

The University of Manitoba

Anthropology, Transformations and Transcendence --

Problems and Implications  
in a Science of Consciousness:  
Toward a New Science of Man

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

May 1975

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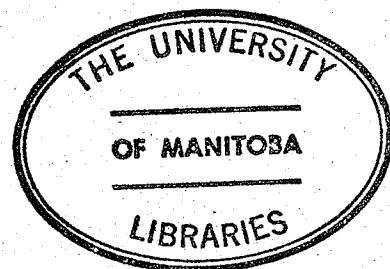
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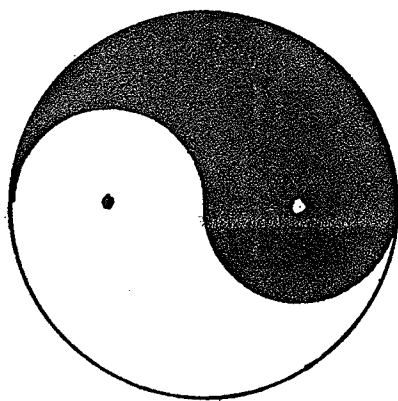
MASTER OF ARTS

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### Preface

The ancient Chinese figure symbolizing the relationship between yin and yang, receptive and active, female and male, dark and light, etc., is symbolic also of consciousness, not only the phenomena and notions which condition our lives. Consciousness forms the primal opposition: in continuous motion, it divides itself into the subject, ourselves, and the object, whatever we perceive.

Yet this circle also symbolizes the Tao, the void, suchness, fullness. It is consciousness, containing both subject and object - experiencer and experience.

Anthropologists have been exclusively concerned with the "object," which, however defined, cannot be defined apart from the subject which "knows" it. And the subject or experiencer is defined by what he knows. In the study of ecstatic states the anthropologist

approaches the problems encountered in this binary consciousness. Usually ecstasy represents transformations within subjects and objects, which allow the subject to explore new realms, new objects. The psychedelic experience is such a transformation.

Transcendence is the suspension of the transformations and subject-object opposition. This is the experience of the Tao, or of the man of knowledge, don Juan Matus's nagual (Castaneda 1974), or of consciousness in its totality, inclusive of all elements. Yet it is not truly experience for there can be no experiencing agency. The resolution of the problem of binary consciousness is the realization of the nagual.

This is an exploration into the two processes, transformation and transcendence and their implications for the study of man - anthropology.

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The Dimensions of Consciousness and Anthropology

This work is an exploration into man's consciousness, its dynamics and the implications these may have for the study of man -- anthropology. In a sense the study of consciousness is the study of man. The nature of consciousness is such that one cannot define anything outside its realm, and, as each man is conscious, all that we study is in some peculiar way a manifestation of ourselves.

A most striking and paradoxical feature of consciousness is that it is not easily known or explored. Although we "know," we do not know consciousness, for our consciousness is our knowing. In ordinary experience, what we know, the object of experience, is only a single aspect of conscious life. The other is the subject or knower. This subject cannot be known to itself through the "maps," cognitive structures, beliefs by which we commonly experience. In this binary consciousness there must always be a knower apart from that which is known.

A. Bo-modal knowing: Two Ways of Binary Consciousness

This problem has not been resolved through the

development of a bi-modal model of consciousness. The model divides binary consciousness into two processes, distinguished generally by their function (Deikman 1973a, Ornstein 1972, Wallace 1970). The first is the rational-manipulative mode, which endows science with its power. It is discriminative, analytic and linguistic, allowing an individual to act on an element of perception. Cognition, particularly as manifested in speech behavior, is understood to be derived from fixed-circuit pathways within the brain (Chomsky 1968). The second is intuitive-receptive or, in Anthony Wallace's (1970) terminology, "autistic." This mode is oriented toward absorption of perceptual material and is not marked by clear boundaries between the subject and its object, as otherwise achieved in a generally linguistic orientation. The first is particularistic, the second holistic.

Wallace considers autistic thinking to explain the problem of shared meanings. Like blind men exploring an elephant, individuals will personalize their understanding of common experience, for each approaches from a slightly different perceptual set. Autistic thinking is that process which is

responsible for reorganizing what has been learned, constantly recombining and differentiating elements in novel arrangements, going beyond information given, solving contradictions, and sometimes innovating new (cognitive structures). (Wallace 1970:78)

This is basically "intuitive" action and may represent



an underlying process in the formulation of all cognitive structures. It most likely is the process responsible for divergences from normative behavior and thought, while the cybernetic-like processing of the first mode acts to stabilize and limit these divergences. In any case, it is clearly intuitional and is non-verbal processing, if for no other reason than the neuronal structures governing speech behavior are in the opposite hemisphere of the brain from that in which intuition occurs (Gazzaniga 1967).

#### B. Radical Introspection: Another Realm of Consciousness

However there is a second realm of consciousness, distinguished from binary consciousness. This is "self-awareness," or in R. M. Bucke's (1953) terminology, "self-consciousness." Commonplace experience, established in binary consciousness, concerns what we know; self-awareness, on the other hand, concerns the "faculty by which we realize... (for) without self-consciousness a sentient creature can know but its possession is necessary in order that he may know that he knows" (Bucke 1958:23). It is this second consciousness which allows the experience of consciousness itself.

Self-awareness is manifested in an individual's understanding, but bears no direct relationship to socially conceived structures of reality, which depend

on conceptual frameworks. There is not the dissection of experience into knower and known. It is "knowing that one knows," which is not to be mistaken as "knowing what one knows," like the index at the back of a book. Self-awareness is simply recognition, regardless of what is recognized. In this manner it is introspective, yet, as there is no need for a particularly recognizable element and the subject which knows it, self-awareness is radical introspection.

Aurthur Deikman suggests the nature of non specific general awareness in radical introspection and in so doing implies the nature of the world and man as both physical and psychological: "Awareness is the 'complementary' aspect of (physical) organization, its psychological component" (Deikman 1973b:319).

Upon reflection you will find that thoughts can cease for a brief while, that there can be silence and darkness and the temporary absence of images or memory patterns - any one component of our mental life can disappear, but awareness, itself, remains. Awareness is the ground of our conscious life, the background or field in which these elements exist. It is not the same thing as thoughts, sensations, or images. To experience this try an experiment now. Look straight ahead and be aware of your conscious experience - then close your eyes. Awareness remains. "Behind" your thoughts and images is awareness. (Deikman 1973b:317-18)

How it is that the subject and object of binary consciousness, dominating commonplace experience, transforms to self-awareness has not been specified. I have

chosen to call the process "radical introspection" in that the inherent duality of subject-object is dissolved by the scanning process turning upon itself to see how it is that it is illuminated; in other words, the discovery of what lies behind the searchlight of scanning awareness.

Deikman suggests that to solve the problem mind functions should be defined as organizing activities. Thinking activity, as it is formed in either the rational-manipulative or intuitive-receptive mode, organizes stimulus inputs, whether originating from the external environment or within oneself as memory, into meanings of different kinds. He compares the mind to a pond of water. When thinking activity has subsided, the surface is reflective. This is a state of pure awareness. Thought functions act to disturb the surface, much as a rock disturbs the surface of a pond when thrown into it. When the thought functions again cease, the pond or awareness is reflective.

We do not have to postulate a super-observer of both awareness and thoughts if we recognize that awareness depends on the state of the pond or bio-system; thought functions are the organization's activity. There is no experiencing agency; the "experience" is the state or activity, as the case may be. (1973b:323)

In as much as all thought or all activity, whether in the intuitive-receptive or rational-manipulative mode, involves organization, they are not representative of radical introspection. Apart from such activity, the "I"

or identity, which is otherwise a reflection of intention and is clearly an organizing force, dissolves. However, in general awareness another "I" emerges.

The "I" feels like an abiding, resting awareness, featureless and unchanging, a central something that is witness to all events. This "I" is identical with awareness. In most cases it is awareness uncircumscribed by the beliefs and assumptions that form actual barriers separating local awareness from universal awareness. (Deikman 1973b:325)

The two processes, the individual forceful awareness or organization and the universal awareness, are not independent. The individual awareness provides the locus for the universal, which is the origin of local awareness. Thus one is never not doing organization: one may only quiet the organizing to the extent that he may see it. The organization and the non-organization arise mutually. Consciousness is therefore like a light wave. The universal awareness, in radical introspection or self-awareness, is not different from the etheric field of Nineteenth century astronomers. The etheric field functioned only as a medium for light waves, which, here, represent binary consciousness. The field could not be defined apart from such waves and had only heuristic significance, for the notion allowed astronomers to conceive a wave which has no medium.

### C. The Anthropological Approach to Consciousness

Clearly the nature of consciousness in both its forms, binary and general, must in some way be ascertained in order that we may achieve a fuller understanding of our nature. However, anthropological concern, as in other disciplines, if touching upon the question of consciousness at all, has been limited to considering binary consciousness primarily as it is formed by the rational-manipulative mode. Mary Douglas notes:

Ethno-methodologists bring great delicacy to analyzing how the process of social interaction constructs the typifications and recipes which make social reality. They are aware of how the dimensions of time and space are socially constructed. But to take aboard the implication that the whole of physical nature must be endowed with its reality in the same way demands an imaginative effort which has been left to artists, novelists, and poets. (1973:10)

But at least one anthropologist has joined these ranks. Weston La Barre (1972a) has accepted the implication and taken an imaginative leap, moving from a functional orientation in the analysis of religious belief into a description of the universe and the individual.

Man came into being out of blind and accidental processes in the purposeless environment that did not have him in mind. The universe is useless until organisms use it. Man is only the heir of antecedent organisms' purposes, or, more precisely, the only purpose of man is himself. (1972a:20)

The individual within this universe is a "peculiar organism," he is "the precipitated experience of many minds, reified knowledge, the word made flesh" (1972a:xv).

The macroprocess governing the relationship of man and universe has been stated by Marvin Harris (1968) in terms of cultural materialism. Cultural materialism relates human behavior and thought to man's interface with his environment, his technological capacity organized and determined by his needs and history. In this perspective, man and his culture arise in relation to the environment which arises or is understood through man's particular articulation with it -- his culture.

Therefore, there is an inherent dilemma to anthropological inquiry. Every element of man's consciousness must be determined by its context within the constellation of culture, technology, environment. The adoption of the perspective requires our alertness: our analyses, our statements, our understanding regarding the nature of reality, ourselves, and, particularly, our consciousness are most probably fallacious.

In order to see and to communicate, scientists must have both hypotheses and symbolic languages -- both of these being subjective human artifacts -- so that it is quite unclear whether science is cumulative adaptive knowledge like genes and snowballing material culture, or a succession of disjunctive cognitive maps, no more real than the group dreams we call languages or cultures. Certainly scientific thinking does change through time hence we must suspect that it may never have salt on the tail of that cosmic bird Truth, contaminated as science must always be by group hypotheses and culturally given symbol-systems. (La Barre 1972b: 264)

La Barre's suspicions are justified. His view that

the universe serves as background, which exists and arises as man's purposes, suggests that all of man's intentions, all the results of those intentions, all his speculations regarding himself are tautological. Each human effort manifested as thought or by and through some element of the universe is only another definition, another statement, another aspect of man himself. The universe is given form through man's use, yet the universe is father to the man.

This dilemma appears elsewhere. The late Alan D. Coult, founder of the diminutive sub-discipline, psychedelic anthropology, refocussed inquiry from man's relations with his environment to the process underlying all relationships, his consciousness (Joseph and White 1972). He sought the underlying principles common to all cultures and found these to lie in universal archetypes which are contained within the individual's psyche and which constitute forms of relationships. The particular contents of experience, as well as particular aspects of cultural systems, are reflections of the history of a group, and are themselves not archetypal, but are conditioned or structured by archetypes.

Because the archetype emerges in intuitional process, Coult advised fellow anthropologists to begin field experience within their own minds: "The anthropologist's first field trip should not be to Africa or South America

or Japan, but into hidden primitive layers of the mind" (in Joseph and White 1972:735). Although psychedelic adventures may sensitize anthropologists to their own archetypal reservoirs and may permit their tolerance of wide cultural variations, Coult's advice rests on a view of man not substantially different from that inherent to the traditional pursuits. Where Harris and La Barre, for instance, look to the environment as the determining force, Coult looked to the universal, the collective unconscious. In either view man is predetermined and, as he is of necessity within and of his environments, the distinction regarding where the source of culture, of his knowledge lies is arbitrary at best.

Archetypes are released through man's articulation with the environment. The nature of the environment determines the nature of archetypal release and the extent particular archetypes are manifested in the culture. Furthermore, Jung postulated that "there are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life" (1971:66). Life situations are simultaneously governed by external circumstances, which are known to men through the inherent processes contained within their consciousness, thus any archetypal explanation is, as the environmental, tautological.

As anthropologists we must be aware of these dilemmas, and, simultaneously, we must expand our consider-



ation of consciousness to include the concept that the individual is not solely reified knowledge, for he transcends that knowledge in radical introspection.

To fully account for the knowledge process, however dependent on the articulation of man and universe, the subject and its object, one must consider the "background or field in which these elements exist." Individually, this is the experience of experience, or awareness, or self-realization. It is self-realization in that there is only a center of consciousness attending to itself.

## II

### Anthropology and Altered States --

#### Explorations of Transformations and Transcendence

With the growing interest in various esoteric philosophies, religions, human potential movements, and the widespread experience of altered states of consciousness (i.e., states other than binary consciousness dominated by the rational-manipulative mode), anthropologists have expanded their research into altered consciousness. These explorations are examined in this chapter.

I am particularly concerned with the examination of alterations in normal conscious functioning; for it is through the cessation, breakdown, or alteration of an ongoing activity that we see the activity more clearly. Edmund Carpenter has pointed out that breakdown allows greater understanding.

The 1929 crash revealed the economic structure to the entire community. The breakdown of segregation revealed the nature of racism. The generation gap revealed the nature of identity. (Carpenter 1970, unpaginated)

In fact, "every breakdown is a potential breakthrough" (1970, unpaginated).

But the breakdowns investigated suggest only that transformation can occur to conscious functioning. These transformations are defined as altered states of consciousness (ASC's), and, for the purpose of discussion, the

definition offered by Charles Tart is used:

An ASC... (is)... a qualitative alteration in the overall pattern of mental functioning, such that the experiencer feels his consciousness is radically different from the way it functions ordinarily. An SoC (state of consciousness) is thus defined not in terms of any particular content of consciousness or specific behavioral or physiological change, but in terms of the overall patterning of psychological functioning. (1972:1203)

An ASC denotes a major shift in psychical configuration, but configurations or cognitive structures, no matter how transformed, remain, leaving an individual within binary consciousness. Such transformations occur through the suspension of prior structures for the establishment of other or newly developed structures. One may speculate that it is the interval of suspension which, if recognized, represents a period of open, general awareness. This interval is commonly known as transcendence. Should no transformation occur, it is the interval of pure reflection.

The human potential movement in general demonstrates tendencies toward both transformation and transcendence. Transformation is sought in order that an individual might find his life more meaningful. Transcendence is thought to be the total experience of oneself, of one's nature. Transformation has been substantially treated by anthropologists; transcendence has not. Yet as discussed below, transcendence is ancillary to transformation and

full transcendence is the nature of self-realization.

As long as transcendence is valued in itself it is material for anthropological inquiry. Indeed, both processes, transformation and transcendence, serve as a substantial basis for explorations of man's total consciousness -- including both his ability to know and to know that he knows.

#### A. Anthropological Inquiries into Transformation

Anthropologists who have examined altered states of consciousness have repeatedly demonstrated its causes and some effects. Ecstatic states, induced through a variety of techniques, including pain, hunger, hyperventilation and the injection of hallucinogenic concoctions, when explored anthropologically, are generally limited to the drug-induced variety (cf. Furst 1972, Harner 1973). Interestingly, the ecstatic experience permits sufficient disassociation (transcendence) from conceptual matrices underlying an individual's perception of his surrounding environment to allow the "reliving" of or personal experience within the mythology of his group. Such experience is either transformative or confirmatory and, in some instances, is both.

Among the Fang of Gabon, James Fernandez (1972) reports, the practice of the Bwiti cult, in which initiates

ingest the hallucinogen Tabernenthe iboga, allows participation in, among others, their migration myth. The stereotyping themes in their hallucinogenic experience result from the set and setting under which the drug is taken, for the hallucinogenic experience is highly suggestible (Masters and Houston 1966). The experience of meeting one's ancestors, descending in order through time to one's origins in the founding gods, is "pre-conditioned" in the worshipping technique of citing long geneologies. Further, the setting of some cults, Fernandez explains, provides close personal supervision within the cult house, reinforcing previous beliefs and teachings as well as providing new opportunities to expose the initiate to other elements of the mythological repertoire.

Functionally the hallucinogenic experience serves as a basis for shared conceptions of the ultimate nature of reality, centered on the personal experience of the fundamental cult beliefs. Mythological origins are no longer mythical when one may visit the founders of his people and, returning along the migration path of his ancestors, relive their experience, while simultaneously taking the same course as his fellow initiates.

In another setting, the hallucinogenic experience is utilized by male initiates of the Peruvian Cashinahua to free their dream spirits for prophetic adventures

(Kensinger 1973). Here, the injection of the psychedelic Banisteriopsis is generally outside formal ritual contexts. However, within the total Cashinahua population of only 500 members, the ecstatic experience confirms the men's understanding of reality. Similarly, but within the more defined ritual contexts of phratry rites, initiated men among the Tukan of Columbia take Banisteriopsis Caapi to open the doorway to participation within their society's mythic repertoire (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972).

In his examination of the cultural contexts of psychedelics, Reichel-Dolmatoff provides an astute description of the ritual context which has far wider application and significant implications.

It would seem...that in a state of hallucination the individual projects his cultural memory on the wavering screen of colors and shapes (the result of perceptual changes induced by B. Caapi) and thus "sees" certain motifs and personages. There is nothing secret or intimate about the hallucinations the individual Tukan experiences. On the contrary, these are discussed openly and, what is more striking, one individual will describe his visions to another even while he is undergoing the hallucinatory experience and will ask for an explanation of its significance. This open communication of experiences could lead to a consensus, to a fixation of certain images; in this manner, no matter what the vision, its interpretation could be adapted to a cultural pattern. (1972:110)

The interpretive component of experience is analogous to the process at the personal level in which "meaning" is ascribed to experience. The particular contents of the experience, as suggested by Reichel-