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ALTERED STATES AND REVITALIZATION AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN

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For the past two years I have attended, as a participant observer, numerous circles, classes, and other meetings of a women's religious movement in Boulder, Colorado. This movement is part of the larger neopagan and metaphysical traditions that are currently rather popular. It goes by the various names of women's spirituality, Dianic wicca, feminist witchcraft, and others, but I choose to call it the goddess movement. The several women's groups with which I have had contact differ in ritual emphasis and belief system, but the common denominator is the frequent use of goddess symbolism. Goddess forms from several cultural traditions -- mostly pre-Christian Europe, the ancient Middle East, and Egypt -- are invoked as Jungian archetypes and symbols of mental, psychological, and emotional processes. The rituals draw on older ceremonial forms from the same traditions as well as each woman's experimentation.

Individuality is stressed and ecstatic states are sought by some, as in shamanic traditions. There is a belief in magic, defined as the power to make things happen by willing them to come to pass while performing the proper ritual procedures. This belief is rationalized by these otherwise fairly well-educated women (one third of whom have postgraduate degrees) as the "power of positive thinking." Rituals are thought to open up and involve the unconscious mind, the "powerhouse of magic," hence strengthening the effect.

The participants in this movement often experience shifts of consciousness or altered states during their rituals, both alone and in a group setting. I interviewed eighteen initiated priestesses about this aspect and received remarkably uniform descriptions similar to those of trance or altered states reported elsewhere (Ludwig 1966; Winkelman 1986). They described feelings of changing body boundaries, of being outside their bodies, heightened perceptions, increased sensitivity to light and sound, a sense of being more in tune with or identified with objects or people in the surroundings, and unity with the others in the ritual circle. They also describe sensations of flying or floating, visions, pulsating energy flowing through their bodies, and an altered time sense. Several women described the sensations as like a waking sleep, which is interesting, considering the involvement of parasympathetic dominance in both sleep and trance states (Lex 1979; Winkelman 1986). Emotional states such as euphoria or ecstasy were also frequently described as part of the altered state. This is congruent with the hypothesis that transcendent states are associated with activity originating in the hippocampal-septal area, which includes the center of emotions (Mandel 1980).

The primary technique used to elicit these altered states is some form of auditory driving, especially

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chanting, but occasionally drumming or the playing of other percussion instruments (finger cymbals, tambourines, spoons, etc.). Other methods less frequently reported are meditation exercises, deep breathing, low lights, fire-gazing, hot tubs, alcohol, and other drugs. Most of these have been determined elsewhere to produce a state of parasympathetic dominance during which the frontal cortex is driven by slow waves originating in the hippocampal-septal region (Winkelman, 1986).

The informants described feelings of peace, contentment, happiness, a more positive outlook, as well as energy, empowerment, and a new perspective on their problems after experiencing these altered states. Fifteen of the eighteen women (83.3%) considered these states to be necessary for a ritual to be effective. It appears that participation in this movement does provide some sense of revitalization.

The goddess is interesting in that she may be a role model or important symbol for reconciling the dual roles plaguing so many modern women: those of wife/mother/household manager (traditionally feminine expectations) and professional/working woman (with traditionally masculine prerequisites). According to Moulton (1981) this conflict is a source of severe anxiety. The goddess may serve to resolve this conflict. When I asked participants what the goddess symbolizes for them, the majority responses were of two main types. The most frequent response was that she is the great mother, life force of the universe, creatrix, essence of life, nature, natural cycles, the female energy of the universe, love, beauty, motherhood personified, and thus she is highly identified with traditional female roles. But almost as frequently she represents for these women attributes like wisdom, strength, power, courage, higher/wiser self, potential, growth, assertiveness, and control over one's own life, characteristics women have had to acquire for their new roles. Incidentally, 46% of these women reported that they had been raised to expect marriage and motherhood as primary goals as opposed to only 22% of women who chose not to become involved in the goddess movement. This suggests that women who have more traditional expectations of their adult roles are more drawn to this belief system.

During my period of involvement I saw numerous women investigate the movement and then either choose to join or drop out. I was interested in why some found the movement appealing and others did not. If, as the argument goes, revitalization movements are the result of relative deprivation (Aberle 1966) or cultural stress (Wallace 1966), why don't all individuals experiencing that deprivation or stress join the movement? It is certainly true that many women today are relatively deprived, economically

and in other ways, and that they are undergoing severe stress due to changing roles and expectations (Moulton 1981). The women investigating the goddess movement probably fit this pattern or they would not be searching for a new belief system. Why does the movement appeal to some more than others?

I had access to class lists for a course called "Women's Magic" taught numerous times between 1982 and 1985. This was an introduction to the principles of the movement, and many women went on to participate regularly in circles, etc., while many others were never heard from again. I contacted as many as I could -- about 130 women -- and sent them a four page questionnaire, of which 78 were returned. After discarding those who were difficult to assign, I was left with a sample of 69 women, 46 of whom were clearly involved with the movement, and 23 who clearly were not. Some interesting differences emerged.

There were no significant differences between the two groups in income level, socioeconomic status, previous religious affiliation, popularity, educational level, or amount of stress. This belies the idea that joiners are somehow "non-mainstream" types. This may be true of men who are attracted to neopagan groups (but this is based only on my own vague impression after contact with some mixed groups), but it doesn't appear to apply in this case.

There were two highly significant differences, one of which suggests why some individuals are more likely than others to join religious movements in general, and another difference which suggests why one movement may appeal more than another.

The first difference was in intensity of religious upbringing. When asked if her family had been very religious, fully 63% of the involved women replied yes or that her mother had been, while only 22% of the uninvolved sample gave the same answers. This highly significant difference suggests that an individual who is accustomed to having religion central in her life (that is, as an important coping mechanism) will be more likely to join a new movement.

The second difference suggests why people choose a particular movement especially in contemporary society where the range of choice is great. The seeker will probably select one that has symbolism and meaning most consonant with the life she wishes to lead. That is, as Geertz (1966) has suggested, religious behavior and beliefs function to provide meaning; religion gives the individual models of and for reality whereby she may find the moods and motivations that make life more attractive, or at

This issue we have two interesting papers on similar topics: magical practices among modern, educated Western professionals. Both papers were given at the 1985 American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings last December. The first paper by Linda Van Blerkom charts her research into altered states among American women involved in the "Goddess Movement." In the second paper Tanya Luhrmann takes a different perspective in her study of magical practices in England and the claims which magical practitioners make concerning the efficaciousness of their magical acts. She argues that magical practices operate under conditions similar to those involved in play. I might add to her comments that such conditions separate the practitioner from the ordinary world, allowing a suspension of disbelief and a psychodynamic situation of total belief that a paranormal belief can occur. This is, of course, one of Batcheldor's principles for the induction of paranormal events. Luhrmann also implies that the healings which occur following some healing rituals are coincidental events. Such normally occurring healings can provide yet another of Batcheldor's conditions: artifact induction.

Next issue we will have a paper given at the last AASC annual meetings on multiple personality disorders.

AASC News

Enclosed with this issue are the forms for the 1987 Annual AASC Meetings to be held March 5-8 at Pacific Palisades, California. All members and interested parties are urged to submit paper proposals and to pre-register for the conference and overnight accommodations by October 10, 1986.

Conferences

The American Society of Dowsers (ASD) will hold its 26th Annual Meeting, September 17-21, 1986, in Danville, Vermont. The meetings feature talks and demonstrations on all aspects of dowsing by nationally known dowsers. Preceding the meetings will be a two day "Dowsing School," September 16 & 17, at which novices can learn the basics of dowsing. For more information, contact:

The American Society of Dowsers, Inc.
Danville, Vermont 05828-0024

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The apparent irrationality of magic is an anthropological classic. There have been two genres in the literature on the topic: 'intellectualists' argue that these actions and statements are attempts to explain and influence physical reality, and 'symbolists' assert that these actions and statements are best understood as performances, often with an expressive or aesthetic content.¹ Magic interprets, like science, or magic expresses, like art. Contemporary English magicians illustrate the way in which these apparently separate functions are intertwined in maintaining a system of belief. I use the analogy of play to understand more precisely the sort of ambiguity on which magic can depend.

In England, perhaps 2,000 people, some of them highly educated, seem to believe in claims of magical efficacy. There are, roughly, three types of magic practiced in organized groups: the Western Mysteries, ad hoc ritual magic, and witchcraft. Most groups contain equal numbers of men and women and most of them are middle class -- computer analysts, businessmen, civil servants. They are scattered throughout the country but they are concentrated in London. In 1983, I moved there for eighteen months of intensive fieldwork in which I became involved in a range of these groups as a participant observer.

Their magic involves intellectual, pseudo-scientific claims, by which is meant the theory of magical efficacy and the description which that theory gives of physical reality. The theory of magic is that mind can affect matter, that the concentrated imagination may alter events and influence people. The practitioners assume that the world is an organic unity and that it is pervaded by forces of which science is ignorant. Magic is a descriptive theory of reality and provides an account of how that reality may be affected. To one who knows the techniques, and who knows the nature of the organic interdependency, a mental image may have physical effects. These magicians perform rituals in which they use their imagination supposedly to achieve particular goals which differ according to the type of magical group.

The Western Mysteries-type magic is roughly modeled on Freemasonry and tends to be conservative, hierarchical, and often Christian. Each group is led by one person generally described as an 'adept,' who is thought to control a channel to a non-physical 'contact.' Contacts are said to be wise, benevolent

beings who watch over human evolution. These groups tend to think of themselves as spiritual commandoes, as silent men and women who keep watch over humanity from behind closed doors. With these groups I have performed rituals whose aim was to unite a native Celtic spirituality with Christianity, to instill the spirit of truth into a troubled Whitehall, and to redeem the earth. The goals are vague and morally lofty.

Then there is a more casual, ad hoc ritual magic. These groups may describe themselves as 'Aquarian' or 'New Age' and they tend to be politically left-wing and socially countercultural. Because they are usually newly formed through the energetic work of one or two people, such groups often consider themselves to be in 'training,' and they tend to perform rituals to see if they can influence the subtle forces described by magical theory. With these groups I have performed rituals about the different planets. The object was to see whether, if we did a ritual about Mars, the aggressive, bellicose influence of Mars would appear in our lives. Vague goals, but not morally lofty. These groups also sometimes performed rituals with quite specific goals, such as to provide the ritualist with a better apartment.

The third category is witchcraft. These are small groups or 'covens' of women or men. Witches describe themselves as practicing an ancient, pre-Christian fertility religion which worships the earth personified as the goddess. They are sometimes politically radical -- particularly feminists who describe themselves as practicing a women's spirituality -- but they can be quiet conservative, and they seem to come from a great range of the socioeconomic spectrum. On the traditional, Frazerian festivals, covens theatrically enact the seasonal change: the return of the light after winter, the death of the year in the fall. They also cast spells which are rituals with particular intentions: to cure Tom's cold, to find Susan a better job, to relieve William's wife's insomnia. Goals, then, are specific and practical.

Magicians -- all three types -- are making pseudo-scientific claims about the physical impact of ritual action. It is important to them that their claims be confirmed, and they use the words 'hypothesis' and 'test' to emphasize the science-like nature of the enterprise. Their intellectual strategies are not startling. The criteria for success are loose. Most rituals have very broad goals; specific goals are often aimed at curing, where inevitably there is a certain success rate. But most magicians identify powerful ritual by 'lateral' effects, apparent consequences not related to the goal but to the symbolism of the rite. If you perform a ritual with imagery about water, you expect water -- as tears, rain, or even burst pipes --

to appear in your life in the subsequent weeks. Most rituals have scope for some confirmation of this nature. If failure is identified, it is explained by the difficulty of the goal and the limitations of the magician. Magic is said to work coincidences, not miracles, to engineer events which others label luck, and to work in situations of flux and not fixity. If the material world is too stubborn the magical effort will fail. And there must be some failure, for the possibility of apparent falsification supports the image of magic as a set of science-like hypotheses. But falsification would not challenge magical efficacy as a general principle; it would reveal that a particular magician, image, or technique was not effective.

Magicians take two other interesting, less obvious strategies to confirm their claims, and these strategies lead them to waver between understanding specific intellectual claims as literal or as metaphorical. The first is that magicians use experiential response to confirm their magical claims, and -- related to the first -- they separate their magic from an ordinary world.

To elaborate. Magicians allow feelings and responses to ritual action to confirm the efficacy and existence of magical forces. They demand a lengthy training in symbolism which specifically involves techniques of meditation and visualization, techniques found in many religions, which alter states of awareness, and they use these techniques to develop a visual symbolism which is presented with explicit experiential criteria. Certain visual symbols, used in particular ritual conditions, are said to be spiritual, dream-like, ineffable, and realistic. Under the intense stimulation of ritual conditions, magicians experience a range of emotional, spiritual, and physiological responses: buzzing sensations, a sense of union with the divine, an overwhelming desire to burst into tears. These purely experiential responses, which follow from the preparation for the practice, are used to confirm the efficacy of the rite. The magician may say that the spell will work because he 'feels' that power has been raised and appropriately directed.

Such confirmations make the specific reference of the magical claims vague and uncertain. They do so, firstly, because they confirm only the most general principles of magical theory. They are used to confirm only that magical power was present, not what it is, where it came from, and whether it has actually reached its particular destined goal. Secondly, the willingness to let experiential response indicate the presence of magical power tends to imply that magical theory is only a theoretical rationalization for a truth which cannot be rationally understood or articulated, but only felt. In order to give the wide range of responses legitimacy, the real nature of magical action is

said to be unknowable. The magician can assert that she 'knows' that magic is real because of her response and yet claim that any specific intellectual account to explain magical power must be partial. In fact the more convinced she is through her personal feelings, the more freedom she may take to question specific theories. Thus the very process of expanding the confirmatory base weakens the intellectual claims.

Simultaneously magical practice creates something like a separate 'context.' Magicians talk about different 'worlds' and different 'realities.' They go to considerable lengths to define whatever happens in ritual as distinct from the ordinary. They describe the time and space of the ritual as different. They remove their watches. They literally draw a circle around the ritualists as a 'boundary between the worlds,' and use setting, costume, and theatrical effect to present that other 'world.' By allowing confirmation to be experiential, magicians free themselves from the need to demonstrate direct pseudo-scientific efficacy but burden themselves with the need to make the experience vivid. Making it vivid involves demarcating the practice as special, and magicians then use the separateness to differentiate the intellectual claims of magic from those they see as science. Like many theologians they say that there need be no conflict: the claims are not the sort of claims that even could conflict.

The pseudo-scientific claims thus become ambiguous under the influence of these two strategies. Rather than simply acknowledging this ambiguity it is important to recognize it as a defining feature of the magical experience. In this sense the closest analogy to magical practice is in play, a serious, committed play. The parallel is not the card game, but the unstructured, 'let's pretend' child's play. For Huizinga (1950:13) the formal characteristics of play are "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life. . . . It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner." Bateson (1972) describes play as framed, paradoxical behavior because the play actions do not communicate what they would normally communicate (playing at fighting, for instance) because of the framing meta-communication, 'it's only play.'²

Play works well as an analogy for magical practice because the creation of a bounded context according to explicit rules and enacted for experiential satisfaction is the essence of a magical rite. In magic you step inside the circle and suddenly you're Merlin, in a world painstakingly differentiated to make it seem more vivid, and you evaluate the practice through the feelings and responses it evokes.

The analogy is useful because it clarifies the na-

ture of the ambiguity in the intellectual claims of magic. A pseudo-scientific claim of the instrumental efficacy of magical practice can be seen as one of the play rules. It is a game condition that witches cast spells that work. Performing efficacious magic is part of what it means to be a magician. Magic involves and encourages the imaginative fantasy in which the practitioner 'plays at' being a ritual magician or witch; the theatrical setting and dramatic invocations are directed at evoking precisely that sort of complete identification with what one imagines the magician to be. But the play-claim of being a powerful, efficacious magician is also a reality-claim, a pseudo-scientific assertion about the objective instrumental efficacy of magic within the physical world. The fact that the same assertion is both play-claim and reality-claim can allow magicians to waver between the literal and the metaphorical when casting a spell: literal, in that the spell is thought to do what it is said that it will do, and metaphorical, in that the spell is thought to do something else -- anagogic, psychotherapeutic, expressive, or creative -- by representing an inner state in figurative form. This grants ambiguity, an ambiguity quite important for the magician. The seriousness of the pseudo-scientific claim makes magical practice seem serious and important, yet the play-claim allows the magician to justify the magic on other grounds. It is a particularly modern strategy which echoes that of contemporary theologians but which may have relevance to the magics of other cultures. The analogy of play suggests particularly clearly the way magicians create a useful ambiguity through developing magical practice as a separate context defined by rules and evaluated through experience. This allows magicians to encompass skeptic and believer alike, and to function in a science-dominated world and in a world in which the magic fails.

FOOTNOTES

1. Skorupski (1976) analyzed the terms of the debate, and cast its polar extremes as Tylor (1871), Frazer (1922), and Horton (1967) on the one hand and (too quickly) Durkheim (1915) and Beattie (1970) on the other. Malinowski (1954, 1978) stressed the functional quality of magical actions in relieving anxiety. More recent emphases of the non-intellectual import of magical practice include Tambiah's (1973, 1979) discussion of the 'performative' nature of magic and ritual, Fernandez' (1982) discussion of metaphor, Lewis' (1980) account of the aesthetic quality of magical ritual acts, and Young's (1983) description of magical mythology in its autobiographical use.

2. Other theorists of play include psychologists like Winnicott (1971), Axline (1969), Vygotsky (1979), and Piaget (1951), to whom playing is a means of growth whose central feature is the ambi-

quity between personal subjectivity and the experience of objective reality. The precariousness of that boundary makes the play exciting, and Winnicott says that this is "the precariousness of magic itself" (1971:47).

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Publications

REVISION: JOURNAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHANGE, a major journal in consciousness studies, has become, with this year's Volume 8, the official publication and journal of the International Transpersonal Association. ITA's president, Cecil E. Burney, Stanislov Grof, and Huston Smith make up the new editorial board which replaces well-known transpersonal psychologist, Ken Wilbur, as editor-in-chief. For information and subscriptions, contact:

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Abstracts

Major Outcomes of Experimental Parapsychology in the Last Twenty years

A brief general review of where and how experimental parapsychology has functioned in the last two decades, followed by an introduction to three major lines of research and their outcome: ESP in dreams, ESP in the ganzfeld-induced state of relaxation, and human interaction with random-event generators. The general outcome is a substantial increase in the evidence that psi phenomena occur and are capable -- despite serious obstacles -- of experimental study.

IRVIN L. CHILD

Remote Viewing: An Applications Oriented perspective for Anthropology

Remote viewing, the ability to describe persons, places, or events, without recourse to either intellectual sources or direct sensory experience, has been the subject of 43 published studies in refereed journals. More than 50% of these studies report significance at the $p = .05$ or better level and, in aggregate, constitute a statistically significant body of data. While controversy will continue, history will decide, and the phenomenon is now so robust that it is possible to design specific applications oriented research whose protocols advance our understanding of the anomalies while, at the same time, they explore practical utilization.

STEPHAN A. SCHWARTZ

(Editor's note: The above two abstracts are from papers given at the AASC sponsored symposium, "A Summary of Data and Theories from Parapsychology Relevant to Psychological Anthropology," at the 1985 American Anthropological Association annual conference in Washington, D.C.)

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Continued from p. 2:

least tolerable. When asked in what time and place

she would most like to live, if she could choose, the women in the survey responded as follows:

	<u>Involved Women</u>	<u>Not Involved</u>
Would Like to Live in the Past	48%	9.5%
Content With the Here and Now	36%	67%

Women who became involved tend to fantasize more about the cultures and times from which many of their beliefs have been taken. The result, too, must be studied in closer detail, for it is possible that much of this difference is the result of rather than a predisposition for, joining the movement.

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