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The Twenty-first-century Study of Collective Effervescence: Expanding the Context of Fieldwork

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Abstract

Durkheim situated the notion of collective effervescence at the source of religious vitality, if not the source of religion itself. Although Durkheim asserted that collective forces/sentiments are measurable and can be investigated scientifically, this phenomenon has been almost entirely neglected by scholars. This article argues that the scientific investigation of collective effervescence requires anthropologists and other scholars to go beyond their current practices of armchair scholarship. Such a move engenders an epistemic pluralist methodology that includes the firsthand subjective and inter-subjective data of lived experience rather than relying solely on conceptual knowledge acquired through text-like verbal utterances.

Keywords: anthropology; ethnography; religious studies; sociology; transpersonal psychology.

Introduction

Since Durkheim's time, general theory in the sociology of religion has advanced slowly.¹ We know about the power of culture and language to shape human subjectivity and experience. This inter-subjective community and the genetic constitution and history of the individual obviously have mutual influences on each

1. This article has benefited considerably after receiving preliminary comments from Dr Michael Radich, which were subsequently augmented by the *Fieldwork in Religion* reviewers' suggestions.

other. How these biological, socio-cultural and psychological strands are woven together is still a mystery.

An investigation of a phenomenon occurring in what Pickering calls “effervescent assemblies” (Pickering, 1984: 385) along with Durkheim’s “collective effervescence,” has the potential to provide some clues to this mystery. Durkheim asserted that the rituals promoting collective effervescence involved the suspension of social norms, allowing new concepts and beliefs to emerge. Van Gennep’s and Victor Turner’s work on ritual process and liminality has enabled us to appreciate certain aspects of this process. Yet how these changes of consciousness come about, the contours of the altered states of consciousness (ASCs) that participants actually experience in these rituals, and the longer-term societal effects are as unknown today as they were for the anthropologists of Durkheim’s day. This is largely a result of scholars disregarding the methodological tools that would enable them to investigate the phenomenon in much the same way as Galileo’s colleagues in the university refused to look through the telescopes he offered them. This situation in turn reflects the prevailing scientific-materialist paradigm and armchair scholarship. We will begin with Durkheim and collective effervescence, working our way towards the twenty-first century.

Collective Effervescence

Durkheim mentioned collective effervescence six times in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim, 1965: 250, 258, 405, 441, 445, 469).² Though it appears that Durkheim was inspired to formulate this concept by Spencer and Gillen’s recent ethnography of Australian aboriginals, the Arunta (Spencer and Gillen, 1899), he had been using the concept for many years prior to their study – as early as 1897 with frequent references to the collective effervescence in his lectures and writings around 1900 (Pickering, 1984: 382). Durkheim asserted that his concept of collective effervescence explained how change occurred in both religion and in society.

It is no longer a simple individual who speaks; it is a group incarnate and personified... There are some periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutions or creative epochs (Durkheim, 1965: 241).

Following this passage, he gives examples both of the Crusades where effervescence focused on Christendom and a universal Christian society and of the French

2. I have included occasions where the words “collective” and “effervescence,” though not juxtaposed, have the same meaning as “collective effervescence.”

Revolution where effervescence was directed towards French nationalism (Durkheim, 1905: 381–82).

With this background, Durkheim culminated his thinking on collective effervescence in his *Elementary Forms* where he cites the most dramatic passages of Arunta ritual behaviour to substantiate the relationship between collective effervescence and social change.³

[I]f collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree of intensity, it is because it brings out a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are over-extended, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced only at this moment. A man does not recognize himself; he feels himself transformed and consequently he transforms the environment (Durkheim, 1965: 469).

Spencer and Gillen describe the Australian aboriginal Arunta ceremony as “a genuinely wild and savage scene of which it is impossible to convey any adequate idea in words” (cited in Durkheim, 1965: 249). Indeed, according to Durkheim, the ritual itself includes the means to bring about the effervescence.

And since a collective sentiment cannot express itself collectively except on the condition of observing a certain order permitting co-operation and movements in unison... The human voice is not sufficient for the task; it is reinforced by means of artificial processes: boomerangs are beaten against each other; bull-roarers are whirled...they also strengthen it [the agitation felt]. This effervescence often reaches such a point that it causes unheard-of-actions. The passions released are of such an impetuosity that they can be restrained by nothing (Durkheim, 1965: 247).

In other words, “a state of effervescence...implies a mobilization of all our active forces, and even a supply of external energies” (1965: 454).

Durkheim continues describing the collective effervescent experience. “When one arrives at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer...carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him think and act differently than at normal times” (Durkheim, 1965: 249). “At the same time all his companions feel themselves transformed in the same way and express this sentiment by their cries, their gestures, and their general attitude, everything is as though he really were transported into a special world” (1965: 250).

According to Durkheim, the Australian thinks that these rituals’ “apparent function is to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god, [though] they

3. On Durkheim’s selective citation of Spencer and Gillen, see Ramp (1998: 147 n. 3). Evans-Pritchard notes that “Durkheim’s choice of that region for his experiment was unfortunate, for the literature on the aboriginals was, by modern standards, poor and confused, and it still is.” See Evans-Pritchard (1965: 58).

at the same time *really* strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society...since the god is only a figurative expression of the society” (Durkheim, 1965: 257–58, my emphasis). In this case Durkheim was seeking to discover the form of “collective action...[which] arouses the sensation of sacredness” (1965: 245). This is a brief summary of how Durkheim, by selectively using the flawed data available, attempted to develop a sociological theory of religion by positing a phenomenon he described as “collective effervescence.”

Scholarly Responses to Durkheim’s Collective Effervescence

Durkheim’s colleagues generally did not respond enthusiastically to this new phenomenon, while a handful of others have significantly developed the concept further.⁴ Pickering, a prominent Durkheim scholar, has coined a more precise term to capture Durkheim’s ideas, which he calls “effervescent assembly,” to describe an intentional gathering where collective effervescence occurs (Pickering, 1984: 385). In addition, Pickering distinguishes two distinct functions of collective effervescence: (1) the creative function where new ideas/change emerge (1984: 382) and (2) the re-creative function where the group primarily feels a communal bond. The first is a process of effervescent assembly from which something new emerges while the re-creative function renews communal bonds and reaffirms collective representations. An example of a combination of these two processes is the Last Supper, a creative type of effervescent assembly, and the ensuing continuation (or recreation) of the ritual. Pickering examined the entire corpus of Durkheim’s writing in order to clarify the term “collective effervescence.”⁵

Mary Douglas’s career has been, in her own words, to “work with Durkheim’s vision and to apply the most suggestive parts of his work towards a completion of his project” (Fardon, 1987: 5). Apparently she did not find the investigation of collective effervescence very suggestive. The longest discussion of collective effervescence is a short excursus where she differentiates societies that foster collective effervescence from those that incline towards ritual. According to Douglas, effervescence is more likely to happen in cultures where there is little differentiation between society and self, a minimal distinction between interpersonal and public relationships, a diverse symbolic universe, little ritual differentiation, and

4. Other scholarship on collective effervescence, not cited in the text, includes Allen (1998: 148–61); Carleton-Ford (1993); Mellor (1998: 87–114); Ono (1996: 79–98); Smith and Alexander (1996: 585–92); and Tiryakian (1995).

5. See his two chapters on effervescent assembly in Pickering (1984: 380–417).

spontaneous expression is common. Ritualism is more likely to occur in societies with the opposite characteristics (Douglas, 1970: 73–74).

The French sociologist Roger Caillois has studied the potential for collective effervescence to transform pre-modern societies. He constructed a theory based on the forces of cohesion and dissolution that can arise from the sacred. The surge of effervescent vitality breaks down everyday routine and threatens the consensual order of morality (Caillois, 1950: 227). Collective effervescence is expressed emotionally as it revitalizes the sacred social life (1950: 171). Caillois thought that effervescence only applied to pre-modern societies and that the concept was only useful in modern societies during times of extremely tumultuous social events like war (1950: 225, 228). “Caillois builds his provocative analysis, in part, through a creative exploitation of the tension in Durkheim’s work between the permanence and diminution of the sacred” (Shilling and Mellor, 1998: 202).⁶

Sociologist Steven L. Carlton-Ford argues that the combination of ritual activity and charisma explains collective effervescence, which in turn correlates with an increase in psychic strength (Carlton-Ford, 1993). He derives his theory by integrating Durkheim’s analysis of the effects of ritual activities oriented to the sacred with Weber’s discussions on charisma, which is the symbolic representation of the sacred in a person. In seeking to reconcile Durkheim’s ideas with Weber’s concept of charisma, he extrapolates Durkheim’s understanding of ritual to include standardized “non-sacred” rituals. He notes the varying intensity of emotions in sacred ritual and that participants experiencing collective effervescence do so to varying degrees (1993: 143–44).

Tim Olaveson has convincingly shown how Victor Turner’s formulation of *communitas* overlaps quite well with Durkheim’s notion of collective effervescence (Olaveson, 2001). *Communitas* is an unstructured and undifferentiated community of equal individuals. In his article he shows seven points of commonality between the two concepts:

1. Both phenomena are defined vaguely. Thus, sometimes collective effervescence/*communitas* can be a moral force, intense emotion, and a type of collective delirium or ecstasy.
2. Both concepts are considered to be social realities. Rather than epiphenomena, they are ontologically real aspects of the ritual process.
3. Both terms are collective, having a levelling and transgressive quality.
4. Both terms involve intense experiences with intense emotional content (emotion in both cases refers to a process of collective energy that takes

6. This article brought the work of Caillois to my attention.

individuals out of their individuality). In addition, both Durkheim and Turner recognized that emotions and biological functions were linked with higher cognitive processes, such as the formation of normative values, assumptions, and other cultural dynamics.

5. Both terms operated outside of normal societal patterns to the point of allowing what would be unacceptable behaviour. Collective effervescence/communitas is spontaneous and can only be temporary.
6. Both Durkheim and Turner saw the intrinsically creative aspect of collective effervescence/communitas, renewing and revitalizing society.
7. Both writers recognized that collective effervescence/communitas can be as destructive as it is creative.

The most recent application of collective effervescence has been to understand the phenomenon of rave and post-rave youth events. In Olaveson's summary of this scholarship he notes that "[s]cholars have begun to conceptualize raving as a transformational and spiritual practice" (Olaveson, 2004: 85). If indeed raves exhibit characteristics of new religious movements, as Olaveson argues, the "connectedness" that participants often report shares many characteristics of Durkheim's phenomenon of collective effervescence (2004: 87).⁷

Not all scholars thought highly of Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence. One of the more common criticisms has been that his theory depended on crowd psychology.⁸ Examining Durkheim's terms, he never uses the word *foule*, the French word for crowd. Instead, *assemblée* (gathering) or *rassemblement* (assembling or gathering) are used to imply order and an intentional act of coming together. A *rassemblement* can be accidental but it soon establishes itself with a sense of purpose. Simply put, "*rassemblement* has a much stronger sense of 'we' than a crowd" (Pickering, 1984: 397). Psychologists of Durkheim's time associated crowd psychology with individuals' loss of rational control, making crowd behaviour pathological. Durkheim never conceived of collective effervescence as pathological, or even abnormal. Indeed, as discussed below, the altered state of consciousness associated with collective effervescence could very well be post-rational, an experience of unitary being. In Durkheim's words, "collective action....arouses the sensation of sacredness" (Durkheim, 1965: 245).

Many anthropologists were strongly critical of Durkheim's formulation of collective effervescence. Evans-Pritchard thought it was overly simplistic. He asked

7. Olaveson uses the term "sociocultural revitalization" rather than "new religious movement" (2004: 100).

8. His first critic in this regard was A. A. Goldenweiser (1915; 1917). See also Evans-Pritchard (1965: 68).

whether the rites create effervescence, which then create beliefs, which ultimately causes the rites to be performed, or does just coming together cause them? (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 68). Durkheim never spoke of a mere cause-and-effect relationship. Indeed, there was some unexplainable synergy of the ritual participants, the ritual itself, and the social circumstances (*representation* or *sentiment*) from which unpredictable social consequences, creative or re-creative, emerged. Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence is still valuable as long as we realize that the social realities involved are vastly more complex than Durkheim realized (Lukes, 1985: 465, 482–85; Pickering, 1984: 416).

Lévi-Strauss, who held the same academic chair as Durkheim at the Sorbonne, undercut Durkheim's notion of a collective stimulation of emotion and energy taking a group out of its individual ego-states into a self-transcending experience of social harmony (that is, collective effervescence). He asserted that emotions explain nothing; they are results not causes (Pickering, 2001: 2:171). From another perspective, it is ironic that Durkheim chose such an apparently "unscientific" term as collective effervescence given his academic position at the centre of French scientific-rationalist inquiry. From a scientific-materialist point of view, subjective data are still considered "unscientific," but Durkheim considered collective forces/sentiments to be measurable and able to be investigated scientifically (Fujiwara, 2001: 155). In this regard Durkheim was ahead of his time (and our time in 2012). He took experiences of ecstasy seriously, saying that the "mental agitation is evidence of their reality" (Durkheim, 1967: 225). He did not in any way consider collective effervescence to be an epiphenomenon. For him, a very intense ritual (Durkheim's "social life") interferes with the normal functioning of individual consciousness (Durkheim, 1965: 259).

Since Durkheim hardly any anthropologists have taken Durkheim's challenge to measure or observe collective altered states in a serious manner. One reason for this ongoing situation is because of armchair scholarship. As we will see below, one of the outcomes of armchair scholarship is that very few anthropologists, scholars of religion, sociologists or philosophers have the tools to clarify the nature of collective effervescence, much less its role in ritual and social creativity. They do not have the tools because they ignore transpersonal psychological and transpersonal anthropological methodologies when studying ritual phenomena.

Altered States of Consciousness, Inter-subjectivity, and Armchair Scholarship

One symptom of the problematics involved in studying collective altered states appears in 1890 when George Frazer wrote the highly acclaimed (at the time) *The*

Golden Bough (Frazer, 1890).⁹ Amply illustrated, among other things, it discussed various tribal peoples from all over the world, none of whom Frazer had ever seen in person or talked to. In anthropology, this is called armchair scholarship (Leach, 1985).¹⁰ By 1930 armchair scholarship had slowly become a taboo in the mainstream disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. Before the twentieth century, “armchair anthropologists” like Frazer and Edward B. Tylor dominated ethnology, the comparative study of human societies. They convincingly wrote about the customs, rituals and beliefs of distant peoples they had never seen in person. The primary data came from missionaries, scientists, administrators, traders, and other travellers who had actual working knowledge of so-called “primitive” peoples. This framework changed when a Cambridge anthropologist, A. C. Haddon, proposed an 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait. This expedition became “a milestone in anthropology,” because it bypassed the traditional, untrained data collectors and sent experts who could both gather data and analyse it in a scholarly manner. Haddon called this activity “fieldwork,” which by 1930 would become the methodological and analytical foundation of anthropology (Chua, 2009). The tipping point came in 1922 when Bronislaw Malinowski wrote his *Argonauts of the Pacific* (Malinowski, 2008). He included guidelines for proper anthropological fieldwork at the beginning of the book that soon were to become normative for the discipline. Anthropological armchairs quickly became obsolete as the principal methodology to study others. Durkheim’s use of Spencer and Gillen’s work was also armchair scholarship, which is not surprising since both he and Frazer were of the same generation.

Evans-Pritchard, two generations after Durkheim, rightfully called approaches similar to Durkheim’s as the school of “If I were a horse” (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 24).¹¹ This means that Durkheim guessed what “primitive” people thought or felt about their experiences and culture in the same way that a human being would conjecture about what it would be like to be a horse. In concrete terms, there was little, if any, data to support what Durkheim had written about the Arunta.¹² A few

9. The third edition, published between 1906–1915, was 12 volumes.

10. Leach discusses the crucial shift in anthropology from the armchair “fantasies” of nineteenth-century figures like Tylor and Frazer to the extensive fieldwork methodologies pioneered by Malinowski, Rivers and Boas.

11. This is in reference to Herbert Spencer. He does not directly accuse Durkheim of being in the “If I were a horse” school of anthropology, but instead says, “[I]f only Tylor, Marett, Durkheim, and all the rest of them could have spent a few weeks among the peoples about whom they so freely wrote!” (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 67).

12. Even scholars who have done field studies living among the people they study can interpret a culture in ways that run counter to the evidence.

examples from Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* will make this evident. When Durkheim says, "At the same time all his companions feel themselves transformed in the same way" (Durkheim, 1965: 250), how does Durkheim know they all feel transformed in the same way? Saying, "collective action...arouses the sensation of sacredness" (1965: 245), how can Durkheim ascertain "the sensation of sacredness" (1965: 245), even if he is there in person talking to the people concerned? Then Durkheim says (reiterating from page 3 above),

The Australian thinks that these rituals' apparent function is to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god, [though] they at the same time *really* strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society...since the god is only a figurative expression of the society (1965: 257–58, my emphasis).

Here the sociologist/ethnographer apparently has the superior perceptual ability to know what is *really* happening on the basis of (necessarily) flawed ethnographic data. Durkheim's conjectural armchair approach arbitrarily uses ethnographic material to support his own pre-formulated set of ideas. Indeed, there is no evidence in *Elementary Forms* that collective effervescence brought about changes in the individual or in society. Without extensive interviewing and/or longitudinal studies, such a far-reaching conclusion is an assertion without data. In Hamnett's view,

Elementary Forms is a work of almost unlimited sociological ambition... Insistently though 'religious' instances and data are paraded before the reader as 'evidence', they are often little more than stalking-horses [!] for Durkheim's much wider intellectual ambitions (Hamnett, 1984: 203).

Such is the nature of armchair scholarship.

At the same time, Durkheim was brilliant in "pointing to imaginative relationships between concepts, not in stating rigorous propositions which could be proved" (Pickering: 1984: 380). Data or no data, he had some worthwhile insights.

In Durkheim's case, there was a complete lack of experiential understanding of such phenomena, as he used other writers' ethnographies to construct his theory. His presaging of Turner's symbolic and processual models by some 60 years is thus all the more remarkable, achieved as it was without the rich ethnographic observation, experience, and detail that characterized Turner's work (Olaveson, 2001: 123 n. 205).

Durkheim's insights, in spite of the data, have made him one of the founders of modern sociology (along with Comte, Weber and Marx). The irony is that in the last hundred years, scholars have yet to gather data to confirm or refute Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence.

Moving the Study of Collective Effervescence into the Twenty-first Century

Now we know that the phenomenon of collective effervescence is an altered state of consciousness (ASC), commonly called a dissociative state or trance that occurs in some rituals (Winkelman, 1986; Goodman, 1971, 1990; Tart, 2009). Durkheim talked about physiological phenomena that were not typical in “normal social life” that we now call driving mechanisms which can produce ASCs, for example, repetitive drum beats, sensory deprivation and fasting, ingestion of mind-altering substances, and communal rituals (Durkheim, 1965: 247, 258). Neuroscientists explain the effectiveness of these driving mechanisms on the basis of their being able to enhance synthesis or inhibition of certain chemicals in the body that affect the nervous system.¹³ Durkheim, to some degree, misunderstood the phenomenon of collective effervescence but did not have the tools as an armchair scholar to proceed any further than he did. As mentioned above, Durkheim’s insights are that more impressive given his armchair status. In our modern language and increased (but far from comprehensive) understanding of ASCs, Durkheim’s insight into social change as a result of collective effervescence can be stated in more modern terms.

Perhaps precisely because they are so qualitatively different from normal waking consciousness, ASCs are productive of new symbols, ideas, and values which are often created or interpreted by a shaman or religious leader and become the foundation of new cosmologies, myths, and norms, even of entire religious movements or cultures (Olaveson, 2001: 114).

There are more constraints than mere armchair scholarship. Durkheim was limited by a scientific-materialist paradigm that is still mainstream in twenty-first-century academia. In Durkheim’s case, this makes him a paradigmatic pillar for the social sciences (along with Freud and Weber). In this scientific-materialist perspective, the universe emerged solely from physical events happening at the time of the big bang, the principles of which are well understood by physicists. Living organisms evolved solely from inorganic physical processes, the processes of which are well understood by chemists. Mental phenomena emerged solely from organic processes, which are well understood by biologists. Religion and contemplative experiences emerged solely from mental processes, the constituents of which are well understood by psychologists (Freudians). Other manifestations of religion can be explained sociologically, anthropologically or politically. It is taboo for an academic to critique any disciplines above him or her in the hierarchy but it is acceptable for

13. There is a large literature on driving mechanisms. A starting place for this literature is Prattis (1997); and Laughlin *et al.* (1986).

those higher in the scientific-materialist hierarchy to criticize the “lower expressions.” Carl Sagen and Richard Dawkins can critique subjects about which they have no qualifications to speak (usually religion), while it is utterly taboo for a scholar in the humanities to critique the dominant paradigm of physics or biology (Sagen, n.d.; Dawkins, 2006). Charles Tart, a pioneer in the study of ASCs, says,

Speaking as a full-fledged scientist, neurology, et cetera, is vastly incomplete and suffers from considerable arrogance, because it thinks it's complete. All the neurophysiological studies in mainstream science ignore parapsychology's data, which has much tighter scientific standards than any other field of science. [To reiterate my point, alluding to what Peter was saying, mainstream science has,] without any consideration of experiments in parapsychology, rejected this data because it fails to comply with assumptions about reality in our current materialistic paradigm (cited in Scholl and Schwartz, 2010: 14).

The same process of rejecting and ignoring data has been occurring across the humanities disciplines. The scientific-materialist bias in mainstream anthropology will not keep new generations of anthropologists from experiencing psi phenomena/ASCs in their field research any more than it has in the past.¹⁴ And there *does* appear to be progress, especially in the last fifteen years. Things have really changed since the 1950s. Edith Turner remarks,

Vic Turner and I had this dictum at the back of our minds when we spent two and a half years among the Ndembu of Zambia in the 1950s. Ok, our people believed in spirits, but that was a matter of their different world, not ours. Their ideas were strange and a little disturbing, but somehow we were on the safe side of the white divide and were free merely to study the beliefs. This is how we thought. Little knowing it, we denied the people's equality with us, their “coevalness,” their common humanity as that humanity extended itself into the spirit world. “Try out that spirit world ourselves?” No way (Turner, 1993, 9).

Meanwhile, in the 1950s, the anthropologist Colin Turnbull was among the forest people of the Ituri in the Congo. However, he never published his most significant experience, a state of unitary consciousness that came to him hearing the pygmies singing, until the 1990s.

Turnbull tells us how the Mbuti sang these songs at night seated around a fire whenever there was a need to cure someone's sickness, “to make good,” as they put it. The song form involved canon, that is “rounds” – with overlapping voices in harmony. Turnbull had closed his eyes and felt free to join in the singing. And he tells us that in an instant it all came together: there was no longer any lack of congruence, and it seemed as though the song were being sung by a single singer.

14. Psi phenomena, also called psychic phenomena, are paranormal phenomena. These include the scientifically documented phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and psychic healing. Other psi phenomena may be included in this list in the future but they have not been as well established as these five as of 2012.

While all the others had their eyes open, their gaze was vacant. There were so many bodies sitting around, singing away. Here, he said, some-thing was added to the importance of sound, another mode of perception that went far beyond ordinary consciousness. The *molimo* singing seemed to incorporate all the elements; the totality of the present, including the singers, dancers, and listeners, as well as the central fire, the sound of the ritual *molimo* trumpet, the camp itself, the clearing in which the camp was built, and the forest in which the clearing stood, whatever, if anything, contained the forest, and it very definitely included whatever is implied by such equally ambivalent terms as God and spirit (Turner, 2006: 33).¹⁵

The narrow empiricism of the materialist paradigm has been challenged by many other studies over the last 20 years. In 1991, Karen McCarthy Brown, the academic who became a voodoo priestess while writing her PhD dissertation, won a Victor Turner Prize for her exemplary *Mama Lola*. The same year Carol Laderman also won a prize for *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine, and Aesthetics in Malay Shamanistic Performance*, a research project that involved many painful initiatory experiences (Brown, 2001; Laderman, 1993). During the period of 1990–2006 there has been an exponential increase in the number of notable publications (defined by Edith Turner) dealing with spirituality, healing, radical empathy and radical participation (Turner, 2006: 45; Koss-Chioino and Hefner, 2006).¹⁶ This trend indicates a substantial change in ethnographic epistemology and reflects a shift in not only the way anthropologists do fieldwork, but also in being able to publish their work. Not only is the study of shamanism the fastest growing field in anthropology, but publishers are eager to print books knowing that there is an avid market for books on shamanism and healing. It is clear that the intellectual climate is improving, but there are still constraints.

What I find so astonishing is that we knew about these differences [of doing field work] way back in the 1950s, but still, even in 2006, this “ideal” of the detached ethnographer keeps appearing and even now scares many a SAC [Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness] member into conforming. This is because, of course, if they want a job they have to keep up the appearance of “objectivity” (Turner, 2006, 51).

This so-called objectivity in doing research is intrinsic to the scientific-materialist paradigm – to the point that there is a “taboo of subjectivity.” Mainstream anthropologists and religious-studies scholars are comfortable discussing *participants’* reports of their experiences, but not in having these experiences themselves. This

15. The original source is Turnbull (1990).

16. In the five decades from the 1900s to the 1950s, there were five; in the 1960s, there were four publications; in the 1970s, there were six; in the 1980s, 11 publications; in the 1990s, 15 publications; in the half-decade, 2000 to 2005, 15 publications; and seven publications between January to September 2006.

is not to say that many anthropologists and scholars of religion do not have these experiences; they simply cannot write about them because referees and publishers “usually feel that this material is not suitable for inclusion in a serious anthropological publication” (Turner, 1994: 71–72). Once it becomes respectable for scholars to openly admit to their experiences then it opens the possibility to speak more from within a culture instead of being outsiders. Then the barriers between “outsiders” and “natives” can be broken down and anthropology and religious studies can become a truly shared collaboration (1994: 86–87).

The Taboo of Subjectivity

The need to investigate alternative modes of consciousness in sophisticated ways has been articulated for over a hundred years. It has been outlined brilliantly in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, still a staple in current undergraduate psychology of religion courses. Its author, William James, the western pioneer of psychology and religion, said,

[O]ur normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but apply the requisite stimulus and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded (James, 1985: 387–88).

There were two sentences preceding this quote that I omitted purposely to make a point. James was already starting to use the kind of methodology that is lacking in our current study of collective altered states of consciousness (which I am going to use as a synonym for collective effervescence from now on). He said, “Some years ago I myself made some observations on [the effects of] nitrous oxide intoxication... One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that...” James *had* an ASC and he is encouraging others to follow in his footsteps. But few have followed him methodologically in the intervening century.

What happened? A method of inquiry in the field of psychology was hijacked very soon after James wrote these statements. Seeking to make psychology a “hard science,” the American behaviourist John B. Watson declared that the use of all subjective terms was to be avoided in the discipline of psychology (Watson, 1913).¹⁷ Forty years later, B. F. Skinner asserted that mind as such does not exist; there are

17. There is a detailed discussion of how this happened in Wallace (2000).

just behavioural dispositions (cited in Wallace, 2000: 28). After a decade of experiments, it became increasingly obvious that reducing mental processes to behaviour did not work. Now the same assumptions are guiding work in cognitive psychology as they desperately look for consciousness in the brain (which is like tearing apart a television to find the television programme). To a great extent this taboo of subjectivity is common across all mainstream humanities and social studies disciplines. It involves another level of armchair scholarship, one that has not been generally recognized.

Fieldwork in anthropology is a methodology that produces kinds of inter-subjective knowledge that is impossible to replicate in an armchair. To do fieldwork in a twenty-first-century context studying collective altered states of consciousness means using a methodology that produces kinds of subjective knowledge involving a change in the investigator's own state of consciousness. This does not mean that it is a pre-requisite since there are many perspectives not involving such experiences and many people choose not to have these experiences. Those, however, are twentieth-century approaches.

I propose that the armchair of everyday consciousness, "armchair consciousness," be temporarily put aside as one enters the domain of collective altered states. The principle is to use the most direct and comprehensive source material whenever possible. The anthropologist must often rely upon the reports of informants stating what they remember about direct experiences. If the anthropologist has not had experiences of trance, visionary travels, or possession, for example, then it is almost certain that the anthropologist will intellectualize the informant's report (mistaking a very poor map for the territory). If the anthropologist does share the experience with her collaborator, there is an entirely different quality to the subsequent interaction, as we will see below.

Going Beyond the Armchair

Exploring other modes of human consciousness is not a function of material resources or elaborate infrastructure. It is simply a matter of deciding to "look through the telescope of altered states," which allows one to experience a vast inner universe analogous to how a telescope allows one to see the outer universe more clearly. By making subjective experience a taboo in academic inquiry, scholars are similar to their Italian counterparts who refused to access the appropriate tools of their time. Galileo, writing to Johannes Kepler in 1610, observes, "My dear Kepler, what would you say of the learned here, who, replete with the pertinacity of the asp, have steadfastly refused to cast a glance through the telescope? What shall we make of this? Shall we laugh, or shall we cry?" (De Santillana, 1978: 9). The

learned he was discussing were not the Jesuits, whom Galileo knew to be “friends of science and discovery,” but the professors at the university. They were the ones he feared (1978: 8).

In retrospect, modern scholars can explain Galileo’s standoff situation in terms of paradigm shifts and the resistance of those of one paradigm to shift to another one. Thanks to the work of Thomas Kuhn and others (Kuhn, 1996; Popper, 2002) we have noticed a pattern over the last four hundred years. In short, the evidence and explanatory power of the new paradigm eventually reach a tipping point such that everyone except the most stubborn utilize the new paradigm’s methodology and insights. Some have called the shift to an expanded paradigm (which William James called “radical empiricism”) in contemplative practice and consciousness studies “the consciousness revolution” (Laszlo *et al.*, 2003). This article is my small bit to help tip the balance towards a larger context of scholarly inquiry.

Being averse to investigating experience outside of armchair consciousness is not academic in origin. It is deeply embedded in the underlying paradigm of scientific materialism, one tenet of which is the “single-state fallacy” (Mark Blainey calls this monophasic consciousness in contrast to polyphasic consciousness). Thomas B. Roberts, the person who coined the term “single-state fallacy,” introduces it with a dialogue, which I am going to paraphrase (Roberts, 2006: 104–105). You have a friend who just bought a new Apple computer after using a Windows-only computer and you ask him why he bought it. He tells you that he is going to play chess with it and you say “Cool, why not try out the game, The Journey to the World Divine? It works better on a Mac.” He repeats that he is going to play chess with it. You ask him for his email address to send him the details and he says again that he is going to play chess with his new computer. But you do not get it and you start to recommend all kinds of even more awesome software. He angrily shouts, “NO! NO! I am going to play chess with my new computer.”

Most people who use computers understand that a modern computer has an ever-expanding variety of uses, and to be using a computer for one use is to limit oneself considerably. In a similar fashion, the single-state fallacy assumes that all worthwhile abilities reside within our normal waking consciousness. Over the last thirty years, the data have been accumulating from a variety of disciplines to demonstrate the fallacy of a single-state consciousness given almost limitless possibilities in the rainbow of human consciousness. These data have been streaming in from multiple methodologies that include the study of altered states pioneered by Charles Tart, transpersonal psychology pioneered by Ken Wilber, mind-body medicine/psychiatry pioneered by Stanislav Grof, anthropology of consciousness, pioneered by Edith Turner, and the philosophy of consciousness pioneered by Robert Forman.

All of these researchers study various consciousness states that overlap with what is very loosely labelled “religious experience.”¹⁸ These are the states of consciousness that shamans, Vedic rishis, prophets, “saints,” sages, sufis and “mystics” have experienced and reported over many millennia. Without these states of consciousness, beyond the single-state, there would have been no religions. It is precisely these post-rational experiences, often written into what become scriptures, that are the foundations of just about all religions on the planet. Logically, one would think that academics in the discipline of religious studies would be at the cutting edge of the academic study of altered states and human consciousness.¹⁹

And this brings us right back to the issue of what may be called “state-specific science,” in particular the single-state fallacy. Few ethnographers up to this point have had the inclination and psychological makeup to immerse themselves into another culture to the extent of experiencing another state of consciousness. Although more and more anthropologists are experiencing transpersonal states of consciousness and writing about it, this type of total immersion is necessarily voluntary. Indeed, it cannot be compulsory because any intentional transpersonal experience involving the driving mechanisms mentioned above requires a high degree of preparation and psycho-spiritual maturity. A person has to be prepared for the possibility of severe physical discomforts, sudden loss of ego boundaries, and confrontations with demonic entities.

During her fieldwork among the Malay, Laderman ran across the concept of *angin* (“Inner Winds”), a native concept which labels an experience that sometimes occurs during healing rituals. She mentions that her informants declined to define the concept for her, insisting instead that she would have to experience *angin* herself in order to know what it means. When she finally gave-in and undertook the healing ritual herself, she experienced the *angin* “like a hurricane” inside her chest. Thereafter, Carol was able to evaluate the meaning of the “wind” metaphor from direct experience. *Angin* ceased to be merely a belief and was appreciated as a metaphorical description of a real and profound experience (Laughlin, 1975: 9, italics added).

When the anthropologist gets out of armchair consciousness and participates in the same collective altered states as her collaborators it entails a more sophisticated

18. Charles Tart also studied psi phenomena, which are another distinct set of phenomena.

19. Ken Wilber, whom Huston Smith has described (in book blurbs) as “the most seminal transpersonal psychologist to date” and “No one – not even Jung – has done as much as Wilber to open up Western psychology to the durable insights of the world’s wisdom traditions.” In 2003, I checked the citation index from 1979 to see how many of my colleagues in religious studies had cited one of Wilber’s 22 books: there were less than a dozen in 24 years.

methodology to deal with the “thicker data,” or in Geertz’s terminology, to arrive at a “thicker description.” A collaborator might indeed have experienced an ASC but the collaborator’s interpretation of that experience may or may not be an accurate (beyond the individual’s subjective reality) description of the group’s inter-subjective idea of “reality” or of apparent realities beyond the physical world. There may be significantly different interpretations of the same event among the collaborators as well as between the anthropologist and individual collaborators. In any case, this process is inevitably reflexive. The ethnographer himself becomes the focus of inquiry as much as that of the collaborators. For example,

The transpersonal ethnographer among the Bushmen would not only participate in the action and significance of the hunt, but also in the experience of !kia. And in either situation, one eye of the ethnographer is upon the hosts, the other is on his/her own phenomenology (Laughlin, 1989).²⁰

In a similar vein, Mark Blainey designates Euro-american culture as monophasic while most other cultures as polyphasic. Euro-american culture is programmed in such a way that the passive observer is looking out at an external material-only world. The reification of the external world relegates the internal world of a person to an imaginary realm (hence the taboo of subjectivity) (Blainey, 2010: 125).

Regardless of the label used, one need simply consider the legal and religious norms of Western society where the only sanctioned psychoactive substances are coffee, nicotine, alcohol, and painkillers (aimed at lessening both physical and mental discomfort without prompting deep existential reflection). For the average Euroamerican, any suggestion that the external world’s integrity is to some extent reliant on the observer’s observing of it (such as with some esoteric corollaries of quantum mechanics or as is commonly experienced in altered states of consciousness) presents a grave threat to ideological norms (Blainey, 2010: 125).

Instead of appreciating experiences as entheogenic or labelling psychotropic substances entheogens, the popular expressions are hallucinatory and hallucinogens because the experiences are not taken seriously. Indeed, people in those transpersonal states are often considered, à la Durkheim, delusional, neurotic and mentally deranged. In other words, anyone experiencing an ASC that differs from everyday, consensus reality is mentally ill. Even believing in a reality beyond consensus reality is enough to discredit people.

What parapsychologists dub psi phenomena, belonged to the pantheon of pre-modern beliefs we now refer to as animism: a worldview of our universe as conscious, multidimensional, and alive with spirits... Shamans frequently refer to

20. !kia is an ASC brought about by songs and dancing. When the healer is in !kia he is able to heal others.

having conversations with trees, plants, animals, as well hearing the voice of the earth – claims that seem preposterous to Euro-American science. Prejudice against animism creates a climate of fear and skepticism towards people that possess the ability to access states of anomalous cognition (like a witch or shaman) and the very existence of such anomalous cognition reveals the limits of Euro-American science (Scholl and Schwartz, 2005: 15; Long, 1977).

A Personal Interlude

Having outlined some considerations for fieldwork, it is appropriate for me at this point to share my own forays into expanding the boundaries of scholarly inquiry. This is not only about establishing a level of authorial credibility of practising what one advocates, but also provides some practical examples to show possible alternatives to expand the context of inquiry that are not as ambitious as what has been outlined so far. Each collaborative context is unique as is each scholar. I suspect that only a small minority of scholars is going to feel comfortable exploring other realms of consciousness in their inquiry, much less participating “radically” in the activities of those with whom they are collaborating (outlined in the next section). My point is that those who choose to do so should exercise their (hopefully) increasing academic freedom to pursue these expanded realms of inquiry. Karen McCarthy Brown as a professor and voodoo priestess is a great example for what is possible. It does not mean that all of a sudden scholars will or should become shamans, sufis and medicine women willy nilly. My intent here is to expand the notions of what is possible and spur others to expand their modes of collaboration.

Let’s start with self-disclosure. Anthropologists have been pioneers in recognizing the necessity of self-disclosure as they work with others as collaborators instead of “observing others.” In my first book, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet* (Buehler, 1998), there was hardly any self-disclosure because of feeling vulnerable as a pre-tenured assistant professor and because there were safety issues for my readers. A beginning at self-disclosure would have been to start explaining how I needed to get a letter in order to meet a person who *might* escort me to visit Sayfurrahman’s sufi lodge in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. For this letter I had to grow a beard. Then I had to successfully pass an interrogation and outfit myself with a turban of a minimum length (three *gaz*, roughly three arm-lengths). Finally I was reluctantly escorted from Peshawar, past checkpoints, under the gate that said in fading paint, “No foreigners allowed beyond this point,” until we disembarked in Bara, which was called “the heroin capital of the world.” Then we got a bus to Mandikas where we walked on foot to the sufi lodge. It was already assumed that I knew what to do when I got to Mubarak Sahib’s sufi lodge (I did not but I knew enough to be allowed to stay for a few days). In *Sufi Heirs*, I only mentioned the shaykh’s name as Mubarak Sahib, which everyone called him, instead of his proper

name, Sayfurrahman. The book was very vague about the location because it was, and still is, very dangerous for foreigners to go there (hence the sign) and I did not want to be responsible for any mishaps. Mubarak Sahib passed away in 2010. Before his death, the location of his sufi lodge had already changed to a place near Lahore, so there is no need to run the gauntlet to visit his sufi lodge anymore.

This very minimal disclosure serves as an example – not only of the value of disclosure in expanding the context – but sometimes of the necessity not to disclose for ethical or practical reasons. Until the larger academic culture accepts a larger context of inquiry, pre-tenured professors will still be judged by the relatively narrow contexts of their colleagues and those who referee their publications.

This expanded context of inquiry is not only for anthropologists, but for scholars who work with texts also. Those who are not intimately acquainted with Indo-Muslim culture or Naqshbandi sufi practices mostly assume that my *Sufi Heirs* is a textual study simply because that is the cover story for academia. The book utilizes almost a hundred sources previously unknown to western scholarship. But for those readers who *know*, interspersed in the text are allusions to very arcane points of Islamic or cultural practice. These points did not come from any book; they came from two years' immersion in Indo-Pakistani Muslim culture. The chapter devoted to Naqshbandi contemplative practice is almost completely ignored by my scholarly colleagues in their 14 reviews of *Sufi Heirs*. Yet when I talk to Naqshbandi sufi shaykhs, some of whom ask their students to read that chapter on contemplative practice, they say that *Sufi Heirs* is the only work in English that they consider to accurately represent the Naqshbandiyya. This is in many respects because apparently I have accurately translated and contextualized the texts, not because of any special experiential knowledge as a result of altered states of consciousness. *But* that translation and contextualization was the result of closely working with practising sufis.

While gathering texts in Lahore, Pakistan, for two years, I was also spending time with Naqshbandis every month in the Northwest Frontier Province (now Pakhtunkhwa). Though I did not experience any altered states of consciousness associated with sufi practice (though I did the contemplative practices), I managed to talk to those who had. These conversations continued with other practising sufis over the next ten years as I translated the most detailed manual on sufi practice in print, Ahmad Sirhindi's *Maktubat*. This time, a tenured and more experienced academic, I wrote an extensive "Translator's Preface: Disclaimers and Confessions" (Buehler, 2011: ix–xxii). The first academic publisher refused immediately to print the self-disclosure of this translation process, but the reviewers at Fons Vitae welcomed it. Albeit slowly, conditions for academic freedom are improving.

Scholars *can* expand the context of the inquiry. Some of us will be heroines in

this regard like Edith Turner and Carol Laderman. Some of us, like me, will have to be content to put the books aside and be thankful that there are people who are gracious enough to help us limp along in our understanding as we clumsily attempt to get out of the armchair.

Methodological Considerations for the Twenty-first Century: Allowing “Radical” Participation

The type of participant–observer relationship that was pioneered by Haddon and Malinowski has tended to be more observation than participation. It lessened the stark armchair portrayal of the “other” but still perpetuated an “us versus them” dichotomy. In contemporary ethnography, the “native–researcher” relationship still engenders seeing the “natives” as objects. Ethnography using this type of fieldwork is a vast improvement over armchair methods of imagination/projection and/or relying solely on quantitative methods. But radical participation is the more encompassing methodology for the twenty-first century. The “participant–observer” is a cognitive approach that necessarily treats the native as “other” as it removes the anthropologist from the actual experience itself. In reality, this approach misses the phenomenon entirely.

It’s a curious thing that, even if scientific investigators of society did begin to apply their method of observing, questioning, and measuring to the phenomenon of *communitas* and spirituality, there would be serious difficulty. Like the famous electrons in particle physics, spirituality and *communitas* will not stay still to be watched. Of all social phenomena, *communitas* is most likely to turn into something else when watched. This is because, by definition, in the mode of *communitas*, a person is not an object, and especially cannot praise herself or himself, nor describe or enact on command what often is impossible to put into words. Naturally, the old social scientist types reject this material as unusable – which it is, under the definitions of old social science (Turner, 2006: 44).

The new social science strives for 100% participation. This enterprise involves a certain level of ego surrender, self-knowledge and trust. For a certain level of knowledge, there is no other way. One leaves one’s own comfortable cultural/subjective world while maintaining sincere motivation and utmost respect for one’s collaborators. The urge to collect data subsides as participation becomes an end in itself. Otherwise there is not total participation. Edith Turner blows the whistle on supposed “participation.”

I describe...how the traditional doctor bent down amid the singing and drumming to extract the harmful spirit; and how I saw with my own eyes a large gray blob of something like plasma emerge from the sick woman’s back. Then I knew the Africans were right, there is spirit stuff, there is spirit affliction, it isn’t a

matter of metaphor and symbol, or even psychology. And I began to see how anthropologists have perpetrated an endless series of put-downs as regards the many spirit events in which they participated – “participated” in a kindly pretense. They might have obtained valuable material, but they have been operating with the wrong paradigm, that of the positivists’ denial (Turner, 1993: 9).

When Colin Turnbull in 1990 finally published his experiences (quoted above), he added,

To conclude, what is needed for this kind of fieldwork is a technique of participation that demands total involvement of our whole being. Indeed it is perhaps only when we truly and fully participate in this way that we find this essentially subjective approach to be in no way incompatible with the more conventional rational, objective, scientific approach. On the contrary, they complement each other and that complementarity is an absolute requirement if we are to come to any full understanding of the social process. It provides a wealth of data that could never be acquired by any other means (Turner, 2006: 43).

Science (versus scientism) involves observation, data and direct experience as primary, complemented and interpreted by reason. A twenty-first-century methodology encourages researchers to have a personal encounter with alternate states of consciousness so that they can be considered adequately prepared to assess collective altered states of consciousness. In addition, self-awareness should be explicit, that is, “autobiography is a condition of ethnographic objectivity” (Goulet and Miller, 2007: 13). Kremer goes one step further with what he calls “ethnobiography,” which

grounds itself in the ethnic, cultural, historical, ecological, and gender background of the author. Part of such writing is the investigation of hybridity, categorical borderlands and transgressions, and the multiplicity of (hi)stories carried outside and inside the definitions and discourses of the dominant society of a particular place and time. As creative and evocative writing and storytelling, ethnoautobiography explores consciousness as the network of representations held by individuals from a subjective perspective and brings those representations into inquiring conversation with objective factors related to identity construction (Kremer, 2003: 9).

Some anthropologists (in addition to the ones cited here) have urged their colleagues, by example and through their publications, to experience the altered states offered to them in their fieldwork, for example, Michael Harner, Felicitas Goodman, Paul Stoller and Tim Knab.²¹ These anthropologists lived in cultures where quite a range of non-ordinary consciousness events was normal (if not

21. Their successors include Bruce Grindal, Nadia Seremitakis, Jean-Guy Goulet, Don Mitchell, Stephen Friedson, Roy Willis, Stephen H. Sharp, George Mentore, Laura Scherberger and Tenibac Harvey.

central). Some of them have experimented with conscious-altering techniques from these cultures. Although most anthropologists, ingrained with the taboo of “not going native,” tried hard to reduce these polyphasic events to “symbolic representations” and the like, even they could not ignore the existence of altered states of consciousness. Edith Turner states this in no uncertain terms, “It is time that we recognize the ability to experience different levels of reality as one of the normal human abilities and place it where it belongs, central to the study of ritual” (Turner, 1994: 94).

In the anthropological domain, Edith Turner has noticed the reductive move of using hermeneutics to reduce spirit to a logical set of symbols or logical systems. She asks,

How is a student of the anthropology of consciousness, who participates during fieldwork, expected to regard all the conflicting spirit systems in different cultures? Is there not a fatal lack of logic inherent in this diversity? The reply: “Is this kind of subject matter logical anyway?” We also need to ask, “Have we the right to force it into logical frameworks?” (Turner, 1993: 11)

Returning to Collective Effervescence

What do these more participatory approaches to the study of collective effervescence reveal?

In two words: a lot. Armchair scholarship is largely an interpretive methodology from afar, often projecting the prejudices and presuppositions of the observer on to the observed. There is a qualitative jump once one gets out of the armchair and begins to experience another culture, asking others about their lives and experience of collective altered states. Although this first level of participation can “degrade” into quasi-armchair projection and speculation, at least the observer has an opportunity to listen to the participants. This in turn enables a thick description representing and reflecting many aspects of their personal and cultural lives. Even at this first level of participation a new world with new epistemological realms, subjective and inter-subjective ways of knowing, becomes revealed. If nothing else, it adds another level of complexity, one that should be taken into account in scholarly discourse.

The perspectives outlined in this essay take this participatory approach to the limit by temporarily dissolving the boundary between participant and observer. This too brings forth further perspectives beyond those of participant-observer methodology. Not only do these expanded perspectives significantly challenge our previous understanding, radical participation demands treating others as collaborators not as *others*. Arguably this is a major ethical upgrade in anthropology and the study of religion by honouring people of quite disparate economic and

educational backgrounds as fellow collaborators. New standards of intellectual inquiry demand new standards of ethical behaviour. Note how these new approaches reveal aspects of ourselves that we perhaps would rather not see.

For many reasons Durkheim's critics may not necessarily be satisfied with these new approaches. One is the relationship between collective altered states of consciousness evidenced in collective ritual behaviour and the variables of individual and social change. This is a multi-dimensional problem made even more vexing by not having reliable tests to measure these two variables. Subjective and inter-subjective data, strongly advocated in this article, are notoriously unreliable and need to be gathered and handled with great skill. We presently lack established methodologies to evaluate this kind of data. For some this is reason to avoid such approaches, in spite of the remarkable pioneering studies cited in this article. For others this is even more reason to involve the subjective and inter-subjective in fieldwork. Long-range studies of societies where there are rituals involving collective altered states of consciousness can chart societal and individual change. Being able to connect those changes with collective rituals will be quite challenging. It is not certain that the methodologies I am proposing here will be up to such a daunting task, but they will certainly lead to other questions and other avenues of inquiry that may satisfy Durkheim's critics. We simply do not know without following through with research. In short, we have nothing to lose except a comfortable armchair. There are no guarantees.

In the area of not-so-hard questions, the approaches outlined in this article can easily expand our knowledge of the nature of collective altered states. One conducts extensive interviews, ideally sharing the ritual experience before comparing notes with collaborators. This kind of data could be incorporated in a preliminary follow-up of Mary Douglas's work, which may very well show that the so-called polarities of ritualism and effervescence are better understood as a continuum. If the rave scene continues, Olaveson's excellent research can be used as a basis to chart transformations in individuals over the long term. These types of studies could productively be compared with other related studies, for example, entheogenic use.²² If the subjective and inter-subjective data from modern rave events indicate long-term individual/social transformation then perhaps Durkheim's critics will take note and investigate further. Until there is a critical mass of studies whose results point towards what Durkheim proposed, Durkheim's critics will rightfully keep their stance. Proposing alternative methodologies, as this article

22. Apparently repeated entheogen usage with accompanying altered states of consciousness does not lead to lasting psychological transformation in and of itself (Roberts, 2001).

has, is an intermediary step in the direction of encouraging my colleagues to formulate research models that incorporate subjective and inter-subjective methodologies as much as possible. If the pioneering studies cited here are any indication, such approaches will expand our awareness of what it is to be human.

Conclusion

We have now come a long way from Durkheim and his notion of collective effervescence. It is a refreshing, expansive distance. It starts with Durkheim's armchair insights with interludes into the still-pervasive materialist paradigm and its taboo of subjectivity, transitioning to an exposé of another level of armchair scholarship and examples of a twenty-first-century methodology. The last quote is a twenty-first-century example describing an anthropologist's experience of a collective altered state of consciousness. I have purposely chosen an example of an anthropologist discussing the experiences of her colleague. The qualitative difference from Durkheim's accounts should be obvious.

For all of them, the drumming and the movement had pleasantly dissolved the boundaries of ordinary selfhood. Now Willis felt in a spaced-out state. There had been a hard-to-find "gentleness" about the night's performance. He said he was lifted out of normal consciousness into a state where ordinary perceptions of time and space were drastically altered. He knew that they were all related, different versions of each other, but that there were no fixed boundaries to selfhood; there was a permeability and flexibility between self and other, an infinite flexibility, and again this sense of everything flowing within the all-encompassing rhythm of the drum. Willis experienced the dissolution of the ordinary sense of time and space, the coordinates of ordinary selfhood, the sense that "he" was a person with a particular inventory of social characteristics, including a "position" in society, living at a particular time. All these defining and localizing criteria temporarily vanished. He said he was indeed in Victor Turner's state of *communitas*, intensely aware of himself in relation to his fellows. He was interested that he could "see" himself more clearly than in ordinary reality, when self-perception was typically more fragmentary, tied to one or another fleetingly relevant social role. Then, in the moment of *communitas*, he saw himself whole and objectively. He was "at home" and among, as it seemed, "kinsfolk." He discovered that the state of *communitas* provides access to those transpersonal entities or forces commonly called "spirits" (Turner, 2006: 49).²³

In this manner, there are precedents of honouring collective altered states of consciousness as valid data, ones that we should be encouraging our students to

23. These are her comments on the work of Willis *et al.* (1999). Note the inclusion of his African collaborators as co-authors: K. B. S. Chisanga, H. M. K. Sikazwe, Kapembwa B. Sikazwe and Sylvia Nanyangwe. This is an excellent source for an exposition into trance experience and spirits.

explore. It is time to bring anthropology and religious studies into the twenty-first century. I suggest we strongly consider moving beyond the single-state fallacy and Euro-American monophasic consciousness and do science, a radically empirical science. We can honour objective data while *also* honouring the subjective and inter-subjective imaginal, contemplative, psi phenomena and spirit variables in the study of collective altered states of consciousness. The more epistemic dimensions that we include in our inquiry the more comprehensive our knowledge. Ninety percent of the planetary cultures have institutionalized aspects of altered states of consciousness, that is, they operate out of a polyphasic consciousness (Bourguignon, 1973: 11).²⁴ We are dealing with the mainstream of humanity not simply a handful of “exotic” cultures.²⁵ More than ever, we need more scholars who can develop the means of communicating polyphasic experiences in a scientifically rigorous fashion as they develop methodologies for testing polyphasic events. This is the supreme way of honouring Émile Durkheim and his notion of collective effervescence.

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24. This is on the basis of a sample size of the most predominant and representative 488 societies on the planet.

25. Another way of saying this is “that most human societies operate upon multiple realities experienced...through *polyphasic consciousness*” (Laughlin *et al.*, 1983: 145, emphasis in original).

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