

DID I REALLY FLY? — SOME METHODOLOGICAL
NOTES ON THE INVESTIGATION OF ALTERED STATES
OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND PSI PHENOMENA

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TART: I recently read a remarkable book just published by the University of California Press, "The Teachings of Don Juan."¹ Don Juan is a Mexican Indian of the Yaqui tribe who was a brujo or sorcerer, representing a native American tradition of magic, going back many thousands of years. The book was written by a young anthropologist, Carlos Castaneda. Don Juan had chosen Carlos to become his apprentice, as it were, and teach him the trade; the book resulted from this. This work illustrates so clearly some of the major methodological problems we have to deal with, that I want to quote a couple of passages from it, and illustrate how they might apply to the theme of our conference.

Carlos, after some initial instruction and training, including direct experiences with the hallucinogenic properties of peyote and *datura*, was ready for a major experience. The anthropologist describes as follows the effects of *datura*:

" . . . Don Juan kept staring at me. I took a step toward him. My legs were rubbery and long, extremely long. I took another step. My knee joints felt springy, like a vault pole; they shook and vibrated and contracted elastically. I moved forward. The motion of my body was slow and shaky; it was more like a tremor forward and up. I looked down and saw don Juan sitting below me, way below me. The momentum carried me forward one more step, which was even more elastic and longer than the preceding one. And from there I soared. I remember coming down once; then I pushed up with both feet, sprang

backward, and glided on my back. I saw the dark sky above me, and the clouds going by me. I jerked my body so I could look down. I saw the dark mass of the mountains. My speed was extraordinary. My arms were fixed, folded against my sides. My head was the directional unit. If I kept it bent backward I made vertical circles. I changed directions by turning my head to the side. I enjoyed such freedom and swiftness as I had never known before. . . ."

The experience eventually ended. To make an understatement, our young anthropologist was disturbed by it. He did not feel a change in his state of consciousness; the experience was perfectly real. It felt as if he had flown around through the night sky, but of course, he was educated at UCLA, and he knew it could not have happened. Nevertheless, his experience told him it had.

He waited a couple of days until he had fully recovered from the experience. Don Juan, his mentor, had questioned him about it at great length for items which were important to him.

" . . . There was a question I wanted to ask him [don Juan]. I knew he was going to evade it, so I waited for him to mention the subject; I waited all day. Finally I had to ask him. Did I really fly, don Juan?" "That is what you told me, didn't you?" "I know, don Juan. I mean, did my body fly? Did I take off like a bird?" "You always ask me questions I cannot answer. You flew. That is what the second portion of the devil's weed is for. As you take more of it, you will learn how to fly perfectly. It is not a simple matter. A man *flies* with the help of the second portion of the devil's weed. That is all I can tell you. What you want to know makes no sense. Birds fly like birds and a man who has taken the devil's weed flies as such." "As birds do?" "No, he flies as a man who has taken the weed." "Then I didn't really fly, don Juan. I flew in my imagination, in my mind alone. Where was my body?" "In the bushes," he replied cuttingly [referring to where Carlos Castaneda found himself at the end of his experience], but immediately broke into laughter again. "The trouble with you is that you understand things in only one way. You don't think a man flies; and yet a brujo can move a thousand miles in one second to see what is going on. He can deliver a blow to his enemies long distances away. So, does he or doesn't he fly?" "You see, don Juan, you and I are differently oriented. Suppose, for the sake of argument, one of my fellow students had been here with me when I took the devil's weed. Would he have been able to see me flying?" "There you go again with your questions about what would happen if . . . It's useless to talk that way. If your friend, or anybody else, takes the second portion of the weed all he can do is fly. Now, if he had simply watched you, he might have seen you flying, or he might not. That depends on the man." "But what I mean, don Juan, is that if you and I look at a bird and see it fly, we agree that it is flying. But if two of my friends had seen me flying as I did last night, would they have

agreed that I was flying?" "Well, they might have. You agree that birds fly because you have seen them flying. Flying is a common thing with birds. But you will not agree on other things birds do, because you have never seen birds doing them. If your friends knew about men flying with the devil's weed, then they would agree." "Let's put it another way, don Juan. What I meant to say is that if I had tied myself to a rock with a heavy chain I would have flown just the same, because my body had nothing to do with my flying." Don Juan looked at me incredulously. "If you tie yourself to a rock," he said, "I'm afraid you will have to fly holding the rock with its heavy chain."

My sympathies are all with our young anthropologist, Carlos Castaneda. My whole scientific training tells me he is asking the right questions, and this old man is giving him a very rough time. But at the same time, I begin to realize that from don Juan's point of view, Carlos Castaneda is pigheaded, obstinate and dense, insists on asking meaningless questions, and refuses to recognize his own experience.

Ordinarily I live, breathe and eat scientific method. I ask the anthropologist-type questions, but in thinking about methodology for studying altered states of consciousness I intuitively feel a great deal of dissatisfaction with much of our current methodology. There are gaps. There are things we just cannot handle. Some of my own experiences with altered states of consciousness simply do not fit with the kind of training I had scientifically. And also our current scientific theories do a very poor job in handling altered states of consciousness.

The conversation between the anthropologist and the brujo can be very instructive, especially if we look at it in the light of what Thomas Kuhn² has said about the stages of evolution of a science. In the study of both psi and altered states of consciousness, we are quite clearly in what he called the "preparadigmatic stage." This stage is characterized by random and superficial data gathering. You observe what is convenient to observe. Occasionally you observe something profound. Usually you are picking up what really turns out to be trivia. There are many competing schools of thought attempting to explain the phenomena, with personal animosity between the members of different schools. The data are a mixture of the simple and the complex, and communication is primarily in terms of books because everyone has to argue from the very foundations of the field up and everyone picks different basic things to illustrate the correctness of his own point of view.

What Kuhn refers to as a paradigm is a theoretical structure of such excellent generality that it either solves some major problems with immense precision, or solves many problems with a high degree of precision. Almost everyone working in the area agrees this is a highly profitable

way to deal with that area. Once this is generally accepted, you get the emergence of journals and of tremendously specialized research; this is the kind of approach we meet in the physical sciences today, but certainly do not have to any large extent within the psychological sciences.

According to Kuhn a science is not a neutral way of gathering Truth (with a capital T in some abstract sense) so much as it is a conceptual framework which guides the investigator in his quest for data, in their elaboration, and in building up theoretical structures. In this sense scientific method is exceptionally powerful, but also exceptionally blind at times. Once a paradigm is accepted, there are a number of *obvious* things to do. Where to look for profitable data becomes obvious, and a number of problems become metaphysical (or at least not immediately practical) and therefore are not investigated.

This meeting is concerned with generating research ideas for studying altered states of consciousness in their relation to psi operation.

As I mentioned, we are quite clearly in the preparadigmatic stage; there is no general theoretical structure or paradigm which everyone accepts in principle, from which to go on into very specialized research. There have been attempts within the psychological sciences to create paradigms; behaviorism was one attempt, psychoanalysis another, but neither attained the status of paradigm.

We have many loyal adherents, of course, to particular schools, but we do not have any common understanding. However, our preparadigmatic stage has some peculiar features which I do not believe have appeared in the history of the physical sciences.

First, we borrow from more successful sciences, because they have prestige, and research money. Then, we borrow methods from the natural sciences because such methods have worked very well for them.

Sometimes this pays off extremely well, other times it simply does not work. A good deal of research is done that has the trappings of scientific respectability, but whose results are not very worthwhile. As an example, the whole card-guessing test methodology looks good in terms of a lot of the criteria of other sciences; it has a mathematical basis, it is objective, it has been standardized and replicated, etc. Yet, for the amount of energy invested, the yield of psi phenomena has been very low indeed: statistically significant but practically useless.

A second unique feature of our preparadigmatic stage is that altered states of consciousness and psi frighten us, and I just do not mean the man in the street, I mean us.

Our culture by and large regards states of consciousness as consisting of two simple alternatives: being "normal" or being crazy.

We supposedly have a wider view and yet there are many elements of fear that we share with the man in the street in our dealing with altered states of consciousness. We have terms like "losing control," "freaking out," getting into a psychotic state; and fears of not being able to come out of it, as has been the case with some of the early researchers in this field, who felt that their minds would be permanently affected somehow. "It is dangerous to fool around with these things, you might lose your judgment"—in the sense that your peers will not approve if you yourself experience altered states of consciousness.

For psi phenomena we have a similar problem. Things we are afraid of do not come up in our research literature. There is a tradition that psi is very dangerous and can be used in an evil way. Someone can make you sick with a magical spell, take your wife away from you by a charm, break your will and enslave you. But we have taken all this out of our ordinary parapsychological work. Nice, clean card-guessing tests will not frighten anyone.

Incidentally, Carlos Castaneda eventually gave up his sorcerer's apprenticeship because he was too frightened by what had happened.

These peculiar factors, borrowing from other areas because they have prestige and our emotional ambivalence in dealing with psi phenomena, cause a great deal of confusion for our methodology in our preparadigmatic stage.

If we apply Kuhn's ideas to the conversation between don Juan and Carlos Castaneda, you can see that these two people hold entirely different paradigms. They are really not talking with each other, they are talking past each other. And yet, Carlos Castaneda shares our paradigms. We resist, as he did, the implications of what don Juan says; we "know" that Carlos's physical body did not fly; it could not have! Don Juan is the one who does not have a clear grasp of reality. We "know" that a brujo cannot strike down an enemy a thousand miles away. The anthropologist's experience must have been hallucinatory. Hallucinatory is our word for making this sort of thing all right, so that it fits in our schemes. We cannot accept don Juan's statement that the experience was real, and his implication that the use of an outside observer is not particularly useful cannot possibly be accepted in terms of our paradigm. Furthermore, don Juan refuses to make this big distinction between a mental and a bodily experience, but we are very strong dualists on this point; we insist that this was a mental experience.

From don Juan's view of the world, Carlos Castaneda's approach to this whole field (and the approach of many of us in parapsychology), is stupid. It consists of asking the wrong questions, obviously looking

at the wrong sorts of phenomena, having no hope of getting a proper grasp on things.

You will notice in what I am saying an implicit assumption that there *was* a real set of phenomena that was simply being looked at from two sets of paradigms, which may or may not be true.

How shall we apply these considerations to the study of altered states of consciousness and psi? On the one hand, I do not have a new paradigm to offer. On the other hand, I am not advocating that we stop borrowing models and methods from more successful sciences. If anything, I want us to push the borrowed paradigms as hard as we can, to see how much of our data they will order; how many useful theories they will generate. But we must also develop some new theoretical structures out of the observational material of our fields instead of exclusively borrowing from other areas.

This is a two-step process. First, we need an adequate phenomenology of altered states of consciousness and psi, which we do not have. Most of our present data have been gathered by people who are totally committed to other paradigms, which tell them that certain things are worth looking at in detail and other things are not even to be looked at.

As a concrete example of this let us take the study of mediumship. The psychology of mediumship is almost totally undeveloped, because the emphasis has been on "Are spirits real, are the communications verifiable?" and the personality of the medium has been almost regularly ignored.

I propose that a criterion for an adequate phenomenology should be that it makes sense to the practitioners of altered states of consciousness and of psi. For instance, we ought to develop a psychology of mediumship that will make sense to a medium; a phenomenology of sorcery that would make a sorcerer say: "You have solved several paradoxes inherent in the field, by fitting these things in your scheme." Of course, in developing this phenomenology, we cannot stick with the "sanitized" parapsychology which we have been cultivating until now.

I am not going to take the position that a theory must somehow be true to experience; that it must speak the same language as the phenomena themselves. A theory does not have to be true to experience, if it turns out to be quite useful in dealing with the experimental data. But the theories we have so far have not turned out to be useful; so I am suggesting that one which would evolve out of the phenomena observed might represent a more profitable starting point. Given an adequate phenomenology which makes sense to the people who experi-

ence the phenomena, we can start looking for correlations between different variables. We could apply our theoretical concepts to further data collection (as we do in standard scientific methodology), so that we might develop an experimental sorcery, or an experimental mediumship. (I realize that there are some ethical problems involved, but I will not go into them at this time.) We could then refine the data we collected with these theories, and perhaps a paradigm will emerge from the material itself. Only then, I think, would our comparison with other scientific paradigms become profitable.

In summary, I have been questioning our whole methodological approach which has consisted of borrowing from other fields. We do not yet have meaningful enough approaches to study either psi or altered states of consciousness.

I am asking you, in one sense, to throw out all your conventional scientific training and look at the data of these fields with new eyes. I am the first to admit that I cannot do this myself. I am asking that we continue to push our borrowed paradigms all the way, but that at the same time we try to be true to the phenomena on their own terms, and look for interdisciplinary correlations. Ideally, all this should go on simultaneously; you might have to develop something of a schizophrenic split. Until we succeed in seeing the material from its own logic, from its own internal set of rules, we may be overlooking extremely important parts of it; and we may find ourselves asking the question, "Did I really fly?" In one sense we are asking the right question, but in another sense we are being exceptionally obtuse.

MARGENAU: Thank you, Mr. Tart. Does anyone wish to comment?

SERVADIO: The example quoted by Dr. Tart reminded me of a discussion between two anthropologists, namely, Mircea Eliade and Ernesto de Martino, just on the question of the supposed flight of a shaman. I remember that Eliade said that the question of actually flying was practically indifferent. This aroused de Martino's reaction: "What are you talking about?" he said, "If I had the suspicion that the shaman really went up in the air, I would go there and take a full-length movie." This example shows clearly that there can be two different mentalities, even among scientific observers. I wonder whether we can really speak about methodology in general or if we should not examine more closely our personal attitudes vis-à-vis the phenomena we are studying.

TART: In the anthropological literature on shamanism there are excellent examples of this. You find terribly long descriptions of the

diameter of the drumhead in centimeters and the arrangements of patterns on the reindeer skins, but what the shaman says about the phenomenology—well, that is “fantasy material” that is not dealt with. The diameter of the drumhead, that is *objective*, that is scientific. I think this is an excellent example of looking very well at the wrong facts.

LUDWIG: How a person says he feels and how he behaves in reality are not necessarily correlated. The subjective and the objective observations should be studied with different methods.

TART: I think this is the crux of the matter. The anthropologist's stated intention was to understand shamanism. Period. If he had said: “To understand shamanism strictly from the viewpoint of what I have learned in a Western university,” there would be no problem. He wished to be unbiased, and yet he had a conceptual framework which was quite different from don Juan's conceptual framework, and so the two were not communicating. When don Juan was trying to teach him which ones were the important aspects, he could not see them. Before we attempt to translate observations into the kind of conceptual framework we prefer, it is essential to understand the conceptual framework of the other person. Your own conceptual framework can be very powerful and give you certain data, but can also blind you and make you overlook what may empirically turn out to be quite important.

EHRENWALD: I think we do not have to decide who is right. We have to be able to switch our frame of reference from one to another. We have to be able to shift our attitudes from the sacred to the profane; from a causal-mechanistic to a teleological series; from Euclidean or Aristotelian models to non-Euclidean, post-classical models of thinking; from the scientific to the existentialistic approach, if you like. But in the end, we have to invent a new paradigm in which both approaches are possible and fruitful. Think of Bohr's principle of complementarity which has proved so fruitful in physics. We have a lot to learn along these lines, and I hope we will proceed along them in the future.

REFERENCES

1. CASTANEDA, C.: *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), pp. 91, 93-94. Reprinted by permission of The Regents of the University of California.
2. KUHN, T.: *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962).