

Sacred Geography: The Power of Place

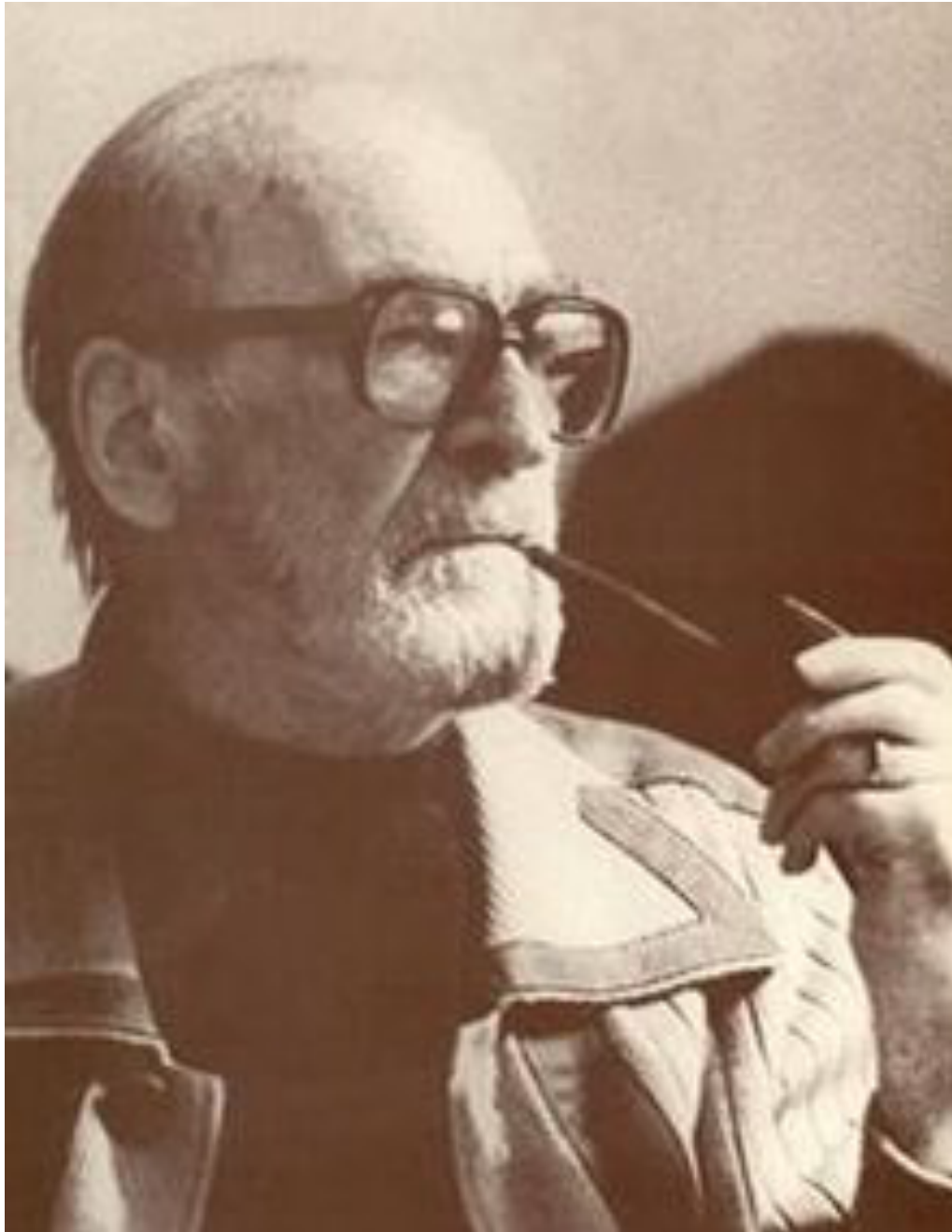


Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Canolfan Sophia
The Sophia Centre

Dr. Jack Hunter
(jack.hunter@uwtsd.ac.uk)

Eliade or Durkheim?



The sacred is 'out there.'



The sacred is socially constructed.

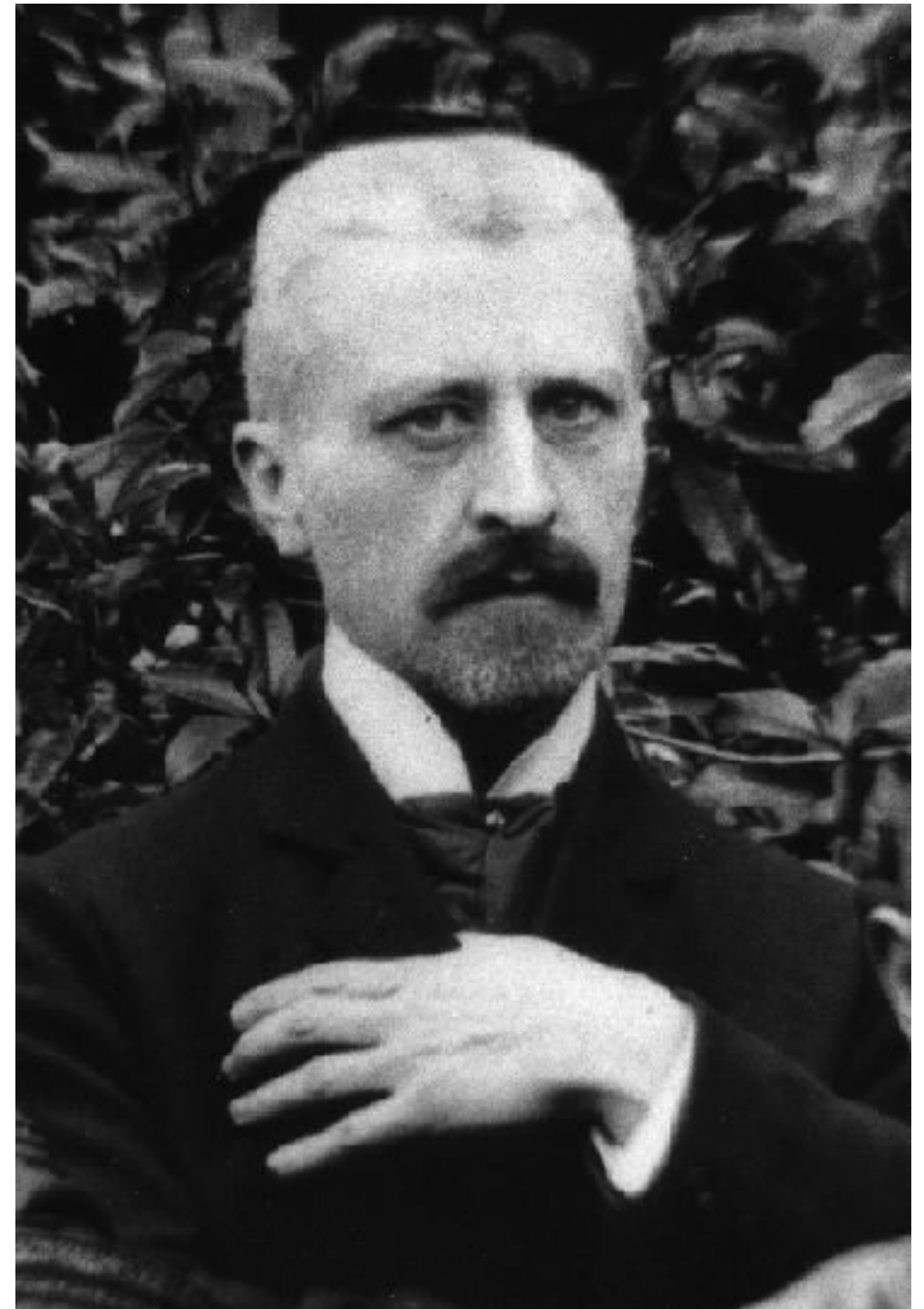
Hierophany

- A 'manifestation of the sacred.'
- The idea that there is something external, dwelling in the land, that we can encounter.
- It manifests through interaction.
- What is the nature of this interaction? What is the interaction with?
- In *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1996) Eliade also talks about Kratophany - 'an emanation of power.'



Haunted Places

- Rudolf Otto argued that there is distinct kind of feeling-response when we encounter the ‘wholly other’ - the numinous.
- The numinous arises when we interact with certain places.
- “...the implicit meaning may be rendered explicit. It is already the beginning of this explicative process...when a [person] says: ‘/t is not quite right here’; ‘/t is uncanny’...‘This place is haunted’...”
- “Here we have the obscure basis of meaning and idea rising into greater clarity and beginning to make itself explicit as the notion...of a transcendent Something, a real operative entity of a numinous kind, which later...assumes concrete form as a ‘*numen loci*,’ a daemon, an ‘El,’ a Baal, or the like”
(Otto, 1958, p. 126).
- The experience comes first, followed by the stories and further cultural elaboration (cf. Hufford, 1982).
- Hauntings are one of the “oldest problems in environmental psychology” - how people relate to and interpret their surroundings (Dagnall *et al.*, 2020).

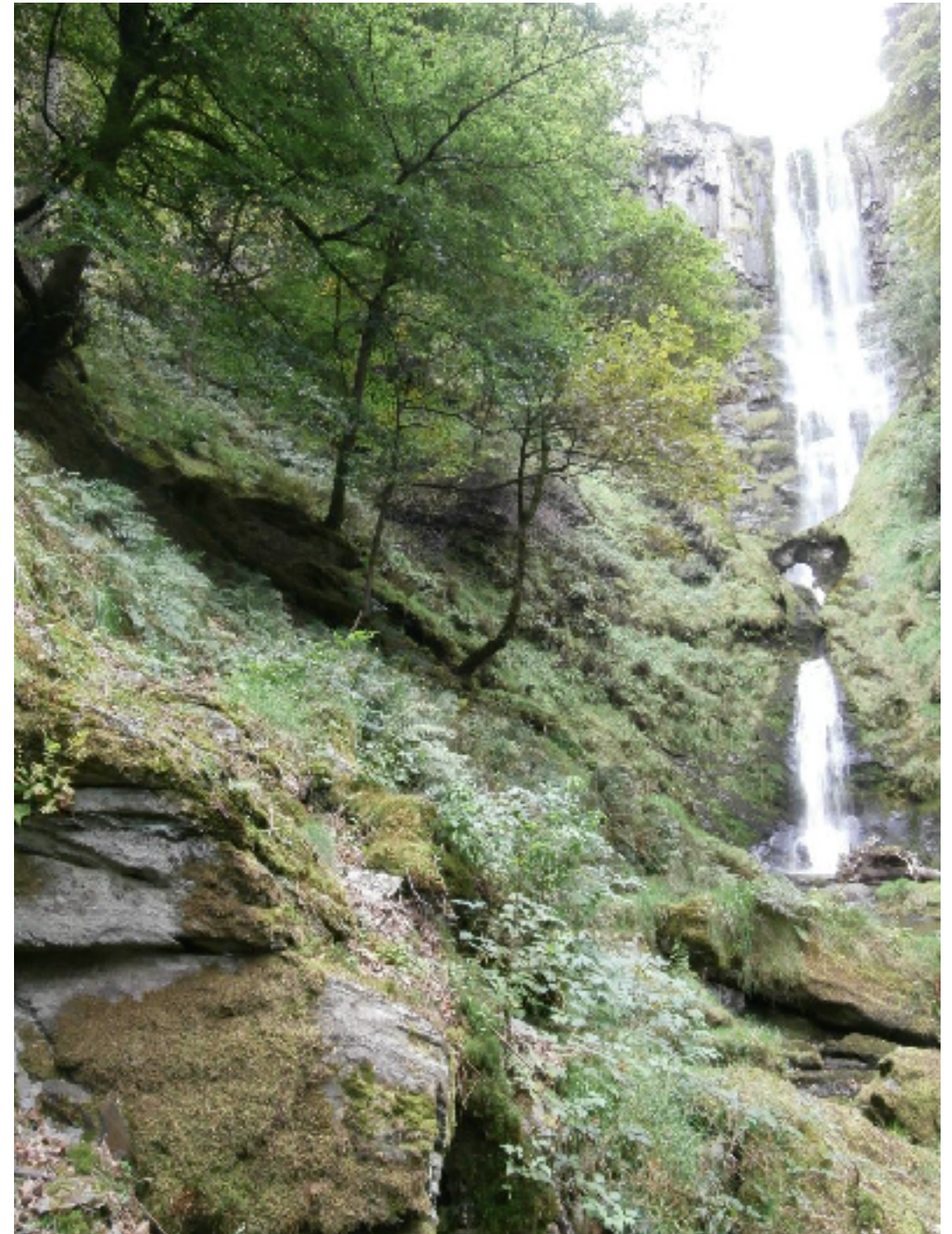


Phenomenology of Landscape

- “A landscape is a series of named locales, a set of relational places linked by paths, movements and narratives. It is a ‘natural’ topography perspectively linked the existential Being of the body in societal space.”

(Tiley, 1994, p. 34).

- We engage with the landscape through stories, and through our bodies.
- Sometimes bodily experiences (e.g. the feeling of the numinous) give rise to new stories, or reinforce old ones.



Pistyll Rhaeadr, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

Topos and Chora

- “...the Greeks had two terms for place, *topos* and *chora*. *Topos* signifies a simple location, the physical, observable features of a locale. *Chora*, however, refers to the more subtle aspects of place, those that can trigger memory, imagination, and mythic presence” (Devereux, Krippner, Tartz & Fish, 2016, p. 412).
- What are these subtle aspects of place? Forces? Spirits?
- How do they mediate between mind and place?



Pistyll Rhaeadr, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

Psycho-physiological Influences?

- Research of Michael Persinger (1945-2018) and colleagues.
- Investigating the effects of subtle stimulation of the temporal lobes with weak electromagnetism (cf. Persinger *et al.*, 2010).
- Can result in the participant experiencing visions, sense of presence, etc.
- Further research on the role of infrasound, radiation, etc. on human consciousness.



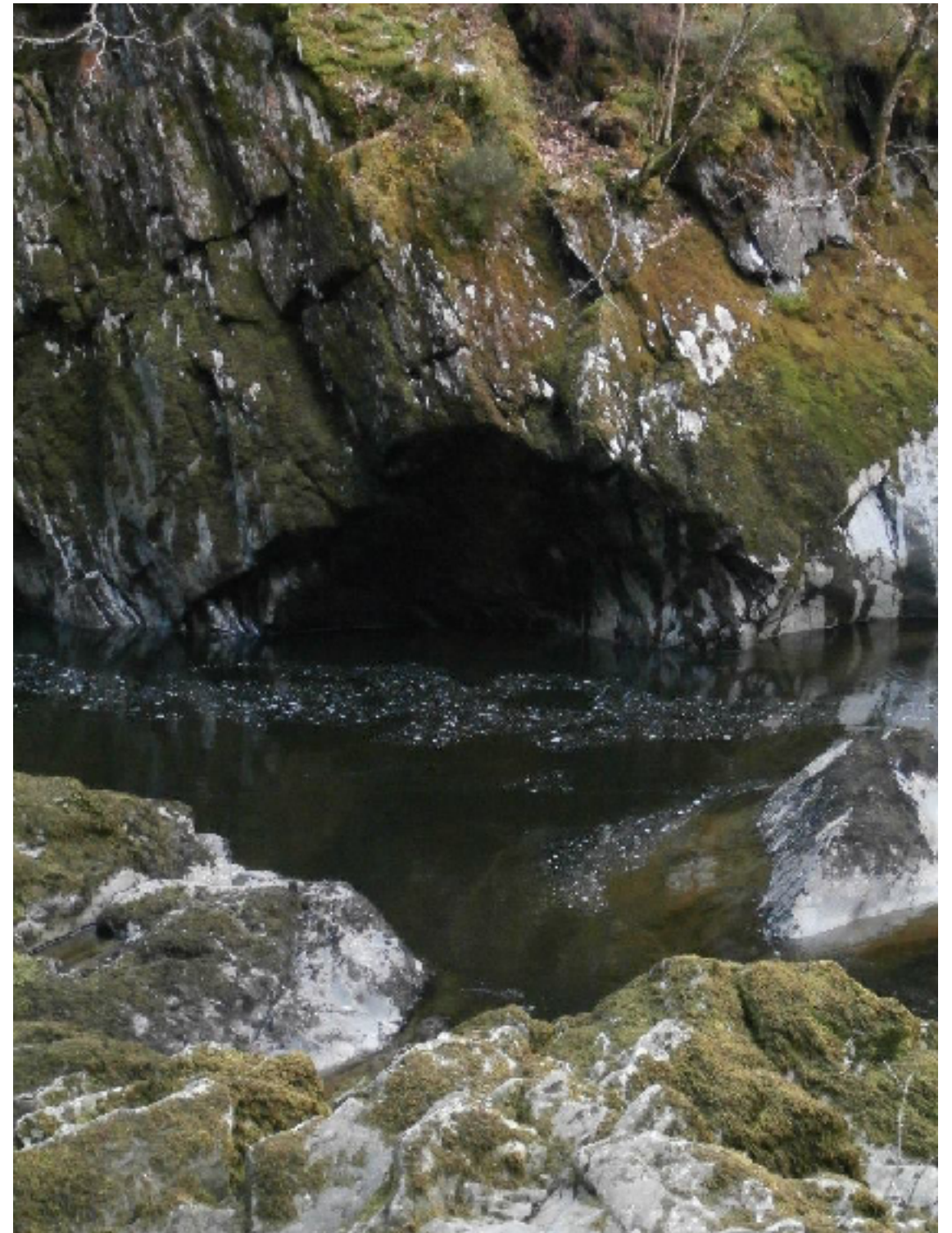
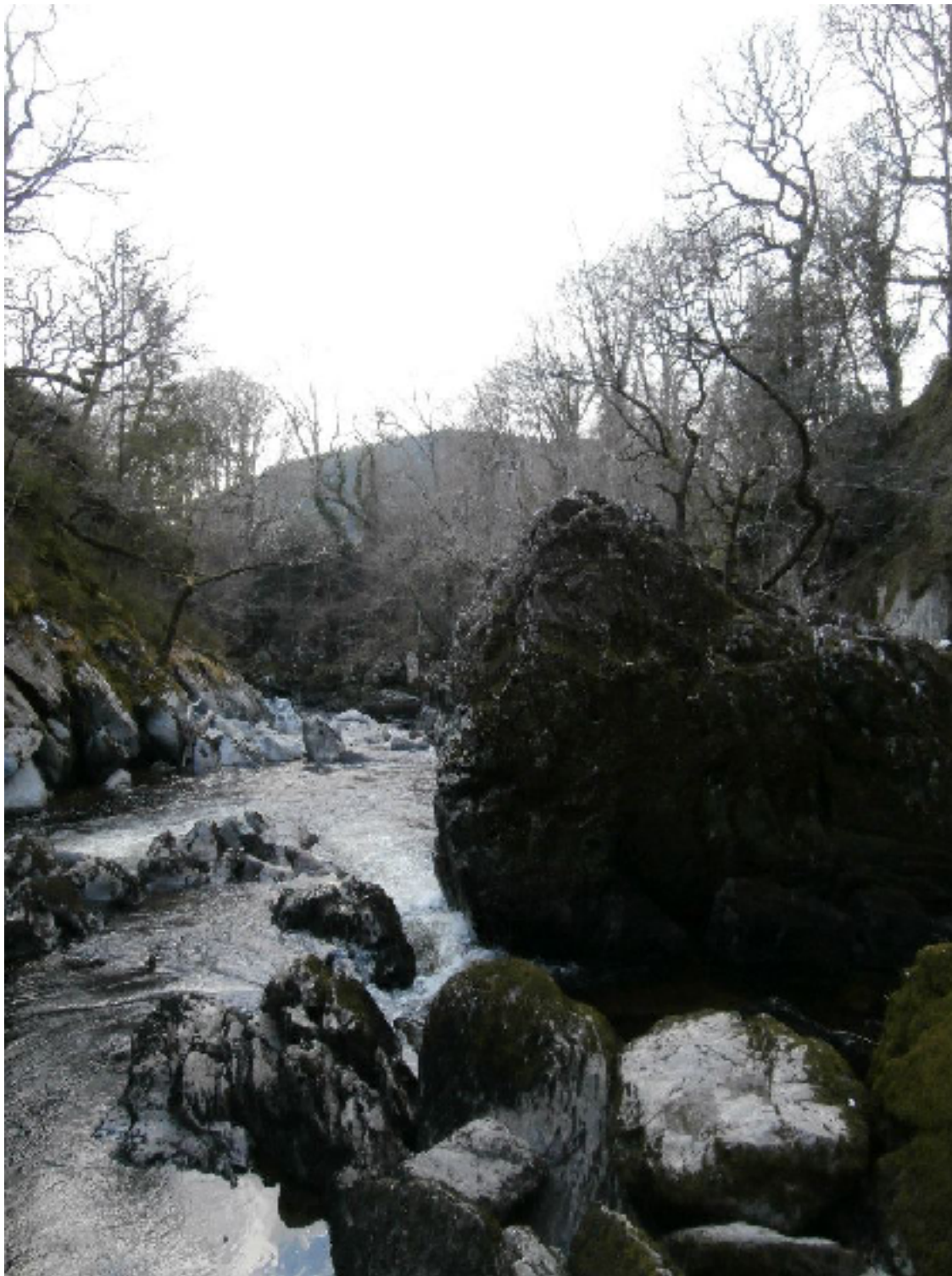
The God Helmet

Dreaming at Sacred Sites



- Roman dream Temple at Lydney - dedicated to Celtic deity - Nodens.

Fairies in inaccessible places...



- The Fairy Glen, Betws-y-Coed.

Springs and Wells



- Holywell, Flintshire.

Springs and Wells



- Shrine at Castell Henllys, Iron Age Hillfort, Carmarthenshire.

Landscapes

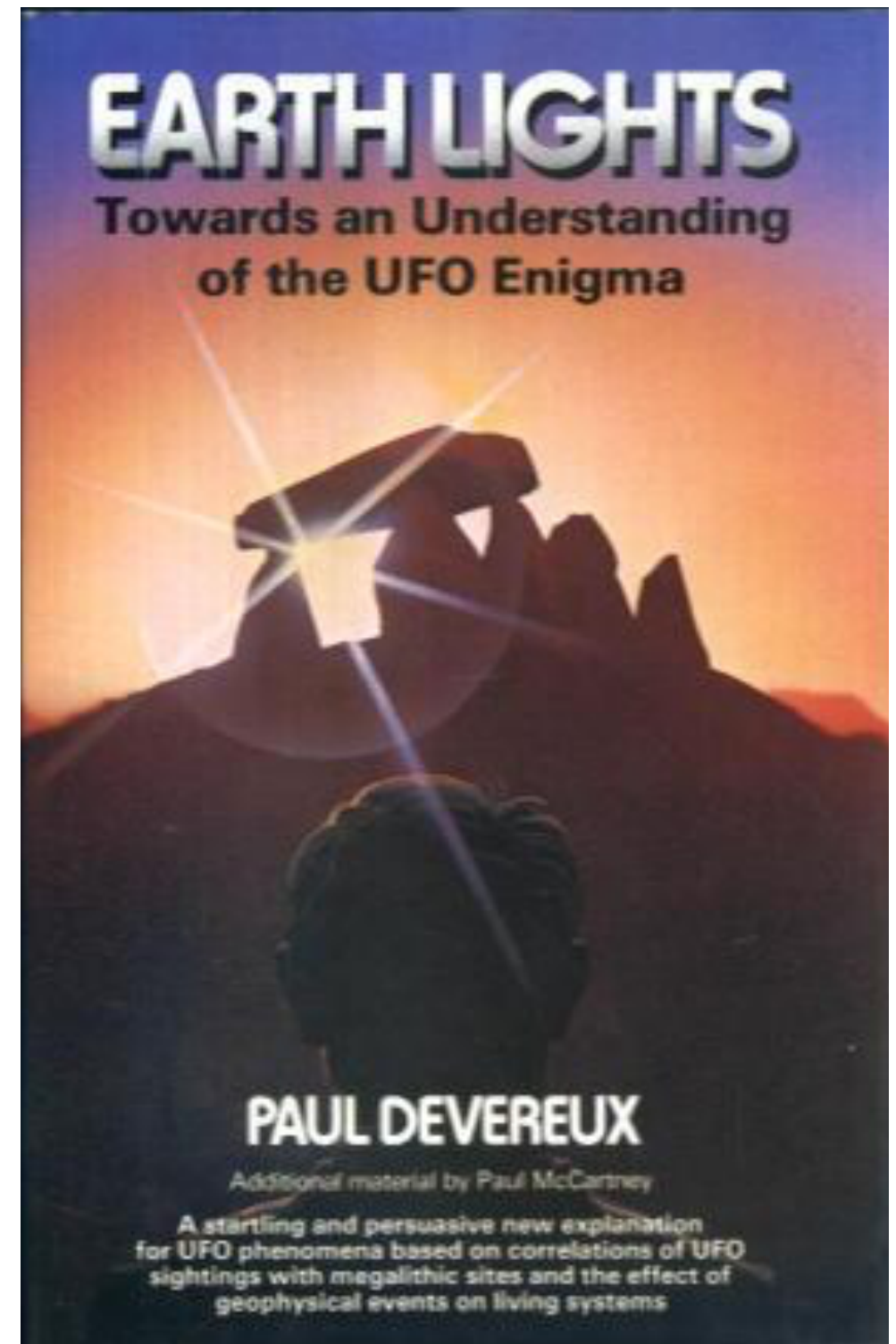


- Crop circle at Silbury Hill, Summer Solstice 2010.

Paul Devereux

- “What are earth lights? Well they certainly have electrical and magnetic attributes, and some form of plasma is assumed. Modern witnesses who come close to earth lights typically report hallucinatory episodes – suggesting magnetic fields that are known to be able to affect parts of the brain.”

(<http://www.pauldevereux.co.uk>)



Winged Vipers in Powys?



- Y Post Coch (The Red Post), or Post Y Wiber (The Viper's Post), Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.

Winged Vipers in Powys?



Nant-y-Wiber (Viper's Stream)

Penygarnedd, historical mining of phosphate.

Radiation?

Experiences

“Old Mrs. Davies, Plas, Dolanog, who died 1890, aged 92, told the Rev. D. R. Evans, B.A., son of the Vicar of Dolanog, that once, when she was a young woman, she went to Llanfair market, and on the way she sat on a stile, and she saw smoke and fire issuing from a hole on Moel Bentyrch, where the *Gwiber*, or Flying Serpent, had its abode. She ran, and never stopped until she had placed a good distance between her and the hill. She believed that both the smoke and fire were caused by the serpent.” (cited in Owen, 1896, p. 349)

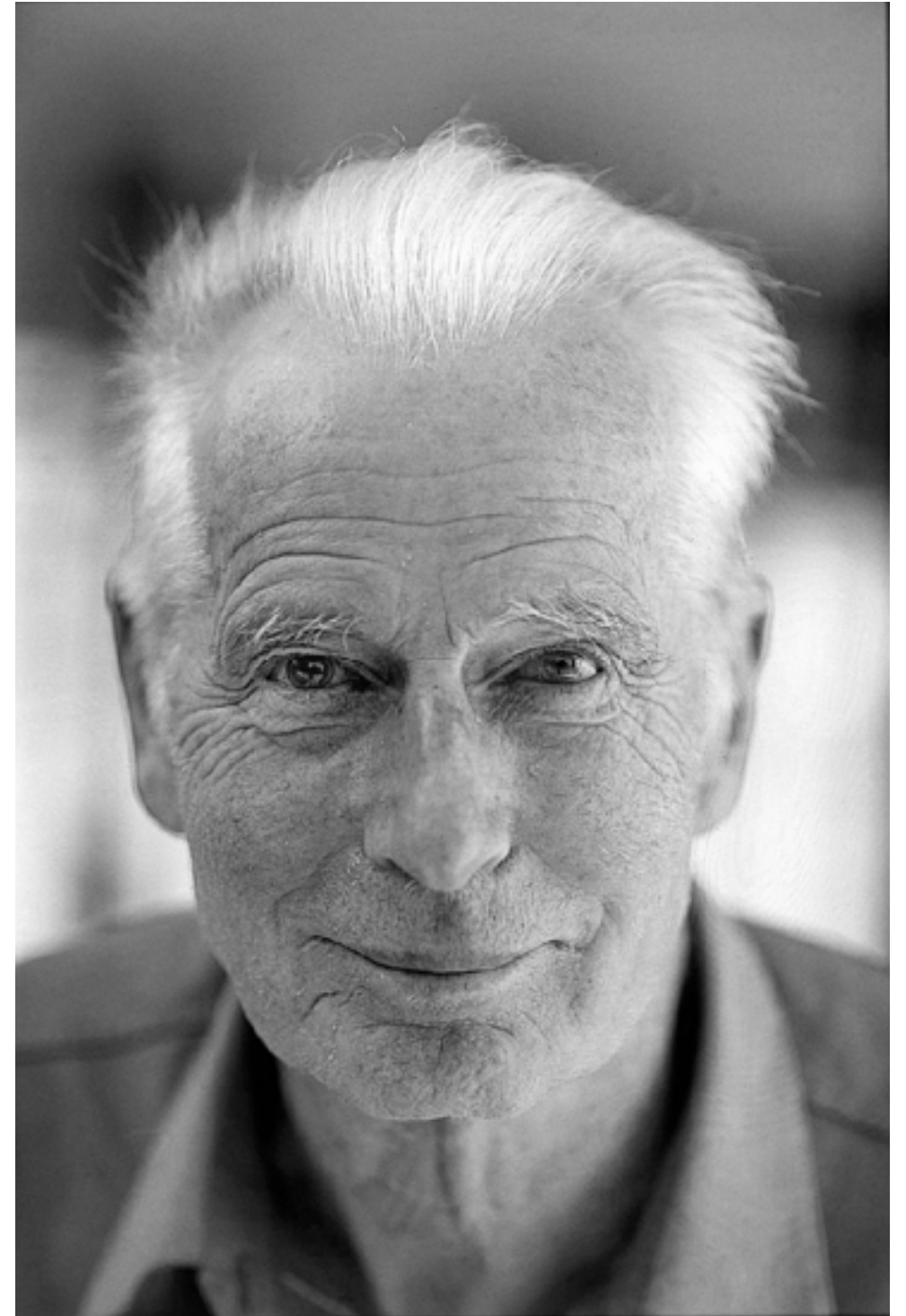
“A British naturalist and some colleagues were conducting some research in the area after being notified by a local of "something" strange that was seen earlier on the year. As they stood at the edge of some woods by a quarry they suddenly spied an extraordinary entity. Measuring 2.5 ft or so in length, it resembled a serpentine dragon with four short limbs, but its head was shaped very like that of a sea horse, and it was airborne-undulating and wriggling as it flew about 10 ft above the surface of the quarry in a wide circle. They were unable to recall seeing any wings, but it had a long tail that terminated in a pair of horizontal, whale like flukes. The entity was green in colour and shimmered somewhat, but appeared solid, not translucent or ethereal, and they watched it for 3-4 minutes, at a distance of approximately 50 ft, before it finally vanished into one of the numerous caves and large crevices pitting the quarry. The naturalist had the distinct impression while watching it that this creature was deliberately seeking to keep them at bay, warning them off from approaching further into its territory.” (cited in Shuker, Strange Magazine)

- What are they? Hallucinations? Cryptozoological? Spirits of place?
What are the implications of these entities in the landscape?
How should we treat them? (cf. Foster, 2020).

Ecosophy

“By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium ... The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities.”

(Naess, cited in Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. 8).



Transpersonal Ecosophy

- Mark Schroll - philosophy of science, emphasis on psi research, altered states of consciousness, anthropology of consciousness...
- Incorporation of the 'transpersonal' into our models of reality - experiences that go beyond the personal..
- '...an ecstatic visionary philosophy of ecological harmony' (Schroll, 2018, p. 37).

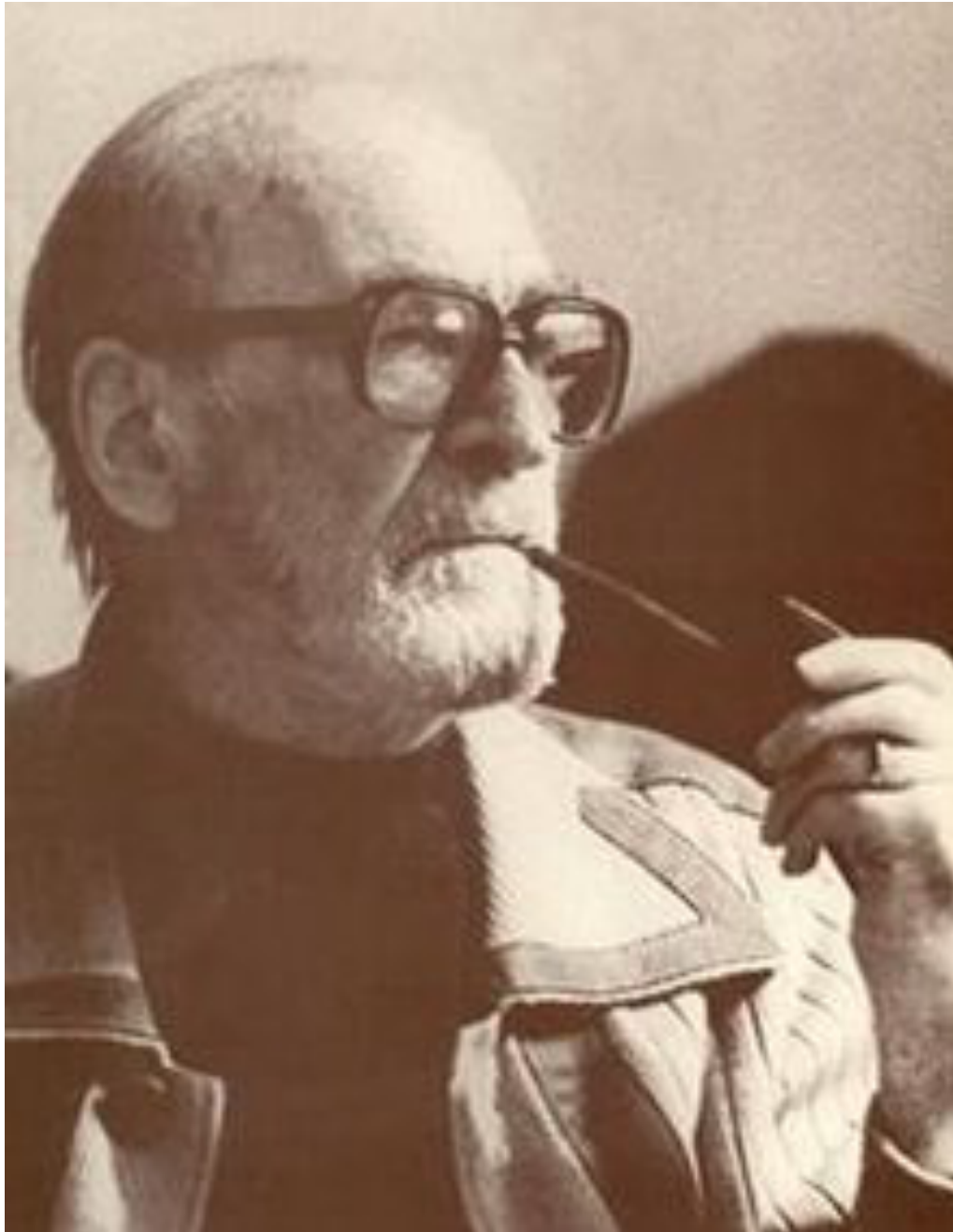


Conclusions?

- Is this a reductive way of thinking about hierophany and the power of place?
- Are we ‘explaining it away’?
- Could altered states of consciousness be a necessary pre-condition for accessing the ‘numen loci’?
- Perhaps a complexity perspective, with multiple contributing factors, is better than any single reductive explanation.

Eliade or Durkheim?

A bit of both.



The sacred is 'out there.'



The sacred is socially constructed.

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