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Just floating on the sky: A comparison of hypnotic and shamanic phenomenology

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ETZEL CARDEÑA

"Just Floating on the Sky". *

A Comparison of Hypnotic and Shamanic Phenomena.¹

- * Winner of the Ernest R. Hilgard Award for the Best Theoretical paper on hypnosis published in 1996, bestowed by the Society for Summary Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (SCEH), 1997.

Despite the vastly different cultural contexts of hypnosis and shamanism, a comparison of the phenomenology of the two is warranted. The author proposes that the two types of very hypnotizable individuals, one exhibiting vivid imagery and the other showing diminished memory and control, corresponds roughly to the classical distinction between *soul journey* and *spirit possession*. Other cognitive traits, developmental histories and alternate experiences of hypnotic *virtuosos* and shamans also suggest many similarities. The resemblance between hypnotic and shamanic phenomenology strongly suggests a universal disposition that is independent of culture. Western culture should acknowledge, respect and study the potentials and risks of this ability.

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Introduction

To compare such seemingly distinct phenomena as hypnosis and shamanism might strike the reader as a bold if not outright foolish enterprise. After all, the domain of hypnosis has become clearly contained within a Western scientific/secular epistemology that cherishes certain forms of empiricism (particularly the scientific method) while abhorring any vestige of metaphysics. In contrast, the various strands of what is generally called shamanism emphasize other forms of empiricism (particularly immediate experience) framed within a metaphysical system that assumes the reality of spiritual forces and mechanisms.

However different the ethnoepistemologies underlying them, it is at the level of immediate experience that hypnosis and shamanism can be more easily compared. While it is the case that conscious experience is porous to the influence of sociocultural and psychological factors, this influence is limited by the constraints imposed by the biological limitations and dispositions of the human nervous system and by universal environmental factors such as the prolonged socialization required by the human organism to survive (TART 1975). Rather than considering cultural and biological factors separately, we should consider their interactions. In contrast to either of the positions that consider biology as "destiny" or as a completely cultural creation, a third position is that a substrate of human potentials and limitations inform the selection of cultural

¹ I thank Lynne Horniak, Ph.D., for her sensitive and helpful critique to an earlier draft of this paper.

choices, and cultural processes, in turn, reinforce particular manifestations and provide them with specific interpretations. While cultural processes reinforce and select for specific human potentials, cultural variations are in turn constrained by the structure and process of the nervous system and by universal socialization experiences. With these considerations in mind, a phenomenological comparison of hypnosis and shamanism becomes a reasonable enterprise, particularly because it is at the level of immediate experience that the cultural overlay is more transparent.

Before comparing hypnosis and shamanism, a point of caution is mandatory. Because we are immersed in our particular cultural perspective, it is easier to observe the influence of other cultures on beliefs and experiences than to discern the effect of historical vicissitudes in our own culture. For example, the last chapter of this book shows that the idiosyncratic history of Haiti produced a syncretic religion, Vodou, that fosters among some devotees the experience of being possessed by African/Catholic spirits. Usually less recognized is the fact that hypnosis has also had an idiosyncratic history that has shaped its practice and theory. Terms such as "hypnosis", from the Greek god of sleep "hypnos", or practices such as defining a context as hypnotic or using a relaxation induction reflect particular historical developments. To name but a couple of instances, our current terminology and practice of hypnosis reflect both the vanquishing of the mesmeric passes and crisis model of Mesmer by the "somnambulist" model of his disciple PUYSEGUR, and the original explanation by BRAID of hypnotic phenomena as analogous to sleep (see below). These particular techniques and terms are not more "scientific" per se than other explanations or practices. To state that a shamanic experience is a form of "hypnotic trance" is logically equivalent to saying that a hypnotic experience is a form of "shamanic journeying"; to assume that a particular ritual phenomenon is explained because it is relabeled according to the terms of ours scientific discourse is not to explain anything at all. Labels, whether Western or not, do not explain, explanations do.

In the following sections I will point to various similarities between hypnosis and shamanism, while attempting not to reduce one to the other. I will concentrate on phenomenology, but the interested reader may want to consult CARDEÑA (1987; 1988b) for a discussion of topics not covered in the chapter such as induction procedures.

1. Shamanism and hypnosis: More than one type

Leaving aside unique individual variations, the literature on shamanism has typically posited two major forms of alterations of consciousness associated with the role of the "technicians of the sacred", to use ELIADE's (1964) felicitous phrase. The first one refers to a mostly imaginal experience in which the person journeys to an alternate spiritual region. The second one is a mostly embodied experience in which a spiritual entity displaces the individual's personality and acts on the "physical world". The first type is what has been called "soul journey" or "magical flight" and, according to ELIADE and others, the only one that should be called shamanism proper. The second type of experience has been variously called possession, mediumship or, in its more recent incarnation, pun intended, channeling.

ROUGET (1985, p. 11) also made a distinction between two types of alteration. The first one he called "ecstasy", defined by immobility, silence, solitude, no crisis, sensory deprivation, recollection and vivid imagery ("hallucinations" in his terms). The second one, "trance", is characterized by movement, noise, social company, a period of crisis, sensory overstimulation, amnesia and lack of vivid imagery. This distinction is of course very similar to that between magical flight and possession experiences. In his statistical analyses of magical religious practices in 47 cultures throughout the globe, WINKELMAN (1992) slightly complicated this distinction by positing three major types of alterations of consciousness. In the first one, which he called

"yogic or mystical tradition", sleep deprivation, austerities, auditory driving, fasting and social isolation dominate. The second, "shamanic", tradition is associated with sleep, unconsciousness, soul flight and sometimes motor behaviors such as dancing. Finally, the third type, "mediumistic or possession tradition", is associated with amnesia, convulsions, the possession of the individual's personality by that of a spiritual being, and spontaneous onset. WINKELMAN, however, cautions that these types cannot be considered to be absolutely distinct and LEWIS (1975) shows as well that shamans in the same region may undergo both shamanic and mediumistic alterations. But even if there is some overlap between these forms of experience, they cannot be considered just variations in intensity, but distinct modalities of experiencing with particular alterations of identity, imagery, etc.

In the Western tradition of hypnosis, mostly imaginal and mostly embodied alterations of consciousness have been manifested throughout history. As LAURENCE and PERRY (1988) point out "mesmerism", the direct XVIIIth century predecessor of hypnosis, was an attempt to integrate medical beliefs and practices such as magnetic medicine and laying on of hands with a secular version of exorcism. Contrary to typical contemporary hypnosis that emphasizes relaxation and visualization, Mesmer sought to produce through hand passes, music and a very emotionally charged atmosphere, a "crisis" in his patients, characterized by convulsions and some spontaneous reports of amnesia. It has been speculated that these reports of amnesia, so infrequent nowadays, were the product of implicit or explicit suggestions and expectations. Another possibility worth considering is that amnesia may have a stronger association with consciousness alterations involving physical activity and an emotionally charged context than with relaxation. A recent study found that physically active hypnotic context produces a significant decrease in self-awareness as compared with quiescent hypnosis (see below), a finding that needs to be replicated.

Whereas mesmerism produced behaviors perhaps more closely related to spirit possession than to the current practice of quiescent hypnosis, the association between hypnosis and relaxation can be traced to Mesmer's disciple, the Marquis de Puységur. He, among others, de-emphasized crisis and encouraged a physically passive type of practice along with a spurious analogy of hypnotic phenomena to sleep (cf. LAWRENCE & PERRY 1988). But contrary to this belief, hypnotic testing, behaviors and experience do not involve sleep-like cortical activity and can occur while the person is physically active, for instance while pedaling a stationary bike.

The induction of a mostly imaginal experience can be found in "guided visualization" and similar techniques used by hypnosis practitioners. There are also antecedents to this practice. The Italian historian GINZBURG (1991) proposed that some of the manifestations that came to be condemned as witchcraft in Renaissance Europe were the expression of a hidden shamanic tradition. He described the Italian sect of the *Benandanti*, who periodically went into a dream-like state and engaged in imaginal battles against witches in order to preserve the crops of the community. Thus, the Western tradition contains evidence both for mostly imaginal and mostly corporeal type of alterations.

A related question is whether the term shamanism should be restricted to a mostly imaginal (i.e. "soul journey") type of experience. WALSH (1990) agrees with the argument of ELIADE that shamanism, in the strict sense, has to be distinguished from mediumship and possession because only the former implies mastery of the spiritual or consciousness domains. Although initially appealing, this distinction is more apparent than real. While "magical flight" experts maintain a certain control over the events that transpire, that control is by no means absolute: unexpected images may suddenly appear, terrifying sensations of dismemberment may ensue, and so on. Weekend workshops on shamanism or Ericksonian approaches notwithstanding, only a few individuals in this or other cultures seem to have the ability to produce vivid, realistic and organized imagery. In shamanic traditions, magical control and vividness requires talent

and training in attention deployment and control (NOLL 1985). Even then it is simplistic to assume that the shaman is in complete control of the contents of his/her consciousness or spirits. Contrary to the received view on classical shamanism, spirit possession is generally assumed to involve lack of control. Possession experts seem to surrender themselves, to experience being "mounted" by spiritual entities and to lack control of their consciousness or spiritual realm. However, traditional healers in Haiti, Bali, Tibet and other places, actually choose the time and circumstances under which the alterations in identity/consciousness will occur, they choose the beginning and end of these states, and they have enough control to invoke the proper spirit and interact with the people that surround them (ELLINGSON 1994; FRIEDSON 1994). As is the case with magical flight, possession experts have typically been chosen by their innate abilities and have followed some type of training. It is certainly the case that some possession devotees, rather than recognized experts, do not show much control or organization of their consciousness. Some individuals may even have involuntary and distressing possessions. But it is also the case that vivid imagery can be unbidden and produce distress and maladjustment in post-traumatic stress and other disorders (CARDEÑA 1992; SPIEGEL & CARDEÑA 1990). Some very recent work with "fantasy-prone" personalities suggests that a subset of them may actually suffer from impairing discontinuities in experience related to their internal life (LYNN 1994). The usually accepted distinction of a controllable/imaginal state versus an uncontrollable/em-bodied one, may actually reflect the fact that because we are not privy to the other's internal life, we assume it to be more controlled and organized than the behaviors during spirit possession.

Rather than following the strictures of ELIADE and WALSH's terminology, I will consider both mediumship and magical flight alterations in consciousness under the rubric of shamanism. It should be borne in mind, however, that not only do they vary from each other but they also represent a range of alterations. For example, amnesia is not always absolute or even present in spirit possession but varies according to the person and the event (FRIEDSON 1994; FRIGERIO 1989). Although there are magico-religious practitioners that do not undergo alterations in consciousness, I will follow WINKELMAN's (1992) suggestion to consider them "healers", rather than shamans or mediums proper.

If we accept both magical flight and possession experiences as belonging to a general definition of shamanism, the question arises as to the origin of this variation. WINKELMAN (1992) has presented evidence that magical flight and possession types of experience are significantly related to the economic and political status of a culture. How to interpret these results, however, is far from obvious. That magical flight is characteristic of a hunting-gathering society whereas possession occurs in sedentary and hierarchical cultures could mean at least two different things: 1) that the particular status of a culture in some way "creates" or shapes a ritual alteration of consciousness. 2) that the social and hierarchical nature of a culture selects for or evokes, rather than creates, a particular variation of anomalous consciousness. The first hypothesis implies that the phenomenology of hypnosis or shamanism is purely arbitrary and depends on the ideology and mythology of a culture. In this case, a particular account, secular or religious, creates the experience. The second hypothesis, while granting a role to society, nonetheless assumes that the nature of certain alterations of consciousness depends on basic neurocognitive processes, which then interact with cultural variables. I will make the case that a comparison of hypnotic and shamanic phenomenology supports the second contention.

While we may not be able to fully answer this question from a historical or anthropological perspective, a number of findings in the hypnosis field are germane. We should first dispel the frequent assumption that if hypnosis is an alternate state of consciousness, it is a unitary state. Contrary to this simple view, phenomenological inquiry shows that at least very highly hypnotizable individuals have different *qualitative* alterations according to how "deeply" they experience their hypnosis (e.g., CARDEÑA 1988; SHERMAN 1971; TART 1970). A similar considera-

tion of levels of "trance" is maintained by indigenous practitioners of Brazilian possession practices (FRIGERIO 1989).

Recent research in hypnosis has shown that there seems to be at least two types of very hypnotizable individuals (hypnotizability is a measure of an individual's responsiveness to a standardized set of suggestions following an induction procedure). These two types parallel to an extent the shamanic alterations discussed above.

PEKALA (1991) used his own *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI) and found two distinct types of very highly hypnotizable individuals. The first one experiences a strong sense of being in an altered state, little imagery and loss of control, self-awareness, rationality and memory. In contrast, the second type reports considerable vivid imagery and only mild to moderate losses in rationality and imagery.

Through in-depth interviews, BARRETT (1990) also encountered two types of very hypnotizable individuals. "Fantasizers" have the ability to become easily hypnotized and very absorbed, have always had a very vivid and realistic imaginal life, and typically do not report spontaneous amnesia or early abuse. "Dissociaters" do not experience hypnosis or absorption so easily as the first group, do not have very vivid imagery or fantasy life, report episodes of spontaneous amnesia and greater rates of early abuse than the first group, and lose muscle tone easily during hypnosis.

Finally, in a very different setting, MILLER & K. BOWERS (1993) found that high hypnotizable individuals can attenuate pain either through "dissociated control" or through the use of imagery. BOWERS (1994) also reported that using imagery to induce analgesia was actually a hindrance to some individuals while beneficial to others. E. HILGARD (1991) has also proposed that some highly hypnotizable individuals use vivid imagery whereas others mostly exhibit mental "blankness".

In the three studies reviewed, the authors found that a group of hypnotic "virtuosos" responds to a hypnotic context with vivid imagery, whereas another group not only does not have much imagery, but reports some of the characteristics of the possession state, namely amnesia and loss of control. These results are consistent with the cross-cultural literature reviewed that a mostly imaginal form of consciousness alteration is different from a state that is more closely associated with amnesia and a sense of loss of control.

The hypnosis and shamanic literatures support the notion of at least two distinguishable forms of consciousness alteration. Whether a specific culture favors a magical flight or a possession type of practice depends on the cognitive style that the culture values, rather than on an undifferentiated state that is shaped arbitrarily.

2. Shamanism and hypnosis: Not everyone is created equal

In traditional societies, shamans are a distinct minority of people deemed to be gifted at mastering alterations of consciousness, and who typically undergo specialized training. In a similar way, a very high ability to respond to hypnotic suggestions is only manifested in a small minority of Western individuals (HILGARD 1986). In this section I will focus on very highly hypnotizable individuals, or hypnotic "virtuosos". As PEKALA (1991), among others, has pointed out, when studying hypnosis or other alterations of consciousness, one has to consider personal traits, particular states and the social context. In other words, only predisposed individuals such as hypnotic virtuosos or shamanic practitioners will manifest particular experiences and behaviors in a particular context.

When discussing a trait, it is not uncommon to cite an index of heritability, that is, how much of the variation in that trait is attributable to genetic influences. There is no study in the

shamanic literature on how much of the ability to alter and control one's consciousness is genetically determined, although it is not uncommon to find lineages of shamans. How much of this variation is attributable to genetic and how much to environmental influences cannot be disentangled other than with the kind of records and controls that cannot be easily obtained in a field setting.

In the research setting, we find the conditions that allow the study of this issue. Hypnotizability, the related trait of "absorption" (the ability to fully deploy one's mental resources) and cortical activity related to states of consciousness all show significant heritability (BUCHSBAUM & GERSHON 1980; MORGAN 1973; TELLEGEN ET AL. 1988). Although the authors did not study the heritability of these traits in other cultures, there is no reason to suppose that they are just applicable to the North American population. The results suggest at least one criterion for the selection of a shaman, an inherited disposition to have unusual and vivid experiences. To be manifested, this disposition depends on environmental factors that allow for its appearance and development (cf. BRAUN 1993).

Some years ago J. HILGARD (1979) found two significant developmental paths to high hypnotizability: intense imaginative involvement and early punishment. The first one involves the cultivation of imaginal and creative activities, including "imaginary companions"; the second one was the surprising finding that reports of early punishment were a significant predictor of hypnotizability. Recently there has been growing evidence that individuals reporting early trauma are overrepresented among dissociative disorders, who also show high hypnotizability (SPIEGEL & CARDEÑA 1991).

A recent evaluation by CARLSON & PUTNAM (1989) of J. HILGARD's model of two pathways to hypnotizability found support for it. These authors also proposed that the difference between the two paths may be that individuals who develop high hypnotizability following punishment or trauma are not as likely to control the induction and deinduction of hypnotic-type events as individuals whose development only included the fostering of imaginative abilities. Of course, some individuals may be exposed to both imagery cultivation and exposure to traumatic events. It is worth mentioning that exposure to traumatic events is not a sufficient condition to manifest dissociative or hypnotic abilities, otherwise whole populations in disaster areas would be high dissociators and hypnotic virtuosos. A more likely explanation is that there is an interaction between a propensity to dissociate and frequent and intense trauma. A recent study by EISEN and collaborators (1994) found that individuals who reported having been abused repeatedly manifested higher hypnotizability than those claiming only an isolated instance of abuse or no abuse.

There is no equivalent database on the developmental history of shamans, but there is nonetheless a close parallel to the finding of J. Hilgard that hypnotic virtuosos frequently engage in dramatic and artistic activities. Ethnographies and life studies of shamans frequently mention the imaginative and dramatic presentation of shamanic practices, both in magical flight and possession type of practices (e.g., CARDEÑA 1987; HALIFAX 1980; HITCHCOCK 1973-74). Classical shamanic instruction involves the cultivation of imagery (NOLL 1985), and spirit possession can be analyzed as a dramatic representation (MÉTRAUX 1955). Conversely, a number of authors have written on the shamanic characteristics of various traditional and contemporary artistic manifestations (CARDEÑA 1989; LEVY 1988; TUCKER 1992).

The case for "traumatic" antecedents in the development of a shaman is not as robust although there are frequent references to personal "crises" preceding shamanic initiation, and to the belief that shamans have become healers because they were able to heal themselves (e.g., HALIFAX 1982). It is not clear, however, that these personal crises precede all shamanic initiations or that they are equivalent to the early traumas reported in the hypnosis and clinical literatures. With regards to spirit possession, there have been studies linking it to chronic severe stress or trauma, particularly among women of the underprivileged classes (cf. BODDY 1989; LEWIS 1975). There is no evidence, however, that trauma or chronic distress are necessary or

sufficient conditions for possession experiences, particularly among the traditional experts who can control and organize these experiences. We should also be careful not to assume that distressful or traumatic events are necessarily negative or that dissociative abilities necessarily represent an effort to "escape" a terrible situation. Trauma has the potential to effect positive transformations of the self (LIFTON 1993), and grief or sadness can bring about a deepening of experience about the human condition (JAMISON 1993) and a greater sense of connectedness with life (ABERBACH 1987).

The literature reviewed consistently suggests that the cultivation of imaginal experiences and a history of distress, in interaction with a biological disposition to alter consciousness, are two main paths to the development of hypnotic and shamanic abilities.

3. Phenomenological resemblance between deep hypnosis and shamanism

With respect to the imaginal shamanic experience, hypnosis researchers have documented significant, although usually modest, correlations between hypnotizability and the related constructs of absorption, imaginative involvement and fantasy proneness (KIRSCH & COUNCIL 1992). The generally mild relationship between absorption and hypnotizability, however, is actually much stronger when only high hypnotizable individuals are considered, suggesting that absorption is an important factor for high, but not low, hypnotizables (BALTHAZARD & WOODY 1992). The constructs reviewed, absorption, imaginative involvement and fantasy proneness, all involve the capacity to have realistic and intense "internal" experiences. By definition, the "soul journey" involves a compelling and vivid subjective experience. A difference, of course, is that the experiences that the secular perspective interpret as internal and individual, shamanic traditions consider interactions with an independently existing spiritual reality.

With respect to mediumship, the hypnotic literature also has some interesting parallels. A group of highly hypnotizable individuals tend to report amnesia and lack of vivid imagination (see above); there is a positive but modest correlation between dissociation and hypnotizability (KIRSCH & COUNCIL 1992); and dissociative symptomatology is positively correlated with hypnotizability (SPIEGEL & CARDEÑA 1990). While this is not the place to consider the complexity of the concept of dissociation, suffice it to say that its measures include items dealing with spontaneous amnesia and depersonalization (CARDEÑA 1994). The studies just mentioned thus suggest that a subgroup of highly hypnotizable individuals may present with characteristics such as amnesia and changes in identity similar to those found in possession/mediumship experiences. Of course, in the case of a possession/medium expert, the alteration in consciousness involves a control and organization that is lacking among psychiatric patients.

The previous section reviewed psychological traits related to hypnosis. The following section concentrates on studies of the specific contents of consciousness in hypnosis and shamanism. The cross-cultural phenomenology of the "soul journey" experience is quite consistent. While cultures and even practitioners within the same culture differ in forms of induction and the belief system underlying shamanic experience, scholars have found a great similarity in the reports obtained from different cultures (ELIADE 1964; HALIFAX 1980, 1982; HARNER 1982; WALSH 1990; WINKELMAN 1992). Following an induction to enter into another reality, or go into an altered state if you prefer the Western lingo, a "soul journey" may involve some or all of the following: 1) the experience of the phenomenal self as flying (thus the term of "soul journey" or "magical flight" and the feathers so commonly associated with Eurasian and other traditional shamanic cultures), 2) the sensation of falling down through a tunnel or some other opening in the earth (particularly if the journey is to the "lower world"), 3) arrival to a different world (upper or lower) or level of reality, that is experienced as "real" as consensual reality and where

a number of imaginal adventures and interactions occur, 4) encounter with a number of "allies" or spiritual entities, all of which seem to manifest independently of the willed control of the shaman, 5) recollection of the event. Other frequent events include experiencing oneself as dying or becoming a skeleton and, in some accounts, passing through rainbows to a luminous "Sun door" where the shaman may experience freedom from the heavy burdens of historical and spatial constraints. This list does not imply that every shaman necessarily experiences all of these events.

A possession experience, as mentioned before, does not usually involve much imagery, but rather a sense of dizziness, alterations in body image and a not infrequent experience of weight or pressure on the shoulders or neck, frequently explained as being "mounted" by a spirit. Practitioners typically remark losing self-awareness and not having a recollection of the events transpiring while the spiritual entity replaces their personality (CARDEÑA 1989, 1991).

Older research on hypnotic phenomenology with a standard procedure consistently found experiential reports of lack of reflective awareness, enhanced suggestibility, and a sense of being in a different state of consciousness (e.g., AS & OSTVOLD 1968; EVANS 1963; FIELD & PALMER 1969). This is not surprising since hypnotic procedures specifically foster a non-reflective form of awareness that is closely associated with increased suggestibility (CARDEÑA & SPIEGEL 1991). The more recent work of PEKALA (1991b) has confirmed that highly hypnotizable individuals in a hypnotic context report alterations in various systems of consciousness, although he did not specifically study the content of those alterations.

TART (1970) devised a hypnotic procedure geared to provide information about the contents of consciousness of hypnotic virtuosos during hypnotic state(s) of consciousness, while minimizing the effect of specific suggestions. In a study conducted some years ago, I followed the general outlines of this procedure. With a group of twelve hypnotic *virtuosos* without serious psychological impairment, I used a neutral induction that consisted in counting from 1-30 and a request for participants to go into as deep a state of hypnosis as they could. What constitutes "very deep hypnosis" was purposefully left undefined and every attempt was made to minimize indirect suggestions and to evaluate the role of expectations. The participants were undergraduate students not involved in any type of alternative religion or practice and without previous knowledge of shamanism. Data was collected in 1987, before much of the recent media attention to shamanism. During the session I queried the participants on their experience about every five minutes, and the basic ("what are you experiencing") and follow-up questions were free of suggestions. They were also given standardized measures to assess their states of consciousness (PEKALA's PCI and an ad-hoc questionnaire). Sessions were conducted under three physical conditions: lying down, pedaling a stationary bike, or having a motor do the pedaling. Sessions occurred in a dark, silent room.

In comparison with a no-hypnosis condition in which participants were in the same physical conditions and setting but were asked not to go into hypnosis, they reported significant differences in most of the dimensions assessed: sense of being in an altered state, altered experience, increased imagery and direction of attention, decreased self-awareness, memory, attention, etc. During a light level of hypnosis, the predominant experience was of changes in the experience of the body, including the sensation of body parts becoming increasingly larger or losing awareness of the lower limbs. The initial alterations of the body image, followed by the establishment of an imaginal experience, are consistent with TART's (1975) proposal of a general cognitive reorganization when transitioning from one state of consciousness to another, also present in the transitions between sleep stage and being awake.

Almost in every session there was a mention of floating or flying sensations (e.g., "I seem to be flying through the sky", "just floating on the sky but I'm much more free"). Vivid sensations of sinking, falling down (e.g., "just falling, kind of expecting to ... hit bottom") or going through tunnels were also commonly reported.

After the initial stage, all participants experienced being a phenomenal self separate from their physical bodies. These phenomenal bodies could nonetheless be associated with various sensations (e.g., "my body is being twisted", "I feel pain in my joints ... as a skeleton"). Conversely, the process of coming out of hypnosis, which occurred spontaneously or was initiated by the experients themselves, involved a regaining of awareness of usual body sensations. In post-session interviews, participants stated that they had intentionally used their attention to retain and deepen their hypnotic state, a process that we can assume that shamans also engage in.

During hypnosis, a focus on physical sensations was typically replaced by vivid imaginal reports of journeys to unusual worlds (e.g., being in a dark world, encountering a limitless sea). These experiences did not include rehearsals of previous everyday events or anticipation of realistic interactions.

At deeper levels of hypnosis, participants reported synesthesia, hearing beautiful music and seeing a plethora of colors (e.g., "I found my kaleidoscope"). In some cases, experients had transcendental experiences such as being in a timeless/spaceless realm ("there is not time and space here, just being"). Even more striking were reports by every experient of seeing a very bright light or, in some cases becoming one with it (e.g., "there's a bright light. I'm in it"). Such events involved intense positive emotions (e.g., "all the good feelings", "this is the best place to be"). There were some reports of absolute blackness and mental quiet, enormous peace, and a sense of being one with everything. At follow-ups immediately after completing the project and at four months, every experient reported positive effects from the experiment, from mild ones such as better concentration, to a sense of profound contact with the self. Other projects using the same method have also described transcendence and many of the phenomena just reported (FELDMAN 1976; HILGARD 1986; SHERMAN 1971; TART 1970).

PETERS & PRICE-WILLIAMS (1983) remarked that shamanic "trance" serves as a threshold for transcendent experience, which seems also to be the case for a number of hypnotic *virtuosos*. We should not expect that hypnosis experiments are the only place where these experiences can happen, so it is not surprising that some hypnotic virtuosos report spontaneous occurrences of paranormal and mystical-type experiences (PEKALA, KUMAR & CUMMINGS 1992).

To evaluate the role of expectation, I asked participants for their prediction of what the "deepest" hypnotic state would be like. These predictions were typically vague or sometimes assumed a loss of control or memory that never happened.

Although the three physical conditions during hypnosis were more similar than not, showing that deep hypnotic experiences do not depend on relaxation, the few significant differences found were consistent with the two types of shamanic experiences described before. As compared with effortful motor activity (i.e., pedaling a stationary bike), lying down was associated with more changes in body image, particularly the sensation of detaching from the body. The "soul journey" experience is commonly associated with either immobility or with less intense movements than those found in possession rituals. The other interesting result was that there was significantly less awareness when a motor was doing the pedaling, an analog of the rhythmic repetitive movements found in many possession rituals, than during quiescence.

Even devoid of the cultural frameworks of traditional societies, the experience of these hypnotic virtuosos shares many similarities with that of classical shamans. In both, unawareness of the physical body and a sense of floating or flying is present; in both, events in imaginal worlds are pregnant with vividness and meaning and may culminate in transcendent events. Other similarities include a bright light, memory of the experience and a careful deployment of attention to "internal" events. Lastly, in the physical condition that was most similar to the physical rhythmic activity associated with spirit possession, there was the least self awareness although no participant actually became amnesic.

Most of these events are not exclusive to shamanism or hypnosis, but can be found in other alterations of consciousness. An experience of a bright light is frequently reported in so called "near-death-experiences", kaleidoscopic and tunnel imagery are reported during the hypnagogic state and hallucinogenic drug ingestion, and so on.

All of this evidence strongly suggests that the alterations in consciousness found in shamanism and deep hypnosis are likely the product of innate biological/cognitive dispositions rather than the mere byproduct of a particular culture.

4. Differences between hypnosis and shamanism

While I have concentrated on the similarities between deep hypnosis and shamanism so far, there are also telling differences between these contexts. For instance, whereas tales of shamanic adventures typically involve animals and plants, my urban students did not mention either in any meaningful way. This difference probably reflects the ecological differences between the hunting-gathering culture of shamanism, and the intellectual-technological culture of my sample. The importance given to plants in shamanism also reflects the frequent, although not universal, use of hallucinogens, obviously absent in the hypnosis study.

Another difference is that whereas shamanic traditions have shared cultural interpretations and even "cartographies" for these experiences, my participants did not have a framework for their experience other than the vague notion of being in an undefined state of deep hypnosis. A more overarching difference is the lack of cultural acknowledgment and validation of the experiences manifested during hypnosis. Particularly after a very vivid and unusual experience, it was not uncommon that an experient would ask me whether s/he was going "crazy", an obvious reflection of the lack of information about these events even among bright and interested undergraduates. Although the shamanic "call" is by no means necessarily a welcomed or desired event, the ethnoepistemology of many traditional cultures accommodates transcendent experience by providing:

1) a mythology and epistemology that validates those events, 2) experts with which a person having received the call can apprentice, and 3) a meaningful role (medium, classical shaman) that the person can adopt.

Probably the closest that our society comes to fulfilling these needs is by providing a niche, however precarious, for the artist. The artist in our society is allowed, to a degree, to explore his/her "internal" life and be the guide to unknown territories; or, as the French poet Rimbaud states it, the artist becomes a seer by a purposeful derangement of the senses. Although it is common to propose that the contemporary physicians/therapists are the successors of the shaman, there is an important distinction between the two: only the latter actively and purposefully goes into alternate states. This difference between the two types of practitioners can be expected to have an implication in clinical practice.

5. Clinical implications and conclusions

There is no current diagnosis in psychology or psychiatry for experiential undernourishment or inhibited potentials. Some hypnotic *virtuosos* experience their consciousness alterations as deeply meaningful events, although they do not get opportunities to share them or explore them within mainstream cultural practices.

At best, we can assume that their capacity to have existentially profound experiences will remain underdeveloped. At worst, their inhibited or undisciplined potentials may bring about distress and impairment. Descriptions from other cultures show that individuals with an uncon-

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trolled propensity to experience an alternate state, possession for instance, may suffer until they find the guidance of an expert (e.g., STOLLER 1989). In our culture, there is some evidence that maybe up to about 1/5 of individuals show significant psychopathology associated to their intense "fantasy proneness" and ability to undergo hypnotic experiences (cf. CARDEÑA 1992; LYNN 1994). Recently, the diagnosis of "trance dissociative disorder" was proposed for these individuals. While that diagnosis did not become part of the DSM-IV (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 1994; CARDEÑA 1992), it was included in the appendix for further consideration.

Regardless of the final outcome of this proposal, most clinicians need to become much more sensitive to the innate ability of some individuals to have extraordinary alterations of consciousness, and to their inherent potentials and liabilities. At times, it seems that the "mainstream" automatically considers these experiences as pathological, whereas the "fringe" automatically assumes that any kind of experience has consensual validity or utility just because it was intensely felt. The British anti-psychiatrist Laing wrote passionately about how our society has greatly reduced the scope of human experience that is not considered pathological. The parallels between shamanic and hypnotic phenomenology show these experiences to be neither abnormal or idiosyncratic, but inherently human.

We should pay greater attention and respect to these extraordinary experiences, and study their potential advantages, liabilities, and optimal development. We still have much to learn from those societies that have provided good instructors for flights into extraordinary realms.

6. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Ein Vergleich zwischen hypnotischen und schamanischen Phänomenen

Der Vergleich zwischen Hypnose und Schamanismus erscheint uns als gerechtfertigt, wenn man davon ausgeht, daß die direkte Erfahrung, – auch wenn letztere kulturellen Einflüssen durchaus zugänglich ist – durch inhärente biologische und kognitive Fähigkeiten geformt wird.

Neuere Ergebnisse der Hypnoseforschung legen nahe, daß es zwei Typen von hochhypnotisierbaren Individuen gibt: Der eine ist durch eine lebhaftere Vorstellungsfähigkeit charakterisiert, der andere fällt durch das Fehlen von Vorstellungskraft sowie durch eine verminderte Gedächtnis- und Kontrollfähigkeit auf.

Diese Unterscheidung entspricht in etwa der Trennung zwischen „Seelenreise“ und „Geistesbesessenheit“, auch wenn sich gelegentlich beide Kategorien stark überlappen.

Hypnotische „Virtuosen“ und Schamanen/Medien haben viele gemeinsame Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten.

Die Phänomenologie der schamanischen Erfahrung und der tiefen Hypnose zeigt etliche erstaunliche Parallelen. Es reicht vom Gefühl des Fliegens bis hin zum Erleben der Transzendenz. Nebenbei bemerkt: Entspannung und Unbeweglichkeit sind sicher keine notwendigen Voraussetzungen für den hypnotischen Zustand.

Ein wichtiger Unterschied zwischen der schamanischen Erfahrung und der tiefen hypnotischen Trance besteht sicher darin, daß die Schamanen und Medien eine kulturelle Unterstützung und Validierung ihrer Erlebnisse erfahren, während es für den modernen Menschen wenig Möglichkeiten gibt, veränderte Bewußtseinszustände sozial zu kanalisieren bzw. zu organisieren.

Somit besteht für den modernen Menschen die Gefahr, durch intensive bewußtseinsverändernde Erlebnisse seine Anpassungsfähigkeit eher abzuschwächen als zu fördern.

Unsere Kultur generell, aber ganz besonders die klinischen Psychologen und Psychiater sollten sich viel mehr als bisher mit diesem unüblichen, transpersonalen Erfahrungsbereich befassen. Dabei können sie viel lernen von solchen Gesellschaften, in denen die schamanischen Traditionen noch lebendig sind.

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