "1. The animating or life-giving principle in humans and animals. 2. The immaterial part of a corporeal being." In English, spirituality has referred to spirits for more than five centuries (Skeat 1909).

Religions are institutions organized around spirituality. Religions are culture-bound. But the concept of spirit varies sufficiently for cross-culturally application: spiritual beliefs may be more about forces (e.g., qi) or processes (e.g., reincarnation) than about deities or other

entities or they may be very theo-centric. Being religious, that is, having commitment to a particular spiritual institution, varies by degrees. This explains why some Americans say they are "spiritual, but not religious": they hold spiritual beliefs, but do not accept the authority of a given religion; the tendency for modern religion to avoid spirits is often a reason for moderns to prefer spirituality to religion.

It is often mistakenly claimed that the spirituality-religion distinction is new (George et al. 2000: 103). The development of religious dissent and pluralism leads to a multiplication of spiritual views that may seem eccentric, perhaps even "not authentically spiritual from within an orthodox religious perspective". But the idea of spirituality as separable from religion is not new in America. (Ahlstrom 1972; Butler 1990; Fuller 2001; Hufford 2010). It is central to a strong and historically deep American spiritual tradition associated with progressive philosophies since before the American Revolution (Schmidt 2005). The "spiritual but not religious" tradition preserved belief in spirit, especially among intellectuals, against modern theological and philosophical dogma.

Language capture is the explicit changing of lexically established meanings to new meanings that advance specific, often covert, theoretical positions. This removes useful terms from discourse on stigmatized topics, while advancing the stigmatizing theories. To define spirituality as that which provides ultimate meaning to the believer incorporates a theory about the origins of religion and simultaneously excludes some of the most common spirit experiences. Ignoring the distinction between spiritual and religious, allows metaphysical religious arguments (e.g., about the existence of God) to displace the common spirit encounters such as visits from the deceased that form the empirical base of spirit belief. This conflation of Western religion and spirituality makes theism a powerful red herring in modern conversations about spirituality!

Conclusion

The disenchanted world of modernity arose from the interplay of traditional religion, the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance, colonialism, the Enlightenment, and the rapid development of technology and science in the 19th and 20th centuries. Much of the modern antagonism to traditional spirit belief resulted from struggles over cultural authority between secular and religious institutions. In this process belief in spirits, the core of religious traditions, came to be viewed by many intellectuals as hostile to science. Although some religious doctrines are contrary to science, many widespread spirit beliefs are not.

The presumed contradiction between spirit belief and science provided much of the foundation for modern theories about spirit belief. It followed that most of these theories assumed spirit belief would recede before modern education and science. Belief in science versus belief in spirits was constructed as a forced choice (Ferngren 2002). Choosing science was equated with powerful and attractive improvements in modern life, from transportation to medicine. Science solved the mysteries of the world, spirit belief was said to mystify the world. Belief in spirits, outside the radically transcendent context of modern religion, was stigmatized and sanctions attended it. Why wouldn't the rational person choose science?

Religious institutions provided little protection from scientism. In traditional belief, spirits were plentiful and of many kinds, often interacting with humans for good or ill. But the spirits of modern religion were few and distant. The science-spirit contrast became increasingly stark, resulting in what Peter Berger called "the demise of the supernatural" (1969). But as Twain said about reports of his death, the reported demise of the supernatural was a great exaggeration (White 1897).

If modern theories of spirit belief were correct, its demise would have been inevitable. Its persistence throughout modernity and among well-educated, sane persons shows these theories to be wrong, in both description and explanation. Anthropology has been a

central player in the development of modern theories seeking to exclude from modern life spirit belief and, even more, spirit encounters. Those theories require radical reformation, not secondary elaboration.

Reforming our understanding of spirit belief requires that we confront both the empirical and rational roots of many spirit beliefs, and that we not assume all spirit belief to be the same or equally (in)valid. First-person research should include experimental efforts to achieve experiential access to the believer's viewpoint, as in ethnographic fieldwork. It should also include openness to scholars willing to describe their own experiences of "encountering the invisible." I personally did not publicly acknowledge my own "Old Hag attack" for decades, because I knew that ironically it would harm my academic credibility. But first-person research is not enough. If we require the scholar's own spirit experience, we simply reinforce the hermeneutic circle – but now the researcher is inside the circle.

The empirical investigation of spirit belief hinges on the inclusion of experiential grounds for belief in a symmetrical and epistemologically fair enterprise (Hufford 2002). In this effort, neither rationality in general nor science in particular is the enemy. Fair and effective inquiry begins with rigorous methods and controls for bias. Science is not the problem, but the modern cultural bias of scientism is (Hufford 2003). In a long struggle scientism captured the flag of rationality.

If we are to understand the ubiquitous experience of human spirit encounters and beliefs, we need rationality back. Present day, pan-human spirit encounters prove that the spirits do not need the infantilizing protection of hermeneuticism and "multiple logics" in order to survive. What is good in modernity will survive our growing understanding. Modernity can protect itself, and the academic disciplines must stop their cooperation in erecting irrational authoritarian defences for its unwarranted assumptions.

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Science, Superstition, and the Supernatural: Exploring the Tension between Skepticism and Experiences with Spirits

Scott Habkirk

Investigating the tension between scientific and religious paradigms has been at the heart of my academic journey. As I am deeply invested in a scientific way of perceiving the world and equally curious about religion and the spirit world, the question of experiences with spirits has been at the forefront of my studies. In Europe and North America, scientists and religious specialists have been debating the limits of and compartmentalizing their domains of knowledge since the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Deborah Blum describes the people of that time and the tension they felt when referring to the work of Everard Fielding, a psychic investigator of the early 20th century:

> They lived surrounded by new knowledge, inundated by facts; they were told absolutely that such information was the only route to certainty about the universe. They were given no guidance as to how religious feeling, faith, or intuition might fit into that world; they were given less guidance if they experienced a supernatural event - saw a crisis apparition, had a premonition, or simply felt an inner sense of belief in something more. "If but some link could be established between the two, some stepping-stone laid on which they could venture out into the dark stream, their confidence would be restored," Fielding[13] would insist. And he would mourn the past, grieve for the loss of that moment when he and his friends had thought they might reconcile science and faith after all, and find that elusive path, as faint and as real as moonlight, leading to a universe where all things were possible (Blum 2006: 321).

[13] Fielding, Everard, 1925, "Can Psychical Research Contribute to Religious Apologetics?," Dublin Review, April-June; reprinted in Fielding, Everard, 1963: 326-334.

Many scholars have tried to bridge the gap between scientific and religious ideologies that was broadened with the advent of modern science in the West. This is my attempt to contribute to that endeavour.

While conducting fieldwork among Sioux and Cree medicine men in Canada as well as traditional Chinese spirit mediums in Taiwan, I have encountered beliefs and experiences for which the model of Western scientific materialism does not to provide satisfying explanations. To explore why this is, I will start with an introduction to the development of Western skeptical philosophy and some of its dealings with experiences with spirits. This will be followed with ethnographic accounts from three people, one from Taiwan and two from Canada, who have participated in my research and demonstrate the tension that results from being invested in scientific materialism and having experiences with spirits. Lastly, I will explore solutions with regard to the problem of experience with spirits for those of us who are deeply rooted in Western science and philosophy.

Skepticism

In movies such as *The Rite* and *1408*, skeptical individuals unconvincingly try to explain away experiences with spirits while revealing that their skepticism is based on traumatic events from their obscured past rather than on scientific inquiry. The assumption by filmmakers is that audiences consider skeptics to be cynical, arrogant, and emotionally scarred. Though this portrayal sorely misrepresents the true spirit of skepticism, it highlights the fact that a strong tendency to disbelieve experiences with spirits can be just as biased as the tendency of extreme believers to attribute every bump in the night to supernatural causes (Wiseman 1998).

As long as we have had the power of self-reflection, we have doubted. Modern popular portrayals of skeptics are of people who are closed-minded in their denial of non-scientific explanations (Martoccia 2013). Scholarly skepticism traces its roots to the ancient philosophies of the Greeks, in particular Socrates and Pyrrho. The basic tenets of their philosophies were that doubt is a necessary part

of the process of arriving at the truth and that we cannot know the objective nature of reality (Bridgestock 2009). Pyrrho admitted, though, that since we cannot know the objective nature of reality, we have to settle for our collective subjective (or intersubjective) experience and live in accord with the customs of our society.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and David Hume (1769-1850) are generally credited with the development of modern skepticism (Bridgestock 2009; van Ede 2009). Descartes, "father of modern philosophy", was one of the first scholars to advocate for the importance of doubt in the pursuit of knowledge since the ancient Greeks. Like the Greeks, he restricted his doubt to the philosophical pursuit of knowledge and accepted the customs and habits of his society. Unlike the ancient Greeks, though, he doubted the appearance of things, not just the unknowable objective reality behind them. Descartes doubted even the subjective experience of our senses and questioned what we collectively accepted to be real. This doubting of appearances could be credited, for example, with laying the foundation for the idea that our bodies are made of more space than matter, and that it is only the forces that bind the matter together that give our bodies the appearance of solidity.

David Hume is credited with the development of empiricism, from which we get the saying "seeing is believing" (Bridgestock 2009; Hume 2007; van Ede 2009). He was opposed to Descartes in that he believed we can only trust that which we can directly observe, and did not doubt appearances but admitted that nothing can be inferred from them with absolute certainty. Hume argued that all knowledge comes from experience, which is limited and can lead to mistakes, but knowledge that guides us in a course of action must be based on something, otherwise we are paralyzed by doubt. Wisdom and correct action come from weighing the evidence for and against a theory. In the case of extraordinary experiences like miracles, Hume argued that by definition they defy the laws of the natural world and the world as we have come to understand it through our collectively accumulated knowledge. Therefore, he asserted that extraordinary phenomena, like miracles, required extraordinary evidence to prove

them. This sentiment was later echoed by Carl Sagan (1934-1996) and skeptics refer to it as Sagan's balance (Caso 2002).

Hume's argument that extraordinary experiences necessarily defy the laws of nature is not a universal belief. The commonly accepted categorization of "supernatural" in Western culture is not found in every culture, and anthropological research indicates that not all cultures view the spirit world as being non-natural (Klass 1995; McClennon 1995). I have been a participant observer in Sweat Lodges and other First Nations ceremonies in western Canada since 1999, and in Sioux culture, the spirit world is uniquely in tune with the natural world (Niehardt 1932). In ceremonies such as the Vision Quest, a practitioner enters an altered state of consciousness through fasting where it becomes possible for spirits to send messages or speak through non-human mediums (e.g., animals, plants). In this way the natural world is infused with spiritual potency, and spiritually gifted individuals may walk through everyday life with the ability to sense these messages without the aid of fasting. I have also done extensive research on religion in Taiwan where, according to traditional Chinese culture, the heavens are modelled after an imperial government (Feuchtwang 2001; Weller 1999). Spirits are ruled by the same social conventions, organization, wants, and needs as the living. During funerals, Tomb Sweeping Day, and the Hungry Ghost Festival, special money and cardboard copies of popular commodities (e.g., cell phones, laptops, cars, etc.) are burned as offerings to the dead so that they can be prosperous in the afterlife. For the Taiwanese, the spirit world is a reflection of both the living natural and human worlds.

Both the Sioux and Taiwanese spiritualist traditions share the idea that, though this spirit world may be integrated with the natural and human worlds, it is not necessarily governed by the same immutable, physical laws. For example, ritual specialists from both traditions have mentioned that time in the spirit world is opposite to ours, the world of the living. They indicate that night in the living world is day in the spirit world. In Taiwan, this manifests as taboos regarding twilight for people who are having problems with troublesome

spirits because Taiwanese spiritualists believe twilight is when spirits are waking up and are most active.

In the late 1800s, during the height of the debates between scientists and theologians in Europe, a small group of open-minded scientists endeavoured to satisfy Hume's argument that extraordinary phenomena require extraordinary evidence (Blum 2006). This group included such notable scholars as Alfred Wallace (1823-1913), who jointly presented the idea of natural selection as a mechanism for evolution with Charles Darwin, and William James (1842-1910), who is often credited with being the founder of American psychology. During this time, spiritualism—a belief that the spirits of the dead reside in an afterlife and can communicate with the living—was rising as a reaction to the rigid doctrines of both scientists and theologians. This preoccupation with the spirit world was fertile ground for those who wished to investigate experiences with the afterlife and who would eventually found the British Society for Psychical Research (1882, a.k.a. SPR). The goal of the SPR, which still operates today[14], is to investigate extraordinary experiences using scientific principles.

At the time of their founding, members of SPR spent most of their efforts investigating mediums that were part of the spiritualist movement and claimed to be able to contact the dead. The rules they set out to follow when investigating these claims were that the medium had to have no prior contact with the clients, they had to have no information about the clients' families, and they could not ask leading questions of their clients. This was to ensure that mediums had no prior knowledge that would undermine the validity of their claim to contact the dead. After many years of evaluating mediums for their authenticity, SPR generally found that most professional mediums were fraudulent and unreliable—either they outright faked the experience with props or sleight of hand, or could not produce results with any consistency. Though most mediums proved to be false and academic support for such research was scarce, there were enough mediums whose powers could not be

[14] www.spr.ac.uk/

sufficiently disproven (e.g., David Home, Eusapia Palladino, and Leonora Piper) to keep SPR motivated to continue their research.

Richard Hodgson (1855-1905), in particular, was well known for discrediting famous mediums and was sent by SPR to Boston to investigate Leonora Piper at the request of William James (Blum 2006). Mrs. Piper was a reluctant medium who became well known through word of mouth for her ability to know things that she should not be able to (e.g., family secrets). She desired only to be a well-respected, middle-class wife and mother, but after some encouragement from James, she agreed to participate in Hodgson's research. Hodgson, ever the skeptic after all the frauds he had discredited, assumed that when Mrs. Piper related to him the specifics of how his long dead cousin died that she had found this out through some kind of background investigation. In an effort to uncover Mrs. Piper's fraudulent techniques, Hodgson hired private detectives, but after a month of surveillance they had discovered nothing to indicate that Mrs. Piper was doing anything to provide her with the knowledge she should not have had. After sitting with 130 clients and having many sittings himself, Hodgson claimed that Mrs. Piper was the only genuine medium he encountered, though other members of SPR claimed they had found more. As his research with her continued, Hodgson had the chance to test Mrs. Piper regarding a recently deceased friend that she had no connection with besides him. He found that on questioning her regarding specific and obscure details about his friend's life that she produced consistent and reliable results. Hodgson eventually got his work with Mrs. Piper published in the periodical *Saturday Review*, but much of the work from the SPR was lost in obscurity because of the number of mediums that had been proven false, such that investigation into the spiritual nature of humanity was thought to be best left to theologians rather than scientists.

In the early 1900s, experiences with spirits were considered unfit for proper scientific study, and this attitude is promoted by many scientists to this day. For example, the United States' National Science Foundation states that "science and religion are based on different aspects of the human experience" and that "because they

are not part of nature, supernatural entities cannot be investigated by science" (Drees 2010: 13-14). Investigating experiences with spirits continues to have a negative impact on the reputation of anyone trying to establish themselves as a legitimate scientist (van Ede 2009). Though Alfred Wallace and William James were pivotal personages in their respective fields, they rarely receive the credit they are due when compared to their contemporaries—Darwin and Freud—in part because of their association with SPR and spiritualism (Blum 2006). They both died with the concern that, although many claims about contact with the spirits were found to be false, ignoring the few credible cases might blind scientists to some underlying truth about the nature of reality.

In the skeptical movement of the 20th century, as led by such scholars as Carl Sagan and Paul Kurtz, it is acknowledged that our beliefs rest ultimately on probabilities (Kurtz 1995). Kurtz's version of skepticism is motivated by a cautiously open-minded sense of inquiry that aims to be positive and constructive. The New Skepticism (or Mitigating Skepticism) that Kurtz promotes, like ancient and modern skepticism, acknowledges that skepticism is essential for a healthy mind committed to uncovering the truth, but when taken to excess, can lead to paralyzing doubt. We must accept some beliefs as true in order to function in the world even while entertaining the notion that those beliefs may be wrong or that there are better ways of doing things. It is in this spirit of practical skepticism that I present the following three case studies. One happens in the context of Taiwanese religious culture, which I will give some background information on; another is in with a woman from Canada; the third is regarding myself. In each case the person was skeptical of what they were experiencing, but was ultimately driven by practical needs to find meaning and solutions for problems that modern scientific materialism was deficient in providing.

Taiwanese Ghosts and Ancestors

> Lady Wu said to her son, "Confucius claimed that 'ghostly spirits manifest inexhaustible potency.' He also said, 'Pray ye to the spirits dispersed above and concentrated below.' We may not doubt such

> things as ghostly spirits." (Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Luo Guanzhong 1991: 224)

Lady Wu admonished her son Sun Ce, ruler of the Southlands, for executing a powerful Daoist monk in his crusade to rid the land of what he deemed to be wasteful superstition. Tormented by the spirit of the man he has killed, his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the power of the spiritual world quickly resulted in him getting sick and dying from its influence. Though many of the young people I interviewed in Taiwan (Habkirk 2012) were skeptical about the existence of gods, only one gave me a definitive no when asked if he believed in spirits (though he had dreamed about the spirit of his stepfather), and most of them told me about personal experiences they had with spirits. According to Jean DeBernardi (2006), Chinese belief[15] in spirits predates Confucianism and continues to this day. In traditional Chinese religion as practiced in Taiwan, a soul may enter into the world of shades, which is similar to the world of the living, or it may go to hell to atone for its mistakes and eventually be reincarnated (Jordan 1972). In the world of shades, a spirit can be content if it receives offerings that are usually the obligation of living family members to give.

In the world of shades, the afterlife is much like the world of the living, and the descendants of the deceased make offerings of money and paper items so that their ancestors are provided for (DeBernardi 2006). Those who have someone to make offerings to them and maintain relations with the living are called ancestors (zǔxiān祖先) while those who do not receive offerings or have died tragically become hungry or troublesome ghosts (*guǐ*鬼), although one person's ancestor may be another's *gui* (Harrell 1974; Wolf 1974).

[15] The island of Taiwan was a part of greater China until 1949. Between 1895 and 1945, it was a part of the Japanese empire. It was returned to China after World War II. The Nationalist Party (Guomingdang) of China fled to Taiwan in 1949 and set up their own government after they were defeated by the Communists. Otherwise, it has shared a long cultural history with China and other countries with large Chinese populations (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, etc.).

Gui occupy the opposite end of the continuum of supernatural beings from *gods* (shén神), and somewhere in the middle are ancestors. Whereas believers consider *shen* to be pure, upper-class kings, generals, and officials (even if they were not of such high status in life), *gui* are often dirty, lower-class peasants, beggars, thieves, and other people of ill repute. They act like beggars and bullies even though they may not have been so in life. Without people to make offerings to them in the world of the living, the deceased may be reduced to a lower class in the world of shades.

The relationship a person has to a spirit plays a large part in whether a spirit is considered a god, ancestor or hungry ghost. In Western culture, we typically associate any experiences with a phantasmal person as a 'ghost experience' regardless of our relationship with the spirit. In traditional Chinese culture, designation as a god is evident through veneration by those who have no personal history with the spirit while it was a living person, but the distinction between *gui* and ancestor is less clear. If ancestors are slighted in some way by their descendants, they, too, can act maliciously (Wolf 1974), and in either case the Taiwanese go to great lengths to avoid such encounters.

Wolf (1974) distinguishes between *gui* who are actively harmful and may have been malicious individuals while living, and those who are passively harmful as Taiwanese people believe any contact with *gui* can bring about misfortune and sickness. As Charles Emmons (1982) notes from his research on beliefs about spirits in Hong Kong, some *gui* are not necessarily evil but just seek to satisfy their desires, which is why they are known as 'hungry ghosts'. *Gui* are not only those without someone to make offerings to them, but they can also be people who were hatefully wronged (e.g., murdered) or died prematurely.

Ivory

I conducted fieldwork in Tainan, Taiwan from 2006-2008 and have returned there twice (August-November 2010 and March 2012) since

moving back to Canada. Tainan is the traditional cultural heartland of Taiwan and is well known for its constant public religious festivities. Taiwanese typically assume that most foreigners do not believe in spirits and look down on people that do as superstitious; nonetheless, as word got around about my MA research, my Taiwanese friends began to open up to me about their experiences with spirits. I then specifically targeted people who were 20-40 years old and had at least some post-secondary education for formal interviews. Regardless of their investment into scientific materialism through their education, the majority of the participants in my research had no problem maintaining a belief in spirits as well as faith in science and materialism.

In March of 2012, I was in Taiwan making a documentary film based on my earlier research and the host of the movie crew, Evon, insisted that I interview her friend Ivory. Evon was well aware of my research interests, and in the spirit of letting the Taiwanese tell their own story through the film, I trusted her judgment and arranged the interview. Ivory was 23 at the time and worked as a secretary at her father's lumber company. She said she was not particularly religious and originally only went to temples when familial obligation required her to do so. When she was 16 years old, though, she became very sick and emotionally unstable.

> I didn't have much pressure in school. I had a lot of friends. I was doing okay in school. I was pretty happy. There was a period of time suddenly where I was just not right. Like in class, I was very sleepy. No matter how early I went to bed, the next day I was just tired. I was just not right and then one day suddenly in the class I started crying for no reason. The teacher was in the class and was like, "What's going on there?" I was just crying like very, very sad, but I could not stop myself. I just couldn't control myself. My teacher thought it was stress or something, so they sent me to see the nurse. That was the first time and it stopped, and I didn't take it seriously. I thought maybe it was PMS because at that time I was going through my period, but after that the frequency was more often. First it was crying and then after it became crying and laughing. I just couldn't stop and in the end there was like a burp [makes sound like a

> hiccup], but it did not come from my stomach, like in my body or something. I just couldn't stop makes hiccup sound. I kept doing it and start shaking and crying and that was just the beginning.

Ivory's mother took her to doctors first who tried a variety of tests and medications. When they had finally exhausted the options modern medicine provided them with, Ivory's mother started taking her to temples. At the second temple, Ivory lost consciousness when the attendant asked her who she was. According to traditional Taiwanese spiritualism, if a person has been possessed or spiritually polluted by a spirit, proximity to a virtuous god will cause the possessed or polluted person to get sick and try to expel the unclean spirit. After a series of questions, the temple attendant determined that Ivory was possessed by two spirits she was related to but did not know about, a young boy and young girl. The attendant asked if Ivory's mother knew anything about having a brother and sister who died prematurely but she did not, so they went to ask Ivory's grandmother. To their surprise, Ivory's grandmother confirmed that she had had two children who had passed away that Ivory's mother did not know about. They returned to the temple where Ivory once again became possessed, but the attendant informed them that they had to go to a higher god in the pantheon to get the help they needed. At the next temple they went to, Ivory became even sicker:

> As soon as I walked in the door I just dropped. The whole way I was just walking down on my knees with my head down. No one could get me up. My mom said, "Ivory, don't be like this. People are watching. Don't embarrass yourself." But I couldn't help it. My legs wouldn't let me stand up. A woman, she had a paper in her hand and she was speaking in some language I couldn't understand, waved incense around me and I started hiccupping, puking, and crying. It was very painful. It was really painful, with the screaming and all the people just watching me and I couldn't stop. I felt embarrassed, but I couldn't stop. Then the woman said something and burned some ghost money[16] and I started feeling better.

[16] Taiwanese burn various kinds of ritual money as offering to spirits. They have different kinds of spirit money for *shen*, *zuxian*, and *gui*.

After further communication with the spirits, the temple attendants determined that the spirits had wanted to train Ivory to be a spirit medium and were looking for someone to help them become gods so that they could help people, but Ivory had no desire to become a spirit medium, so they agreed to leave her alone. Since then she has been in good health. During times when hungry ghosts are especially active, like the Hungry Ghost Festival (also known as Ghost Month because it falls on the 7th month of the lunar calendar) she might feel a bit sick, but a trip to the temple to maintain her relationship to the god remedies any illness.

Skeptics will often claim that experiences with spirits are based on irrational belief. From an insider's perspective Taiwanese beliefs are perfectly logical, though skeptics may claim other grounds for what they see as erroneous beliefs (e.g, lack of concrete evidence, inability to independently verify, etc.). A spirit medium I interviewed in 2006, Mr. Fu, said that people who are born with a low *bāzì*（八字） can see spirits, and every other Taiwanese person with whom I discussed the topic repeated the same thing. A person's *bazi* is a divining number based on when a person is born. The number indicates the strength of one's life energy (qì气). A light number means one's qi is weak and that person is more prone to seeing and being seen by spirits, while a heavy number means one's qi is strong. Another way, the Taiwanese research participants explained to me, was that each world (e.g., various Buddhist and Daoist heavens, the Earth, the world of shades, and the hells) is like a wave that vibrates at a different frequency. A person with weak qi has a vibration that is closer to the world of shades, so they can see spirits and spirits can see them. People who can see spirits are said to have yin-yang eyes, a heavenly eye, or the Buddha's eye. Yin-yang eyes enable a person to see hungry ghosts and ancestors. The heavenly eye and the Buddha's eye are related to higher levels of spiritual cultivation rather than a person's *bazi* but they include yin-yang eyes. The heavenly eye enables people to see gods and immortals, and the Buddha's eye enables them to see their past and future lives.

From the perspective of a Taiwanese person who maintains traditional religious beliefs and practices, it is perfectly logical to believe in and interact with spirits, and it is foolhardy to deny such things. Stories like Ivory's, in which traditional spiritual medicine provides solutions where modern medicine has failed, are fairly common among people who have had experiences with spirits (Bridgestock 2009; McClennon 1995). Ivory was fortunate to be immersed in a culture that has ready solutions to such problems as possession and other negative experiences with spirits that Jean DeBernardi (2006: 69) identifies as "spiritual collisions". In the following case study, the research participant was not as fortunate, and denial of her experiences served to magnify the negative impact of her spiritual collision.

Michelle

Michelle and I grew up in the same city in Canada, Edmonton, Alberta. In contrast with Taiwan, religion is a very private affair in Edmonton. Like Ivory, Michelle is not particularly religious and she identified her most spiritual practice as spending time outdoors (e.g., camping, hiking, etc.). I met her at a volunteer party for a festival that I help to coordinate. She was 34 years of age at the time. When I explained what I do for a living and my research interests, she began to tell me about some of her more unusual experiences, and I asked if I could follow up with some formal interviews. One of the things that makes Michelle unique is the frequency of her experiences with the spirit world. She began seeing spirits at an early age, but due to the negative stigma associated with people who see spirits in Canada, she did not tell her family and has kept her ability secret for most of her life. As I do with all my interviews, I gave her the option to remain anonymous. After a moment of thought, she responded with the following:

> I think before I would not have wanted you to use my name because I don't want to be judged like, "Oh yeah, Michelle, she's crazy. Don't talk to her, she is going to tell you something weird, or she might see something in you." That's another thing too, because I don't want people to be afraid of me because they think that I can

> see something that… is wrong or might hurt them or whatever, but I decided that I don't need to be anonymous because I am tired of hiding that. This is part of myself. I really am, because it is a huge part of me and I shouldn't have to hide it.

Her sentiment exemplifies the persistence of the idea in Western societies that people who have experiences with spirits are somehow mentally unfit. She currently runs her own interior decorating company, but at one time she was an acupuncturist. She eventually had to quit acupuncture because she had a hard time not taking on her clients' issues.

> I did get out of acupuncture because I was burnt out just from touching people and getting too much information. I couldn't filter it out. It was like an information overload on a totally different level and I just couldn't deal with it anymore. As soon as I would touch someone I would start getting sick to my stomach. I don't know how to deal with any of this stuff, and I don't know how to filter what's important and what's not, so I think it all stays inside my body until I am just so fried that I just can't do it anymore.

Michelle is by no means a hermit, but remains sensitive to other people's state of mind. She has never been diagnosed with any mental disorder and, regardless of her sensitivity, has no unusual problems functioning mentally, physically, or socially. She has shared a wide variety of extraordinary experiences with me, some with what Taiwanese people would consider hungry ghosts, but one experience in particular stood out as pivotal and transformative in her relationship to and acceptance of her sensitivity. During the time she was an acupuncturist, she and her ex-husband were active members of the acupuncture association and the Chinese community at large in Edmonton. Since they were not Chinese, they faced much opposition to their involvement in acupuncture and at one point Michelle started to think that they were being spiritually attacked by someone in the community with whom they had been friends.

> There was a lot of movement and electrical problems in my house. Very weird dreams. Things coming to visit me at night. Having the same dream with this person in it as my husband. It was pretty bad

> and we were getting sick quite a bit. I think that those who attack you, they make you ill and they break you down. So, we were getting sick a lot and just having really bizarre dreams and it actually was… it felt like a living hell. It was almost impossible to get rid of because I never had to deal with anything like that. I don't know anything about magic or, even though I can feel ghosts, see them, and hear them sometimes, I don't know how to deal with them. I have never been taught and I don't know who to go to and, honestly, I don't really feel like I trust anyone here because I feel like it's so… New Age-y and flaky and that the information that they are giving me is not real.

After three years of sickness and nightmares, Michelle and her husband finally sought out someone through the Internet who practiced what she described as voodoo. Through the use of protective mantras, potions, and spells they began to bring some sense of normalcy to their lives. Michelle has since come to terms with her sensitivity, but during this time she struggled to accept it.

> I think I kind of tried to bury my head in the sand a little bit. I just didn't think that someone could be that horrible to do these things to you. So, I kind of avoided it. My husband really took the front seat, researched it and sought this person out. He took the reins there, and even after we hired that person I still kind of dug my head in the sand. I just didn't want to deal with it and I didn't know how. I was terrified to be quite honest.
>
> I really wish that I could talk about it more openly, and not be judged. And I really wish I had a place to go where I could learn about this kind of stuff and feel like it was valid information, because I feel like some of my closest friends don't even know this about me. I don't tell them, and I think that is awful. I think we should be able to be open about it. I have been to Asia, Vietnam, and Thailand, and it's everywhere there. It's even in the newspaper.

Michelle's denial and skepticism of her experiences did not serve her when dealing with the problems that she faced. She comes from a vastly different cultural background than Ivory, but the problems they faced required similar suspension of doubt in order to solve a practical problem.

Case Study of an Anthropologist

This last case study is autobiographical and exhibits my own struggle to find a solution to a very simple yet annoying problem. I had been living in Tainan for about a year and a half when I started having trouble with my television. I had lived in the same small apartment on my own for about six months and had no previous electrical issues. One night, as I lay down to fall asleep, my television suddenly turned on. Being the scientific materialist that I was raised to be, I checked the power outlet, the buttons on my TV, as well as the remote control for some kind of malfunction. I am quite technically savvy and could not find anything wrong. Thinking that it might have been some freak electrical power surge or some such thing, I went back to bed. As I lay down again, just as I was beginning to fall asleep, the TV turned on again and I got a brief visual image of a young boy standing beside my bed looking down at me like he wanted something. I was annoyed, and I got up to turn the TV off, but when I lay down again I could not sleep. The image of the boy seemed seared into my memory and I could not shake the feeling that he was still there. My intellectual reflex was to dismiss it as my imagination. I had been studying Taiwanese religion for some time and thought that it was starting to affect my imagination. The skeptical scientist in me, however, was eager to test the Taiwanese way of dealing with such encounters. In the spirit of curious inquiry, I tried to apply the logic of my research participants to the situation. If indeed there was a boy spirit who had followed me and was bothering me, I asked myself what a Taiwanese person would do in my place. The answer was simple. The boy was, as the Taiwanese call them, a hungry ghost, so, unless he was particularly malicious, he was just looking for a handout much in the same way a beggar would. I got up and grabbed some crackers from the cupboard, put them in the kitchen and said, “Here is something to eat. I am trying to sleep, so please take it and stop bothering me.” After doing this, I went back to bed and fell asleep soundly. If this was a one-night occurrence, I could have easily dismissed it as a coincidence or fluke of some kind. The problem was that it happened the next night, and the following three nights in a row. Each time the TV would turn on

as I was lying down to go to bed and would not stop turning on until I had left the crackers.

On the fifth day, I happened to be interviewing a spirit medium with a translator. Once we finished up the interview, we passed a nearby temple and I decided to go in and seek advice about my problem. Once I explained the situation to the temple attendants, they had a good laugh at my expense and told me that young boys will not be satisfied with crackers—I had to leave him candy! Before going home, I stopped at a convenience store to buy some candy. This time when the TV turned on, I left the candy instead of the crackers and asked more insistently that he vacate the premises. The next night there was no problem. In the following year that I lived there, there was no further recurrence of the problem with the TV or any other electrical appliance in my apartment. The statistical improbability of these occurrences and the effective solution that the Taiwanese spiritualists gave me led me to believe that maybe their beliefs are based on an intersubjectively human, spiritual reality that belongs to what Marshal Sahlins (1999) quoting Ulf Hannerz (1997) describes as our "Culture of cultures" rather than belonging to any one culture in particular.

Conclusion

Though experiences with spirits may be extraordinary, anthropological research suggests that they are not as uncommon as our reluctance to talk about them would suggest. I have struggled to acknowledge the limits of cultural relativism, positivistic philosophy, and psychological reductionism because they do little to help us understand the data anthropologists have collected on experiences with spirits from the cultures we have studied. Dismissing experiences with spirits as culturally relative and subjective does not address their widespread and cross-cultural nature. In my own research I have found that the concept of the hungry ghost to be cross-cultural. I have found spiritual collisions with malicious or hungry ghosts like the ones I have described above in every culture I have done fieldwork in (e.g, Sioux, Cree, Taiwanese, Euro-Canadian). The cultures seem only to differ in how

they categorize the experience, address the problem, and how open people are to talk about it.

Trying to reduce such experiences using psychology often ends up creating overly convoluted explanations that would portray many people as being mentally unfit. Yet most scientists will not risk treating experiences with spirits as a serious object of study for fear of being labelled as crazy, superstitious, or religiously ignorant, even though such beliefs have not been sufficiently resolved by materialist explanations. Finding funding for such research is equally challenging and much of the research on experiences with the spirit world is left to paranormal investigators on television shows who seek more to sensationalize the experience rather than apply well informed scientific rigour. SPR stands out as an organization committed to the scientific study of paranormal phenomena, but a quick survey of their research indicates that their focus is primarily on extrasensory perception in the Western spiritualist tradition.

The irony is that those who would claim that examining experiences with spirits is unscientific and irrational often neglect to approach such phenomena with the true spirit of open-minded, skeptical, scientific inquiry. What a scientific skeptic seeks, among other things, is independent verification of results and experiences. Generally, skeptics do not trust anecdotal evidence because it can be clouded by subjective factors, like confirmation bias, that make the findings seem questionable. What gives me pause when considering experiences with spirits are accounts of independent verification such as what Ivory received regarding her experience of being possessed. When the temple attendant asked if her mother had two older siblings that had died, Ivory's mother said that she did not. Upon questioning Ivory's grandmother, they found out that indeed Ivory's mother did have two siblings that had passed away that she never knew about until then. How could the temple attendant know about the two dead siblings when she had no connection to the family and Ivory's mother did not even know? As discussed earlier in this paper, similar independent verification was found by Richard Hodgson through his testing of Leonora Piper. Try as he might, Hodgson could not find a satisfying materialist explanation for Mrs.

Piper's ability to recall private, specific, and obscure details about the life of his friend who had recently died and to whom she had no previous connection. These are just two cases of many that make an open-minded skeptic think twice about dismissing experiences with spirits as purely imaginative or culturally subjective.

If experiences with spirits are a cross-cultural, intersubjective component of human reality, then we should be able to test them with some consistency using the scientific method. By integrating data from the multitude of cultures anthropologists have studied and taking into account the postmodernist critiques of the ethnocentric, sexist, racist subjectivity of what we have come to recognize as science (e.g., male, white, European dominated ways of knowledge legitimization), we should be able to come up with scientifically legitimate theories and experiments that test the intersubjective reality of experiences with spirits. These theories and experiments, while rejecting the ethnocentric, racist, and sexist elements of traditional scientific institutions, would have to be guided by the principles of the scientific method - logically consistent, independently verifiable, predictive, broad of scope, and integrated into our current pool of knowledge as much as possible (Harris 1994). They would also have to be open to the idea that the spiritual universe may not necessarily operate according to the same immutable laws as the material universe (e.g., their night is our day), as well as take into consideration that the spirits they may often be dealing with are (or were) human and that the same challenges when dealing with living humans may apply.

To ignore the success of the scientific method because of postmodernist critiques of its cultural specificity is to throw the baby out with the bath water, but examining experiences with spirits for consistency and predictability would take a significant re-examination of our acceptance of it as a legitimate field of scientific inquiry. It would require a de-compartmentalization of science and religion/spiritualism in favour of a perspective that endeavours to integrate multiple ways of knowing into a holistic worldview that runs counter to the Cartesian notions of duality that are foundational to Western philosophy. SPR has been conducting this kind of

research for years, but to date they have not tapped into the wealth of experience, knowledge and relationships that anthropologists studying spiritualist or shamanistic traditions have to offer.

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Appendix: Mandarin words

Pinyin	Character	English
Bāzì	八字	divining number
Fóyǎn	佛眼	Buddha’s eye
guǐ	鬼	unclean spirit
línghún	靈魂	dead person (neutral)
qì	氣	vital energy
shén	神	good dead
tiānyǎn	天眼	heavenly eye
xiān	仙	Immortal
yīnyángyǎn	陰陽眼	yin/yang eye
zǔxiān	祖先	Ancestors

The Quest for Evidence: Scientism, Doubt, and Paranormal Investigation in England

Michele Hanks

Several months into my fieldwork with English paranormal investigators, one of my collaborators texted me in the middle of the night to let me know that Jack, a mutual friend, had "seen a ghost" that night on an investigation. My friend urged me to go meet with him as soon as possible to interview him about it. Jack was the leader of a paranormal research group in the North East of England and he was deeply agnostic—or, as he would put it "open-minded"—about the existence of ghosts. Despite years of paranormal research, he remained unsure of their existence. The text was deeply exciting for me. While instances of informants seeing ghosts were far from unusual so far in my research, I interpreted my collaborator's text as an indication that, perhaps, this sighting had transformed Jack's view of ghosts. At that stage of my research, I still regularly described the goal of my project as understanding how knowledge and belief were produced among paranormal investigators. Jack's sighting seemed like an ideal moment to understand how such knowledge and belief emerged.

When I met up with him to discuss his sighting, he enthusiastically told me about his encounter. During the course of an investigation at a well-known haunted hotel, he was alone in a room. He felt someone behind him and assumed it was one of the other investigators. Eventually, he turned around and he saw that there was a figure he described as translucent standing "through a chair". I eagerly asked him if this sighting had demonstrated satisfactorily the reality of ghosts to him. He shrugged. He was so startled by seeing it, Jack explained, that he didn't "properly investigate" it. Ultimately, he reflected, he would "need to investigate it properly to

really know anything." This experience had done nothing to alter Jack's understanding of the reality of ghosts. At the end of our conversation, he brightly suggested, "something might be out there, but I still need to find evidence of it." At the time, this exchange confounded me. Jack told me a story, in great detail, of seeing a ghost, and, yet, he did not believe in ghosts or accept their existence. Why was this sighting not enough proof? In the aftermath of his seemingly extraordinary experience, Jack remained unconvinced of the reality of ghosts, the validity of his experience, and the rigour of his own investigative protocols. Jack was not alone in his inability to reconcile personal encounters with ghosts or spirits with his understanding of objective evidence. During the course of my research, paranormal investigators who regularly saw, heard, or felt ghosts during the course of their paranormal investigations remained deeply doubtful about the nature and meaning of these encounters.

These extraordinary experiences never satisfied investigators' desires for evidence of the paranormal. On the surface, this may not seem terribly surprising. After all, ghosts are entities typically associated with the supernatural or the superstitious, and, as Tanya Luhrmann (2012: xviii) has observed, the "supernatural is often treated as an entertaining fantasy" in much of the North Atlantic world. However, as anthropologists have shown, globally people come to trust (Landry 2016), experience (Klin-Oron 2014), know (Laycock 2015; Keane 2013), and develop personal relationships (Luhrmann 2012) with incorporeal entities such as gods, spirits, demons, aliens, and angels. In England, Abby Day has found that many people, including atheists, have experienced some contact with a ghost or paranormal force (2011: 98-101).

Taken together, all of this makes paranormal investigators' persistent doubt seem all the more confusing. Why doubt the entities you seek out and, eventually, find? This problem, while intellectual, is also emotionally resonant for investigators. It looms over their experiences and drives them in their quest for satisfactory evidence of the paranormal. This problem of encountering the extraordinary but being unable to locate a satisfactory explanatory framework drives much of paranormal investigating. In this chapter, I will aim

to explain this seeming paradox of encountering ghosts yet remaining unconvinced of their existence. Doing so requires closely attending to investigators' epistemology. Drawing on long - term fieldwork with paranormal investigators in the North of England between 2006 and 2015, I examine paranormal investigating as a research ideology and methodology that seeks to balance embodied encounters with spirits and scientifically grounded testing as a means of producing new knowledge of the ghostly. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the balance or mastery of both scientific evidence and embodied experience, which is at the core of paranormal investigating, remains elusive for investigators. Ultimately, I argue that paranormal investigators, enmeshed in the moral economy of scientism, are unable to translate their embodied encounters into a growing body of knowledge. Instead, their practices of investigation produce doubt rather than certainty or knowledge.

In recent years, anthropologists have focused on how spiritual practitioners come to accept incorporeal entities as real, felt presences. Much of this work has emphasized the embodied, practical dimensions of such transformation from doubt to belief. For example, in her study of how women in 1980s London became practitioners of magic, Tanya Luhrmann (1989) introduced the concept of the interpretive drift, which explained how people came to fully embrace beliefs and practices that many in their community might view as irrational. Highlighting the cognitive, practical, and embodied components of spiritual practice that allow such a transformation, she argued that, "magical ideas begin to seem normal in the process of becoming a magician" (Luhrmann 1989: 312). Similarly, other scholars have foregrounded how material culture can act as a materializing catalyst affirming or generating belief, trust, or knowledge of spiritual domains (Landry 2016; Laycock 2015). In these approaches, though, the emphasis remains on how trust, belief, or certainty emerge. In much of this work, doubt remains on the ethnographic sidelines: it is something to overcome.

It is only in recent years that anthropologists have begun to attend more closely to doubt. As Mathijs Pelkmans has suggested, anthropologists and social scientists have often overlooked and

under theorized experiences and states of doubt (2013: 3-4). For Pelkmans, doubt is ephemeral, unstable, and inherently contradictory (2013: 16). He persuasively urges anthropologists to attend to the "dynamics of conviction and doubt through which [both religious and secular beliefs'] efficacy and affective qualities are made and unmade. Indeed, as anthropologists have shown, doubt emerges under particular contexts (Bloch 2013; Hanks 2016a, 2019) and produces particular outcomes (Bubandt 2014; Kaufman 2010). In the case of English paranormal investigators' doubt, this chapter shows how investigators' attempts to reconcile their extraordinary experiences with the epistemological demands of secularism – particularly scientism—produce doubt.

Paranormal Investigating in England

There is a long history of paranormal investigating or ghost hunting in England. In the 19th century, gentleman scientists pursued psychical research and founded organizations like the Ghost Club and the Society for Psychical Research (Oppenheim 1988; Owen 2004). In the 20th century, such research attracted the attention of amateur researchers in the form of "ghost hunters" and "paranormal investigators." Historian Owen Davies wrote that, "the twentieth century heralded the rise of the 'ghost hunter'" (2007: 95). As early as the 1930s, ghost hunters, such as Harry Price, appeared on radio broadcasts popularizing the idea of rationally grounded inquiry into the paranormal.[17] While paranormal investigating fell from favour during the later part of the century, by the start of the 21st century it was, again, widely popular. Spurred on by online networking technologies and the popularity of the television series Most Haunted, significant numbers of people began to fashion themselves as paranormal investigators and formed local groups dedicated to scientifically researching ghosts. According to one estimate, there

[17] While ghost hunting and paranormal investigation emerged as popular pursuits in the twentieth century, popular engagements in Spiritualism (Davies 2007; Meintel 2007), Hazlegrove (2000), and Owen (1989, 2004) and psychical investigation (Oppenheim 1988) predated them.

were 1200 local groups engaged in such work in the U.K. in 2006 (Winsper et al. 2008).

Paranormal investigating was a heterodox practice. Investigators agreed on little in terms of standard of evidence, research protocols, and epistemological frameworks. No formal training programs were universally recognized or embraced18. Like its American counterpart (Bastian 2015; Li 2015), English paranormal investigation was a largely working-class engagement, and investigators brought a variety of educational and professional backgrounds to their work. Many had harboured an interest in ghosts, the paranormal, or as one investigator put it, "all things spooky", since childhood. Many reported uncanny encounters in childhood—from seeing a ghostly figure to observing objects move of their own volition—that were never explained or resolved. Others developed an interest in ghosts after the death of a loved one; many reported disappointing experiences in Spiritualist churches or with mediums that led them to turn to paranormal investigating, which they saw as a more objective practice.

While their beliefs were deeply heterodox, investigators typically espoused an interconnected view of the world (Luhrmann 2007) that did not distinguish between the natural and supernatural, or, as Day describes it, the "everyday or the ever-after" (Day 2011: 113).[19] Because of this view, they expected uncanny encounters to be explainable phenomena. Investigators were fond of likening the paranormal to known natural phenomena. Jenny, a paranormal investigator from Newcastle, explained, "if it's real, the paranormal is just the normal. It's like anything else: rain, gravity, lightning…things that used to see magical to us but are now

[18] While parapsychology exists as an academic discipline in the U.K., few of my informants fully embraced parapsychology. Many had read online texts about parapsychology, and a few had participated in online courses in parapsychology; however, it did not emerge as an authoritative way of knowing the paranormal for the investigators who I worked with.

[19] This worldview links paranormal investigators with a range of New Age practitioners, witches, and Spiritualists.

understood." Her point here was that while our human ancestors may have struggled to account for natural processes like lightening or gravity, through science they became knowable. Her hope was that the paranormal was the same. Indeed, other investigators often echoed Jenny's location of the paranormal as a natural process. This understanding of the paranormal as part of the natural – rather than the spiritual world – is deeply significant. It locates paranormal investigating as a materially and empirically grounded process, one squarely part of a secular project.

In recent years, anthropologists have foregrounded the political dimensions of secularism (Cannell 2010; Mahmood 2005); however, as Edward Royle's (1974) study of 19th century English secularism reveals, the emergence of secularism portended radical transformations to political and epistemological order. Beyond redefining the political lines of spirituality and the public, secularism demanded rational explanations for the seemingly extraordinary. Today, scholars often overlook this epistemological dimension of secularism, in part, because it has become so commonly accepted. Indeed, Talal Asad has suggested that today, we "assume that the philosophical battle of truth has been won" (2011: 660). This assumption ignores both the complex historical relationship between magical practices and seemingly secular knowledge systems (Josephson-Storm 2017) as well as the lived realities of people who struggle to reconcile secular epistemological demands with their experience of the extraordinary, such as English paranormal investigators. At the core of English paranormal investigators' project, then, is the desire to accumulate the rational, scientific evidence that could establish the status of the paranormal (Hanks 2016b). After all, if the paranormal is a natural process akin to gravity, electricity, or lightening, it must be subject to the same processes of measurement. Managing this inquiry proves complex for investigators though.

The Trope of the Investigator

Paranormal investigators' forms of self-identification and self-understanding are important dimensions of how they balance the

demands of epistemological secularism and their interest in and experience of the extraordinary. These self-fashioned experts on the paranormal tend to call themselves paranormal investigators.[20] This form of self-identification is important. They do not call themselves paranormal scientists, paranormal theologians, or paranormal mediums; rather, they call themselves investigators. This is a term that is important for them and its use is not accidental. The investigator has become an important trope throughout much of the English-speaking North Atlantic world and it is one that investigators use to organize their queries into the paranormal. Tropes provide a useful framework for understanding the ways in which people interested in the paranormal self-identify and craft strategies for exploring the paranormal. Eleanor Townsley usefully wrote that, "tropes link cultural form to content, illuminating one way that actors use, enact, inhabit, and deploy cultural structures" (2006: 41). Researchers' adoption of the term "investigator" resonates with the proliferation of idealized investigators who populate the English-speaking media world.

The 21st century has seen an abundance of investigators in the popular media. House M.D., the multiple incarnations of C.S.I., Lie to Me, Sherlock, The Mentalist, Most Haunted, and T.A.P.S. are but a few of the television programs that foreground the investigator as popular cultural figure.[21] In each of these veins, the investigator has emerged as a leading expert capable of solving even the most confounding of problems. In each of these cases, the expertise of the investigator crosses several arenas. She or he is not an expert in one arena but able to master many arenas. This ideal of multiple masteries is important to the self-image of investigators.

Consider, for example, the representation of investigation found on House. Dr. Gregory House, the main character, often reminds his

[20] Some use the term ghost hunter; however, in my experience, the more seriously minded researchers tend to use "ghost hunter" to refer to those whom they see as thrill-seeking dilettantes.

[21] While some of these shows are American in origin, they are widely consumed in England as well the United States.

colleagues that "everybody lies", instructing them to search below the surface for the underlying cause of illness. This search requires his colleagues to embark on amusing, albeit highly unethical, searches of patients' lives, homes, and work environments to uncover clues that reveal the true nature of the illness. Dr. House constantly reminds his colleagues and viewers that patients are untrustworthy in their accounts of their own illness. Establishing the truth of an illness requires marshalling a variety of different types of evidence. Dr. House, incidentally modelled on Sherlock Holmes, must engage a wide-ranging investigation to uncover the truth, a truth that participants, namely the ill, are not able to directly access themselves. While House certainly maintains multiple masteries, his mastery of physical evidence, in the form of biological markers of illness or the material traces that reveal behavioural patterns are prioritized over the ability to make sense of patient narratives. In her study of the representation of scientific truth on C.S.I., Corinna Kruse raises a similar point. She notes that, "the physical evidence is still given precedence over witness evidence or 'stories'" (2010: 81). Indeed, this is so persuasively portrayed on the program that numerous legal scholars have worried about the so-called C.S.I.-effect when juries deliberate on cases with forensic evidence (Ghoshray 2007). This cultural emphasis here on the priority of material evidence is significant and echoes the secular emphasis on scientific materialism as the core pathway to authoritative knowledge (e.g., Hacking 1995). What is real and knowable, then, is material.

As a further example, then, in both C.S.I. and House, the investigator – whether a doctor or a forensic scientist – must engage a broad range of evidence to reach a conclusion. It is not sufficient simply to engage science; one must also investigate. The same is doubly true for investigators of the paranormal on television. Unlike doctors or forensic scientists, they venture into terrains without established knowledge and rules. Ultimately, what guides them is their capacity to evaluate evidence using the skills they bring to the table.

All of these programs have in common the assertion that an investigator plays a critically important role. The investigator relies

on science but is not defined by it. Dr. House does not cure illness because he is a skilled doctor; rather, he solves diagnostic puzzles because he is willing to pursue the truth ruthlessly. Here, the category of investigator emerges as broader and, ultimately, more powerful than that of scientist. Indeed, these programs constitute the investigator as masterful and in control, seamlessly negotiating bodies of evidence. These enactments of investigators and evidence have important real-life consequences. Indeed, as scholars concerned with the C.S.I. effect in legal proceedings have demonstrated, the depictions of forensic investigators as capable of providing irrefutable evidence, in some cases, has diminished jurors' faith in the validity of eyewitness testimony (Cavender and Deutch 2007; Kruse 2010; Mopas 2007).

These televised depictions of investigators constitute what Arjun Appadurai (1996: 31) and Charles Taylor (2002: 91) have called social "imaginaries". These fictional stories become a way for people to imagine the realms of science, technology, evidence, and investigation. For self-identified investigators, these popular culture images of investigators become crucial tools for their own self-imagining.

An Investigator's Tool Kit

To return, then, to paranormal investigators, it is clear they see the category of investigator in a similar fashion. They see themselves as ringleaders of sorts who must balance, as Jack once explained, the "tools in their tool kit", which take the form of "science, mediums, and personal experience" and then make sense of three resulting forms of evidence: "scientific data", investigators' narratives of their personal encounters with ghosts, and performances of mediumship. The equating of science, mediums, and personal experience as comparable tools is not a self-evident categorization. Each category is far from a simple tool. Tools, after all, are devices used to carry out a simple function: in this case, establishing evidence of the paranormal. But, of course, science, mediumship, and personal experience are all complex ways of knowing the world, contingent on particular epistemological, spiritual, and ontological worldviews.

To position them as tools ignores those complex histories as well as the complexities of evidence these ways of knowing promise.

For investigators like Jack, science comes to mean an idealized version of technologically mediated, objective inquiry that allows for some kind of corroboration. They produced "scientific" data by using technological devices to monitor their environments. When Jack referred to "mediums" as a tool, he was referring to the strategic collaboration with people who consider themselves to be mediums. These mediums came from a range of backgrounds. Some developed their mediumship in Spiritualist churches while others considered themselves genetically predisposed to mediumship. While varying acts and processes of mediumship are entrenched in specific cultural, spiritual, and historical contexts, paranormal investigators tended to ignore those particularities. For them, mediums were people who might have better than average luck at picking up paranormal processes. To use them as a tool, paranormal investigators aimed to record their observations and then attempting to substantiate their claims. Finally, paranormal investigators considered their own extraordinary experiences a potential tool. Few of the paranormal investigators I knew considered themselves mediums, but over the course of an investigation most would have firsthand experiences with a ghost or potentially paranormal entity. These personal experiences included a range of sensory perceptions of ghosts, such as sight, sound, olfactory sensations, and touch, as well as episodes that resembled mediumship. In such episodes, investigators experienced the thoughts and sensations of a ghost. Investigators tended to use the gloss "experience" to encompass this range of mundane and supernatural encounters.[22] "Experience" remained an important category, in part, because many were motivated to pursue paranormal investigating because of previous experiences with the paranormal. Indeed, many longed for such an encounter, even though they believed it to be an incomplete form of evidence on its own.

[22] Throughout this chapter, I will follow paranormal investigators' lead and refer to this set of embodied sensations simply as "experience".

Investigators aim to ultimately amass objective proof regarding the existence of the paranormal; however, each type of evidence poses a variety of challenges for them. They fear the subjectivity of mediumship and their personal "experiences" with ghosts while struggling to translate technologically grounded observations into significant evidence. Investigators manage these challenges by embracing what they label a "toolbox-approach," meaning treating different, competing forms of knowing as simply alternative tools to be strategically deployed. They aim for a sort of balance; however, it often remains elusive for them. They aspire to include and consider the insights of science while also considering the insights provided by mediums. The ultimate, satisfying evidence, investigators argued, would include science and mediumship or science and personal experience. This would satisfy their desire for objective evidence, in the form of scientific proof, while also satisfying their personal desire to personally experience such a phenomenon.

Rose, a paranormal investigator, explicitly articulated this approach. She explained, "A good investigator's got a toolbox. Science is a tool. Mediums are a tool. People's experiences are a tool. It's up to the investigator to put it all together." Ultimately, Rose positions the investigator as master of the toolbox, the agent who must piece together the insights garnered through strategic deployment of each "tool".

Consider a blog post by Bill, an investigator with Eastern Ghost Research (EGR), a paranormal investigation team in North East England. In it, he describes what he sees as the range of investigators. He writes:

Another thing to consider when researching paranormal group(s) is the what 'type' of group they are. Some groups work purely from a scientific angle, even going so far as to belittling anyone who puts any value on anything that falls outside established scientific principles on occasion, while others lay at the opposite end of the spectrum and conduct more psychic-based investigations with teams of 'mediums' and little or no 'science' involved. Many other groups (such as EGR) fall somewhere between the two camps.

Bill collapses the typical trichotomy of paranormal investigative tools (mediumship, experience, and science) into a simpler dichotomy (science and mediumship). While Bill is more explicit than many investigators, his equation of mediumship and personal experience with a ghost reveals a persistent sense that mediumship and personal "experience" of ghosts are similar types of tools. Both are grounded on first person encounters with ghosts and depend on the experiencer's authority and reliability.[23] They ultimately remain emphatic that mediumship and personal encounters with ghosts are deeply similar and constitute forms of experience. In Bill's writing, it is clear that he sees both extremely pro-science and pro-mediumship groups as unnecessarily restrictive. Indeed, such groups would leave little room for investigating. For Bill, then, investigating is an act of balance. It creates an objectivity that supersedes the objectivity of science itself.

While Bill sees very real and concrete differences between groups, I think he overstates the difference. In fact, based on my experiences with a number of groups, most groups see themselves in a similar light – as including mediumship as well as science without excluding either. Because of the heterodox nature of paranormal investigating, groups may maintain legitimate disagreements about methods or epistemology; however, nearly all groups shared this common practice of positioning a team's approach as moderate and balanced. Indeed, this echoes David Hess's (1993) observation that in the culture of US paranormal research, members use boundary work to define themselves against the values of other groups enmeshed in

[23] Many mediums disagree with this equation, pointing to their spiritual expertise, and complain that collaborating with paranormal investigators yields more anxiety than rewards. Indeed, many of the mediums who work with paranormal investigators have considerable experience and training in mediumship. Some regularly demonstrate at Spiritualist churches. Others routinely hold "Psychic Nights" at pubs. They see the nature of their encounters with and understanding of spirits as very different from the inclusive episodes that paranormal investigators count as "experience" on their parts. Despite this, paranormal investigators point to what they see as the overarching parallels between the two forms of practice: both mediums and investigators encounter what they believe to be a spirit in a sensory vein.

studying or critiquing the paranormal. For investigators like Bill, Jack, and Rose, they see themselves as less gullible and given to belief than mediums, less methodologically limited than academic scientists, and less limited by their skepticism than skeptics like James Randi.

Most paranormal investigators ultimately hope and aim for a moderate position, eschewing an extreme embrace of either end of the spectrum. Bill's positioning of his investigation group, EGR, mirrors that of many other groups and it reflects the collectively valued emphasis on the investigator as negotiating and mastering a range of tools or approaches. For example, Drake, the leader of a North East research team explained the role he saw for investigators. "You've got to make sense of a lot of things," he observed. "You can't take anything at face value—not science, not mediums, not experiences. You've got to weed out the people who want a thrill and tone down the ones who just want to parrot back what scientists say." Drake, like Bill, sees balance as key and emphasizes the authority of the investigator. While crucial to their idealized sense of self, investigators rarely deploy such balance in their actual research.

Elusive Balance

Unlike the idealized investigators on television, paranormal investigators are unable to control, contain, and balance the different tools in an investigator's toolbox with the precision they desire. Paranormal investigators struggle to reconcile science and "experience," the two dominant tools in an investigator's toolbox. Investigators tie science to the production of "evidence", whereas they associate mediumship and personal encounters with ghosts with "experience". They believe and hope such "experiences" can be translated into evidence; however, investigators remain uncertain of how to do this. Typically, investigators consider evidence and experience as contradictory and incompatible.

Science and Evidence

A notion of evidence informs paranormal investigators' sense of their intellectual project. They see themselves as pursuing evidence that paranormal events do (or do not) occur. While it is imaginable that they might pursue religious or theological evidence, their notion of evidence is influenced by a sense of scientism. By scientism, I mean what Mikael Stenmark has defined as "the view that all or, at least, some of the essential non-academic areas of human life can be reduced to (or translated into) science" (1997: 18). Stenmark and others (Collins and Evans 2007; Mellor 2003) have argued that this is a pervasive ideology in much of Europe and the U.S. It is the broad context in which investigators work today. While the paranormal investigating project is not defined exclusively by scientism, it is influenced by it.

A particular understanding of science, which is partially at odds with how scientists may see their own project, heavily inflects paranormal investigators' understanding of evidence. The tenets of science that influence investigators include: 1) technological mediation, 2) idealistic imaginings of objectivity, and 3) a desire for repeatability and corroboration. Interestingly, these three chief components also inflect much of their anxiety over the validity of experience as a means of producing knowledge. Technology lies at the heart of their enterprise, at least in theory. Investigators imagine technology as an unbiased way of accessing, observing, and chronicling the changes in their surroundings that cumulatively indicate the unfolding of a paranormal event. While technology occupies a privileged place in the collective investigating imaginary, in practice, it often takes a backseat to more experiential engagements. In an idealized setting, investigators would use technology—namely, electromagnetic energy field (EMF) readers, thermometers, and digital recording devices—to record or verify the embodied experiences of researchers; however, this verification often remains elusive, as we will see later.

Objectivity constitutes paranormal investigators' chief epistemological goal. They hope to establish objective (i.e. real,

irrefutable, and not subjective) indications of the reality of the paranormal. For them, objectivity is synonymous with a definitive sense that a person is reporting the truth. Indeed, they understand the "objective" as that which is true. It is opposed to their understanding of "subjective" knowledge, which is personal and difficult to "verify".

For paranormal investigators, repeatability replaces falsification as the chief component of science. Repeatability constitutes a component of their ideological problem with embodied experiences. They question how they could test or repeat instances of people "picking up" spirits or experiencing the symptoms of a haunting rather than how one might falsify the claim that a spirit was the cause of such occurrences. While some might see this as a problem emerging out of the expressly fleeting nature of the phenomena in question, most see it as a problem inherent in experiential knowledge.

Perhaps surprisingly, paranormal investigators' enthusiasm for science does not extend to scientists. They value the methods of science while maintaining a degree of skepticism regarding its orthodox practitioners. Adopting a remarkably constructivist stance, many investigators argued that orthodox scientists are neither pure nor objective in their pursuit of knowledge, and that their practice is dangerously ensnared in socio-political life. For example, Jack has hypothesized that science, because of its deep connection to organized government and corporate power, has no investment in revealing realities that would challenge the stability of the status quo. He explained to me that, "they [scientists] don't want us to know about ghosts and survival. If they did, think of how it would change the political situation." He went on to hypothesize that if survival after death was a known component of human existence, governments ultimately would lose the power to control their citizens and extract wealth from them. Indeed, Jack suggested that people would no longer fear death and they might prefer death, with the promise of spiritual survival, to the financial and political burdens of their present lives. The specificities of this critique matter less than the implicit claim that official, authoritative scientists are

complicit with systems of power. In short, they do not achieve the unbiased stance that science requires.

While investigators remain skeptical of scientists' objectivity, they still embrace science as an objective method. Investigators understand "science" as an instrument that enables them to detect the invisible worlds of the paranormal. This is evident in a popular online article describing "Ghosts and Science" found on many paranormal websites.[24] The article began with the assertion that:

> When *scientists* debunk ghosts their first statement is usually, 'there is no *scientific* proof of the existence of ghosts'. This is wrong. There is *scientific* proof. *Science* even has theories that explain something must be happening beyond what we know and what we can see. [My emphasis.]

In this statement, the crucial distinction between science and scientists becomes clear. Paranormal investigators do not see scientists as individuals able to control or determine the definition of science exclusively. In a sense, science is bigger and broader than scientists. Greg Downey has remarked that in American culture "scientific activity" constitutes "a supreme cultural authority" (1988: 30) and indeed, this is true for Britain as well. In their imaginaries, it is deeply tied to the production of definite proof, or evidence.

The article goes on to cite electrical activity and variations in temperature as arenas with the potential for scientific query. It stated, "Recording temperature changes is another scientific way of detecting the presence of ghosts." The language of this assertion is revealing. I suspect that a scientist might note with concern that investigators are conflating science and technology; however, in this instance, it is clear that investigators see science as something instrumental rather than philosophical. Indeed, this conflation of science and technology enables them to embrace what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have called "mechanical objectivity," which is the idea that machines "offered freedom from…the willful

[24] Like many such articles, there is no clear author.

interventions that had come to be seen as the most dangerous aspects of subjectivity" (1992: 84).

By reducing all of science to its mechanical tools, they emphasize its objectivity. Further, this emphasis on science as an instrument allows them to position it as part of their repertoire as investigators. Indeed, this understanding of science actively positions it as a tool. Because of this instrumentalization of science, they can assert more readily that science reveals things. The article noted, "These unexplainable electromagnetic fluctuations and temperature changes are scientific evidence that something is happening." The role of interpretation is radically diminished here.

Investigators' association of the instrumentalization of science with the production of evidence underscores their emphasis on evidence as objective. Part of the appeal of this idea of science is that it is devoid of personalized, partial information. They conceptualize science as a tool that can be used to reveal real information, in the form of evidence. Their identification as investigators, rather than scientists, would allow them in a perfect world to manage and consume scientific evidence without succumbing to "belief in science". Ideally, they would remain too objective and detached for such a posture.

Investigators aim to extend this mode of instrumentalization to personal encounters with personal experience as well. Such lessons were rendered explicit during the course of a paranormal investigating course that I participated in Newcastle in 2008, which actively instilled these practices in students. During the experiential elements of the course, the instructor explained that we, the students, should articulate any physical or bodily sensations we encountered as soon as possible. Other students would report feeling cold, a sudden draft, a sensation of tingling in their legs, or head pain.

These experiences, sometimes very clearly welcomed by the students, triggered others to approach the area where they were standing and to begin using tools such as EMF readers and thermometers to see if there was any "quantifiable change" that

would indicate paranormal evidence. After class, I asked Steve, the instructor, about this and he explained that individuals' bodily experiences were interesting, but that the data produced by EMF readers and other technologies was "objective." To return to the recurrent toolbox metaphor, this exchange constituted embodied experiences as a tool but as a tool with less use and less independent evidentiary basis than technology.

Experience and the Fear of the Subjective

While paranormal investigators valued "science" for its capacity to yield objective understandings of the paranormal, they viewed experience—in the form of mediumship and extraordinary experiences with ghosts—far more ambivalently, fearing the experiential and seemingly subjective nature of them. Paradoxically, such "experiences," or embodied encounters with spirits, were at once both a desired entity and something that was not entirely to be trusted as a form of knowing.

Extraordinary experiences abound on paranormal investigations. People feel, hear, smell, see, and taste ambiguous presences, which are typically partial and fleeting. Investigators aim to subject these sensory experiences to both common sense and technical verification. For example, if someone smells flowers, investigators are likely to check to see if anyone is wearing perfume or washed his or her hair with floral scented shampoo. If someone remarks that she feels colder, ideally someone will direct the thermometer at her and see if there has been a decline in temperature. On one investigation in a pub, someone asked me if I felt anything and I remarked that one side of my body (the side closer to the window) was colder than the other. The investigator proceeded to use his handheld thermometer and measure the surface temperature of both of my arms. One side was indeed several degrees cooler.

These senses, in theory at least, are subject to technological verification. Despite this, investigators do not always or even frequently pursue technologically mediated understandings. This is a central paradox in their project. They fervently desire to include

sensory, mediumistic knowledge in their articulation of the paranormal; however, their attempts to do so remain mired in self-doubt and suspicion.

Beyond the typical sensorium, there is another component of embodiment present in investigations, one that is more difficult to articulate. It is a sense or a consciousness that permeates individual's emotions and mind. During the course of an investigation, investigators will report thoughts and feelings that do not seem to originate in their own experience. For example, during one investigation in a pub in Stockton, Dara, an investigator, began to report marked changes in her mood. In everyday life, Dara was a soft-spoken, kind woman. She has been investigating for several years, and her interest veered more toward the technical side of research that its experiential dimensions. Dara, Joe, another investigator, and I were sitting in a storage room in the pub, when Dara began to report unusual sensations. She explained, "I'm quite angry. I wasn't angry when we came in here, but I'm feeling quite angry right now. I'm so sorry Joe, but it feels quite directed at you. It's like my mind is furious at you, like you've done something awful to me." Joe nodded seriously and took notes about her experience as she reported her emotional state. When we later left the room, Dara again emphasized that the anger was not her own and that it felt quite foreign to her. Later, both Dara and Joe agreed that this was an "interesting", meaning potentially significant, experience; however, they were unsure of how to interpret it. As Joe explained to me, "I trust Dara as much as I trust anyone. If she says she's feeling angry, I suppose she was. But what do you do with that? What does that mean?"

Investigators have multiple problems with experiential knowledge. First, there is the problem of the reliability of others' reporting. As one investigator put it, "How can you trust someone else's experience?" Historian Martin Jay, reflecting on the term experience, remarked that, "'experience,' we might say, is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity" (2005: 6). This observation is useful here. Idealized performances of experience on investigations should compress the public and private

temporally. Investigators encourage mediums and other investigators to "say what you get as soon as you get anything".[25] This points to two central components of experience. For the most part, it is individual and it is reported so, in essence, it is always in the past. Each of these points creates conflict for investigators' sense of objectivity. Ultimately, the demarcation of "public language" and "private subjectivity" (Jay 2005: 6) proved difficult for investigators to successfully navigate.

The Embodied Tension Between Experience and Evidence

The tension that I am describing between the paranormal investigators' categories of evidence and experience is not purely theoretical. It appears in emotionally fraught and unresolved ways in the lives of participants. For example, in the days after the investigation in Stockton, Dara expressed her frustration and doubt about her experience. During the course of a conversation, she reflected,

> Was that real? Why did that happen? Why didn't Joe do more to investigate at the time? I don't know why I felt that way. The not knowing gets me upset. We're meant to be investigators. If all we're doing is going out and having these experiences that we never explain, it feels like we're not doing a good job.

While people across England who are not involved in paranormal investigation somewhat regularly encounter ghosts (Day 2011) and find ways to explain them, in the wake of their own extraordinary experiences, paranormal investigators struggled to find a satisfactory explanatory framework. They were unsure what caused these experiences and they were uncertain of how to deploy such experiences in the production of new knowledge about the

[25] Such demands for immediate reporting often annoy the mediums, who have developed their own ways of processing and accounting for their encounters with spirits. At times, mediums became slightly resentful of paranormal investigators' demands, which they saw as interfering with their own expertise.

paranormal. They did not trust their own perceptions of their bodies, minds, and emotions.

One of my close collaborators, Ginny, a woman in her late 40s, regularly struggled to account for her experiential encounters with invisible worlds. Her experiences demonstrate the degree to which such encounters generate heated anxiety and uncertainty. Ginny is a co-leader of a paranormal research team that is deeply committed to the deployment of scientific perspectives and methods in investigating. She and Harry, her husband and co-leader, were among the most unequivocally pro-science investigators I met during my research. Their typical approach to personal experience with ghosts was to politely record it, but to dedicate very little time to analyzing it. Ginny and Harry were both skeptical of most mediums. Despite this inclination, Ginny started out her interactions in the paranormal community as someone who thought she might be able to "develop" as a medium.[26] Starting out, she regularly "picked up" things and she found that many of the things she was "picking up" on investigations, such as dates and names, turned out to correspond to knowledge about the sites in the historical record. This "made [her] wonder". However, despite her personal encounters, she remains highly suspicious regarding instances of mediumship. She explained:

> I'm not saying there's no such thing as mediumship. I think a lot of people are faking it, though. In my case, I don't know what it is. I

[26] "Developing" is a common way of describing the processes through which a medium practices focusing on her encounters with ghosts or spirits and learns to accept and articulate them. "Developing" is associated to some degree with Spiritualist churches, which hold regular "development circles" for people to practice their mediumship. There are "development circles" held outside of the churches as well. While not all mediums participate in or embrace the idea of development circles, many use the term "develop" to describe the process through which they honed their skills as a medium. Interestingly, the term "develop" implies that mediumship is an inherent feature of these people and that it only requires nurturing to blossom. Of course, not all mediums embrace this ideology but many do.

> pick up on things, I do. But I don't know how. I don't even know if it's real. I don't know. It's frustrating.

For Ginny, this uncertainty emerges in a variety of distressing ways. One night, I arrived at an investigation with her. As we sat waiting to get started, she began to "pick up" on things. We were at an airfield in Sunderland at the time. She began to feel like "men were walking about here and they were happy and friendly with each other. But one of them wasn't going to come back. Something was off with him." She suspected that these feelings were associated with the presence of ghosts; however, she remained deeply uncertain.

This episode of quasi-mediumship lasted for less than five minutes and it was the only such instance for her during the night. When I later asked her to describe how she "picked up" on this, she described her process noting, "the thought just popped into my head. I hadn't been thinking of it. I'd been thinking about getting a cuppa but then it was there. There was imagery too. I could see it but couldn't see if that makes sense." [27]

After her extraordinary experience, Ginny was visibly flustered by the event. She continued to tell the story of it and retell it to her friends as they arrived at the investigation. She punctuated her retellings by noting, "I don't know what it is. How is it that it happens?" She was genuinely flustered, confused, and anxious as a result of this. Her paranormal investigator friends listened to her attentively. Many noted that her experience was interesting; however, no one had an answer to her question. None were sure how or why she had such an experience.

[27] In many ways, Ginny's difficulty reckoning with her experiences mirrors those of experts grappling with the paranormal, such as parapsychologists. Beyond the amateur paranormal investigators I discuss here, many academic experts on the paranormal grapple with such experiences, debating if they originate from spirits or if they are the result of human faculties (Tart 2002).

The Ensuing Knowledge

Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of paranormal research is how little new knowledge is produced. Neither the extraordinary experiences nor the technologically mediated investigative work generated much in the way of the precise insights investigators typically hoped for. Similarly, very few paranormal investigators ever convince themselves that the paranormal exists.

Investigators typically translate their experiences, the insights of mediums, and their technoscientifically-generated evidence into what they call "investigation reports". This is the typical outcome of an investigation. The nature of these written reports is revealing. They are typically descriptive, chronological narratives of the events of an investigation. Teams typically break into groups throughout the night and one person recounts what happened in their visit to each area in a site. This results in two to three accounts of each area in a site. Consider the following expert from an EGR investigation that occurred in a pub in York in 2009. Percy, an EGR team member wrote:

> Both groups then switched locations as Percy, Jack, Rose, Molly and Michele trotted upstairs [to] the function room. Moonlight coming in through the windows that were causing a light patch on the wall opposite. Percy saw big shadow go across this light patch as if a figure had walked past the window (but it was on the 1st floor). At 1.50 AM Rose mentioned she was experiencing a 'tightness' across her chest. Percy had been feeling the same thing prior to her saying anything and Jack also complained of a 'tightness' too. Rose started to pick up on things once more. She felt as though she was getting dragged by her hair through a street with grey cobbles (although she was a man in her vision). She then 'saw' grass and an empty gallows, but she felt that people would have gathered here to watch the hangings, although not in the hundreds but a smaller crowd. This was felt by Rose to have taken place to the right of Gillygate, which was a short distance away. She didn't however 'see' any city wall and got no sense of the gate itself. It was instead on a slight incline (maybe landscaped), very grassy though. The incline had been levelled for the gallows, so maybe landscaped for this. Rose was keen to point out that she was pretty sure that these images were her

> imagination and were not anything like the 'vivid' images that she had experienced downstairs.

Percy's clinical tone and use of the third person reflect the idealized, objective stance investigators hope to assume. Indeed, this description is a fairly typical rendering of a night of work. In fact, it is more attentive to detail and interplay than other reports. In the report above, Percy describes activities, impressions, moods, and perceptions. He does not assert that any of the potentially significant events described above, such as Rose's vision or Percy's sighting of a shadow, indicate the presence of a ghost or demonstrate the reality of the paranormal. Rather, these events are simply described. EGR pairs this narrative report with a similarly descriptive set of data regarding the environmental conditions present at the pub that night. For example, Percy charted the variation in temperature and humidity present in the function room during the time we sat in there.

Reports such as this are typically the final end product of investigations. At best, they are frustratingly inconclusive. Such reports do little to add to a cumulative view of the hauntings present at a particular location or to the development of a portfolio of individual investigators' experiences across time and space.

Investigators are not all unaware of the shortcomings of this approach. Rose, for instance, was very vocal about what she sees as the futility and lost potential of such projects. Her chief argument was that reports were useless unless investigators were committed to exploring reports at the same location over time and seeking out patterns. This was not a remarkable claim. In essence, this was the goal of investigators; however, she was alone in routinely vocally criticizing investigators' failure to do so. In her mind, such a "mishandling of evidence" reduced her team to "ghost hunters," which was a serious accusation on her part. While members of the public may use the terms paranormal investigator and ghost hunter interchangeably, paranormal investigators tended to emphatically distance themselves from ghost hunters. Percy explained the difference between ghost hunters and paranormal investigators to

me. He remarked that, "well, with ghost hunters, they want an experience. For them, it's an experience they're after. And that's fine, I guess, but that's not what we do. We want evidence." For Percy, the distinction between evidence and experience is sharp.

Similarly, Penelope, a lead investigator of Eastern Paranormal Investigations (EPI), another Northeastern Investigation team, articulated her periodic frustrations with EPI's less than stellar attempts to gather and shepherd evidence through recourse to the experiential dimension of ghost hunting. After a frustrating night spent calling out and engaging in glass divination, she explained:

> When we go out and mess about with things like calling out and glass divination and all of that, we're no better than ghost hunters! Eastern Paranormal Investigations… Investigation, it's in our name. You'd think we did that! If we're going to sit around and try to get an experience, we ought to call ourselves Eastern Paranormal Experiences, because we're kidding ourselves if we think what we did was investigating. If we act like that, we're bloody ghost hunters. I'm sick of it.

The activities Penelope cited – divination and calling out – are often pointed to as among the more experiential components of engaging ghosts. They are designed to facilitate contact with spirits. This is not to say that groups do not try to deploy them in investigative scenarios; however, they remain highly suspicious. In Penelope's comments, it is clear that she, like many investigators, view experience with deep skepticism, despite their efforts to include it into their toolboxes.

This intellectual positioning does not diminish investigators' individual interest in or passion for knowledge of ghosts though. Many investigators are interested in generating new knowledge of the paranormal for themselves. Most remain "skeptical but open-minded" about the existence of paranormal phenomena and ghosts and they hope to find personally persuasive evidence one way or another. As Molly, an investigator in her 50s explained:

> I'm doing it because I like it, obviously. I wouldn't do it if I didn't like it. But what I really want is to find out if there's anything to it. Are there ghosts? That's a question for me. I would love there to be but as of now I don't know.

Investigators often revealed this sentiment during private interviews or conversations with me; however, it was not frequently expressed in group settings. Molly was more forthcoming than many about the role she imagined personal encounters to have in shaping her understanding of the paranormal. Molly, Rose, and I were sitting in a pub chatting one afternoon when the ever-present topic of evidence re-emerged. Molly remarked, "I want objective evidence, I do. But, for me, I know I also need a personal experience. I need to see it myself." This was a common assertion. Indeed, many people become investigators to address their own, personal interest in the paranormal.

Rose had been friends with Molly for some time and decided to push this assertion. She noted that Molly had "experienced several things." She cited an incident during Molly's first investigation when Molly was "winding a spirit up" and a closet door violently swung open, ripping Molly's scarf. "Yes, that was quite good!" Molly noted. Rose pushed Molly further. She asked, "so that was an experience. Are you convinced there are ghosts or spirits or whatever you want to call them?" Molly shrugged dramatically. After thinking, she explained, "I guess not. It happened so quickly. I think I would have to see something more definitive." This tacit dismissal of her own experience and her desire for further visual encounters was not uncommon; however, sighting a ghost did little to convince investigators' of their reality. Indeed, returning to Jack's sighting, which I began this chapter with, is instructive.

As I noted, Jack was an open-minded skeptic but he had always said that a personal encounter, ideally a visual one, might convince him, at least on a personal level, that ghosts existed. When I asked if he now "thought that there was something to the paranormal", he shrugged. He remained unconvinced. He continued to identify himself as an open-minded skeptic. He explained, "I don't know,

Michele. I guess I'd need to investigate."[28] The ideal of investigation, then, becomes crippled by the investigator's imagining of evidence and science. By all explicit accounts, an embodied encounter such as Jack's should be able to constitute a tool in understanding the paranormal; however, as Jack's story demonstrates, Jack was unable to translate his own encounter into a meaningful insight. It remained a thrilling, tantalizing glimpse of the possibility of the paranormal.

Revealingly, Jack explained that he could not translate this experience into evidence of the paranormal because it was hard to trust himself. He explained, "I experienced something. I did. But I don't know what it was. It's hard to believe it even happened now [a few days after the event]. I feel a bit mad really but it happened. It was great." Like Ginny, Jack is marked by profound self-doubt. Despite the fact that he is certain he encountered something out of the ordinary, something that in his view is likely to be paranormal in nature, he cannot categorize it with any degree of certainty. The personal encounter lacks the power to persuade him or even slightly alter his perception of the reality of the paranormal.

Despite investigators' genuine concern for "evidence", they produce markedly little of what they themselves recognize as evidence on either a personal or general level. At best, investigators conclude that a site is "active", meaning that they suspect it is a location of paranormal activity. They do little in the way of defining the specifics of this activity or constructing an overview of the nature of the activity. More frustratingly to them, they are never able to locate the evidence necessary to enable them to accept their own experiences with the paranormal.

[28] At the moment he did not investigate. This is a fact that garnered some criticism from the group; however, it was unclear what precisely he could have done to investigate such an experience.

Conclusion: Science as Cultural Constraint

In considering the dilemma of paranormal investigators, it is important to ask why they associate science so closely with evidence. In their deliberations, the insights of mediums never outweigh the workings of technology. Similarly, they do not understand their own personal embodied encounters as transparent enough to indicate the unequivocal existence of the paranormal.

The fascinating feature about paranormal investigating – the trait that separates it from movements such as ufology or creation science – is the residual doubt and uncertainty that marks their recourse to science. While they seek to position science as a tool and scientists as biased, subjective researchers, the spectre of science haunts their pursuit. And despite their explicit desire to convert embodied experiences of mediumship into "evidence", they are unable to shake the suspicion that they are wrong, that their embodied encounters can never constitute real, objective evidence pointing to the existence of ghosts. This is all the more striking in investigators' hopes to convince themselves (and themselves alone) of the existence of ghosts. Here, a scientifically mediated doubt permeates individuals' understandings of their own minds and bodies. They remain hindered in categorizing and labelling a phenomenon that they highly suspect.

Many scholars, such as Charles Taylor (1989, 2007), have noted the importance of attending to and better understanding the power of scientism. He observed that there is a "drawing power" to scientism, which is itself a moral framework with particular ethics of belief: one should not believe what one has insufficient evidence for (Taylor 1989: 403-404). Scientism – the fear and hope that science can and should explain the entirety of the world – ultimately condemns investigators' endeavours. Despite their explicit suspicion of institutionalized science and popular scientism, investigators fall victim to a sneaking sense of dread and doubt that whatever they try to do will not work. There is no evidence capable of successfully submitting to the demands they imagine science to make.

Investigators often deployed the metaphor of a toolbox for explaining their approach. In an idealized investigation, investigators assert that they would have a toolbox that would include science, experience, and mediums. Despite such reactions, many investigators would argue that science is just one tool in their toolbox for exploring the paranormal. One investigator explained, "It's not perfect but it has its uses." In much the same vein, they would suggest that mediums should be thought of as tools, to be observed and chronicled, not to be taken at face value. They emphasize that nothing should be left out. Ultimately they would fantasize that they were the masters of their toolboxes, yet the duelling sets of tools proved to be powerful in the own right. Investigators are unable to reconcile their desire to include tools of experience with the tools they see as producing experience.

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"Feeling as One" during Fieldwork: The Anthropologist as Phenomenological Subject

Géraldine Mossière

> "What I am attempting, then is to portray the objective world...built up from 'the private plane of perceptual experiences' of all those who hooted with praise at the emergence of Sakutoha's ihamba, of the five doctors in Meru's Ihamba, and also the experiences of many other Africans and, indeed, as far as one can estimate, of many ritual performers throughout humankind." (Edith Turner 1992: 161 quoting Ralph Burhoe 1974: 25-26).

From the effervescence of Pentecostal rituals with Congolese migrant believers to narratives of ecstatic encounters with "God", from Sufi converts to Sufism in Montreal, my ethnographic experience has been fraught with the extraordinary. As I participated in a large-scale research project[29] aimed at documenting the religious diversity that developed in the province of Quebec (Canada), after a long period of hegemony of the Catholic Church, I discovered that such phenomena had become common in the religious lives of many:

> Actually, I did not want to speak in tongues, but I had been praying so much in that church [and] the communion was starting, and that's when I started to speak in tongues. I mean, I was under the impression that God was talking to me, God could talk to me at any time. I could sit in my living room and then start to talk with God. I was obviously talking alone, but I knew he was present and he could

[29] This project was financed by the Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et Culture and by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Researchers included Deirdre Meintel (director), Claude Gélinas, Josiane Le Gall, Géraldine Mossière, Khadiyatoulah Fall, François Gauthier and Fernand Ouellet.

> hear me. And I was praying and praying. [Later on], I started to have the gift of prophecy. I mean, I could see things before they came true or at the same time as they were occurring. For instance, one day I dreamt that my sister was losing a lot of things in her stomach. I had the feeling they were taking out her intestines; this is what I could see in my vision, in my dream. At that time, she was travelling in China and when I called her, she told me: "I have been losing blood for an hour," [and] then I knew: That's why God woke me up with this dream. (Interview conducted by the author.)

> When I was 6 or 7, my parents had an altar at home with pictures of many holy figures from different traditions, especially from Hinduism, like Rama, Krishna, and so forth. One day, my father added the picture of Sai Baba, a guru from India, even though [my dad] did not know much about him. Later on, [my dad] invited a special singer to the home; a lot of people were present and they sang *bhajans* [spiritual songs]. When the session was over, my mother went upstairs and discovered that ashes had appeared to cover Sai Baba's picture. Everybody was astounded, because Sai Baba is supposed to have the power to materialize sacred ashes to cure people. People started to sing *bhajans* again. The following day, the altar was completely covered with ashes. Nobody knew what to do with it. Then people around came to ask for healing for particular pains. So the ash was diluted in water to be drunk by sick people. More and more people came to my house for this purpose and many of them were healed this way. (Interview conducted by Vincent Brillant-Goux.)

For the scholar, the content of these unanticipated experiences belongs in the realm of the extraordinary, raising questions such as: did those experiences really happen or are they the fruit of believers' subjective perceptions? Where should the line be drawn between illusion and reality? May one speak of different levels of reality? It is as if we are in a twilight zone where the frontier between the explainable and the unexplainable is blurred, as no scientific field has yet satisfactorily understood such experiences. According to Birgit Meyer: "[Social scientists] have to come to terms with the mediated nature of experiences that are claimed to be immediate and authentic by the beholders, and authorized as such by the religious traditions of which they form part" (Meyer 2006: 16).

The issue is then not so much about what meaning and rationale we, as anthropologists, should give to those experiences that appear at first to be beyond the reach of rational explanation, than how to grasp and report them. Would these accounts have more empirical legitimacy if the ethnographer lived and reported similar experiences himself or herself? As Throop points out "there is indeed a spectrum of possible articulations of experience in terms of coherent and disjunctive forms" (2003: 235). How, then, can we make those experiences coherent and conjunctive with those of the believers'?

In the following pages I want to explore subtle levels of participation by examining different ways of sharing extraordinary experience that vary on a continuum between two poles, namely as a distant dialogue and phenomenology. I will then look at how a phenomenological approach to religious experience may be an appropriate way to grasp the very nature of experience, notably by means of embodiment. In this respect, anthropologists seem well-suited to achieve such analysis, as they are prone to embodying the experiences they observe by the fact of being physically present in the field, as well as by participation in the actions, rituals, more generally, the social and symbolic practices that occur during fieldwork, be it voluntary or not. This observation relates to a growing field of anthropology of experience that Turner and Bruner (1986) initiated and keeps on unfolding with Schmidt's recent volume on the study of religious experience (2016). While anthropologists who situate themselves this way invite ethnographers to tackle the own bodiliness in the process of knowing in the field (Pierini 2016a), I argue that the role of the anthropologist's experience in fieldwork can best be grasped by considering this posture as phenomenological and by addressing the various implications of his/her subjectivity, namely his/her definitions of the self, including issues of affects, emotions, empathy, intimacy, *einfühlung* ("feeling as one") and intersubjectivity.

Literature in recent decades has shown that such lived experiences not only concern those we study, but also ethnographers themselves who may experience the extraordinary in the course of fieldwork.

Bruce Grindal (1983) was one of the pioneers of the current trend of ethnographers' reporting such experiences in his narrative of his participation in a death divination ritual that he attended 15 years earlier in the town of Tumu (Ghana):

> I began to see the *goka* [the praise singer of the funeral] and the corpse [of the drummer of the chief of Tumu] tied together in the undulating rhythms of the singing, the beating of the iron hoes, and the movement of feet and bodies. Then I saw the corpse jolt and occasionally pulsate, in a counterpoint to the motions of the *goka*. At first, I thought that my mind was playing tricks with my eyes, so I cannot say when the experience first occurred; but it began with moments of anticipation and terror, as though I knew something unthinkable was about to happen. 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. What I saw in those moments was outside the realm of normal perception. From both the corpse and the *goka* came flashes of light so fleeting that I cannot say exactly where they originated. The hand of the *goka* would beat down on the iron hoe, the spirit would fly from his mouth, and suddenly the flashes of light flew like sparks from a fire. Then I felt my body become rigid. My jaws tightened and at the base of my skull I felt a jolt 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 the head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in a 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. I cannot say whether what transpired took a matter of minutes or even an hour. Nor can I be sure about the sequence of events which I witnessed. But after a while the power which had filled the compound began to cool, and the body of the Tumukuoro's drummer

> was once again sitting propped against the west wall of the compound. (Grindal 1983: 68)

Grindal's narrative is typical of many others. In 1984, Paul Stoller related his own apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger and his experience of sorcery with his teacher. In Zambia, Edith Turner (1992) reported having been immersed in a drumming ritual to heal a woman with a devouring spirit, while Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) gave account of her personal entanglement in the witchcraft universe that she studied in rural France. These narratives have nourished vivid debates over dominant scientific categories of thought, their fundamental assumptions, as well as the ethics and analytical changes needed to account for these experiences and phenomena. In Barbara Tedlock's words, the discipline of anthropology is undergoing a "reconfiguration of social thought and practice that ought to be recognized for what it is, a change in ethnographic epistemology embodying key ethical and analytical issues that has already produced a major body of work" (Tedlock 1991: 69-94).

While Favret-Saada argues that it is only by believing in witchcraft that she was able to witness the practice, Stoller (1984) proposes to approach such phenomena with a new philosophy, considering them as true and therefore as outside the category of rationality of Western thinking. For her part, while studying Balinese world views, Unni Wikan suggests that "feeling is more essential for intellectual comprehension for it spawns intuition, evaluation and moral judgment. From this perspective a Western epistemology based on intellectual reasoning and objective thought alone appears as an act of hubris" (1991: 229). Beyond the ongoing debates over anthropological and epistemological principles, ethnographers also question the limits and nature of their participation during fieldwork. Overall, the very existence of extraordinary experiences emphasizes ontological questionings in terms of ways of being in the world and conceptions about its essence and definition. In this chapter, I propose to draw on this current trend in anthropology to think about how to grasp and address such things as extraordinary experiences. While scholars have primarily tended to objectify these, the current

focus on subjectivity allows for new possibilities for ethnographers to live such experiences as part of their methodological approach.

After briefly presenting how experiences were first considered as social facts, I will discuss how a phenomenological approach by anthropologists may raise new understandings of extraordinary experiences by means of "embodied" fieldwork. Drawing on previous fieldwork studies that I have conducted among Congolese Pentecostal ritual congregations and with women converts to Islam both located in Montreal, I will show that a phenomenological perspective that puts senses, emotions and affect at the core of embodied knowledge (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) may be the only feasible way for grasping unexplainable experience. I will rely on my own sensorial and emotional experience in Pentecostal African congregation rituals to argue that embodiment relates to experiences of empathy and *einfühlung* as compared to the Other's lived reality. Following Julia Kristeva (in Nowak 2011: 318), I define *einfühlung* as "a feeling of oneness to the outside world with a loss of the subject's identity". As Waldstein (2016) observed during Rastafari rituals she documented, such "heightened sensory awareness" may give rise to intersubjective experiences that challenge the realm of Cartesian knowledge. I will show how these experiences impact the definition and boundaries between the self and otherness.

In this reading, empathy and *einfülhung* as an ethnographic method are framed as an ongoing conversation, fraught with differentiation as well as entanglement of the self and of the Other, which are produced in common practices and activities. Such a perspective brings the possibility of opening new avenues for the construction of knowledge that depart from the canons of positivist thinking whereby reality is limited to that which is rational, verifiable and consensually validated; i.e., whereby "reality is relative to one's consciousness of it" (Grindal 1983: 76). Given that the experiences of the informant and of the ethnographer are intermingled in the process of producing knowledge, I will consider both in much the same way. This technique for producing knowledge, however, raises the issue of the relevance of the ethnographer's experience as

compared to the informant's. I will argue that it requires the anthropologist to reach for a phenomenological perspective on his or her own experience.

Does according legitimacy to the scholar's experience mean that anthropologists should go native *per se*? Actually, it invites us to revisit anthropology's methodological assumptions, which are influenced by the locations and sympathies of the researcher as regards his or her fieldwork - as an insider, an outsider, an apostate and/or an advocate - as well as by the position that the religions studied occupy in the societal context (Neitz 2013). In this fashion, as Gooren (2009) reminds us, several anthropologists who practice methodological theism accept the possibility that the phenomena they write about are related to a supernatural actor (Evans-Pritchard 1962; Victor Turner 1986; Jules-Rosette 1975). This position allowed them to be full and active participants, and thus to make in-depth observations. On the other hand, other scholars such as Durkheim have positioned themselves as atheists and conceive of experiences as social facts, putting severe limitations on the possibility of the researcher's participation during fieldwork. In the secular and religiously diverse environments being documented today, a growing number of anthropologists are now adopting a more cautious approach by showing a nuanced openness to the experiences their informants report, recognizing the possibility that these subjective phenomena exist outside of the realm of empirical science. These scholars tend to distance themselves from methodological atheism "as the only lens through which to view social reality within the social scientific community," arguing that "the very possibility of divine human interaction has been at best overlooked and at worst denied by many scholars" (Poloma and Hood 2008: 8). In their ethnography of an emerging Pentecostal church in the US, Poloma and Hood claim they adopted an agnostic posture so as to "use as real data the reported acts of God that informants assert they have experienced" (2008: 8). In so doing, the authors developed a model of "Godly love" to frame the experiences of God in evangelical churches in a range of interactions between divine and human love. Nevertheless, as Poloma is herself an active member of the church studied, the agnostic claim may be

misleading. Overall, such methodological agnosticism obliges contemporary scholars to negotiate their participation during fieldwork.

Experience and the Study of Lived Reality

Victor Turner was the first anthropologist to conceptualize experience. He referred to its etymology that implicates the idea of "peril" and indicates that "each of us has had certain "experiences" which have been formative and transformative, that is, distinguishable, isolable sequences of external events and internal responses to them such as initiations into new lifeways (going to school, first jobs…)" (1986: 35). In this respect, experiences are events. A category *sui generis*, as proposed by Dilthey (1833-1911), they have a temporal or processual structure. During his fieldwork among the Ndembu in Zambia, Turner found that initiation rituals usually involve a deep personal experience that connects the individual to a group, leading her to a change of consciousness. This change of consciousness is achieved through a state of liminality that Turner defined more precisely as "a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to postliminal existence" (1986: 42). In this stage of liminality, *doors are opened to the spirits*. For Turner then, experience results in dissolution of the ordinary sense of time and space, leading the individual to perceive himself or herself as a whole more clearly than through the fragmentedness of his/her social identity and role. Still, these deep human emotional and ephemeral experiences may be co-experienced with a group within a state of ritual comradeship and fellowship that Turner (1972) calls *communitas*, a term that recalls Malinowski (1923)'s notion of "phatic communion".

Anthropology of Experience or Experiential Anthropology?

As Edward Bruner notes, in the field of the anthropology of experience it is not quite clear whether experience is the object of study, or whether it is the methodology. In any case, the creation of this novel realm of research meant to dissolve the separation

between experience and theory, leading the ethnographer to a personal, participatory, reflexive and sensual approach to fieldwork based on the sights, sounds, smells, and body as a perceptual device. Among Turner's many successors (including James Fernandez, Bruce Grindal, Paul Stoller, etc.), Edward Bruner notes that "anthropology of experience deals with how individuals actually experience their culture that is how events are received by consciousness" (1986: 4). Such perception draws on Wilhelm Dilthey's reading of experience as a form of *erlebniss*, a German concept that reads as "what has been lived through", emphasizing the lived dimension of experience as well as its elementary, preconceptual, and sometimes ineffable aspects. This is opposed to the term *Erfahrung*, which refers to the realm of already-interpreted fact.

Edith Turner, Victor Turner's widow, later exemplified this approach as she attended African rituals of healing and in her studies of shamanism. As the Turners' perspectives on the anthropology of experience draw on the supposedly universal biological ability of humans to experience spirituality, their body of work invites ethnographers to rethink their own tools for understanding realities that lie beyond the reach of the ordinary. This raises new concern regarding the extent to which we can really experience the extraordinary without necessarily sharing the symbolic and social settings that make it possible.

Experience as the Hallmark of Contemporary Religiosity

The Turners' contribution paved the way to the current focus that religious studies are now giving to the notion of experience, sometimes at the expense of ideas of belief and disbelief. This renewed interest in the issue of experience is related to various features of current religious landscape: the secularization of Western societies, the revitalization of mainstream religion, New Age and Earth-related movements, the attraction spiritualities exert on some seekers, globalization and religious diversity, and above all, individualization of religion and the centrality of the subjectivity and reflexivity of social actors. The stories collected in our research

project on religious diversity in Quebec also describe encounters with sacred or supernatural beings, feelings of otherworldly transcendence, a sense of being united with all beings. Research participants report feelings of deep bliss, sensations of well-being and relief, and sometimes a sort of completeness or awe that remind one of Otto's conception of the sacred. These inner experiences may be lived collectively and they are likely to be catalyzed by the strength of the community. For instance, some yogis talk of an energy circulating between practitioners that helps them go deeper in their personal, inward experiences (Bouchard 2013). Such experiences that relate to perceived encounters with supernatural entities or that heighten awareness of one's relationships and unity with spiritual beings may occur exceptionally as a founding moment in one's faith, or regularly in the framework of organized ritual life.

While such topics now form the core of ethnographic research on religion, they call for an epistemological shift from the definition of anthropology of religion as "the way in which religious beliefs [among others] appear to the believer" (Geertz 1972: 99). As a matter of fact, very few of the participants I mentioned above relate their experience to any symbolic system or to any particular belief; rather, they remain contemplative or interrogative. While a number of them combine beliefs or practices that belong to different spiritual traditions, they remind us of Jeanne Favret-Saada's call to cease "to cling to the idea of "belief" as an analytical concept" (2012: 47). Rather, we should acknowledge the range of possible attitudes towards the propositional content of a subject's belief, including the subject's own shifting attitudes over his life trajectory.

Favret-Saada's contribution truly reminds us of the frontier that exists between the reality of individual experiences and the symbolic meanings that are attributed to these. The latter can be expressed by means of performances, commodification or texts. As they "encapsulate" the experience of others (Turner 1996: 5), they can be interpreted as ethnographic material. In my research among converts to Islam in France and in Quebec, I have collected nearly eighty interviews. However, it quickly became clear that convert narratives were standardized and hinged on a few redundant issues (gender

relationships, the veil, Islam and public spaces…) , and that converts followed a pattern that circulates on the Internet. As experiences structure the modes of expression, it is likely that the patterns of expression that are available or culturally valued also govern the experiences that individuals may live through, and their awareness of those experiences. In charismatic movements, a broad array of ritual techniques function to prompt believers to speak in tongues or "fall" (in the Lord). Given that these unexplainable experiences are seen as gifts from the Holy Spirit, they display the believer's level of "spiritual maturity", and as such, they determine the symbolic capital he or she may enjoy within the community. On the basis of her ethnographic research in the Bocage (France), Favret-Saada goes further, showing how the set of attitudes regarding witchcraft reflect — in their own particular manner — "the universal demands of life in society" (2012: 48) and "formulate certain universal facts of life in society" (p. 49). She uses the notion of "force" that is present in humans' corporeal world, and that some people manage to channel.

Distinguishing the realm of subjective experience from the system of normative beliefs shifts the issue of experience beyond the domain of the mundane and of what can be socially enunciated. It puts severe restrictions on our ability to understand such phenomena by typical scientific means. If, as Favret-Saada proposes, we consider that a somehow universal force is at the origin of extraordinary phenomena, what kind of methodological tools can we develop to grasp them? In this respect as for many others, fieldwork knows how and where to guide us.

Experience as a Way of Understanding

The construction of anthropological knowledge is based on fieldwork, that is, an inductive methodology that brings anthropologists into sometimes chaotic and uncomfortable encounters that may last for long periods of time. An example of potentially uncomfortable field activities is attending extended and noisy Pentecostal services, where participants display strong effervescence and seemingly deep contact with supernatural entities they view as visits of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, participation

in these services allows the researcher to grasp fieldwork beyond words, by means of prelogical tools or what I would call, borrowing from the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1971), "le corps propre", that is the bodily perceptual device through which individuals experience the world as a unit. In this reading, the meaning given to the world is not limited to what is said or thought by participants; it exists in the gestures and in what is accomplished through actions. This phenomenological perspective that puts senses, emotions and affect at the core of one's ability to comprehend the world engages a form of practice that induces new perceptions and convictions, where doing and meaning converge. Founded on the premise that the ability to reach otherworldly experiences draws on biological universals constraining human beings, a phenomenological perspective typically requires the anthropologist to temporarily put his own categories of understanding the world into brackets, to suspend disbelief.

A Phenomenological Approach to Knowledge

For anthropologists who are physically present in the field for extended periods of time, phenomenology represents as much a methodological condition as a constraint. Indeed, experiences can generate sensations that directly affect the researcher's body and perceptions, making it harder to maintain scholarly distance. In the words of Birgit Meyer:

> Encounters with a new religion often work through the body, making it difficult for researchers to maintain an outsider's position. Many anthropologists have reported how they were sucked into the sensory modes of the religion they studied, without even being aware of it. (2006: 25)

Although some ethnographers seem thoroughly uncomfortable with writing about these experiences during fieldwork, others have called for taking them into consideration as a means of adjusting anthropological methodology:

> What is needed for this kind of fieldwork is a technique of participation that demands total involvement of our whole being. Indeed it is perhaps only when we truly and fully participate in this way that we find this essentially subjective approach to be in no way incompatible with the more conventional rational, objective, scientific approach. On the contrary, they complement each other and that complementarity is an absolute requirement if we are to come to any full understanding of the social process. It provides a wealth of data that could never be acquired by any other means (Turnbull 1990: 51).

Thus far, the idea of living experiences of fieldwork has generated varied and innovative methodologies, sometimes borrowing on the worldviews of those studied. Wikan sought to grasp the Balinese cosmology by means of an "experience-near" approach that would recognize the "feeling-thinking character" specific to Balinesian views of the world (1991: 286). Csordas (1993) transposed the phenomenological understanding of the world to the realm of the social sciences with the seminal concept of "somatic mode of attention", that links perceptual experience (Merleau-Ponty 1971) with socially informed attitudes (Bourdieu 1980). Following on her husband's work, Edith Turner reported:

> As for my function as ethnographer, I had had to relax the detached-observer imperative in order to see as the Africans saw, thus bridging the gap and entering the culture. This turned me around to the spirituality of religion, honing my sense of atmosphere and my understanding of spiritual healing." The same year, she pioneered a phenomenological approach in anthropology without labeling it as such: "to study ordinary human changes of consciousness, certain of us have had to shift our own invisible, real spiritual life and what we know of that of others into a position to the front and have it working *in us*, so that we fully *know* the material of our fieldwork. We've then written this material, intimately. (Turner 2006: 34)

This reflection on anthropology as a way of experiencing the other's perceived reality relies on the body and its many symbolic and perceptual possibilities: As a sensorial device and a mode of individual and collective expression, it first represents an experiential vehicle. Moreover, the body is endowed with great

potential for expressivity and receptivity, which has recently led anthropologists to turn their focus towards the somatic dimension, the body,, and the role of mediation and symbolic interpretation especially regarding issues of healing or charisma. Because the body is also the locus of extraordinary experience, experiential knowledge also relies on embodied knowledge.

Experience as a Form of Knowledge

For anthropologists, experiencing fieldwork influences bodily sensations and perceptions in a way that creates prelogical knowledge, before the latter is attributed conventional meaning. The American ethnographer Charles Briggs (1993) writes about an "embodied discourse" that is based on "denotatively implicit" meaning (i.e. language that is lacking in semantic content), as opposed to "denotatively explicit" meaning (i.e. prevailing ideologies of language in the West). From this perspective, the senses stirred by music, tastes and rhythms are seen to have the authority of producing knowledge. Whether or not it allows one to consciously incorporate knowledge into the body, an experiential approach in fieldwork provides access to certain experiences of sensitive knowledge that other methods sometimes overlook or obscure (experiences of reflexivity, interiority, etc.). In this respect, Kulick and Willson argue that, "To experiential ethnographers, the self and especially experiences in the field, are epistemologically productive" (1995: 20). These arguments also promote the methodological benefits of a more participatory approach to fieldwork where the impact of the ethnographer's presence and participation in actions, rituals or practices in the field are acknowledged and integrated into analytical work. For example, to go back to Bruce Grindal's experience of a death divination ritual in Ghana, the ethnographer does not explicitly interpret his experience in religious terms, but rather compares it to what people around him experienced, that is the "passionate resurrection of the power of the ancestors" (1983: 75) Following this perspective, understanding extraordinary experiences can best be achieved by an embodied approach that transcends epistemological fields. In this reading,

knowledge is stored in the body and is created by the practical execution of the act that prevails over the meaning attributed to it.

The concept of embodied knowledge first emerged from medical anthropology with Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) contribution that draws on the relationship between mind, body, self and society. The authors deconstruct the notion of the body into three dimensions: "the phenomenally experienced individual body-self", the social body as a "natural symbol for thinking about relationships among nature, society and culture", and a body politic as an "artifact of social and political control" (1987: 6). In this perspective, emotions are considered as "embodied thoughts" (Rosaldo 1984) that mediate between the three dimensions of the body, acting as a conduit between experience and getting involved in action. Over the course of my fieldwork in Congolese Pentecostal churches, I had the opportunity to experience how rituals articulate emotions, as well as imagination, memory, perception and senses with the various dimensions of this "mindful" body. As I regularly attended Sunday services, I gradually became more deeply involved in hymns, dances, melodies and speeches, feeling intimately touched by the strong emotions that were evoked during rituals. Here are some notes that I wrote in my journal on February 22nd, 2004, after an observation in a Congolese Pentecostal service:

> I have been deeply moved by the joy that emerged from the cult. I surprised myself as I started to dance on my chair and to sing along with the lively rhythms. The atmosphere was so stirring that I even thought I would join the women who were dancing in circle at the front of the service space.

I eventually experienced states of true joy and grace, sometimes a feeling of communion with members of the church, as well as spontaneous sensations of love and bliss. Such feelings aroused by means of music, dances, and bodily gestures convey a new grid of perception of the self and of the others; that is, a new sense of belonging and different relationships with participants. I could indeed observe their impact on my own subjectivity. Again, some

personal notes from fieldwork after attending a "Christian party" organized by the young members of the church a few years later:

> All participants but one were of African or Haitian background. One after the other, they went on the stage to perform a personal song to the rhythm of rap music. The songs describe their personal encounter with Jesus, a sort of deep and unexplainable sense of being loved that came with bodily or visual sensations of his presence. The lyrics situate these experiences within the young members' personal stories, which are often difficult trajectories that mix feelings of personal loss or of social rejection, mainly the hardships typical of teenager and immigrant pathways. The audience sings and dances to accompany each performer, the atmosphere is moving, filled with sadness and joy and a deep sense of cohesion. I feel moved by the party's effervescence, by the intimacy generated by the sincerity of such personal narratives, as well as by the solidarity they arouse among participants. I can feel the emotions of those around me, a blend of hope and despair. At this point, I sense a deep feeling of communion with the others, a sort of affection for those young people who could all be my younger siblings. Regardless of the colour of my skin, I feel as though I were black tonight, and I start loving Jesus myself for the sense of hope it gives to these people who worship and believe in him. I can feel the hope of my companions pouring over my life and my own personal challenges, as I share this special moment of common bliss. Now I understand how the religious life of these young people relates to all aspects of their social and personal stories, as it alleviates their personal drama by giving a meaning and a purpose to it all. (Field notes, August 2012)

For ethnographers, experience can represent an implicit form of knowledge that is located in the body, giving the them the possibility of grasping what is not visible to the external observer, and what cannot be verbally explained by the research participant. Through this awareness of one's own experience and self-reflexivity, knowledge reaches a higher level of sensitivity to reality, one that lies beyond immediate perception. In his account of how he and his wife studied divination, Dennis Tedlock holds that this approach may sometimes be the only one possible:

> I have found myself expected to learn, however imperfectly, some of the skills I was observing. This happened when Barbara Tedlock and I reached a point in our questions about divinatory practices where the only workable answer was an offer to teach us those practices [...] This information permitted me to rerun the divination in the very process of writing it. (1997: 82)

Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) also found that radical participation and experiential knowledge was the only way to get insights on the vision of the world among the Dene Tha group he was studying. In his reading, non-verbal communication and embodied thoughts represent new ways of building knowledge about the other's experience that require ethnographers to open their perceptual apparatus to the full range of sensual and sensory experiences that arise from fieldwork. This raises questions about the authenticity and veracity of our perceptions, leading us to examine the level of subjectivity involved in fieldwork as an embodied process, an issue to which I now turn.

Intersubjectivity and Empathy as Conditions for Ethnographic Fieldwork

Proposing to consider anthropology as an embodied form of knowledge brings out the need for scholars to perform what they study in order to make their ethnographic comprehension as accurate as possible. However, it raises the question of the extent to which the anthropologist's attention to embodiment may inform his or her understandings of the other's experience. As he applied phenomenological theory to the social sciences, Thomas Csordas introduced the notion of "somatic modes of attention" to refer to the experience of embodied presence as both "reflexive (as sensation of oneself) and relational (as presence to others)" (Csordas 1993: 138). Bringing interactional experiences into the subjective realm has many implications regarding definitions and extent of the self. For example, Edith Turner (1996: xxiii) explains that "coexperience" enables one to connect to some reality that lies beyond its cultural substrate and represents a common human condition. Agar (2006) speaks of cooperation between the informant and the anthropologist,

cooperation that depends on the adequacy of each one's own perspective regarding the interests, visions of the world, and space and time configurations.

Fabian (2001) emphasizes the *coevalness* of informant and ethnographer, since they share the same space, time and contemporaneity. Their intersubjectivity then relies on preconstructed mutual conceptions that may align during the encounter, though these do not always lead to consensus. As these experiences on fieldwork bring into question the ethnographer's own otherness, they follow "a movement by which a subject leaves her own condition through a relation of affections that she can establish with another condition" (Goldman 2003: 464 in Pierini 2016b).

All these approaches converge and focus on the idea of shared experience that conveys knowledge of its own and that is produced in the intersubjectivity of the ethnographer's presence with the informant. Addressing the issue of intersubjectivity means questioning the ethnographer's commitments during fieldwork, as far as social identity and inner-self are concerned. As one enters fieldwork, the researcher is challenged to negotiate an ethical stance, as well as subjective openness to sharing the experiences of the others. For example, when examining sorcery among the Songhay of Niger, Stoller realized that "anthropological writers should allow the events of the field to penetrate them" (1984: 110). Fieldwork then, situates ethnographers in a liminal state that may engender different degrees of ambivalence with respect to the people studied. In my own research on Pentecostal rituals, mere observation would have hardly been possible without sharing the bodily language and enthusiasm of my companions. My study of religious effervescence as it is ritually organized would have been considerably constrained had I taken the stance of an ambivalent outsider. On the one hand, as I was not Pentecostal myself, I kept a neutral and distant attitude which proved quite difficult to maintain in an atmosphere of strong collective emotions, where the expressivity of participants tended to emulate one another.

On the other hand, the rituals deeply touched me, not only because of the moving narratives of believers, but above all because of the blissful and ecstatic atmosphere of their celebrations. The hymns, dances, melodies and expression of emotions emanating from participants may indeed easily move any witness of religious ritual. During the limited time of the rituals, and within the ritual space, I shared such intimacy with the believers I was observing that I gradually felt we were all part of a community; in a sense, I had the feeling we were as one. Resisting such spontaneous actions and censoring my own feelings would probably have impeded me from entering the field setting. Therefore, I gradually positioned myself in a *liminal* state, suspended between the circumstantial feeling of Sameness that Pentecostal rituals mobilize by way of warm and endearing rituals, and the implacable awareness of my own Otherness that my religious identity as Catholic combined with yogic philosophy and practices involves. The sense of the self I developed resonates with the multiple dimensions of my subjectivity that may extend to and connect with various realms of sensitivity within in a skewed matrix of space-time that some of my informants would label as the Holy Spirit.

In a previous reflection on my stance during fieldwork among Pentecostals, I have shown that the possibility for anthropologists to share in ritual emotions with believers generates feelings of empathy, intimacy and intersubjectivity that pave the way for the ethnographic process (Mossière 2007). For me, the empathic position that I embraced seemed the only way to grasp the embodied dimensions of religious behaviour similar to the "empathic resonance" Halloy (2016) experienced on Afro-Brazilian fieldwork. Following Lutz and White, I associate the notion of "empathy" with the universalistic premise whereby "all humans have the ability to understand another's emotional state…through the channels of empathic (and usually nonverbal) communication and is conceptualized as either an intellectual understanding or a more direct emotional one" (1986: 415). Such empathic methodology leads to other ways of producing knowledge through non-verbal and unintentional communication, which replaces spoken communication. Ethnographic fieldwork then makes it possible to

reach other types of knowledge, and to grasp the distinction between communicable knowledge (informative) and kinds of knowledge only learned through tacit experience (formative).

In fact, discussions over the notion of empathy as a mode of relationship to the Other date back to the German philosophical school of the late XIX century, and were launched with Schleiermacher's romanticist theory founded in hermeneutics (Nowak 2012). According to its many critics, of which Gadamer was not the least, the concept of empathy involves the author's own projection and identification with the Other; potentially reducing the work of interpretation to an intuitive process. In the social sciences, such critiques have been challenged by scholars such as Lutz and White (1986) and Beatty and Watson (1999), who describe empathy as an ability to understand phenomenologically that is not irreconcilable with emotional distance. In this respect, anthropologists can be sympathetic and compassionate (in the Latin sense of "compassion", to "suffer with") by simply observing the reality of the Other, rather than entering into this reality. Following Dilthey's premise, anthropologists argue that before anything, experiences are embedded in socio-historical conditions that define their ordinary/extraordinary status. For example, in another study I conducted among converts to Islam in France and Québec, I decided to wear a veil to accompany one of my informants during a walk downtown in Montreal. I thought that trying to veil myself like my informants would shed a different light on my research, and help me understand the way they live and perceive their reality. I intended thereby not only to get insights about the ethical modesty the converts experience as they adopt the veil, but also to experiment with this feeling of turning the gaze inward and perhaps get a chance to experience the sensation of connection to the divine that the converts had all told me about. However, I could not take on the heavy burden that wearing veil the veil represents for Muslim women in some secular public spaces. In the end, my embodiment methodology (literally) followed other paths, because throughout my investigation over the course of two years, I wore modest clothing and often chose hooded jerseys. The latter not only hid my hair and femininity, but also helped me to experience the feeling of intimacy

with an inner-self that the converts I was studying called *Allah*. Along with other social and personal characteristics that converts and I shared and created a space of intimacy (same age and on a same spiritual quest), I have often overstepped the limits of an empathic attitude, reaching a feeling of being as one (*einfühlung*).

Nevertheless, empathy and *einfülhung* as an ethnographic method should be framed as a dialogic and ongoing process, fraught with differentiation as well as assertion of the self and the Other, which are produced in common practices and activities. Sharing embodiment makes the self and the Other coexist, interweaving each into an intimate space that does not necessarily mean mutual identification. In other words, if the ethnographer is able to think, act, and feel like the other, he does not ascribe the same meaning to the experiences he shares with other participants who, for their part, do not necessarily share the same interpretation of their lived experience (supposing that they have the same experience, which is not likely). To conceptualize this process, Rosaldo (1984) proposed the concept of "overlapping circles" that are shared responses to individual experiences, ones that overlap rather than coincide, but that also allow one to have insight into the meaning of another's world. I then argue that since anthropology constitutes an embodied form of knowledge, co-presence during fieldwork paves the way for an empathic attitude that follows upon shared intimacy. It may culminate in feelings of oneness (*einfühlung*) but should nevertheless take into consideration contrast and difference. The anthropological method should involve a scholar's awareness and reflexivity regarding his own stance and experience throughout fieldwork. This effort to put one's own social and historical categories of understanding into brackets in order to understand the perception that the Other ascribes to a common experience turns the anthropologist into a phenomenological subject. While Pentecostal rituals deeply moved me in a way that created feelings of communion with the other believers, I decided to keep my distance from the dogmatic message of the church, as I often felt oppressed by the rigid normative framework and sermons, that in my view were at times fundamentalist. As a result, I did not interpret the ritual ecstatic atmosphere and common feelings of bliss as manifestations

of the Holy Spirit as did my interviewees, but rather as a common feeling of being in touch with the divine that is accessible to all human beings. I then framed this shared experience in my own vision of the world, focusing my research on the specific Pentecostal ritual techniques that made this common experience possible.

Conclusion

When he phrased the scholars' task of understanding social objects as *verstehen*, Weber advocated that we do not need to experience what others do in order to build knowledge around their activities. The phenomenologist Edmund Husserl agreed that it is possible to understand expressions and feelings that we cannot reproduce ourselves. In the social sciences, some scholars like Edith Turner consider that experiencing the extraordinary is part of the universal abilities shared by all human beings, while others like Renato Rosaldo (1984) argue that because human feelings are ineffable, they can only be captured by someone who has already and previously experienced such states. In fact, sharing feelings with the other does not necessarily mean full *mimesis*; in other words, reaching a point of intimacy does not require the ethnographer to "go native", though some ethnographers have chosen to adopt this position (Jules-Rosette 1975; Hermansen 2006).

For the ethnographer, however, the issue lies elsewhere, as empathy often comes as a condition for doing fieldwork. For example, before accepting to meet with me, most of the converts to Islam to whom I had proposed an interview wanted to know more about my religious identity and beliefs. The fact that I am a believer myself, though within another religious tradition, opened doors not only to their homes, but also to their personal and subjective experiences with a sense of transcendence they deem as divine. In other words, building knowledge about the experiences of human beings requires the scientist to share a sense of humanity with the people one is trying to understand, who represent therefore more than a mere object of study. As Dilthey poses a distinction between understanding the experience of others and experiencing it oneself (Nowak 2011: 308),

I suggest that for anthropologists, the conditions of fieldwork quite often blur the frontier between those two domains.

In a context where the anthropological objective is not to feel like the other, but to understand what the other feels, the issue of experience puts the fieldwork approach into question. After all, Favret-Saada (1990) points out that the anthropological method of participant observation forms an oxymoron. In the same vein, Barbara Tedlock argues that in the last decades, cultural anthropological method has shifted from participant observation toward the observation of participation where the ethnographer both observes and experiences his "own and others' coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter" (1991: 69). In this manner, personal openness to experiences during fieldwork allows for the embodiment of knowledge that only seems possible with full personal participation. Although the scientific nature of such a subjective approach may be challenged, anthropology is now framed so as to mobilize the human assets of the ethnographer to build knowledge about the Other. And indeed, it produces unique qualitative knowledge on the idiosyncrasy of human experiences, including on experiences culturally labelled extraordinary. These approaches to fieldwork lead to fundamental epistemological problems in social anthropology. For instance, can we imagine objects of study in which, through their own personal experience, the anthropologist becomes her or his own informant?

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Spirit Mediumship and the Experiential Self

Jack Hunter

Introduction

This chapter explores the possibility that the self is an experiential phenomenon, as distinct from the classical anthropological understanding of the self as a cultural category. The notion of the self as a cultural category has been prevalent in anthropology since (at least) the work of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). This chapter will introduce key historical developments in the anthropology of selfhood from Mauss onwards, focusing on the different ways the self has been defined by ethnographers working in the field. We will also briefly survey the anthropological distinction between Western and Non-Western models of the self to set the scene for the discussion that follows.

Against this background, I would like to suggest that the self is something more than a cultural category. This is not to say, of course, that culture plays no role in the development of self-conceptions. Indeed I shall argue that, rather than being the source of self-concepts, culture is best understood as a filtration system, or as a modulator, through which experiences are given meaning and interpreted. Often, however, cultural notions become fixed, and are passed on as given fact: they can be taken as normative, prescriptive, accounts of all that is potentially possible. In such situations individuals who experience alternate modes of the self may find that their own experiential understanding of the nature of the self is at odds with the normative models of their host culture (unless, of course, their culture takes into account a wider perspective of the nature of self and consciousness).

This is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the context of post-industrial Euro-American society, where the dominant paradigms of materialist science define consciousness, and

consequently the self, as little more than an epiphenomenon of physiological brain function—as a by-product and an illusion (cf. Crick 1994). I argue that through adopting an understanding of the self as an experiential phenomenon (that is as something that is *experientially* defined, rather than culturally generated), it is possible to move away from such reductive explanatory models. Embracing the experiential dimensions of consciousness and self requires that we consider the implications of the widest variety of self-experiences that are reported by human beings across the world, and above all that we take these experiences seriously.

These ideas have emerged from my own ethnographic fieldwork with a private, non-denominational home-circle in Bristol, UK, where mediums experimentally and experientially explore the nature of consciousness and self through the practice and development of trance mediumship, which involves the incubation of altered states of consciousness during which ostensible spirit personalities communicate with sitters in the context of séances (Hunter 2020). Ultimately, through the development of this practice, mediums (and sitters) develop and adopt models of consciousness and the self that seem to exceed what anthropologists have historically referred to as the 'Western' conception of the self, in spite of the fact that in their daily lives they are immersed in mainstream Western culture. There are, perhaps, interesting parallels here with the work of Tanya Luhrmann amongst American Evangelicals, whose experiences communing with God have similarly led to alternate conceptions of the self (Luhrmann 2012). Furthermore, and intriguingly, these conceptions of the self appear to exceed the standard models of mainstream materialist science, which might suggest that this line of inquiry also has ontological implications for our understanding of the nature of consciousness (though we will be unable to explore these in depth in this short chapter). Let us now turn to the field.

The Bristol Spirit Lodge

The Bristol Spirit Lodge is a private, non-denominational[30] spiritualist home-circle based in Clevedon, a town about fifteen miles to the West of Bristol in the southwest of England, right on the banks of the Bristol Channel. The Lodge was founded in 2005 by Christine Di Nucci, a sixty-something housewife who was introduced to the world of mediumship by a friend with an interest in Spiritualism. After some early experiments at home with a small group of her friends, attempting Ouija boards and meditation sessions, Christine was invited to attend a physical mediumship demonstration at Jenny's Sanctuary, a well-known mediumship circle in Banbury, Oxfordshire. A complete account of Christine's experience at this séance exceeds the limitations of this chapter (see Di Nucci 2009; Hunter 2012, 2018 for a more detailed account), but suffice to say that the experience was life-changing for her.

In addition to observing unusual physical effects in the room around her (floating lights, bangs on the walls and ceiling, and touches on her arms and legs), Christine heard a voice that she instantly recognized, just a few feet away from her, emanating from somewhere close to the ceiling. Following this particular séance experience, Christine's entire worldview was transformed, and her life was changed forever. To borrow Jeffrey Kripal's term, this was her 'Flip' moment (Kripal 2019). From that day on she was determined to find out more about this expanded reality through her own experimental process of mediumship training, employing what she has termed a "house-wifey-DIY awareness of science". To this end she established the Bristol Spirit Lodge, initially encouraging her friends to sit as developing mediums, and later, primarily in response to the Lodge's voluminous website,[31] welcoming other mediums to sit and develop their abilities as well.

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[30] The Lodge is referred to as non-denominational because it is not affiliated with the Spiritualists National Union (SNU), the main organization representing Spiritualists in the UK.

[31] http://the-bristol-spirit-lodge.blogspot.co.uk/

Over time, the members of the Lodge grew from the original small group of close friends gathering informally in Christine's living room. At the time of writing there is a core group of eleven regular sitters, five of whom are males aged between 27 and 80 years, and six females, aged between 50 and 80 years, who sit in regular weekly circles with developing mediums. Most are old friends of Christine's, but some are more recent additions, having been recruited by word of mouth and through the Lodge's website – friends of friends, and spiritual seekers. The Lodge is also attended quite regularly by visiting sitters, often two or three times a week. Visiting sitters sometimes attend with a desire to make contact with a specific deceased loved one, but Christine is generally averse to this kind of visit as she does not think it is possible to guarantee communication with specific spirits. Instead, mediums at the Lodge usually channel a regular group of spirits known as a "spirit team", which may include up to as many as 11 individual entities, each with strong, and distinctive personalities, complete with their own back-stories. More often than not, however, visiting sitters are simply there because they have an interest in physical mediumship and want to experience it first-hand for themselves, perhaps as a result of hearing about it at Spiritualist churches, or through reading the Spiritualist literature, and occasionally as a direct result of personal paranormal experiences earlier in life and a desire to find out more.

At the time of writing there are six mediums in training with Christine at the Lodge, half of whom are female. The most frequently active mediums during my time with the Bristol Spirit Lodge, between 2009 and 2013, were Jon, 47 years old, salesman brought up in the Church of England; Sandy, aged 49, a nutritional therapist; Syann a 36-year-old fitness instructor; and Emily, 33 years old, an office worker. Other trainee mediums attended less frequently, sometimes for weeks at a time, sometimes more sporadically, but the above-mentioned mediums were the most dedicated, attending séances at least once a week, and sometimes more often. Guest mediums also occasionally visit the Lodge, invited by Christine to give demonstrations of their more developed abilities. The medium who originally presented Christine with her life-changing experiences in Banbury regularly gives guest

demonstrations of physical mediumship to sitters and trainee mediums at the Lodge, for example.

It is my contention that these practices, and the unusual experiences that accompany them, give rise to novel ideas about the nature of self and consciousness in participants.

What is the self?

Marcel Mauss' famous paper, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self" (1938 [1985]), is frequently used as a starting point in discussions of the anthropology of personhood and selfhood, and this chapter will be no exception. In his writings, Mauss often employed the terms 'self' and 'person' interchangeably, which has become a common trait in the wider scholarly discourse. "What I wish to show you," Mauss writes, "is the succession of forms that this concept [the category of self] has taken on in the life of men in different societies, according to their systems of law, religion, customs, social structures and mentality." (Mauss 1985: 3) The specific concern he addresses in his influential paper is the development of what he calls conceptions of self and person (i.e. cultural models), as opposed to the 'conscious personality' itself (1985: 3), and this is where our approaches diverge. Mauss' main emphasis is on the evolution of different cultural notions of the 'self,' while my own research is focused on the experiential core, the self itself that underlies such cultural notions.

Mauss achieved his goal through a cross-cultural overview of different notions of the self, which he neatly divided into five distinct stages. He begins with the self as 'the subject' (being the state of human experience as an embodied entity, and the main focus of my inquiry), followed by 'the role' (being the place and function of the person within a society), the 'persona' (the character, or moral and legal entity), and onwards to the Christian 'person' (an individual metaphysical entity), before finally arriving at the person defined as an individual, bounded, 'psychological being' in the modern, post-industrial, Euro-American sense (Mauss 1985: 1-23).

For Mauss, then, the self was a constantly evolving concept, "imprecise, delicate and fragile," and above all was socially and culturally constructed, eventually culminating with the model of the individual Western self we know today.

While I agree that self-concepts do become ingrained within a particular cultural context, I nevertheless feel that a focus on the self as purely culturally derived, that is as a category of thought without any wider ontological implications, is to ignore a much deeper, and much more interesting, problem. Namely, what do alternate experiences of the self, even if they fly in the face of dominant cultural models, tell us about the ultimate nature of human consciousness itself? What is the experiential core that underlies the cultural concepts of person and self that Mauss investigated? If the self is purely a cultural category, how is it that practitioners of mediumship, meditation and shamanism (for example), come to develop conceptions of the self that seem to contradict mainstream cultural models?

Writing some sixty years after Mauss' first tentative explorations of the self, the anthropologist Melford Spiro took up the issue of defining the self in a paper entitled "Is the Western Conception of the self 'Peculiar' Within the Context of the World's Cultures?" (1993). Spiro's article was written in response to influential papers by Clifford Geertz (1974), and Markus and Kitayama (1991), who had argued for a distinction between the bounded 'Western' notion of the self and the 'Porous' non-Western self (more on this later). To begin his deconstruction, Spiro drew attention to the different ways in which the terms 'person' and 'self' have been used, and very often conflated, by theorists, psychologists and anthropologists. Spiro delineated seven possible things to which the label 'self' is frequently applied:

1. The person, or the individual, including the package of biological, psychological, social, and cultural characteristics by which he or she is constituted.
2. The cultural conception of the person or individual.

> 3. The cultural conception of some psychic entity or structure within the person, variously designated as 'pure ego,' 'transcendental ego,' 'soul,' and the like.
> 4. The person's construal of such an entity as the center or locus of his or her initiative, sensations, perceptions, emotions, and the like.
> 5. The personality or the configuration of cognitive orientations, perceptual sets, and motivational dispositions that are uniquely characteristic of each person.
> 6. The sense of self or the person's awareness that he or she is both separate and different from other persons. The former is often referred to as 'self-other differentiation,' the latter as 'personal individuation.'
> 7. The self-representation or the mental representation of the attributes of one's own person as they are known, both consciously and unconsciously, to the person himself or herself. (Spiro 1993: 114)

Although Spiro does not go on to propose working definitions of his own, which might have helped to bring a little clarity to this area, he nevertheless highlights the fact that the focus of the majority of anthropological studies has been primarily on 'cultural conceptions of the self' (1993: 143), in keeping with Mauss' tradition, rather than dealing with the self as a metaphysical or phenomenological entity. It is this phenomenological perspective that I am concerned with here, that is how the self is experienced from the subjective perspective.

Spiro also criticized the often assumed binary distinction between the so-called 'Western' and 'Non-Western' conceptions of the self, and my research would certainly seem to support this view. As we shall see in the next section, the ethnographic reality is far more complex than this simple either/or dichotomy gives it credit for. I also agree with Spiro's suggestion that the over-emphasis on cultural conceptions, rather than on the phenomenological dimensions of the self (the many different ways in which the self is experienced, for example in different states of consciousness), is a cause for concern for anthropologists and anthropological theories of the self. It is my contention that an appreciation of the range of phenomenological

dimensions of the self will ultimately help to shed light on the nature of self as a complex ontological entity.

As another example of an attempt to clear up some of the confusion around these terms, Grace Harris (1989) has proposed much more rigid definitions of the terms 'individual,' 'self,' and 'person,' arguing that the conflation of such labels in anthropological and ethnographic writing has led to considerable problems in cross-cultural comparison and interpretation. How do we know that we are talking about the same thing in one context as our colleagues are talking about in another, for example? In order to counteract this confusing state of affairs, Harris offers the following definitions:

> 1. Individual: "A concept of the individual is one focusing on a human being considered as a single member of the human kind" (1989:600). This is a biologistic category.
> 2. Self: "To work with a concept of self is to conceptualize the human being as a locus of experience, including experience of that human's own someoneness" (1989:601). This is a psychologistic category.
> 3. Person: "Dealing with a concept of person entails conceptualizing the human or other being as an agent, the author of action purposively directed toward a goal" (1989:602). This is a sociologistic category.

Harris suggests that local variations of these three concepts are employed near-universally across human cultures, though whether this is actually the case is a point of contention. It could be argued, for example, that the models of personhood that emerge in Amerindian perspectivist cosmologies (as documented, for example, in A. Irving Hallowell and Viveiros de Castro's work), effectively blur any kind of neat distinction between these three components of the 'self.' With this in mind, then, in the context of this chapter at least, we are primarily concerned with what Harris calls the "self", as distinct from the individual or person, in that our emphasis is on the phenomenology of the self, how the self is experienced and how this experience subsequently influences the development of particular cultural models of self.

Drawing on recent research in neurobiology, anthropologist Naomi Quinn (2006) criticizes the "impoverishment of cultural anthropological theory with regard to the self" (2006: 362), which she characterizes as overly simplistic. Following neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux's view of the self as "the totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally," Quinn proposes a definition of the self that emphasizes "the intra-psychic - including psychological, biological, and cultural, and both explicit and implicit processes that comprise it." This view of the self "encompasses the physical organism, all aspects of psychological functioning, and social attributes" (2006: 363). Interestingly, however, Quinn is comfortable with using the words 'self' and 'personality' interchangeably, though, to me at least, this seems to be a further unnecessary conflation of ideas. I would understand personality as the outward expression of the self, much as in Mauss' conception of the persona, and the self as the inner phenomenological component of the person. In spite of this difficulty, however, I agree with Quinn's general conclusion that the "self" consists of a variety of component parts, ranging from the intra-psychic and experiential to the physical and biological.

It is clear, however, that there are further aspects of the self that are frequently left out of these kinds of discussions, namely the so-called "transpersonal" dimensions. Transpersonal anthropologist Charles Laughlin defines the transpersonal as "a movement in science toward seeing the significance of experiences had in life, that somehow go beyond the boundaries of ordinary ego-consciousness, as data" (Laughlin, 2012: 70). The implication here, then, is that certain kinds of experiences that appear to contradict cultural expectations should not be simply brushed aside as essentially delusional, pathological and irrational, but rather ought to be understood as data that might provide fruitful insights into the nature of consciousness, mind and self.

Daniels, for example, argues that the different aspects of the soul/self encountered in different cultural traditions are "based on interpretations of a wide variety of human experiences, including life and death, dreams, out-of-body experiences, hauntings, possession,

self-reflexive consciousness, inspiration and mystical experience" (2002: 17). My own research also supports this view, and I will suggest that the experiences of trainee mediums in the development of their trances lead to expanded conceptions self and consciousness.

By defining the self as experiential (that is, defined by experience rather than by culture), then, we can overcome many of the problems associated with the cross-cultural study of selfhood. Instead of comparing cultural models (although this is undoubtedly a fascinating and useful approach in itself), we could instead be comparing how the self is actually experienced by different groups and individuals, as well as the methods and techniques by which the experiential self is investigated and explored by our fieldwork informants. In this way we might also be able to learn something more about the nature of human consciousness, as distinct from specific cultural ideas about it, perhaps leading to the development of a "map", or topography, of consciousness.

Western/Non-Western, Bounded/Porous

Now that we have surveyed some of the literature on the definition of self, we will turn to examine some of the classical distinctions between so-called "Western" and "Non-Western" models of the self.

Willy de Craemer (1983), in a small-scale cross cultural comparison of American, Bantu and Japanese conceptions of the person, highlighted several key characteristics of what he considers the "Western" conception of the person, which includes characteristics of: (1) Individuality, (2) Rights, (3) Autonomy, (4) self-Determination, (5) Privacy, and (6) Specific roles and functions within society. In addition to these characteristic features of the Western person-concept, de Craemer also emphasizes the relatively restricted extent to which the individual is located within a wider kinship group, which "does not usually include kin-like friends or patrons and clients as it does in many other societies." Furthermore, "even within the confines of strict biological relatedness, what we count as kin, with whom we identify, has shrivelled over time and is now predominantly a matter of relationship to a spouse, parent,

sibling, grandparent, and, to a lesser extent, aunt, uncle and cousin." de Craemer characterizes this individualizing of the person as running even deeper, arguing that "relations with the deceased and the unborn, especially ancestors and descendants, so interpersonally and metaphysically important in African and Asian societies, all play a minimal role in the conscious conception and life of the American individual" (1983: 20). While this may be true generally, the reality on the ground is not quite so clear-cut, as we shall see. There are groups, even within the dominant Euro-American culture, who deliberately seek to foster relationships with the deceased, as well as other non-physical beings, and whose understanding of the self clearly exceeds the limitations of the "American individual".

Clifford Geertz also provides a very similar, and hugely influential, definition of the so-called "Western" person when he writes that the Western person is conceived as

> [...] a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background. (Geertz 1974: 31)

For Geertz, then, the Western conception of the person is structured and defined by contrast with "other such wholes". It is bounded by the limitations of the physical body, which acts as a barrier between the inner "centre of awareness" and the outer world of the natural and social spheres. The "Western" person is understood to be autonomous, bounded and individual. In Charles Taylor's terms, the Western self is "buffered" (2007: 37-41), separated from the outside world. By contrast, Marilyn Strathern is famous for popularising the distinction between "individual" models of personhood (exemplified by the "Western" model), and "dividual" models (exemplified by "Non-Western" models, and particularly Melanesian models). The key differences between these two modes of conceiving of the nature of the person have been briefly summarised by Karl Smith as follows:

> In the simplest terms, the individual is considered to be an indivisible self or person. That is, it refers to something like the essential core, or spirit of a singular human being, which, as a whole, defines that self in its particularity. To change, remove or otherwise alter any part of that whole would fundamentally alter the 'self'; she/he would then be, effectively, a different person. By contrast, the dividual is considered to be divisible, comprising a complex of separable - interrelated but essentially independent - dimensions or aspects. The individual is thus monadic, while the dividual is fractal; the individual is atomistic, while the dividual is always socially embedded; the individual is an autonomous social actor, the author of his or her own actions, while the dividual is a heteronomous actor performing a culturally written script; the individual is a free-agent, while the dividual is determined by cultural structures; the individual is egocentric, while the dividual is sociocentric. (Smith 2012: 53)

Anthropologists have, therefore, attempted to highlight the variety of personhood concepts worldwide, but have not quite so often addressed the plurality of personhood concepts within a single society. In her discussion of cultural variations in theories of mind, psychologist Angeline Lillard, for example, explains how "variation in folk psychological thinking within the [Euro-American] community has not received adequate attention from researchers" (1998: 3), and suggests that further research in this direction is required, a sentiment echoed more recently by Tanya Luhrmann (2011). Lillard proposes that differences in theories of mind within Euro-American society might arise as a consequence of individual, or sub-cultural, beliefs, for example "whether non-material sources like spirits or God can directly influence one's mind" (1998: 3).

Taylor also agrees, arguing that the "buffered self" arises as a product of the disenchantment of the world (Taylor 2007: 41). Cultural beliefs and expectations, then, seem to either limit or expand conceptions of the self. In spite of this, however, it is still possible to have experiences that seem to exceed the limitations expected by a particular cultural model, which would seem to imply that the self is not derived directly from culture – experience can also give rise to cultural models.

What we are dealing with, then, is a greater degree of intra-cultural variation in experiences and conceptualisations of self than the standard Western/Non-Western dichotomy seems to allow for (cf. Spiro 1993: 144-145), and this appears, at least preliminarily, to be due not so much to the influence of culture, but rather due to individual first-personal experiences.

Mediumship, Experiences and the Experiential Self

We will now turn to examine some of the types of experience reported by developing mediums at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, before elaborating on how such experiences influence the development of models of self. In addition to accounts from mediums in training, I have also included a couple of references to my own subjective experiences as a participant-observer in mediumship development sittings. I felt that it was important that, as a researcher, I experienced, as far as possible, the kinds of experiences reported by my fieldwork informants.

Surrendering to Trance

Some of the most unusual experiences reported by mediums themselves involve the hours and minutes leading up to the onset of their trance states and the formal beginning of the séance. Before entering the Lodge, for example, mediums often report strange bodily sensations and subtle alterations of their consciousness indicative of the presence of their spirit teams, who are understood to move closer to the medium before the séance begins. In the following extract, Sandy describes the sensations she feels when surrendering herself to the early stages of the trance state:

> I don't feel tired as such. But, you know if you're tired, you start kind of staring, and you're just not totally with it. If somebody's chatting at you, you know they're chatting and you're kind of half with it and half not. That's how it starts. They've not taken over at that point. I'm just aware that they're going to be in the near future. And that happens before I get here [...] There's this kind of, almost a

> daze, as if you're really tired and you're just going to go to sleep, and that's the first thing I notice.

Sandy describes a gradual process of her spirit team moving closer, beginning with an altered, drowsy, state of consciousness, and progressing towards full trance and a dissociation from the external world. She describes a growing awareness of the presence of her spirit team leading up to the beginning of the séance, as they move into her field of awareness. Similarly, in the following extract, Rachael describes her own sensation of falling into trance over the course of an hour leading up to the start of the séance. She explains:

> My head starts spinning. That's normally before I sit, it starts about an hour before, just a little bit, you kind of can't get your words in the right order sometimes, and your head doesn't really seem to connect with the rest of you for a little while [...] by the time you're sat in the cabinet you're feeling quite calm [...] and it's weird, it's almost like you're moving backwards inside your own head, and it's like your own head is bigger than it normally is and you're moving backwards into it. I don't seem to go anywhere else at the moment, I just seem to stay in myself, but it's kind of like my head's a lot like an alien [laughs], and I'm going backwards into my own head.

Rachael's description contains interesting references to anomalous bodily sensations. Her head feels larger than it normally is, and she senses herself falling backwards into it. The boundaries of the physical body are felt to expand outwards, or dissolve, or to lose their normal sense of proportion, and consciousness is experienced as more expansive than in her everyday waking state. She feels dizzy and hazy as the locus of her consciousness dissociates from her body, perhaps focusing on inner processes rather than the external world. This unusual bodily sensation, the evaporation of the boundaries of the physical body, is also echoed in Jon's description of the process of falling into the trance state:

> Once we're out in the Lodge [...] I sit down [and] feel a calmness wash over and the music starts. I love the first couple of tracks but usually find they've gone very quickly [...] I'm still very much aware of the room but find that I've often missed bits of time [...] For the first half of the evening I have absolutely no awareness of

> what's going on externally [...] Often now, when they are talking I'll go back into myself and I get a strange sensation of vertigo and being detached from the conversation, not just intellectually but physically as well. (Hunter 2009: 74)

Again, Jon reports the dissolution of the usual boundaries of the physical body. Time is experienced differently, it seems to flow much quicker, or it stops and starts. His awareness shifts, like Rachael's, from the external world towards internal processes. Again, the boundaries are expanded so much that Jon has a 'strange sense of vertigo' that 'physically' detaches him from the conversations going on around him. My own experience of falling into trance during a development sitting at the Lodge also featured many of the aspects of Sandy, Rachael and Jon's experiences, which, to my mind at least, adds credence to the veracity of the experiences they reported to me:

> I felt my hands begin to tingle as they rested on the arms of the chair, and my heart rate began to quicken. I began to feel as though I was going to lose control of my body, as though I was on the verge of fainting or passing out, though still sitting comfortably in the chair. Gradually I felt as though I was becoming distanced from my physical body; as though I was somehow sitting just behind my own body. At the point when I felt most distanced from my physical form I heard Christine say that she sensed a presence standing by me, a male presence that wanted to communicate. This unsettled me, because I too sensed an unusual, invisible, presence. I felt on the verge of losing control of my body. I panicked. I swore. I opened my eyes and snapped myself back into the room. I felt light headed, and my heart rate was racing. I had to regain composure, calm down, and reassure myself that everything was okay. The group laughed.

Experiences such as these seem to challenge the cultural notion of the physical body as an impermeable membrane between the inner and outer worlds, which is a hallmark of the so-called 'Western' individual model of the self. I 'felt' a sense of presence move into my awareness, as if my consciousness were a field extending out from my experiential centre. Like Jon and Rachael, I felt an expanse

open up within me, like a cavernous space, much larger than my physical body.

Such experiences come as a shock to mediums in the early stages of development precisely because the dominant paradigms of Western materialist science, which are ubiquitous in mainstream post-industrial Euro-American culture, do not prime us to expect them, and, if such sensations are mentioned at all, it is usually in the context of pathology. In the words of transpersonal anthropologist Charles D. Laughlin, Euro-American society participates in a predominantly mono-phasic culture, in which the ostensibly productive, everyday state of waking consciousness is promoted as the only acceptable, practical, economically viable and "normal" state of consciousness (excepting, perhaps, the drunken state at certain socially and culturally prescribed times; only after work, for example). There is no framework within which to understand experiences of bodily dissolution and expanded awareness, except in the contexts of intoxication and pathology. Polyphasic cultures, by contrast, can be said to embrace a variety of altered states of consciousness as normal, or at least not as abnormal, and have developed frameworks within which the kinds of sensations reported by developing mediums, for example, can be understood. What seems to be taking place at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, then, is the formation of a polyphasic subculture, within which expanded experiences of self can be made sense of.

Porous Bodies and Field-Like Selves

We can say, then, that the kinds of experiences reported by those developing mediumship at the Lodge, lead to a porous conception of the body. No longer is the body understood as an impermeable layer, as a solid boundary between the internal and external worlds. Instead, the body is experienced as permeable, so permeable in fact that under certain conditions non-physical entities can move into, occupy and control it. Christine describes the idea in the following terms:

> I think we just flow through each other. Or, we've got very blurred edges, we appear to be solid, but only our eyes are seeing this solid, this light reflection which causes us to appear solid. We're not. So, our boundaries aren't where we think they are. We are here to experience whatever this is, this life form, this stage of life is. We are here [...] to experience, or to perceive things as solid and individual and it's a very little tiny part of a very big life. I think. Possibly.

Christine conceives of the boundaries of the person as extending beyond the confines of the physical body, which self only appears to be solid. According to this perspective the "solid" and the "individual" are, to a certain extent, illusory. With a porous body, then, it is possible for things to flow into and out of the person. Anthropologist Fiona Bowie has characterized this, in the context of spiritualist trance séances, through describing the body as a "shared territory, holding the physical life-force of the medium and the conscious intelligence of visiting spirits" (Bowie, 2012 :14).

In further discussions, Christine has described her model of consciousness as being somewhat "like an onion," that is like "a whole split into millions and trillions of consciousnesses that can act together" This kind of pluralistic, dividual, understanding of consciousness and the person recurs throughout the ethnographic literature (see, as one such example, Roseman on the structure of the self among Senoi Temiar, which is described as consisting of "a number of potentially detachable selves" (1990: 227).

In the following extract Emily further describes her own experience of the porosity of the body, and elaborates on how she subjectively experiences spirits moving into her "personal space":

> Then, usually around the table while we are waiting for the start, I will feel a presence around me kind of like an enveloping feeling, the first thing I feel is as if a friend is standing unseen nearby. I have an awareness of there being someone there, near me; that is, a friend. I then feel them come closer into my personal "space" in some quiet gentle way.

Emily's description of a sense of presence, unseen but felt, further suggests a model of the self as a non-physical field expanding outwards from the physical body, into which other entities can pass. Again, we see the idea that mediumship development is a gradual process, beginning with a sensed presence, and an interjection into "personal space", and finally resulting in the embodiment of distinctive spirit personalities, who communicate through the medium's body.

In the following extract, Rachael, who had been attending the Lodge for just over one year when I spoke to her in 2012, explained how before developing mediumship she would frequently experience the unusual, and often unpleasant, sensation of spirits moving through her body. She explains:

> When they actually make a personal entrance into your body, that's pretty bizarre. It would normally happen, um, in the middle of the night I'd wake up and there was something, it's a sort of odd feeling, it's like, um, if you can imagine taking off a polo-necked jumper, but from inside yourself. It's like something's pulling, it's kind of gone in, and then it's kind of pulling out, and it's, oh, I can't explain it, but it's the weirdest, weirdest feeling. But it's quite horrible [...] It happened, um, on about three occasions through my thirties, and in the end I got talking to a medium and she said it sounds like a spirit entity in you, or something passing through you, and she said to contact the local Spiritualist church. I did that, but nobody there seemed to feel the same kind of thing: with mental mediumship it all seems to be outside of the person coming in through the mind and talking, it wasn't, with me it's a very physical thing [...].

For Rachael the process of developing mediumship allowed her to come to terms with experiences that had previously been disturbing to her. Where once the experience of spirits moving through her body had been unpleasant and spontaneous, primarily because she did not have a cultural framework through which to understand her experience, it is now both deliberately induced during formalized séances, and has become an enjoyable experience for her. She explains how mediumship development has made her "soft and squidgy" and "more open to other people", again, a description of

the self that accords particularly with the so-called "Non-Western" model, but which has arisen through first-person experience rather than through cultural indoctrination.

Multiple Intelligences/Spiritual Augmentation

Christine's notion that consciousness is "a whole split into millions and trillions of consciousnesses that can act together" accords very well with what I have termed "spiritual augmentation"; that is, the notion that spiritual beings can be thought of as augmentations of consciousness, co-existing and assisting with cognitive processes. In the following extract, for example, Sandy describes how the members of her spirit team assist her with memory and information recall:

> [The spirits] help me keep a clearer mind, and therefore I am able to make better decisions. I can utilize information that I've got [...] I did a degree in nutritional medicine, years ago I was a nurse and a midwife, and there's a lot of information in my head somewhere, but I can actually tap in on information that I've not used in years and years and years [...] the knowledge is mine but it can be used more efficiently.

Sandy told me this in the context of a wider discussion about an experience she had several years before we met. Sandy explained that when her children were growing up they had been ill and were recommended a course of drugs by their doctor. Sandy eventually came to the conclusion that this course of action was only making the situation worse, and so decided to personally oversee a reduction in the amount of drugs she was giving to her children, noting along the way that they seemed to be getting better the fewer drugs they were taking. Eventually, however, Sandy reached the point where she was beginning to doubt the action she was taking, that was until she was affirmed in her actions by a mysterious, seemingly disembodied, voice. She explains:

> One day I was, um, laid on the bed upstairs and um, I was really, I was mulling over it, and I was thinking right I really don't know if I should be doing this, I don't know if I, you know, where this can

> take me, you know, this is my kids, so this is important stuff you know. And so, um, and suddenly I heard the voice and it said "You've Gotta Keep Going." And it was out-loud, you see, and I kinda looked round and my son was asleep on the bed [laughs]. Come on, I don't know, who said this, you know? And I just didn't know, and I didn't know whether to tell anybody that I'd heard this voice, but it was an out-loud voice. In fact it was the only time I've heard that out-loud voice, I haven't heard that out-loud voice since. In fact I don't really hear a voice since. But this was an out-loud voice, it was a definite voice, and, um, and I thought wow, OK then...The whole thing was managed, and when Joseph started to come through he said that he'd been with me for a long time, and, you know, previously he was a medicine man in a previous life, and he was a healer, and he was here to heal and that was what he was doing...and so he said he did it.

The reassuring and practical, supportive tone of Sandy's experience accords well with a general pattern in auditory "hallucinations" of this nature, namely that they are helpful. Tanya Luhrmann, for instance, drawing on her own research with members of a Charismatic Christian church and the work of others in similarly structured fieldwork situations, explains how "whether internal or external, the voices focused on immediate issues. They offered practical direction, not grand metaphysical theology. Many, though not all, had the experiences during emotional turmoil" (2011: 74).

Here Christine, the circle leader, describes how her spirit guide, known as Fuzzy Critter, influences her decision-making:

> As time went on … trusting Fuzzy Critter, and these telepathic voices, I did get to a point where I knew it was separate from me [...] It was a separate personality. The words he uses are better than mine [...] his language is different to mine [...] His general way of working, it's not me, in fact sometimes I'll argue with him [...] I have a sense, he seems to approach me from this side of my shoulder, this side of my head [left]. I, in my own mind, feel that he's a bit like a fluffy owl sitting on my shoulder [...] Sometimes it's annoying if I'm doing housework and he wants to communicate with me, and I get this feeling. It's a bit like having something

> playing with your hair, or whispering in your ear when you're trying to do something.

Again, we see here examples of what anthropologists have labelled a "dividual self", or "porous self", emerging from a Western post-industrial context. The locus of the self can be entered by discarnate spirits who may offer their assistance in a range of different everyday situations and decision-making processes.

The Experiential Self

Although the examples cited in this chapter only offer a snapshot of the wide range of experiences reported by developing mediums at the Bristol Spirit Lodge,[32] they nevertheless serve as a useful illustration of some of the ways in which anomalous experiences (trance experiences in this instance), can lead to the development of expanded conceptions of consciousness and the self.

Lillard's (1998) suggestion that variations in theories of mind might arise from specific cultural beliefs about the influence of spirits, deities, and so on, naturally begs the questions of where such beliefs come from in the first place. Of course, the cultural diffusion of ideas clearly does takes place, and specific ideas and beliefs are undoubtedly transmitted through social groups, families and communities, but many such beliefs also have an experiential source. David J. Hufford (1982), for example, has written extensively on the experiential source for a wide variety of supernatural assault traditions, arguing that such traditions emerge in direct response to first-hand experiences, specifically of sleep paralysis. Hufford writes:

> The primary theoretical statement of the approach might be roughly summed up as follows: some significant portion of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observations interpreted rationally. This does not suggest that all such belief has

[32] A more detailed analysis is presented in my doctoral thesis.

> this association. Nor is this association taken as proof that the beliefs are true. (Hufford 1982: xviii)

Beliefs about the nature of the self, then, might also arise from first-hand personal experience, built up over time and incorporating new experiential insights. Psychedelic experiences, for example, may lead to expanded notions of the nature of the self, just as experiences with mediumship might also lead to different models. An understanding of the self as arising through direct first-hand experiences, as opposed to the notion that conceptions of the self are purely culturally constructed, goes some way towards explaining the much greater variety of intra-cultural conceptions of the self commented on by Lillard (1998), and further noted by Luhrmann (2011). It also raises important questions about what, if anything, should be considered a "normal" self-conception, and clearly has implications for both psychology and psychiatry, especially with regard to diagnosis and treatment. Through engaging with the way that self and consciousness are experienced phenomenologically, rather than on cultural categories, we can further advance the anthropology of consciousness, and begin to move away from dealing with problematic notions of "belief" (see Hunter, 2015), towards a greater appreciation of distinctive phenomenological experiences. In other words, what I am suggesting is that people do not simply believe that the self can survive death, or that it consists of multiple parts, or that it is porous and permeable, rather they experience it to be so, and through this experiencing know that consciousness is far more expansive than the dominant cultural models of Western materialism allows itself to admit.

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Extraordinary Experience, Intersubjectivity and Doubt in Fieldwork: Studying Urban Spiritualists

Deirdre Meintel

Introduction

This chapter is largely inspired by several other contributions to this volume, notably those by Michele Hanks and Géraldine Mossière, as well as a recent publication by Fiona Bowie (2014).[33] When researchers participate in the extraordinary experiences of those they study, questions arise that would not otherwise. All fieldwork involves at least a minimum of subjective engagement on the part of the researcher; however few ethnographers choose to problematize their own experience and bring it into their analyses. Though not entirely absent in other fields of anthropological inquiry (e.g., Wikan 1991, 1992), this seems to happen more frequently in studies of religion. Part of this might be the unusual and unexpected "extraordinary" form that perceptions and experiences may take in this field of inquiry. Moreover, they would seem to be in direct conflict with one's identity and role as a researcher, an issue I take up at a later point in this chapter. Another factor may be that scholars in this field must deal with the issue of credibility, simply by virtue of the fact of studying religion. As Hervieu-Léger (1993: 22) has noted, there is no unassailable position for the researcher in this field; whether believer, nonbeliever or former believer, one is vulnerable to accusations of bias. A certain degree of reflexivity is thus inevitable for those working on religion or spirituality.

Bringing the ethnographer's extraordinary experiences into the analysis of the research results raises a number of questions and issues that otherwise do not usually present themselves. When the

[33] My thanks to Guillaume Boucher and to an anonymous reviewer for their questions and comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

researcher enters into experiences that science has ignored or dismissed, s/he is led to consider local explanations of these experiences; this can lead to questions of ontology that have been mostly ignored in classical ethnographies. As I will explain, certain kinds of perceptions and experiences typical of the Spiritualist mediums I study have become normalized in my own experience, yet they are not explicable in scientific terms at present (e.g., visions and perceptions of the invisible, foreknowledge of future events and so on).

I have not shared every type of extraordinary perception as most of the mediums I have interviewed; in particular, I do not have direct experience of malefic entities that they typically report. Yet, I will explore the possibility that sharing *some* such experiences may influence one's approach to the "extraordinary" experiences that one does *not* share with one's informants. My understanding of their accounts of combat with evil entities or assaults by negative beings, for example, is conditioned by the fact that I have had experiences of benevolent invisible presences that are similar to theirs.

Continuing a thread of analysis proposed by Michele Hanks in this volume, I would argue that what she terms a "growing body of knowledge" should be constructed by researchers reporting and analyzing such experiences. The ontological status given to extraordinary experiences lived in the course of fieldwork varies from one author to another (cf. Turner 1994; Dubisch 2005, 2008; Tedlock 1997), and it is perhaps not necessary to agree on their ontological status in order to begin building such a corpus. However, given that we are not immune to the logic of scientism, taking these experiences seriously as tools for understanding, forms of knowledge and material for analysis requires us to suspend objectivist judgments as to their reality, at least temporarily. I hope to contribute by example to a conversation about what makes such experiences convincing to the one who experiences them, even in the absence of conventional proofs. I shall do so by laying out some of the emergent criteria of validity that allow participants, including researchers, to consider their experiences as real. In this context, it is perhaps worth remembering that certain non-extraordinary

intrapersonal experiences have long gone unverified by objectivist means, and are now finding documentation by objectivist methods. One example is the experience of pain by newborns now being discussed in medical circles as it relates to circumcision. Another concerns the pain felt by patients who, unknown to their doctors, remain completely conscious during surgery. This phenomenon of "intraoperative recall" (Lang 2013), long discounted, is now being studied with the help of new research instruments.

In what follows, I will present the fieldwork on which my remarks are based, first describing the context of the study, noting some of the circumstances that affected my participation in Spiritualist religious activities such as healing and clairvoyance. I then present different types of extraordinary experiences typical of Spiritualist mediums, and continue with some reflection on the notion of intersubjectivity in anthropology. I give particular attention to intersubjectivity's embodied aspects, as much of the intersubjectivity that is created in the Spiritualist church where my research is based is not articulated in words, but rather is deeply felt, often via the body. Next, I take up the issue of scientific skepticism, looking at how scientism, or the notion that all can and should be explained by science, affects the intellectual reflexes even of researchers, myself included, who are open to the idea that there are realities that science cannot explain, at least at present.

The Fieldwork Context

After several decades of working on ethnicity and migration[34], studying the religious experience of Spiritualists brought the challenge of a far deeper reflexivity than that required in my earlier work. Not only does studying the religion of others push us to examine our own beliefs as well as to situate ourselves in relation to theirs, but it also brings the possibility of a more challenging intersubjectivity than most ethnographic research. It is safe to say

[34] I did doctoral fieldwork in Cape Verde on migration and racial ideology (Meintel 1984) and then worked mainly on migration, family and identity issues in Montreal until 2005.

that most fieldworkers aspire, as Malinowski (1932, first published in 1922) put it in his introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, "to wake up every morning to a day, presenting itself … more or less as it does to the native" (p. 7) and ultimately, "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (p. 25). This was certainly the case for my fieldwork on race and colonialism in the Cape Verde Islands, where conditions approximated those experienced by the author of *Argonauts*: tropical, colonial and very isolated (Meintel 1984). Empathy led to close, enduring friendships in several cases; however, I could never claim to inhabit the colonial world in the same way as my friends did. Though I did reflect on the personal factors conditioning my fieldwork (my relative youth, gender, whiteness, etc.), such reflexivity was usually mobilized for interpreting interview material and observations rather than for structuring the research itself.

The fieldwork that gave rise to the questions discussed here is based in the Spiritualist Church of Healing[35] (hereafter referred to as the SCH), situated in downtown Montreal. Its services attract people from all over the metropolitan region and regular members numbered 187 in 2019. Membership is simply a matter of paying an annual fee of $20 and does not involve baptism or conversion nor does it necessarily represent religious affiliation. In fact, the boundaries of the congregation are quite blurred; members are mostly baptized Catholics who do not consider that they have rejected Catholicism (Meintel 2011a). Some still attend Catholic churches or participate in shamanic rituals; in fact, many of them frequent groups representing different religious currents. Women outnumber men at services and other activities by a ratio of about 3 to 1, though there are as many men as women among the healers, mediums and ministers who practice in the SCH. For participants, their spiritual experience is central to their connection with the SCH, which is the main reason it became the focus of my research.

[35] The name of the church as well as those of individuals mentioned are pseudonyms.

My first contacts with the Spiritual Church[36] of Healing date from late 1999. Situated on a slightly seedy stretch of a central thoroughfare, not far from a subway stop, the presence of the church is indicated only by a discreet sign at the entrance. Located over a restaurant, it shares the block with several grocery stores, restaurants, a sex shop and other small businesses. Members are mostly French - speaking though a growing number of immigrants and English - speaking Montrealers come to its activities. Services attract many individuals who are not members, who may also seek other spiritual resources from its seven ministers; for example, private clairvoyance sessions, a naming ceremony or a wedding, exorcism.[37]

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Clairvoyance and spiritual healing by the laying on of hands feature prominently in the SCH's public rituals, as is the case of the seven other Spiritualist churches in the city. These activities involve volunteer mediums and healers trained by the ministers and the ministers themselves. Services also include opening prayers, including the Our Father[38], and hymns. According to Spiritualist belief, everyone has spiritual gifts that can be developed with practice. However, they must be used in a spiritual framework and never for personal advantage. Receiving and transmitting the spiritual gifts of clairvoyance and healing are at the heart of the faith of those who frequent the SCH.

My interest in studying religion was sparked by several events in the late 1990s. As a visiting professor at the Université Lyon2, I was

[36] Officially a church; that is, recognized by the Québec government. This means that the ministers are able to officiate at weddings and funerals, but does not mean that the SCH enjoys tax exemption.

[37] Michel is the only Spiritualist minister I know of in Montreal who performs exorcisms (Meintel and Boucher 2020). These are always conducted either at a distance, using floor plans, or at the home of those concerned, whether it is exorcism of a person or, as is more often the case, of a dwelling.

[38] At the SCH, this term is used, in Catholic fashion, rather than "the Lord's Prayer", more common among Protestants.

asked to give part of a course on the anthropology of religion. François Laplantine, of the same university, had recently published a book with some colleagues on a popular clairvoyant in Lyon. Though personally fascinated by clairvoyance, I had never thought of mediumship or clairvoyance as an object of ethnographic study. Not long after my return to Montreal, a friend told me of Michel, whom he described as a talented medium, and put me in touch with him. I soon found out that Michel was also the pastor of a downtown Spiritualist congregation. When I visited their services at his invitation, I was struck by the contrast between the church clientele (working class, Francophone, brought up Catholic) and their religious activities (channelling, clairvoyance, healing by the laying on of hands) that till then I had associated with more exotic contexts. I found myself spontaneously taking notes and thought of doing a small fieldwork project for my own interest. Most of my research on ethnic themes was carried out by assistants and returning to Cape Verde was difficult to combine with other obligations. I was missing fieldwork. At that point, the Spiritualist church seemed to offer a chance to once again experience real otherness and on my own doorstep, so to speak. Besides the fact that their activities were strange to me, the congregation represented a part of Quebec society that I did not know well. My work on Spiritualists in Montreal would lead to a long-term interest in contemporary religions and spiritualities in Quebec, and to broader team research projects on the subject.

When he accepted my request to do fieldwork on the SCH the pastor, Michel, encouraged me to join what he called a "closed group" or "circle". I soon discovered that this was a stable group of about 5 - 20 persons (there are currently seven such groups in the SCH, each led by a minister/medium). Most include no more than 10 people, except for Michel's groups, and meet weekly or biweekly. The object of the groups, I learned, is to develop the members' spiritual gifts, mainly clairvoyance. Members are chosen by the leader and commit to attend regularly and to pay $10 per meeting, including any they miss. Michel was agreeable to my conducting observations of church activities, on the condition that I participate like the others present. By joining the closed group, I hoped to

connect with future informants and perhaps meet some individuals who had had mediumnic experiences. For about 18 months I carried out participant observation on church activities but conducted no interviews except for three with Michel. Later I conducted two or more interviews with 15 individuals, one on life history and the other on their spiritual trajectory, as well as informal interviews with dozens of other "regulars" at the SCH. Most of the structured interviews were carried out before 2008, but I have continued to have regular contact with the SCH since then and often conduct informal interviews with Michel or other participants.

Learning to See

Normally the closed groups number twenty or fewer people, though Michel's groups are sometimes larger. People arrive on time and take their assigned place on chairs arranged in a circle. Michel, the leader of the group where I have participated, assigns places on the basis of the colour of one's aura[39]. A guided meditation of some 20 minutes is followed by a brief exchange on what each received. After a break, participants return to their places and Michel gives instructions for an exercise in clairvoyance. This is usually focused on a particular theme (health, spirituality, daily life…) and using a particular kind of symbolism (precious stones, colours, etc.). Occasionally, the exercise focuses on a material object; in one form, participants write their name on a slip of paper and then fold it. Each person chooses a folded "billet" as it is called, picks up what they can and relates it to the group before reading the name. In a somewhat similar exercise, psychometry, each person places a personal object on a tray passed around in the dark and then picks up an object and tries to read it. Participants are directed to receive what they are able from the object and relate it to the group. In all the

[39] Auras are the fields of light around people, something like a large halo; the colours vary from one individual to another. Michel sees changes in aura according to the person's mood, but also holds that there are stable aspects, colours that are always there. Some mediums see auras around animals as well.

clairvoyance exercises, the group sits silently in the near darkness. After about five minutes, Michel calls on each person in the group to share whatever they have received. As in the exchange after the guided meditation, each participant speaks when called upon, or otherwise asks permission. People remain in their places and in the designated posture (seated on chairs, with feet crossed during meditation, uncrossed during clairvoyance). Respectful behaviour is required, and verbal aggression forbidden.

Thus is created a space of security in which participants come to notice sensations and impressions that might otherwise go unnoticed – feelings of heat, cold, tingling, mental images, voices and so on. Generally, Michel's comments are encouraging but noncommittal: "Good, thank you." Having nothing to report is not seen as a failure; in fact, this is common, especially for newcomers. In any case, the objective of the group is spiritual development, clairvoyance being simply a tool in the process. Laughter is frequent, especially during the challenging exercises of the "billets" and psychometry. Generally, exchanges are kindly, often light-hearted, though occasionally participants may be moved to tears by a meditation experience or a "message" (clairvoyance) from someone else in the circle.

Newcomers to the closed group usually have the impression that they are "imagining things" rather than receiving clairvoyant messages. Yet, even in a group of neophytes, the convergence between messages for any given individual is striking. Usually, messages for the same individual are different, but are rarely contradictory. Moreover, in almost every session, one or two individuals will receive far more messages than others. Learning to see clairvoyantly involves not only becoming aware of one's perceptions and impressions but also learning how to interpret them and how to formulate them verbally for the person involved. Seemingly negative messages (rare among neophytes) are generally given a positive twist. When participants do not know how to interpret what they have perceived, Michel often encourages them to consult (silently) their spirit guides.

The learning process in the closed group, which I have described in detail elsewhere (Meintel 2003), is reminiscent in some ways of Luhrmann's (2007) analysis of the process whereby the Christians she studied learn to receive communication from God in their lives. In both cases, religious learning is an individual process, but one that is socially shaped and based on common understandings. I should mention, though, that there is much less attention given to the written word at the SCH than at the Vineyard church that Luhrmann studied, where there is great emphasis on the Bible and where most keep a prayer journal. Some Spiritualists enjoy reading the Bible as a personal spiritual practice, and biblical passages are often the point of departure for Michel's "discourses", however, he often mentions that other great spiritual texts (the Torah, the Koran etc.) are equally valid.

The social aspect of learning in the closed group is revealed by the language regarding colours among the participants. For example, blue may stand variously for water, the Virgin Mary or spirituality. Participants learn to see colours or alternatively, see that a certain colour is "needed" by someone in the group. The way clairvoyant messages are transmitted to others is also framed socially. On several occasions that I know of, Michel intervened privately with individuals whose messages were considered too judgmental or in one case, "too depressing" by other participants.

Close to Home, in Real Time

In a geographical sense, the fieldwork at the SCH has been close to home. In fact, I had passed by the front door of the church many times without noticing it. In social terms, it has taken me out of my usual "locality" in Appadurai's (1996) sense, given that its members, unlike myself, mostly come from the French-speaking working class. For Appadurai, "locality" can be non-territorial; it is a dimension of social life whereby the close social relations of "neighbourhood" (again, not necessarily a spatial entity) are produced and reproduced and often marked by shared rituals. Nevertheless, one does find bilingual English-speakers and immigrants among the regulars at church activities, and a few have advanced degrees. My initial

impression of strangeness arose from the dissonance I perceived between the modern, metropolitan context of the SCH and its religious activities, from the fact that the direct contact with spirits was obviously normalized for people who otherwise looked to be typical North American urbanites. And in the same fact lay the new possibilities of this research: rather than the barriers of language, lifelong cultural understandings or neo-colonial privilege that affected my work in Cape Verde, only my own personal capacities and choices would limit how much I would share in of Spiritualists'[40] religious experience.

At the same time, as Dubisch (2008: 331) has pointed out, there is always a certain cultural newness for the researcher working "at home" among those for whom spirits are "real and active." It means learning a new language, not only of colours, as mentioned earlier, but of personal spiritual experience. For example, in the SCH context, when someone says, "They are telling me that …", it is understood that "they" refers to spirit guides. As for the deeper learning that would permit one to also hear "them" speaking, the anthropologist is situated like any other neophyte.

When researchers enter into extraordinary lifeworlds in culturally and geographically distant settings, the divide between the scientific rationality of the investigator and the "beliefs" of others is rarely questioned. If on the experiential level, some researchers have bridged this divide (Goulet 1993; Stoller 2004), the credibility issues that haunt anthropologists who adopt "experience near" (Wikan 1991) approaches are intensified for anyone studying spiritual or other forms of extraordinary experience close to home.

[40] I refer to those who frequent the activities of the SCH as "Spiritualists" for the sake of economy; in fact, most do not identify as Spiritualists; rather Spiritualist activities correspond to their "spirituality" and most would consider Catholicism as their "religion", whether or not they practice it.

The proximity of home to field tends to blur the boundaries between the two (Hirvi 2012) and may bring issues of credibility to the fore[41]. At the same time, proximity often allows research to be carried out in "real" time, rather than the compressed temporal framework of more distanced fieldwork. This was the case of my work at the SCH, which had the further advantage of not being dependent on outside funding. This allowed relationships with participants to evolve naturally; it also affected the expectations of others regarding my role in the SCH. Fieldwork in one's own urban environment is necessarily a part-time affair in most cases, but in this case it was extended over a number of years. Moreover, after a few years of attending church activities, I was asked to take on roles (healer, apprentice medium[42]) that I would not have been invited to adopt in the first year or two.

In the following section I will discuss some of the experiences of Spiritualist mediums that I came to share. Often the deep participation of the researcher in a new locality (again in Appudurai's sense of the term) is completely unexpected. This was the case, for example, with Edith Turner's (1994) vision of a spirit form among the Ndembu, not to mention Evans-Pritchard's (1996) vision of a ball of light one evening described in his classic discussion of witchcraft among the Azande. My subjective participation in Spiritualist religious experience came as a surprise;

[41] To give a personal example, I chose to keep a low profile in Spiritualist activities during a heated political debate in Montreal in the first few months of 2014 about religious garb (Muslim headscarves, primarily) when I took a public position on numerous occasions based on my team's research on religious minorities.

[42] The Spiritualists speak of the gift of clairvoyance to refer to seeing things that are not knowable by normal means; however, they tend to use the term "medium", rather than "clairvoyant" to refer to the individual practicing clairvoyance. This situates the one giving the message as an intermediary, rather than the initiator, in a process of transmission of messages received from their spirit guides. Mediumship also refers to channelling and in the broad sense healing, because in all cases the individual practitioner is seen as a vehicle rather than the source of these gifts.

when I first asked if I could do research on the ESG, Michel invited me to join a closed group. At that point, I did not even know such groups existed or what their activities were and only hoped that by participating, I would make some contacts for interviews that would be helpful for the study.

Observant Participation

Elsewhere (Meintel 2007, 2011b) I have shared some of the key events that have marked my evolving participation in Spiritualist religious experience; I present several of them in summary form in what follows. I should perhaps make it clear that while my relationship with Spiritualism has a personal dimension, it is not a denominational affiliation for me, as is also the case of most of the people who frequent the SCH. (Most identify as Catholic.) From the beginning, images that were meaningful for those concerned came to me during the period of the meeting devoted to a clairvoyance exercise. Initially I did not welcome receiving what were "messages" for other participants. It was not what I had expected in this research; another part of my reluctance was the fear of seeing negativity, whether in my own life or for others in the group. Indeed, the night after the first class, which I was eager to leave, I had vivid nightmares about a childhood trauma. As I woke up, saying aloud, "It really happened," I realized that if I were to continue my initiation into clairvoyance, I would have to accept my perceptions of negativity, past or present. Not long after, in a group meeting, we were asked to "see what you can see" for anyone in the group. I was trying, as per Michel's instructions, to mentally "enter the aura" of Nancy, a woman in her mid-thirties with whom I had become friendly. I found it impossible to approach her this way, feeling a disagreeable sensation each time I did; moreover this sensation was accompanied by a strong mental image of a small dirty whitish blob near her. I felt embarrassed at the prospect of having to give a message that seemed negative in her regard, the rule being, "you must give what you receive". I phrased the message as carefully as I could, and Michel quickly intervened. He interpreted my impressions as a "thought form"; that is, a materialization of

negative energies around Nancy, and went on to describe in detail the jealousy she was experiencing in her work.

As time went on, I was surprised to experience bodily sensations in the clairvoyance exercises – heat, cold, tingling … often combined with mental images as well. I received a message early on for a woman in the group whom I was slightly acquainted with. The message made no sense to me, but when I told her what I received, she began to cry with gratitude and relief. After some months, when I shared the physical and mental impressions I had received in a clairvoyance exercise, I added that I did not know how to interpret them. Michel instructed me to "ask your guides." Given that I had grown up in a practicing Catholic family, I had no trouble with the idea of spirit guides; yet to think of them as actually present beside me was a bit disturbing. I resolved to continue "as if", invoking them without much conviction. Here I think of Drooger's (1996)[43] "methodological ludism", where anthropologists of religion, "play along", entering fully into participation while knowing that later, they must take a distance in order to comment on what they have observed – or, I would add – experienced. In Drooger's words,

> They need to find an equilibrium between distant observation and intimate participation. While observing, they belong to two domains; while participating, they belong to one only. When only observing they cannot participate, and vice versa. Fieldworkers often report on the play-acting needed in such situations. They too experience … tension between multiple selves and the illusion of wholeness and find a way to manage these contradictions. (1996: 59-60)

Some months later, the group was asked to do an exercise where we would receive healing for ourselves and to put our hands on our hearts while trying to receive such healing. Suddenly my heart started to pound and seemed to be surging out of my chest; at the same time, I felt a huge, heavy hand on my chest. "I know who it is," I thought. It's my Native guide." Typically, in the SCH, the principal spirit guide is believed to be an Amerindian spirit who acts as a

[43] See also Knibbe and Droogers 2011.

"gatekeeper" and allows other spirits to come through or not. Michel attributes this to the fact that "we are on their land and that First Nations peoples are very spiritual".[44]

After a few years, Michel asked if I would serve as a healer at the weekly healing service in the church. I readily accepted, since I myself had been the recipient of Spiritualist healing, where a team of six or so healers transmit healing by the "laying on of hands" to individuals who seek it, as I have described in more detail (Meintel 2003, 2013). Despite the term, little or no direct physical contact is involved; furthermore, I had never found it anything but relaxing and beneficial. However, I hesitated for several years to accept Michel's invitation to "work up front"; that is, to give clairvoyant messages during church services to members of the congregation[45] a much more visible role than that of healer. Whereas healers work anonymously, in a team, mediums seem to be individualized, set apart from the rest of the congregation. I finally accepted, if only to discover for myself how this would be different from giving a message to someone in the closed group. Though I had asked SCH mediums about this, their answers were vague (e.g., "It's a different energy"), reminiscent of Samudra's (2008) remarks about embodied experience in her study of White Crane Silat (a martial art), as often being difficult for actors to articulate. I have found that they are often unmotivated to do so; the telling can seem laborious compared to the experience itself (think of describing riding a bicycle as opposed to actually doing it). Moreover, some find these experiences to be both sacred and deeply personal and are not eager to put words to them.

[44] It is worth noting that Spiritualism first developed in upstate New York in the 1840s in a region where Amerindian groups of the Iroquois confederacy were present. Accounts of British spiritualist séances of the late 19th and early 20th centuries often mention "Red Indian" guides; e.g., Marryat 1920.

[45] Though people in the congregation are free to refuse to receive a message, I have only seen this happen once in the hundreds of services I have attended.

Accepting the apprentice medium role led me to understand that far from being removed from the others present, the medium is in intense communion with them. The touching receptivity of those present is matched by the act of faith that allows the medium to take her/his role. The exercises in the closed group habituate participants to let go of any desires to "succeed" at transmitting messages, since this only closes off the extraordinary perceptions that clairvoyance involves. Rather, the process of learning mediumship in the small group context is largely a process of unlearning (Meintel 2011b), where some of the usual filters to our perceptions are deactivated. Working "up front" in clairvoyance means accepting all possibilities, including that of receiving no messages at all. To my surprise, accepting the apprentice medium role had the effect of increasing and intensifying the messages I received, giving them more clarity and detail than those I had received in the small group. This was eventually confirmed by others and corresponds to the experience of several whom I interviewed who have served as mediums in the SCH.

I should perhaps add here that the mediums usually do not know the persons to whom their messages are addressed. Even in the small group, there are participants of many years' standing who are familiar to me in energetic terms; yet I do not know if they are married, single or cohabiting with a partner nor do I know their occupation. Community life at the SCH is almost exclusively limited to spiritual activities, such that those present, including mediums, have limited knowledge of each other's lives.

At first, my anxiety was lessened when I saw that the messages I received corresponded in a general way to Michel's, though they were far less elaborate than his. Later, I would occasionally receive messages that were quite different from his, though not in contradiction with them. For example, one evening he addressed a young woman in the congregation, describing issues in her work life. With some trepidation, I gave a very different message to the same person, describing the immense sadness she was feeling, as well as the help she had received from unexpected quarters. It later emerged that the young woman had recently lost her mother, but had been

helped through her grief by her mother's friends, whom she had not met until her mother's death.

Such episodes oblige the medium to a more radical letting go of anxiety about giving a "wrong" message, about appearing ridiculous; at the same time, they reinforce confidence and faith, not so much in oneself as much as in the source of the messages. Mediums at the SCH experience them as coming from outside themselves. I found that on the occasions when I received a message for a friend at the church, it usually seemed at odds with what I knew of them. Typically, they confirmed that the message was meaningful for them, without necessarily explaining why. As several of the mediums I interviewed reported, it is especially when clairvoyant impressions seem counter-intuitive that they are most likely to be true for those concerned, judging by their reactions. Recipients are often non-committal and are in no way obliged to confirm the messages they receive, but often their facial expression is telling and sometimes they confirm the message privately with the medium.

With time, transmitting messages regularly leads to a certain spiritual autonomy for the medium in the sense that he or she now has at least limited access to a dimension that appeared closed to all but a rare few, such as Michel. For most, like myself, "flashes" of clairvoyant impressions begin to appear in daily life. Some report premonitory dreams, clairaudience[46], seeing angels or other types of visions. Sharing some of the experiences typical of SCH mediums changed the course of the research somewhat, in that I was able to use my own subjective participation in Spiritualist religiosity as a tool to better understand that of others. This sharing led me to reread the transcriptions I had done earlier in the research and see them in a different light. I was also led to ask questions I would not have thought of otherwise. In later interviews, I asked for more detailed descriptions of the visions people reported: e.g., were the figures they saw transparent or opaque, was it like a normal image or more ethereal-looking? I learned to ask about the physical sensations that accompany giving healing, about whether they felt the strangeness of

[46] Hearing voices that are not audible through physical hearing.

receiving messages for friends or family members that seem so different from what we normally know of them, about getting messages that seem so ridiculous that one is almost embarrassed to speak them aloud, and which turn out to be very much on the mark.

I believe that "insider" experiences of visions, clairvoyance and healing also helped me to understand better the ones I have not shared; namely, direct encounters with negative entities or unwanted spirit presence. Typically, those who work as mediums for the SCH on a regular basis as well as some of the participants in the closed group report a whole range of other experiences that I have not shared; namely direct encounters with what they call negative, or lower, entities. On several occasions, I have picked up negative energies and spirit forces around other people and felt disturbed by them, almost a little nauseous in one case. These episodes, along with knowing how strong impressions of benevolent spirit presence can feel – as if they are all around, practically inside oneself – make it possible to imagine what it is like to experience negative presence.

Negative Energies, Lower Entities[47]

Virtually all of my informants, including those who work as mediums for the SCH, have felt unwanted spirit presence in their homes. Negative entities are the spirits of the dead who are at a low point in their spiritual evolution. They seek to control living persons and hold them back from spiritual development; they aid and abet negative behaviours, such as falling away from spiritual practice. Sometimes they do physical harm and try to seduce the person sexually (somewhat like Anais' experience presented in Véronique Béguet's chapter) so as to create a dependency. The category "lower entities" includes these harmful beings as well as wandering or 'vagabond' spirits; the latter are dead but cannot grasp the fact and so continue to haunt spaces inhabited by the living. Spirits "go rogue" either because of sudden death, or because while alive, they did not believe in an afterlife. Experienced mediums sometimes form

[47] Here I summarize material presented in Meintel (2014).

'rescue circles' where one medium goes into deep trance and incorporates the lost spirit and the others help the spirit to move away from the earth plane and into the next life; Michel participated in such a circle in the past, but none are operating at present. However, I witnessed one occasion where he took the "rescue medium" role.

After an evening session in mediumship, Nancy, mentioned earlier, suddenly went silent and then began sobbing, eyes closed. Michel went to her and prayed over her, with gestures that resembled healing. A few minutes later, Nancy opened her eyes and asked what was going on, speaking in a normal voice. Michel explained that he had just helped a "vagabond spirit" on its way. Some weeks before she had had a dream about a major plane crash that was deliberately caused by the pilot; she recounted the dream to Michel and the group shortly thereafter. A few days before the events just described, such a crash had occurred, killing a number of people from Montreal. According to Michel, it was the spirit of a man who died in this crash and who had not yet accepted the fact that he was dead. The work he did, he explained, was to help the spirit on his way and protect Nancy from any further unwanted presence.

Several members of the SCH who frequent one or another closed group believe their young daughters (all in early adolescence) have been beset by unwanted spirit presences. Some report that they have been personally attacked themselves by evil entities and that their homes have been the site of nefarious spirit activity in the past. In still other cases, those so attacked believe this to be the result of 'black magic' employed by individuals who sought to do them harm. In one case, for example, a man who still frequents the SCH first contacted Michel many years ago because he felt that his Haitian mother-in-law was using Vodou against him, which Michel confirmed. Several others recount visions of a supremely evil being, whom they take to be Satan.

According to Spiritualist belief, conducting mediumistic activities, and even meditation can leave one vulnerable to evil spirits; thus the importance given to saying the Our Father at the beginning and the

end of closed group meetings, as this is seen as the paramount prayer for protection. Even mediums with decades of experience have sometimes experienced attacks by evil spirits; a typical form this takes is waking up at night with the feeling of being strangled. As mentioned, spirits considered malevolent may also approach the living in a sexual way, generally when they first waken from sleep. (See Hufford 1982; Adler 2011.) When a young woman mentioned such an experience in the closed group, Michel was quite concerned. In his view, this was the work of a lower entity, the spirit of a deceased person who wants to control the person he or she has targeted. Another such incident happened to a man who is now a Spiritualist minister. Early in his acquaintance with the SCH, in what felt to him like a waking dream, he found himself in bed with an extremely beautiful woman: "… she started making love to me. And I couldn't stop and I didn't want to stop. That's the worst part. I didn't want to stop …" As he sees it now, this encounter was an attempt to derail his new spiritual practice. Michel often reminds his students of the importance of praying regularly for spiritual protection; he often advises them to avoid 'esoteric' environments and individuals; that is, those who contact spirits outside of a religious framework for personal power or gain. The psychic fair held in downtown Montreal once or twice each year, in April and sometimes in October as well, he says, brings "many negative energies".

Many Spiritualists I have met have experienced problems with unwanted spirit presence in their homes (lights going on and off, knocks, or simply the feeling of an unwanted presence). Interestingly, I find no mention of such attacks on homes in the older Spiritualist writings I have consulted[48]. I should add that this problem is felt far beyond the Spiritualist milieu; every year, Michel receives hundreds of calls from people in the Montreal metropolitan region for help in exorcizing homes of troublesome spirits. (Michel

[48] I have wondered whether this might not be a by-product of secularization as it has occurred in Quebec over the 1960s, whereby religion is supposedly confined to the private sphere (Meintel 2014).

does not have a website and his phone number is only available from people who know him personally; his reputation is mainly spread by word-of-mouth). Several times when I have brought up this topic in university lectures, students have come to see me afterward to tell me of how their home has been the site of disturbing spirit visits.

Yet another form of invasive spirit presence concerns astral projection, or the capacity of living individuals to project themselves in spirit to another place. While this is in principle a spiritual gift, misuse of this ability is considered wrong. Two informants have told me of such experiences, both concerning individuals active in the SCH. Michel relates a case some years back where several people believed that a certain church member had projected himself into their homes. The man in question admitted doing so and refused to stop, at which he was expelled from the SCH and joined a different Spiritualist congregation.

It is somewhat perplexing that I have had no direct knowledge of the negative spirit phenomena I have just described, even though I have shared a number of other kinds of mediumnic experiences. When I told Michel that I had never directly felt the intervention of negative spirits (though I have felt them around others), his response was, "They can be very subtle." In any case, negative spirit encounters are not something Spiritualists welcome and it would make even less sense that a researcher seek them. However, this lacuna in my experience opens several interesting avenues of reflection.

Intersubjectivity

Classic methodology textbooks present intersubjectivity as an element of reliability, which, along with validity, is considered fundamental to the scientific method. By reliability is meant that two researchers similarly situated would observe the same thing. Here, the intersubjectivity between researchers is crucial. However, anthropologists have long been concerned with the intersubjectivity between the researcher and those studied, going back to Malinowski's famous chapter on fieldwork, quoted earlier. Goulet (2011) has analyzed three major currents in the field as to the type of

intersubjectivity; in the structuralist tradition exemplified by Levi-Strauss, the fieldworker creates a researcher persona that allows him to grasp what those he is studying cannot apprehend; the interpretive tradition (Geertz, for example), requires the researcher to distance himself from his own system of meaning to better apprehend those of others – but always from the outside. In the experiential current, the ethnographer accepts to enter more deeply into the experience of others; an example might be Goulet (1993) on dreams in the field.

Initially, I was mostly concerned with the perspectives of other researchers when I first began the Spiritualist study; having never approached extraordinary experience as an anthropologist, I felt the need to have other anthropologists visit the SCH to see if their perspectives corresponded with mine and so invited half-a-dozen anthropologist friends, one man and five women, mostly in their 30s and 40s, to do so. That they confirmed what I was observing, commenting on the faith manifested by those present and on Michel's impressive clairvoyance, was reassuring. At that point, I hoped to grasp the experience of Spiritualist mediums as well as that of healers and other participants but was still expecting to be situated as a recipient of healing and clairvoyance, and otherwise as an observer. Performing these activities was an unexpected development and led to experiences of intersubjectivity that I had not anticipated.

The intersubjectivity at the heart of mediumship is a connection between individuals, whereby one sees aspects of their lives that normally one would not. Clairvoyance is above all, relational; not only does it concern other people, but the meaningfulness of a message derives from how it is received by the person it concerns. Often a kind of experiential validity for clairvoyance is established; the medium voices a perception that the individual confirms later as having been proven true in their lives. A small example: once I saw small dollar signs raining on the head of a woman in the congregation whom I knew. This signified to me a small inflow of money. Since I happened to know that she was in a very tight financial situation, I could only hope that I had seen correctly and had not given her false hopes. Two weeks later she told me that she

had won the "Mini Loto" (a state-sponsored scratch ticket lottery) twice, for a total of several hundred dollars. Most of the time, it should be emphasized, confirmation is neither expected nor given. In another case, I saw a small flame for a woman I had met a few times in the past; this signified a lighthearted romance to me. This surprised me somewhat from the little I knew of her; months later she confirmed that she had had a fling while on vacation, but that it was not meant to last. One of the most dramatic experiences of such confirmation I witnessed happened in the closed group. One woman "saw" black tulips for another woman. We all laughed because the message seemed incongruous, as is often the case. At the end of the evening, a third woman pulled out a package from under her chair; they were black tulips, a birthday present for the woman to whom the message had been addressed. At times recipients of messages see them as irrelevant and not particularly accurate; Michel often advises them to wait and see if the message is borne out by later events. I have the impression that most who receive messages remember the ones that seemed true or were borne out by later events and they tend to discount any others, attributing messages that do not seem accurate to the medium's level of ability or frame of mind when the message was given.

Intersubjectivity between mediums and those to whom their messages are addressed may include several mediums at once. Early in the fieldwork, I was struck by the fact that Michel and another experienced medium in the closed group seemed to see exactly the same type of spirit around one of the male participants (Meintel 2007: 124). As mentioned earlier, there is often a surprising convergence in what participants in the closed group perceive for a given individual. Sometimes several mediums see exactly the same thing or the same kind of being around the person they address. On the deepest level, what is shared by mediums is the experience of perceiving what is invisible (whether as vision, mental image or in some other way) and feeling it as real and meaningful. At the same time, mediumship as practised at the SCH is highly idiosyncratic. Often the same individuals receive different messages from different mediums; one medium may speak of the person's home life, another of their financial situation. Mediums also differ from one another in

how they perceive things, whether as bodily sensations, visions, mental images, sounds, words and voice, odours or a mix of these. Moreover, each has a certain way of presenting what they perceive, such that their messages are marked by their particular discursive style.

Regarding the intersubjectivity between anthropologists and their research subjects, van der Geest's (2007: 9) caveat is worth bearing in mind; namely that "we can never assume that the same experience produces the same *experience*" (italics in the original). In other words, what looks like the same experience from the outside may be lived very differently from one person to another. This goes for the comparability of experience from one participant to another, as well as between fieldworkers and those they study. Anthropologists are divided on whether their extraordinary experiences are comparable to those of their informants, a subject we return to at a later point. I have a somewhat different cultural background from most SCH members, having grown up in a middle-class American environment, with English as my first language; yet we all live in the same metropolitan setting and like almost all of them, I grew up Catholic. My exchanges with Michel and other SCH mediums over the years leads me to feel that extraordinary experiences I have had in the Spiritualist context are comparable to theirs; that is, situated on the same continuum of possibilities.

However, verbal exchange is not the only path to intersubjectivity in such a context; Spiritualist religious activities include a great deal of silent co-participation, most clearly exemplified in the healing service where there is virtually no verbal exchange between healers and recipients. The closed group meetings include two periods of silence: one for a guided meditation of about 15 minutes' duration and the other for a clairvoyance exercise that usually takes 5-10 minutes. Though no words are exchanged, a powerful sociality is created, a *communitas* that includes all present, no matter what their role. I return to the question of non-discursive intersubjectivity at a later point. First, however, we turn to the question of skepticism. Given that researchers are trained to be skeptical of all that cannot be

verified by observation, how can they apprehend the experience of the invisible by others – or by themselves for that matter?

Skepticism and Doubt

Spiritualism developed as a movement beginning in the late 1840s (Braude 1989) and as Bowie (2014), Hunter (2014) and others have shown, Spiritualists have engaged in dialogue with scientists almost from the beginning. Indeed, a number of late nineteenth century scientists were favourably disposed to the new movement (Ferguson 2012). Conan Doyle held that Spiritualism was a science (2010), and even today one of the most important Spiritualist groups in Montreal is called the "Spiritual Science Fellowship." Older Spiritualist writings are replete with references to skeptics and not necessarily disparaging ones; Marryat (1920: 50), for example, wrote that she did not object to skeptics, just those who came to séances with the aim of proving the mediums fraudulent. Scepticism, as Bowie (2014) has pointed out, is traditionally a hallmark of scientific thought, and, as she notes, often takes an ideological form that is resistant to examining anomalous forms of evidence; in other words, skepticism, by ignoring what cannot be easily explained in objectivist fashion, may preclude the reflexivity and critical analysis, not to mention accumulating case studies that might lead us to new ways of understanding, that are at the heart of science. Affirming one's skepticism is often an elliptical claim to scientific legitimacy. Moreover, such claims have weight far beyond academe, as Giddens (1990) and others have pointed out. The hegemony of objectivist science that finds expression in entrenched skepticism affects even those who themselves experience extraordinary phenomena.

I read Michele Hanks' contribution to this volume with a keen sense of empathy for the paranormal investigators she describes. When the investigators, who see themselves as representing a scientific approach, actually see a spirit themselves, they are at a loss to explain it. When I began the Spiritualist research, I was convinced that some exceptional individuals like Michel were able to perceive invisible entities and were capable of apprehending past and future events for which they had no ordinary means of knowing; indeed

there is now a substantial scientific literature on the subject (Bowie 2014: 35). To find *myself* having such perceptions was far more difficult to comprehend. I suspect that when cultural distance does not separate us from those who have extraordinary experience, we are likely to create other forms of imaginary distance, as I did initially when thinking of clairvoyance as something reserved a select few, very different from myself.

The intersubjectivity that is classically invoked as the basis of scientific reliability becomes strangely inoperative when one is talking about experiences that common sense in our society considers unreal. Even in the cases where I have perceived the same invisible entity or situation as another medium, I would be uneasy affirming the factuality of what we saw. Here the self-doubt of the researcher echoes that of mediums and shamans who recant their previous accounts of such experiences only to reaffirm them later; e.g., the shaman interviewed by Lévi- Strauss, Quesalid (Crépeau 1997) and the Spiritualist founder Margaret Fox (Stuart 2005). I understand all too well how – in the face of "science", as represented by researchers or merely by self-appointed skeptics – one would be tempted to discount one's own perceptions. As mentioned earlier, we are all, Spiritualists included, influenced by the prevailing logic of scientism. Furthermore, Spiritualists also have to contend with the fact that their religious practices are sometimes condemned as "Satanic" by those around them (usually Evangelicals or traditionalist Catholics).

Scepticism and self-doubt are familiar to Spiritualist mediums themselves. I have been told of a case of an experienced, well-reputed Spiritualist medium who abruptly stopped believing in contact with the world of Spirit and ceased to practise immediately because she would have felt dishonest otherwise. Moreover, even among those who work as volunteers for Spiritualist church services, skepticism is sometimes expressed about the claims of other Spiritualist mediums (usually those practicing in other churches). For example, a medium in another congregation whom I will call "Roseline," believes that she channels the Vgin Mary, a claim that is often disparaged by members of the SCH. Nonetheless, even her

critics concede that she is a very gifted medium. I return to her case in the next section.

Scepticism, Intersubjectivity and the Extraordinary

The capacity to step back and question the perceptions and interpretations of others, whether they be scholars or our own informants, is indispensable to the process of research. Typically, this is associated with analytical and sometimes social and cultural distance. Yet at the same time, the fieldworker seeks at least some degree of intersubjectivity with those studied. We want others to understand what we seek to learn and we want to understand what they are telling us, by word or deed. This intersubjectivity obliges us to inhabit, at least imaginatively, subjective realities that may be new to us. Some authors have looked at intersubjectivity in cognitive terms, emphasizing language (e.g., Bloch, cited below; see also Verhagen 2005). New approaches on the horizon pay greater attention to the intersubjectivity that is created by embodied co-presence that is often emotionally charged, and generally felt as deeply meaningful by participants. In what follows, I will look at some of these different approaches; I will try to show how those that deal with embodied intersubjectivity almost require deep subjective participation by the researcher while also opening up possibilities for entering lifeworlds that can be described as being, for us, something of a new "locality" (in Appadurai's sense). I also question to what extent we can presume that there is an irreconcilable cultural divide between our experience and that of those we study, such that our experience is inevitably incommensurate with theirs.

Maurice Bloch (2007: 68) holds that "mutual mind reading … an empirical phenomenon of mutual interpenetration" is what makes communication between human beings possible and supports his position with evidence from neurological studies. In the same essay, Bloch presents an interesting discussion of the lack of absolute boundedness between individuals as exemplified in extreme form by witchcraft, Sufi mysticism and more generally, in religious ritual. While Bloch focuses more on interpenetration in the form of linguistic communication, others have explored the kinds that can be

produced by nonverbal co-participation as, for example, in Ashtanga yoga (Bouchard 2013), Vipassana meditation (Pagis 2009, 2010), and the dancehall scene in Jamaica (Henriques 2010). In such cases, emotions (not always the same ones from one person to the next) are experienced together; more than this, "entangled processes" of affect that go beyond the discourse of feelings and emotions link the participants who are no longer separated from each other by the bodies in the usual way (Blackman and Venn 2010: 10).

Studying embodied experience in activities that call for holistic engagement (for example, yoga, martial arts, various forms of meditation and healing activities, as examples) is likely to open the way to new forms of perception for the researcher as much as for other participants. Such activities generally call for reflexive dwelling in the body-mind and kinesthetic sensitivity to others (cf. Schutz' [1964] essay "Making Music Together"). Sometimes subjectively engaged participation is required for the research to continue, as Goulet (1998) found and as was my own case. I could have refused Michel's invitation to participate in the closed group, but it would have put a low ceiling on my understanding of Spiritualists' religious experiences. Inhabiting the same space and time frame in such a context of intense mutual awareness is rich with promise for intersubjectivity, but it sometimes means letting go of a research programme or interview schedule, at least momentarily. This, I would hazard, is a down-to-earth version of the "phenomenological epoché" as proposed by Jackson (1996).

Given our usual reliance as researchers on our perceptions of what is externally visible and articulated linguistically, such embodied, largely nonverbal participation can have a powerful impact on our analyses. When it does, abstracting out one's experience from ethnographic description would be somewhat dishonest and, in any case, impoverishing. Withholding the truth of our own fieldwork experiences from our representations of those we study effectively confers a false exoticism on the perceptions of the extraordinary and thus impoverishes our understanding of such phenomena. Extracting ourselves analytically from the lifeworlds we are studying deforms the description of it that we are likely to be able to render. Moreover,

I would suggest that, to whatever degree we can inhabit the intersubjective lifeworld of others; that is, share the perceptions of what is real for them, our attitude toward even what we do *not* share of the vision of reality is affected. The sense of being attacked by evil forces is not something I have direct knowledge of, but seeing negative presences around others and feeling the presence of benevolent beings gives me, at least indirectly, a sense of what it must feel like to be under spirit attack. To qualify what I have just said, there are some beliefs that Spiritualists have expressed in my hearing that I do not hold (e.g., the idea that everyone reincarnates after the present existence). However, these are not central beliefs to the spiritual experience. Given what I myself have experienced since beginning fieldwork at the SCH, I am inclined to fully believe what they claim has happened to them (e.g., assault by negative entities) even when I have had no similar experience.

Several researchers explore cultural differences in extraordinary experience, a valid and revelatory line of analysis (e.g., Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2011; Luhrmann 2004). In the same vein, Desjarlais (1992) sees the trance he experienced in his shamanic apprenticeship in Nepal as quite different from that of his informants. However, cultural difference in extraordinary experience should not be overstated. As Dubisch has argued in regard to energy systems of healing such as Reiki and Jin Shin Jyutsu, spiritualities often involve what the author terms "cosmologies of connectedness" (2008: 225). They are to some degree like cultures in themselves, in that any participant enters into new ways of perceiving self, the body, nature and so on. Just as cultural homogeneity in religious experience should not be overstated[49] we should not overstate cultural impermeability in the domain of relations with what is normally invisible. Indeed, the accounts such as those already mentioned by Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) and Edith Turner (1994) show that cultural boundaries are far from absolute when it comes to experiences of the spirit realm. In this regard, I note an interesting convergence

[49] Cf. Victor Turner (1975: 28-29) on the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of participants in the rituals he studied, "each with a style and soul of his own".

between Spiritualist "thought forms" and the Thai notion of what the authors term the "supernatural", making allowances for some nuances that differ. For the Thai, the actions of the mind, "usually the mental action of other minds intermingling with one's own" create a sort of ghost (Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2011: 40). When the mind is not focused, an active, footloose energy is created, "a kind of personified 'wits'" (p. 41), as in "losing one's wits", in the authors' words. Similarly, thought forms are non-physical entities, a kind of crystallization of human mental energy, as was seen earlier in the case of the jealousy around Nancy, as Michel interpreted it.

We need not adopt the interpretations of our informants to describe the world in which they dwell, peopled as it may be with invisible beings and forces. It is not essential, as I see it, to pronounce on the reality or unreality of what they (and sometimes, we) perceive. It would be wise to at least allow such beings and forces to have what some call "methodological" reality; that is to acknowledge the status as actors in the dynamics that implicate human beings. This was clear to me long before I ever studied religion; fieldwork on racial ideology in Cape Verde entailed studying popular saints' feasts, where the colour hierarchy was represented vividly in ritual practice. The feasts and the organization, a costly if prestigious enterprise, made no sense unless one included the saints as a social agent.

Bowie (2014: 24) makes an important point when she argues that "bracketing out" questions of truth or reality may signify a refusal to seriously engage with another's reality. Perhaps for this reason, I find Jackson's statement that "witchcraft beliefs have no reality apart from the people who make use of them" (1996:11) a bit unsatisfying; sometimes one can be drawn into the vortex of others' beliefs simply by being present. (See Mossière in this volume.) Moreover, I suggest that we should not necessarily exclude actors' interpretations of extraordinary perceptions; sometimes they may offer explanations for things that science, at this point, does not illuminate. When I went to a service at the congregation led by Roseline, mentioned earlier, I did not believe that she was channelling the historical mother of Jesus as she claimed, and this does not make sense to me now. Yet during the service, I had a vision of the Vgin Mary in

profile, rather like a medallion, next to Roseline. Science does not explain why I saw what I did. However, taking the image of Mary that I saw as a thought form (i.e., interpreting it in Spiritualist terms) suggests to me that Roseline's devotion to the Virgin is genuine. This explanation cannot be verified by conventional scientific methods at this time, yet it makes experiential sense in that it corresponds to what I saw in her behaviour that evening and on several other occasions. "Trying on" the interpretations and explanations of our informants goes a step further than suspending our usual beliefs about reality and "bracketing out" the questions that arise from sharing the kinds of extraordinary experience that are familiar to them. It implicitly recognizes that those we study may possess some kind of knowledge worth having.

Conclusion

Intersubjectivity between anthropologists and those they study is a *sine qua non* for fieldwork and indeed for any form of communication between human beings (Bloch 1977, 2007). In fact, our very subjectivity is constructed in relationship with others (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). Discussions of intersubjectivity in anthropology have focused mostly on linguistic communication verbal dialogue and cognition, whereas the intersubjectivity emerging from bodily copresence has been somewhat neglected, Pagis' (2009, 2010) work being an exception. Quite possibly, the nonverbal communication that occurs through copresence is more challenging to classic notions of the anthropologist as somehow understanding the other (cognitively) yet emotionally removed from them, and unaffected by the dangers (such as sorcery, witchcraft, evil spirits) that beset them because of the immunity conferred by cultural distance and a rationalist mindset. Wikan reminds us that language is just one means to intersubjectivity, recalling her three months' sojourn as a "languageless" person in Bhutan with her husband Frederik Barth. Despite minimal linguistic communication, the couple was able to take in a "wealth" of information (1992: 468). I would argue that reflexive, embodied copresence is indispensable for fieldwork on most contemporary religious currents, which tend to be experience-focused in any case, and where, no matter how

expressive some of these currents may be, much of what participants deem important is, for them, beyond words.

In much fieldwork, a good deal of intersubjectivity probably develops by osmosis. After eight months on a remote island in Cape Verde, I noticed that a young American woman who had just arrived was commenting on many things I had long ceased to notice (e.g., social strictures on acceptable female behaviour). When it comes to extraordinary phenomena, the experience of intersubjectivity seems perhaps more dramatic and striking, but is not necessarily of a different order than that which is part of all human communication. However, there are some differences.

In my work on the Spiritual Church of Healing, co-participation led to not only to feelings of empathy and unconscious normalization of local norms, but also to perceptions and experiences that I had no pre-existing template for, at least not as a researcher. Moreover, I was not, in sociological terms, more an outsider than other participants. Most were socialized as Catholics and identify as such, seeing the SCH as a "spiritual" resource. Many keep some connection with the Catholic Church. Spiritualism as practiced in the SCH is more centred on experience than on any boundary between insiders and outsiders, unlike many Christian religions. Thus, there were no boundaries to negotiate as would have been the case if I had studied, say, an Evangelical group. And so, I was free to "play along", in Drooger's (1996) phrase, as much as I wished; any limitations I felt came less from my religious affiliation[50] than from considerations of professional ethics regarding my participation. While I was able to justify my participation in intellectual terms, as I did some time ago (Meintel 2011a), I now realize that I was also influenced by my respect for the ethics that Michel teaches regarding the messages that mediums in the SCH receive and transmit, a subject I plan to address in another context. I felt no obligation to change my religious identity and was not moved to do so. (I should

[50] I was interested to read Edith Turner's (2006) autobiography, where one finds no conflict whatsoever between her Catholic identity and practice and her fieldwork participation in healing rituals in Africa and in Alaska.

add that very few of those who are active in the SCH as mediums or healers identify themselves as "Spiritualists".) However, my intimate contact with both the Catholic religion and this group of Spiritualists has led me to see that Spiritualism can offer a kind of religious "savoir faire" about extraordinary experience that is much less available in Catholicism. As Justine Louis (2007: 185) observes, phenomena such as visions, spiritual healing, glossolalia, prophecy and clairvoyance are generally regarded with suspicion within Catholicism.[51] In fact, a Catholic bishop once consulted Michel because he was suddenly having premonitions and prophetic visions and wanted help for how to deal with them.

With this in mind, we might look at extraordinary experience we may have in the fieldwork context as an element in how our research results are constructed, and by the same token, a valid, even necessary, element of any account we give of them. Moreover, including such experience in our accounts will surely allow us to better understand the processes of intersubjectivity that are at the heart of our enterprise and to begin a dialogue about domains we do not yet understand and whose parameters are still elusive.

Our research alone may not determine the ontological status of the extraordinary phenomena we study, even those we ourselves might experience. However, I have argued here, it may sometimes be fruitful to "try on" our informants' modes of interpretation, to see if they help us make sense of our shared realities. The idea is not to become a Spiritualist or convert to whatever current we are studying, though this may be an authentic development for one or another researcher; to me, this "trying on" is part of learning from, as well as learning about – what Robbins is urging us to do when he urges anthropologists to radically "recommit to finding real otherness in the world" (2006: 291).

[51] Nonetheless, all are present in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This is an issue I hope to explore in the future.

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Epilogue: Three (Ir)Rational Ways of Being an Anthropologist in the Field

Jean-Guy A. Goulet

The contributors to *Extraordinary Experience in Modern Contexts* demonstrate again and again that epistemological assumptions inform the way in which fieldwork is conducted, determine the definition of what counts as data or finding in the course of one's research, and shape the manner in which the results of one's investigation are communicated in the advancement of knowledge. Whatever the object of a researcher's interest, this object does not present "itself in a state of original purity ready to submit to the work of the observing subject" but "is constructed at the same time as his knowledge is articulated"[52] (Affergan 1999: 7). In other words, what is described or posited as the object of one's investigation emerges within a process of knowing. Disciplines and the objects of interest are mutually constitutive – the one never existing independently and prior to the other.

In this epilogue I propose to show how the originality of this collection of essays is best seen when compared to three approaches to the acquisition of knowledge and experience within the discipline of anthropology.[53] Each approach is seen by its proponents as

[52] My translation from the original in French, as is the case with all other quotes from French sources in this Epilogue.

[53] The structure of this epilogue and part of its content originate in a paper entitled, "To Become Different to Know Another?," presented in the international workshop "Ethnographic Fieldwork and the Production of Knowledge" organized by the Département d'anthropologie, Université de Montréal in Montréal, Québec –September 25-28, 2008. The 2008 paper was developed and published as « Trois manières d'être sur le terrain : une brève histoire des conceptions de l'intersubjectivité» in *Anthropologie et Sociétés* (Goulet 2011). My gratitude to Bob White and Kiven Strohm who have translated that article, parts of which are revised to accompany new material written for the purpose of this book. Finally, my appreciation to

rational and the best avenue to produce valid anthropological knowledge. Each approach, however, is seen by its critics as linked to an irrational fear of exploring phenomena excluded from its purview. Hence, in the following pages, we move from a view of anthropology as a science (in search of laws and explanations), to one of anthropology as an interpretive discipline (in search of subjective meanings),[54] to experiential anthropology (in search of knowledge gained through ecstatic moments that take the anthropologist to the heart of the lifeworld he or she is investigating). As will be shown in the last section of this epilogue, ecstasy in fieldwork is not "a kind of behaviour" one engages in, but a "quality of human action and interaction-–one that creates a common ground for the encounter" with the Other—in his homeland (Fabian 2000: 8).

Prior to exploring how each of these approaches understands the status of fieldwork and the goal of anthropology I proceed with a brief examination of accounts of extraordinary experiences presented in this book in the light of two concepts, membershipping and reflexivity, as defined in ethnomethodology.

In ethnomethodology "reflexivity" refers to this mutually constitutive relationship between the description of an object or setting and the object or setting described.[55] As defined by ethnomethodologists Anderson and Lee,

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Deirdre Meintel for her judicious comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

[54] "Verstehen (interpretative understanding) and erklären (law-governed explanation) are two ways to make scientifically respectable sense of a phenomenon. The scientist who engages in erklären tries to make explanatory sense of the phenomenon by finding the laws that govern it, whereas the scientist who engages in verstehen tries to make empathetic sense of the phenomenon by looking for the perspective from which the phenomenon appears to be meaningful and appropriate." (Bransen 2001: 16165, italics in original).

[55] See Watson and Goulet (1992 and 1998) for an analysis in the light of this concept of fieldwork data I gathered among the Dene Tha of northwestern Alberta. My gratitude to Graham Watson for introducing me to

> Membershipping represents **a way by which persons in social settings categorize objects of knowledge, incidents, events, and other members**. It is therefore revealed in the accounts and descriptions that persons in the world furnish, and is thus constitutive of the objects of the orientation. **It represents the results of the sense-assembly methods as they utilize conventional rules and procedures in practical settings, in order to know the way around, and instruct others as to how to see the world correctly.** It is the sense in which members of a culture deal with contingent events, and rend them into categories such that 'this' may be found to be 'another case of', or 'similar to', or 'the same situation as', 'that'. (Anderson and Lee 1982: 290, my emphasis.)

This reflexivity is found in all accounts of an event, a person or an object, whether the account is personal, professional, or a combination of both.

Consider for instance Hufford's report of an intellectual break in his life that occurred in 1970, in the midst of his doctoral fieldwork in Newfoundland. The "Old Hag" tradition he found there corresponded exactly with the extraordinary experience of a night visitor he had unexpectedly lived through at his home in 1963, "complete with footsteps, evil presence, and so on". From then on, he could no longer believe what his professors had taught him, namely that "the spirit world is a cultural fantasy arising from tradition."[56] Hufford does not ponder different ways of understanding his experience; he readily defines it as the same as those described by Newfoundlanders. On that day, Hufford writes, "I lost my modernity."

With these words Hufford not only memberships himself as different from what he used to be, he creates the grounds upon which to write against the Cultural Source Hypothesis (CSH) of beliefs in spirits

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ethnomethodology when we were colleagues at the University of Calgary from 1988 to 1997.

[56] Hufford adds that if for decades he kept his experience of the "Old Hag attack" to himself, it was "because I knew that ironically it would harm my academic credibility."

predominant in anthropology. Against this view Hufford proposes an Experiential Source Hypothesis (ESH), to rationally explore if "some 'supernatural beliefs' arise from experience in a rational manner." As expressed by Béguet, although "considered cultural constructs in the eyes of the anthropologist," people's accounts of extraordinary experiences might in fact be about "empirical phenomena of the real". If the authors draw on different intellectual traditions to argue the case for an open-minded approach to extraordinary experiences in modern, urban contexts, they all ask: do we really understand what our subjects are talking about when they share the accounts of extraordinary experiences, including that of encounters with spiritual beings?

These brief references to the first two chapters in this book bring to light the theme of the collection of papers as a whole expressed in its title: Extraordinary Experience. If all the authors focus on extraordinary experiences, Hufford, Béguet and Habkirk are the three authors who explicitly engage with modernity or modern as the intellectual perspective inhospitable to the data (extraordinary experiences) they either lived or were told about in the context of the fieldwork. Other contributors to this book are also keenly critical of a strict scientific approach that dismisses people's belief in spirits or other entities because it cannot be validated through empical methods of investigation.

In this respect it is noteworthy that all authors mention spirit, spiritual and spiritualities in the description of the extraordinary experiences they analyze in the work. Meintel, Hanks and Habkk, however, specifically focus on mediums and mediumship. Amongst them, only Meintel offers a first-hand, personal account of how she became a medium. Hers is the contribution that explicitly draws on an understanding of intersubjectivity as defined by Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) in his *Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967), a perspective on different forms of knowledge which he associates

with different cognitive styles characteristic of various domains of human activity, dreaming, theatre, ritual, sports, or science.[57]

Intersubjectivity of the Lifeworld

Schutz and Luckmann define lifeworld as "this realm of reality that from the standpoint of common sense normal conscious humans take for granted" (1973: 3; in Goulet 2004: 110). This world into which we are born and die presents itself to adults as *the* world. In this world, people are interested in persons or objects insofar as they limit or enhance the ability to meet the objectives according to the interests. A defining feature of the lifeworld is that it is experienced as intersubjective. We constantly engage in it, postulating that others are similar to us, that we live with them "like men among men, undergoing the same influences and working as they do, understanding others and being understood by them" (Schutz 1967: 16). All social interaction rests upon a "*practical faith*: we believe in the existence of the Other because we act with him and on him" (Laoureux 2008: 170).

Understanding someone else involves a risk, that of "placing oneself insidiously in the place of those we think we understand and attributing to them something more or less different from what they think" (Lévi-Strauss 2000: 720). To avoid this danger Bourdieu calls upon social scientists to engage in "participant objectification," a practice that "enables the social analyst to grasp and master the pre-reflexive social and academic experiences of the social world that he tends to project unconsciously onto ordinary social agents" such as those that anthropologists encounter in the field (Bourdieu 2003: 281).

[57] See Barber (2016) for an extensive presentation of Schutz's career, publications and influence on this history of social sciences. In the literature Schutz sometimes appears as Schütz. In this Epilogue, following the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, I have opted for the former spelling.

Bourdieu's notion of "participation objectivation" is related to a second meaning of "reflexivity" in the social sciences, a meaning introduced by Scholte in *Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology* (1969), where he referred to the self-critical duty of the anthropologist to not contaminate social phenomena observed and analyzed with one's own preconceptions (unwarranted beliefs) and biases (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Marcus and Fisher 1986). It is in this sense that Hufford, Mossière, and Meintel use the word reflexivity.

Throughout this book, from chapter to chapter, one observes that key terms take different, often overlapping, connotations. This is the case for the concept of spiritualities. For Béguet, they are "ways of being in the world" that arise and are sustained outside religions or spiritual groups. These spiritualities, she writes, posit a "world [which] is imbued with invisible forces, eventually inhabited by invisible, sentient entities. Those forces and entities, although unseen and intangible, are as significant, if not much more, than the materialistic dimension of the world for tenants of those currents." Hence, these ways of being in the world are best understood not according to classical notions of worldview or cognitive system, but as ontology, a statement "about the nature of the real."

In contrast Hufford stresses that spiritualities are parts of local knowledge about spirits that we ought not to dismiss "without argument and evidence" and that we ought to keep an open mind to the possibility of "finding our subjects' beliefs well founded." This approach sympathetic to local spiritualities "raises the ontological implications of possibly finding a belief rationally and empically superior to the available modern alternatives." Hufford further notes that, "the tendency for modern religion to avoid *spirits* is often a reason for moderns to prefer spirituality to religion." In this way the "'spiritual but not religious' tradition preserved belief in *spirit*, especially among intellectuals, against modern theological and philosophical dogma."

Mossière does not oppose religion and spirituality as Hufford does. In the course of her investigation of religious diversity in Montreal,

she came across a Muslim religious tradition that supports, rather than shun, the quest for extraordinary experiences. She heard "Muslim believers oriented toward spirituality argue that their tradition cannot be learned by cognitive means, it has to be absorbed through contact with and dedication to a spiritual master (*cheikh*)." In the end, like Béguet and Hufford, she argues that, "integrating extraordinary experiences into the construction of scientific knowledge…raises ontological questions in terms of ways of being in the world experienced by social subjects, but also by academics who write about them."

The chapters in *Extraordinary Experience in Modern Contexts*, along with similar publications mentioned in the introduction and this epilogue, reflect an understanding of what it means to become an anthropologist and do anthropological work. Differences at this level determine the type of interaction sought in the field to achieve one's research goals and define the kind of original knowledge produced and brought to the attention of one's peers and the public at large. This is well exemplified in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marc Augé and Johannes Fabian. The discussion of the ways in which they differ in defining the objective of their profession offers an illuminating context in which to comment on specific aspects of chapters in this book.

The Structuralist Approach

In *Tristes Tropiques*, presented by the book's editor as the "confessions of an ethnologist", Lévi-Strauss refers to fieldwork as the "negative aspect of our trade", a time of "deprivation and nauseating weariness" devoted to "the collection of an unknown myth, a new rule for marriage, a complete list of kinship terms" leads to the "truths that we go so far away to find" (1955: 13). Here we are confronted with a vision of the field as an experience that uses up precious time: the time it takes to arrive to the field site and to return home in order to write and eventually publish; the time it takes to negotiate access to a territory, to a group and to people with privileged information; the time it takes to bring home truths about the life of the Other. Seen in this light "adventure has no place in the

profession of the ethnographer; it is nothing more than servitude, weighing in on the efficiency of work with the burden of weeks and months lost along the way" (1955: 13).

From this point of view, the encounter with the Other is merely instrumental. If we spend time with the Other, it is only because he possesses information that we are missing with regards to his thought, his mythology, his social organization, his history. The researcher spends enough time with a local population that he can advance his understanding of his area of study and meet the expectations of the scientific community, which seeks objective knowledge about matters of shared interest. When he writes, not confessions but a work of scholarship, the researcher disappears from the text, as do the individuals who are the sources of his information. In contrast, all the authors appear in the chapters in this book as researchers and as intellectuals discussing what status to grant to extraordinary experiences, their own or those reported to them in the field.

The conception of research espoused by Lévi-Strauss is evident in his 2002 review of the thirteenth *Handbook of American Indians*, whose topic is the Plains Indians. In this review he calls attention to what he considers an important weakness in the handbook:

> Instead of seeing each culture as a unique object endowed with its own reality, culture is now presented as a passing moment, part of a historical process which otherwise continues uninterrupted in time. The *Handbook* thus distances itself from a classical ethnographic perspective. It substitutes this perspective with a vision that living people can have of their past. It should be noted that this change in perspective coming from the United States and Canada is due in part to the recognition of rights coming from first inhabitants and the place that their descendants claim. (Lévi-Strauss 2002: 169)

Lévi-Strauss regrets the digression from anthropological interests (as he understood them at the time). From the perspective of classical ethnology, the experiences of the researcher in the field as well as the historical transformations experienced by the people studied by the anthropologist are outside of the realm of data one has a

professional duty to seek and find in order to validate a given theoretical framework.

It is revealing that Lévi-Strauss wrote of himself that he is "probably more faithful to the Durkheimian tradition than any other" (1955: 64). Durkheim advocated and attempted to elaborate a science of society, setting out to identify a series of laws or patterns that would explain social facts through the rigorous application of scientific method. For Durkheim, society is a natural phenomenon subject to the laws of nature, according to which all beings, including those of human societies, go from a simple social organization to one that is more complex, leading to increasing interdependence between the different specialized parts that make up the whole.

Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (Durkheim 1994 [1912]) and *Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Lévi-Strauss 1949) share a common thread based on the profound conviction that the "first and most fundamental rule is to treat social facts as things" (Durkheim 1963 [1895]: 108).[58] Lévi-Strauss agrees with this vision when he writes: "My thought is itself an object. Being 'of this world', it participates in a nature that is one and the same (1955: 60). On this subject, Kerk (2005: 208) reminds us that at the beginning of *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962), Lévi-Strauss refers to Balzac in the following manner:

> For does not society modify man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in zoology? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, a lawyer, an idler, a student, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a beggar, a priest, are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, etc. Thus, social species have always existed, and will always exist, just as there are zoological species. (Balzac 1940-1950: I, 4, in Lévi-Strauss 1962: 221)

[60] Fournier notes that Durkheim's work "lends itself to different, even contradictory readings: from functionalism to structuralism through interactionism, ethnomethodology and pragmatic sociology" and concludes by asking, "Which is the real Durkheim?" (Fournier 2007: 10).

All these species are awaiting the work of the analyst who will classify them, identify their specific features and structures, which unbeknownst to their bearers enable them to live, if not thrive in the world.

In the same way, in the realm of socio-cultural realities, speakers of a language cannot identify and define the phonemes that the linguist—from outside of the language—is able to determine thanks to a particular method of analysis. Lévi-Strauss indeed elaborates models whose mechanics "are set in motion outside of the consciousness of individuals" (Lévi-Strauss 2000: 714). Similarly, those who contemplated suicide could not help Durkheim who was looking for a sociological explanation of variations in suicide rates in different societies. His science made use of quantitative data because its object of study was a social and not a psychological fact. Following Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss's "anthropology was scientific and naturalist in the sense that structural linguistics became scientific" (Bloch 2009: 1). As Carani affirms: "From the point of view of the positivist tradition to which he belongs, Lévi-Strauss proposes an almost normative activity whose purpose is to reproduce the rule (the law) by which information gathered in the field can be brought together and discussed as data" (Carani 1992: 150).

In every intellectual pursuit, knowledge and passion are intimately linked. In the academic field, it is the latter which at some level orients the choice of a school of thought, a research topic, or an author:

> If being a student of the prestigious "école normale" in the 1950s meant being at the top of the university hierarchy, being consecrated by the institutions of higher learning during a period when philosophy was triumphant […] it was also true that making a transition from philosophy to sociology was *jeter ses galons*, at some level a form of decadence or even degradation." (Bourdieu 2005: 327)

The transition that Bourdieu made from philosophy to sociology — one for which he claims to have been the only one of his generation

— did not occur naturally or directly but via an intermediary, that of ethnology. Why? "Structural anthropology was the best of academic thought and even the most arrogant philosophers were required to talk about anthropology" (Bourdieu 2005: 327). The ethnology that Lévi-Strauss had re-baptized as "structural anthropology" carried with it the nobility of all the sciences.

Whether it be totemism, myth, or marriage, Lévi-Strauss makes structures appear, showing oppositional relations between units that belong to the same domain:

> Structure cannot be reduced to a system, a whole made up of interrelated elements and relations. In order to be able to speak of a structure, there must be a certain number of invariants between the elements and relations in such a way as to be able to go from one to another through some form of transformation. (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon 1988: 159)

Lévi-Strauss therefore writes that he has

> attempted to reduce the complex multiplicity of rules relating to kinship and marriage, which are unintelligible, to a small number of types, each one endowed with some explanatory value; to show that from these simple types we can deduct more complex types; that between all these types there are transformational relations. (Lévi-Strauss 2000: 717)

In his afterword to the special issue of *L'Homme* dedicated to fifty years of kinship studies, Lévi-Strauss specifies that contrary to a misinterpretation of his work, he had never "decreed that men were the subjects and women the objects of exchange" (2000: 217), but had simply noted that the ethnographic facts "taught him that, in the vast majority of societies, men act or perceive in this way and that due to the prevalence of this idea, the situation it refers to suggests a fundamental pattern" (2000: 717-718). It is as a scholar that Lévi-Strauss addresses his colleagues in order to correct the interpretation of his thought and to affirm the validity of his particular form of structuralism.

To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, contributors to this book recognize that in the vast majority of societies, including modern and urbanized ones, people report "vivid dreams, visions, hearing voices, premonitions, kinesthetic sensations, relationships with invisible entities" (Introduction to this volume). Is it not appropriate, then, to suggest that the prevalence of such ideas suggest a universal insight into the 'real'? To raise this question is not to voice an opposition to science and the pursuit of scientific knowledge, it is simply to ask that we pay close attention to ethnographic facts and determine as best as we can what they teach us.

The Interpretative Approach

In *Islam Observed*, Geertz uses "The struggle for the real" as the subtitle leading to his discussion of the enduring tension between religion and science:

> Even if they are not direct antitheses, there is a natural tension between the scientific and the religious *ways of attempting to render the world comprehensible*, a tension…which is chronic, and increasingly intense. Unless the importance of *this 'struggle for the real'* is recognized and not passed off with easy pieties on either side, the history of religion, Islam or any other, in our times is, scientifically anyway unintelligible." (Geertz 1968: 103-104, my emphasis)

What religion and science share is the recognition "of the insufficiency, or anyway the felt insufficiency, of common sense as a total orientation toward life…" (Geertz 1968: 95). Both religion and science express the human tendency to find and relate to the invisible behind the visible.

With this notion of struggle for the real in mind, we may come back to Lévi-Strauss and his experience as an ethnographer. Notwithstanding his epistemological preferences that led to the rise of structural anthropology, in the field Lévi-Strauss is confronted with what happens in the minds of the Nambikwara with whom he

spends three months during the dry season of 1938.[59] He gives them "paper and pens with which they did nothing at first", but with which they eventually begin to "trace wavy horizontal lines" (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 339). In the eyes of Lévi-Strauss, for whom this fact has no ethnographic value, the Nambikwara are imitating an art form that they do not understand. They do, however, grasp the value of symbols. This is why the band chief asks him for a notebook that he begins using as well.

In this request, we may recognize the chief's attempt to render his altered world comprehensible. As he struggles for the real, he takes on the status of writer and thus transforms the work of the anthropologist into a collaborative effort. He no longer answers the questions of Lévi-Strauss directly; he now presents the lines he has traced in his notebook and he waits for Lévi-Strauss to read them. The chief cannot read what Lévi-Strauss writes in his notebook, but neither can Lévi-Strauss understand what the chief has written in his. Thus, the chief creates a situation of interdependence. From then on, writes Lévi-Strauss, "we are equipped in the same way when we begin working together" (2000: 340). The chief answers Lévi-Strauss's questions by deciphering what he has written in his notebook, as if they were both scholars: an intellectual in search of knowledge that will be transmitted to him in a new form (Wilcken 2010: 102-103). It is this type of interaction, of little or no interest to the author of a 'classical' ethnography, that will be of great interest to anthropologists who, beginning in the 1970s, adopt an interpretative stance (Geertz 1973).

[59] How did Lévi-Strauss end up meeting the Nambikwara in Brazil? Consider the following account of the conversation that determined his life-long career: "My career was decided one day in the autumn of 1934, at nine o'clock in the morning, by a telephone call from Célestin Bouglé, who was then head of the École normale supérieure. […] He asked me bluntly, 'Do you still want to study anthropology? – 'Most certainly' – 'Then apply for a post as a teacher of sociology at the University of São Paulo. The suburbs are full of Indians, whom you can study at the weekends. But you must give George Dumas a firm answer before midday." (Lévi-Strauss 1973: Part 2, Section 5)

Anthropological narratives are of two orders: personal and professional. Both types of narratives draw upon and/or challenge "the socially available 'systems of significance'–beliefs, rites, meaningful objects–in terms of which subjective life is ordered and outward behaviour guided" (Geertz 1973: 95).[60] At the personal level, the life of those encountered by the anthropologist during fieldwork always seems less real than the one that she lives in her country of origin. This is the place of her work, her lovers, her parents and friends, in short everything that according to Schutz constitutes the lifeworld. This is the world to which one usually returns to resume the pursuit of one's personal interests. Within as well as outside of one's profession, "the individual experiences his own identity only within and through his relationship to the other," a relationship that is always constructed according to "rules that have always pre-existed him" (Augé 2006: 37).

Marc Augé, who works in the interpretive tradition, draws upon notions such as narrative, fiction and interest to think about the relation between the anthropologist and the people encountered during fieldwork.[61] First he asks the following question:

> Does the real life we live and of which we are witnesses every day—whether we are ethnologists or not, psychologists or not, hermeneutist or not—not present itself as a tracery of stories, intrigues, and events that involve the private and the public sphere? (Augé 2004: 32).

These stories "which we tell each other with greater or lesser talent and conviction" (p. 32) are "constructed as fiction in the broad sense (not as fiction opposite to the truth of the narrative the historians

[60] Readers familiar with Geertz will recognize here his semiotic definition of culture, a key anthropological concept, despite the suggestion that anthropologists ought to forego its use altogether (Kuper 1999).

[63] On the question of fiction in ethnography see Simon and Bibeau (2004), Flahaut and Heinick (2005) and Fassin (2014).

claim to be "true," but as narration, scenario that obeys a certain number of formal rules)" (p. 34).[62]

This feature of narration is highlighted by Mossière in her analysis of the eighty interviews of converts to Islam in both Québec and France. She quickly noticed that "convert narratives were standardized and hinged on a few redundant issues (gender relationships, the veil, Islam and public spaces…), and that converts followed a pattern that circulates on the Internet." This led her to conclude that the experience of the people she interviewed was probably shaped by how they thought about that experience in the first place: "As experiences structure the modes of expression, it is likely that the patterns of expression that are available or culturally valued also govern the experiences that individuals may live through, and their awareness of those experiences." Hanks found the same while "examining how paranormal investigators manage their own commitments to scientific evidence and personal embodied experience." She observed that "for their own self-imagining**",** self-identified investigators of the paranormal drew on popular cultural images that defined who they were as amateur scientists and what the evidence they were looking for would look like. The television series *Most Haunted* as well as Internet sites provided many of the scenarios for this shared social imaginary. What Mossière and Hanks see in accounts of people they spoke with is reflexivity in the ethnomethodological sense, the mutually constitutive back and forth process between what people describe (and live) on the one hand, and the description itself, on the other hand.

According to Augé, as anthropologists we may encounter the Other in his lifeworld without forgetting our own fictions: "**If we define others as living a kind of fiction** (in which, let us not forget, a multiplicity of strange characters appear: gods, spirits, sorcerers …), **we thereby define ourselves as objective observers**, at the very most, careful not to let ourselves be carried off into the stories of

[64] On the constitution of the self through narratives that we recount to others, and ourselves, see Ochs and Capps (2001) as well as Collins (2003; 2010).

others, not to let a role be imposed upon us; **in doing so we do not think of the fictions we ourselves our living**" (Augé 2004: 34, my emphasis).

With Schutz we can acknowledge that we do not think of our lives as fictions because we pursue the objectives that define our professional life as if they were naturally rational ones, to be taken for granted because they are shared and structure our personal and collective lives. One's professional life is indeed structured chronologically and ritually around events that are unavoidable, such as attending and contributing to conferences, publishing on a regular basis, applying for grants, etc. Introducing oneself in day-to-day affairs or presenting one's work in academic settings involves mastering the established codes of verbal and non-verbal communication—conscious and unconscious—generally accepted within a given interpretative community. It is through this mastery that we come to feel that our professional lives are real, grounded in a social endeavour that is shared with others.

Choosing an intellectual orientation or research topic always involves taking distance from others with whom these are not shared. Within disciplines, sub-groups form and each nourishes itself with compelling discoveries and stories that it uses to distinguish itself from others. In other words, as highlighted in the introduction to this book and in many chapters that follow, depending on the historical period in which professional choices are made, some are perceived of as more legitimate and prestigious than others.[63]

What are we to think and what are we to do as anthropologists when faced with phenomena or "extraordinary experiences" like those presented in this book that at first glance seem bizarre? According to

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[65] According to Lévi-Strauss, if the social sciences have eclipsed philosophy in the 1950s, it reclaims its place by the end of the century: "whether we will rejoice in it or worry, philosophy will again come to the front of the anthropological scene. No longer our philosophy, which my generation had asked exotic peoples help to undo, but, by a striking turn of events, their own" (Lévi-Strauss 2000: 720).

Augé, the anthropologist's response should consist in becoming "the observer [who] is recording "fictions," "narrations" that are quite foreign to him, but the reasons of which he can penetrate" (Augé 2004: 44).[64] Thus, continues Augé, "The expression 'participatory ethnology' has no other meaning and presupposes no kind of mystical fusion with others. One can enter into the reasons of an individual or a collectivity without confusing oneself with them" (1973: 13). In sum, in the tradition of Schutz and Weber, Augé and Geertz correctly argue that whoever we are and wherever we find ourselves, it is through the mastery of "socially available" codes that we understand each other.

In order to specify what he means by "participant ethnology", Augé writes that

> When, with regard to acts of 'sorcery', Evans-Pritchard confessed that he had managed to reason in the terms of his Ashanti interlocutors, he was doing nothing other than designating his familiarity with a specific rhetoric and grammar and his understanding of tales that implemented them. (1973:13)

I agree with Augé on this point. Among the Dene Tha of northwestern Alberta, with whom I lived for six months out of the year from 1980 to 1985, I did what Evans-Pritchard did among the Azande. At the end of my first fieldwork I was satisfied with the progress I had made with the local language and I had become familiar with several families in this community of 1500 inhabitants. Nonetheless, through a linguist who was also working in the community I was told that a local healer held that I and another elder whom I often visited were taking away his power to heal. The

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[66] Augé's position is identical to that of Geertz who writes, "We are not, at least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that. We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them…" (Geertz 1973: 13). For an in-depth exploration of the dialogical nature of anthropological knowledge see Dwyer (1977, 1979, 2010); D. Tedlock (1995); Calame (2010) and Collins (2010).

transmission of a message by a third party is completely consistent with Dene Tha interpersonal communication, but this situation took me off-guard. I was identifying myself as a researcher, while I was being identified as an accomplice in a nefarious plot.

Several days after learning of this, I was invited to participate in a sweat lodge ceremony in a neighbouring village. It was in this context that I expressed my concern with the accusation, not knowing where it came from or what it meant. After hearing what I had to say, the elder who was presiding over the ceremony told me this:

> It is simple. He is accusing you of taking away his power because he does not feel his power as often as he used to; he doesn't feel it as often as before because fewer people come to see him as a healer; fewer people see him as a healer because more of them go to the elder with whom you work the most; more of them go to see him with their ailments because he has more prestige; he has more prestige because you spend almost all of your time with him and his extended family. (Goulet 1998: 18)

I needed this very concise sociological analysis to understand the seriousness of the accusation and to figure out how to respond: by reducing the number of visits to the elder with whom I was spending most of my time and redistributing my time more or less equally among all the clans so that the elder of each clan would not feel slighted and undermined as a healer. And this is what I did during my second period of fieldwork, after which I never again heard this type of accusation. In this situation I was able to reason and act according to the terms of my Dene Tha interlocutors by depending on the interpretive capacity essential to carrying out, what Augé refers to as "participatory ethnology".

The Experiential Approach

Participatory ethnology can, however, be understood in a broader sense, as a process of initiation in novel ways of experiencing oneself, because of and through interaction with others in their lifeworld. According to Ewing (1994: 571), the interpretive approach

to research is linked to the desire to protect oneself at all costs from "the possibility of entering or believing in the world of the people they meet during fieldwork." When she began her work with Sufis in Pakistan she was immediately confronted with the view that "true understanding is not separable from first-hand experience and true belief" (1994: 572). In the terms of one Pakistani: "It's too bad you couldn't have actually had the experience of sufism yourself — like having champagne rather than just a coke" (1994: 575). So, she joined the school of a local saint (*pir*) who was known for his spiritual power (*baraka*). Much to her surprise, he appeared to her in a dream just as he had predicted. Writing about Ewing's experiences, Marranci (2008: 77) notes that, "she experienced the saint as many of her informants did because she had become part of the community of emotions her informants shared."

A number of authors in this book describe the process through which they became part of such a community of emotions. In her February 22nd, 2004, journal entry, following her dancing and singing with Congolese Pentecostals in their weekly service, Mossière notes that she "eventually experienced some states of true joy and grace, sometimes a feeling of communion with members of the church, as well as spontaneous sensations of love and bliss." Being with them in the midst of their gathering, Mossière developed "a new grid of perception of the self and of the others, that is a new sense of belonging and different relationships with participants." As described below, we shall see that in his investigation of belief in ghosts in Taiwan, Habkirk also ended up not only sharing in their emotional experiences of what is locally known as a hungry ghost (*gui*), but also acting on the strength of that belief to resolve an unanticipated disturbance in his apartment.

Fabian argues that to advance ethnographic knowledge, understanding other people's reasoning is not enough: "much of our ethnographic research is carried out best when we are 'out of our minds,' that is, while we relax our inner controls, forget our purposes, let ourselves go. This is precisely what Carole Laderman did when she decided to become an apprentice to a Malay shaman. She did so following her publication of *Wives and Midwives:*

Childbirth and Nutrition in Rural Malaysia (1983), a rigourous quantitative study that led her to conclude that indigenous ways of healing were valid alternatives to Western medicine (Davis-Floyd and Rapp 2010: 42).

Laderman asked the Malay shamans she approached what they were referring to when they talked of the "Inner Wind" experienced in their trance states. In response, they insisted that, "the only way I could know would be to experience it myself" (Laderman 1988: 805). Eventually she underwent a shamanic ritual in which she entered a trance state. "At the height of my trance, I felt the Wind blowing inside my chest with the strength of a hurricane." When she described her sensation to her Malay hosts they said: "Why did you think we call them Winds?" (Laderman 1988: 806; in Young and Goulet 1994: 101-102)

In brief, fieldwork has an ecstatic side that is a condition of knowledge production. It follows that "critically understood, autobiography is a condition of ethnographic objectivity" (Fabian 2001: 13). This is precisely what Victor Turner advanced when he encouraged researchers to experience rituals "in co-activity with their enactors" so as to distance themselves as far as possible from their usual habits, "in order to have sensory and mental knowledge of what is really happening around and to them" in what is a new context" (Turner 1985: 205-206; in Goulet 1994: 26). If this is so, it follows that "autobiography is a condition of ethnographic objectivity" (2001: 12). Experiential ethnographers know this is the case. They reflect upon the processes whereby they enter the field and associate with others who become their hosts and mentors in multiple settings in their social world.

Fabian argues that if early explorers, and after them ethnographers, who espoused a positive and interpretive view of their activity, "seldom ever sang, danced or played along" with their companions and hosts, it is because "their ideas of science and their rules of hygiene made them reject singing, dancing, and playing as source of ethnographic knowledge" (Fabian 2000: 127). This rejection leads to impoverished ethnographic knowledge. By shedding light on the

ecstatic dimension of ethnographic fieldwork, Fabian rejects "the current meaning of ecstasy as nonrational, erratic, escapist, enthusiastic behaviour (such as that described, say, in studies of cults and movements)" (2000: 8).

Ecstasy is not one among many other possible research methods, "something to pursue in the practice of ethnography–getting drunk or high, losing one's mind from fatigue, pain and fever-induced delirium, or working oneself into a frenzy" (2000: 281). Ecstasy is not "a kind of behaviour" one engages in, but a "quality of human action and interaction-–one that creates a common ground for the encounter" with the Other, in his homeland (2000: 8). "Ecstasy, in a nontrivial understanding of the term, is (much like subjectivity) a prerequisite for, rather than an impediment to, the production of ethnographic knowledge" (2000: 8). If this is so it follows that "autobiography is a condition of ethnographic objectivity" (Fabian 2001: 12). Experiential ethnographers know this is the case. They reflect upon the processes whereby they enter the field and associate with others who become their hosts and mentors in multiple settings in their social world.

Initiates into other lifeworlds, such as Laderman and Ewing, are able to understand what their hosts say and experience to the extent that they themselves consent to all aspects of their learning process. As anthropologists they live the experience of immersion in the world of others. By letting go of their prior knowledge of themselves and the world, they demonstrate that, while in the field, ecstatic moments (in the sense proposed by Fabian) enable them to experience a social reality that was previously foreign to them. In this book, we argue that the ethnography that is the result of this research does not suffer in terms of objectivity. Rather, through intersubjective lived experiences, ethnographers shed new light on what the people they encounter in the field are actually doing and saying. This is at the heart of this collection of eight original essays.

The experiential approach that is evoked in these examples of initiation is also used by researchers who become apprentices in other social and cultural contexts (Harris 2007). As demonstrated in

a recent special issue on the transformative aspects of ethnographic fieldwork (Goulet 2011), researchers who benefit from the ecstatic aspect of fieldwork engage in new forms of writing that call for the inclusion of the anthropologist in the ethnography. Elizabeth Bird, for instance, notes that if "(Goulet) developed a 'narrative ethnography,' creating ethnographic tales through mutual experience with the Dene" (2003: 16), he did so in response to the Dene Tha insistence that true knowledge is obtained not through interviews but through personal, first-hand experiences of topics one is interested in. Narratives of this kind emphasize "not only the experiences of an author living in a foreign setting but the mutual interaction between author and the host community, illuminating the Other as much as the self" (Gottlieb 1995: 571).

To take ecstasy on board in one's ethnographic work is a transformative personal and professional experience. Ewing, working among the Sufis of Pakistan, Laderman working among villagers of Malaysia, Habkirk doing research among the Taiwanese, Meintel becoming a medium in Montreal, and so many other ethnographers in this and in other books, affirm that they could not wish away the transformative events lived with others in their world. Their hosts expected them to take seriously what they have lived locally. In other words, the expectation was that they would rise to the challenge of effective and respectful cross-cultural communication. They were called upon to transcend their own ethnocentrism and to explore forms of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination that serve the best interests of their hosts and, I would argue, of their profession.

From the above it is clear that the positivist separation between researcher and object of study, or the interpretive distance between the foreign interpreter and local actors, leaves little space for the intercultural and intersubjective that is characteristic of a more narrative anthropology. In this discussion it is noteworthy that in the course of his career, Lévi-Strauss distanced himself from his earlier presentation of fieldwork as the "negative aspect of our trade" (1955: 13). In 1976, Lévi-Strauss shed light on a significant aspect of fieldwork which he noted is "not the goal of his profession, or a

completion of his schooling, or yet a technical apprenticeship — but a crucial stage of his education, prior to which he may possess miscellaneous knowledge that will never form a whole." "Where relations between individuals and the system of social relations combine to form a whole," writes Lévi-Strauss, the anthropologist "must not merely analyze their elements, but **apprehend them as a whole in the form of a personal experience—his own**" (1963: 272, in Goulet 1994: 25 and Goulet 1988: 247, my emphasis).

Taking stock of the ecstatic aspect of fieldwork means pursuing as much as possible this apprehension of the whole range of experiences our interlocutors ask us to pay attention to. To engage in this personal apprehension is to refuse to distance one's life and one's work from the transformative events that are experienced within the lifeworld of the Other. It is then that the idea of "participant ethnology" takes on a new meaning without denying the inherent difficulty of developing as it were "a kind of doubling of consciousness that is arduous to sustain" as one strives to be "both subject and object, the one who acts and the one who, as it were, watches himself acting" (Bourdieu 2003: 281).

Our hosts, wherever they may be, expect us to take seriously what we learn by living with them. They expect us to be able to respond to the challenges that are part and parcel of intercultural and intersubjective communication. Anthropologists who respond as best as they can to these expectations share a deep interest "in leaving behind the old detached observer and plunging into the thick of things" (Carter 2013: 13). Doing so, experiential ethnographers go beyond "a willingness to listen to Indigenous understandings of self, place, and existence" to grant them "the respect we show our own ontologies" (2013:13).

Writers and readers sympathetic to this perspective must, however, keep in mind Hanks' reminder that while "evidence and experience are longstanding categories of thought in intellectual, as well as popular, traditions", it is also the case that these terms have many meanings, that are at times contradictory. The investigators of paranormal experiences she discusses who have encounters with

spirits never found the evidence they required to construct "new knowledge of the past or the nature of spirits." Despite the fact that they relished "their ability to experience the spirits of the dead", such encounters always generated "heated anxiety and uncertainty."

Hanks gives the example of a pro-science investigator she met during her research who "thought she might be able to 'develop' as a medium." This woman whom she identifies as Ginny therefore began to interact with mediums in the paranormal community. Doing so, she soon "found that many of the things she was 'picking up' on investigations, such as dates and names, turned out to correspond to knowledge about the sites in the historical record." Ginny then wondered at the significance of this correspondence. Was she really turning into a medium? Should she accept the view that "mediumship is an inherent feature of these people and that it only requires nurturing to blossom"? In the end she is unconvinced. As she told Hanks: "I don't know what it is. I pick up on things, I do. But I don't know how. I don't even know if it's real. I don't know. It's frustrating."

Percy, another investigator of the paranormal explained "the difference between ghost hunters and paranormal investigators to me. He remarked that, 'well, with ghost hunters, they want an experience. For them, it's an experience they're after. And that's fine, I guess, but that's not what we do. We want evidence.'" As it turns out no evidence is clear enough to convince the investigators Hanks met with that visits from ghosts are real events. Contrast this conclusion with that reached by Habkirk in the course of his investigation of in ghosts among Taiwanese. Habkirk ends up sharing in their emotional experiences of what is locally known as a hungry ghost (*gui*).

The unsettling experience begins in his apartment when, apparently on its own, his TV turns on. Soon after turning it off, just as he begins to fall asleep, the TV turns itself on again. Habkirk then "got a brief visual image of a young boy" standing beside his bed looking down at him, "like he wanted something." Taiwanese who are visited by ghosts customarily give them offerings of food for them to

consume, after which they leave the person they were visiting. Habkirk therefore decides to leave a few biscuits for the boy, after which the TV remains off for the remaining of the night. After this first event, however, the interference with the TV followed by offerings of biscuits repeats itself for five consecutive nights. Habkirk decides to consult a local temple attendant who tells him the boy-ghost will not leave before he is given candies. Habkirk obliges and thereafter his TV remained silent. As he notes, "The statistical improbability of these occurrences and the effective solution that the Taiwanese spiritualists gave me led me to believe that maybe their beliefs are based on an intersubjectively human, spiritual reality" that does not belong to the Taiwanese culture but to what following Hannerz (1997) and Sahlins (1999) we might refer to as "our Culture of cultures".

Conclusion

In their ambition to understand human social life in all its diversity, anthropologists have always privileged field-based inquiry. This epilogue demonstrates that throughout history, researchers differ from one another in terms of what they consider the best possible and credible outcome of fieldwork. We have presented and discussed three (ir)rational ways of being in the field. In the structuralist or positivist tradition, the researcher constitutes a scientific self in order to apprehend what he observes that may escape the people he meets in the field. In the interpretive tradition, the researcher successfully completes his fieldwork to the extent that he is able to create a thick description of the Other in his lifeworld, according to his own logic. Moving beyond the positivist and interpretive stances in anthropology, as argued in this book, is not only possible and legitimate, but also productive of new insights in the multi-dimensional reality of human experiences. As Béguet maintains, at times, "one must also transport oneself into a world replete with the spiritual, not as a cultural product (or that of a popular subculture), but as an empirical phenomenon."

In this relatively novel stance, the search is still for valid and valuable ethnographic knowledge. In the experiential tradition,

however, knowledge about the Other is generated by radical participation in the lifeworld of the Other. The researcher who willingly consents to living a deep intercultural experience underscores the ecstatic aspect of her fieldwork. Being open to the advantages associated with the ecstatic aspect of fieldwork or with the deep involvement with others in the pursuit of knowledge through co-participative research, does not exempt the researcher from having clear research objectives and from needing to master traditional ethnographic techniques like the learning of local conventions in various settings, including those of rituals. The experiential approach requires that the ethnographer stick "with ethnography through thick and thin" while participating in the efforts of many anthropologists "to write one's way out of a tradition that one wants both to preserve and change" (Marcus 1998: 231, 234, in Goulet and Miller 2007: 1).

Experiential ethnographers want to preserve the tradition of intensive fieldwork, at home or abroad, which is seen as a condition for the advancement of anthropological knowledge. This advancement, however, is only possible if researchers challenge the classical ideal of the investigator's exclusion of the researcher from ethnographies, especially when it comes to events or experiences that question the epistemological, ontological and ethical assumptions that underlie established approaches in the discipline. Thus, analyzing and reflecting upon key moments of a transformation experienced in the field is essential to the advancement of ethnographic knowledge.

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