

Vít Pokorný
Psychonauticon

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Vít Pokorný

Psychonauticon

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of Psychedelic Experiences

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Content

Introduction	7
Autoethnographic approach	8
Psychonautic approach	11
Anthropological approach	15
Ecosemiotic approach	21
Philosophical approach	23
Autoethnographic prelude	30
The plot	30
Avant-garde, the Velvet revolution and underground	33
Philosophical apprentice	38
Socio-cultural context and psychedelic praxis	47
The impact of everyday life	51
Community of night and the way of poisons	57
Entertainment and free time	65
Rave culture	68
Meeting the Dragon	72
Methodology	75
The concept of transdisciplinarity	75
Methodological precedence of intertwining	80
To think from and to think according to psychedelic experience	85
The concept of analogy	88
Domain, field, umwelt, niche	92
Domain	92
Field	94
Niche and Umwelt	97
Methodological summary	102
Psychedelic rhizome	104
The concept of rhizome	104
Chemical substances	108
Alkaloids	111
Neurotransmitters	114

Entropics, disorganizers, deregulators	118
Psychedelics	128
Hallucinogens	135
Beyond naming: phantastica, psychotomimetics and Shulgin's scale	139
Modelling the domain of psychedelic experiences	149
Application: Set and setting principles	152
Set	153
Setting	158
Onset of psychedelic effect	159
Deterritorialization of perceptual field	161
Emergence of hallucinatory field from deterritorialized perception	162
Synaesthesia and dis-aesthesia	164
Psychedelic experience of time and space	166
The supra-perceptual level of the hallucinatory field	168
Alloy	173
Fading of effects	177
Summary and conclusion	180
References	185

Introduction

*That is how we sorcerers operate. Not following a logical order but following analogical consistencies or compatibilities.*¹

How to describe and interpret psychedelic experiences when they essentially defy a discursive explanation? While experience transcends theory, which always lags behind, theory transcends experience as it connects to it, opens it up and makes it accessible in symbolic communication. Thus, in this book, I don't intend to think *about* psychedelic experiences but *according to* them. To think *according to* or *from* psychedelic experiences means to open their field from within to allow that the levels intersecting therein, and elements emerging therefrom, enter the structure of explanation. At the same time, my theoretical perspective must enter the meaning of my experiences. I assume in this book that the relation between theoretical description and experience is interdependent, i.e. that pure experience without interpretation doesn't exist and vice versa. Experience cannot be fully reproduced by description alone, and interpretation is inevitably a different kind of performance than the original experience. But the former doesn't exist without the latter. Any experience is always connected to an understanding and explanation, as well as the source of conceptually constructed explanation resides in experience.

The key methodological concept that can enable mediation between interdependent activities of making experience and understanding it is the concept of analogy. The relation of interdependence is one of confrontation as well, which takes the form of searching for analogies. For example, a typical feature of almost any psychedelic experience is dissolution of the autonomous subject and consequent loss of control over one's own experience, revealing our inner multiplicity. Reflecting this, I propose a multi-perspective approach, rather than a singular, dominant perspective taking precedence over the others. I therefore employ disparate explanatory strategies that follow different directions and resist unification. Nevertheless, all explanatory perspectives occupy the same space and delineate its boundaries. This methodology thus incorporates the notion of transdisciplinarity, i.e., the idea that different explanatory lines are

1 Deleuze, G., Guattari, F. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 250.

complementary and influence each other. The intertwining of the disparate but communicating perspectives keeps the field of psychedelic experiences unstable and open, and yet interconnected.

Still, inasmuch as it is possible to identify a common thread in this work, I would express this as the following question: How to articulate experiences which not only defy expression in discursive and conceptual language, but also radically transcend and subvert the very laws of such language, for instance the law of contradiction. Psychedelic experiences are extremely difficult to convey linguistically in much the same way as the experience of dreaming or musical pleasure. Yet, we may address the experience indirectly by creating a theoretical web based on two types of explanation. The web I have in mind is on the one hand weaved from descriptions of those aspects of psychedelic experiences that are communicable, and, on the other, from multiple, diverse interpretations of the contexts, i.e. the conditions enabling these experiences, and the consequences they entail for our worldview and self-conception. Together with these methodological considerations, the explanatory web combines the following overlapping perspectives: 1) autobiographical, 2) psychonautic, 3) anthropological, 4) biological and 5) philosophical.

Autoethnographic approach

The autoethnographic explanatory line dates to the years 2008–2015 when I underwent and reflected on approx. twenty (+) self-induced psychedelic experiences. These constitute the experimental core data on which I will be drawing and the starting point of my inquiry. Most of what I claim about psychedelic experiences is directly or indirectly derived from this core. These experiences are situated into the overall biographical context, using the methods of autoethnography; i.e., descriptions and reflections of personal, social, and cultural motives related to my psychedelic praxis in contemporary society. I have chosen autoethnography for two reasons. Firstly, psychedelic experiences are essentially intrapersonal. An intoxicated person is subjectively involved in the stream of intoxication, and his or her consciousness undergoes transformation, both during the experience itself and as a result of the experience in the longer term. Second, our experiences don't occur in a vacuum. They take place at a certain time, and in a certain place, and are, therefore, related to a specific historical and cultural situation of an intoxicated person. The autoethnographical reflection thus attempts to consider a personal journey in a socio-cultural context, asking questions such as: Why and how did I encounter psychedelics?

How did they influence me? What were my experiences like? What is the place of psychedelics and psychedelic praxis in our society?

The autoethnographical approach also includes self-reflection of the scientific process. Scientific process is not an objective and unbiased representation of reality, but as a subjective, creative process. As an author, I am involved in this process not only theoretically or as an academic, but in the context of my total life endeavour. To write this book, I had to, in the end, get involved in this project physically, psychologically, economically, and socially. Psychedelic experimentation has influenced the way I think, feel, and act. It has influenced my family and other social relations. It has led me to unknown places and meetings with diverse kinds of people. Therefore, this text doesn't offer a detached impersonal description of the content and structure of psychedelic experiences, but a complex interpretation of personal psychedelic praxis as experienced from within, rather than just observed.

Since the book was originally submitted as a dissertation thesis in general anthropology, I was looking for a tenable anthropological method for tackling psychedelic experiences. And I found and employed several of them: analytical and evocative autoethnography², reflexive ethnography³, the anthropology of experience⁴, and transformative anthropology⁵, which all conceive anthropological research as a form of transformative praxis, engaged action, and an active, dialectical co-formation of the research field. An anthropologist is a theoretician and at the same time immersed in the field as its inherent part.

The autoethnographical line also addresses one of the key problems of this kind of inquiry that of the subject of experience (the self). The Autoethnographical self is not an atomic person independent of its situatedness in

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- 2 Anderson, L. 2006. Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Sage Publications, 2006, 35 (4): 373–395; Chang, H. 2008. *Autoethnography as Method*. Michigan: Left Coast Press; Cooper, K., White, R. E. 2012. *Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era. Contexts of Qualitative Research*. Dordrecht / Heidelberg / London / New York: Springer.
 - 3 Turner, V. W., Turner, E. L. B., eds. 1985. *On the Edge of the Bush. Anthropology as experience*. Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press; Bruner, E. M., Turner, W. V., eds. 1986. *The Anthropology of experience*. Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
 - 4 Robben, A. C. G. M., Sluka, J. A., eds. 2007. *Ethnographic Fieldwork. An Anthropological Reader*. Malden/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, p. 443–492.
 - 5 Goulet, J.-G. A., Miller, B. G., eds. 2007. *Extraordinary Anthropology. Transformations in the Field*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press.

socio-cultural relations. He or she is a situated actor, who exists and acts inside a variety of pre-existing relational webs. His or her experience is possible only as situated, only under specific external conditions that contribute to the inward experience and determine what it is like for an experiential self to go through these experiences. This means that the meaning attributed to psychedelic experiences will vary according to the overall context in which they take place, i.e. they will be different for an Amazonian shaman⁶ and for a member of a postmodern, industrialized and globalised society. From the autoethnographical perspective, the experiential self is not given as a univocal identity. Instead, the self emerges successively as a place of encounter and negotiation between personal, socio-cultural, and ecological contexts. My experiences are my own only partially as they are pervaded and shaped by historical conditions. These include socially conditioned expectations, moral codes, shared ways of thinking and action, etc., which affect the nature of my experience.

In sum, the role of psychedelic experiences is two-fold: firstly, they are the object of description and analysis; secondly, they serve as a methodological tool and source of analogies. While intoxicated, a person experiences him or herself as fragmentary, realising how individual layers of his self peel off: moral, social, emotional, bodily, cultural, and so on, until nothing remains but some empty, preconscious awareness, transformed by the psychedelic effects. The purpose of herein employed autoethnographical method is to show that the experiencing subject is not a complete master in his own house, and his experience is determined by his involvement in the dynamic intertwined web of pre-existing relations. However, this complex intertwining doesn't mean that my experience with the world and my own self is not at the same time a private and singular event, which participates on the creation of relational webs. To put it simply, my psychedelic praxis, the way I treat psychedelics, is determined by what I have learnt from others, and at the same time my way of using psychedelics may enrich psychedelic praxis to be developed by others.

6 The complex theme of the contemporary shamanism and neo-shamanism is not addressed in this book, yet stays in the background. For basic orientation, see: Znamenski, A., ed. 2004. *Shamanism: Critical Concepts, 3 vols.* London: Routledge; Winkelman, M. 2000. *Shamanism: The Neural Ecology of Consciousness and Healing.* Westport: Bergin & Garvey; Gredig, F. 2009. *Finding New Cosmologies. Shamans in Contemporary Europe.* Zürich/Berlin: Lit Verlag.

Psychonautic approach⁷

Another explanatory line is the “psychonautic” one. The neologism “psychonautic” consists of two Greek words: “PSYCHE” (soul) and “NAUTES” (sailor), whose authorship is ascribed to Ernst Jünger⁸. In his highly allegorical thinking, the term undoubtedly relates to the word “argonaut”, a hero who travels to the boundaries of the known world to discover a treasure with mysterious powers. A psychonaut is thus the one who travels the ocean of human psyche, which simultaneously serve as his own ship. A psychonaut immerses into the inner symbolic, sensual and emotional space of hallucinations, ecstatic raving or catatonic stupor induced by psychedelic substances to uncover the boundaries of human consciousness. I will use the term psychonautics to describe the type of psychedelic praxis typical for modern and postmodern societies, from the nineteenth century until today. The psychonautics thus means an experimental, non-ritualized use of hallucinogens for the purpose of scientific, philosophical, or artistic exploration of psychedelic experiences.

In this sense, psychonautics forms to an entwined tradition that feeds from different roots, and whose unifying feature is non-trivial, thought-out, and intentional experimentation with psychedelics for the purpose of systematic study of these substances and experiences they induce. Psychonautics begins with the development of modern chemistry and pharmacology in modern industrial societies in the nineteenth century, promoting the strategy of versatile exploitation of environment, which was conceived as the source of progress and new technological enhancement of human life. Indeed, the first psychonauts were chemists who synthesized artificial versions of naturally occurring alkaloids such as morphine or mescaline. They were followed by physicians who had been researching the physiology of human sensory and nervous systems, and later by psychiatrists and psychologists. The connection between scientific and industrial (pharmaceutics) interests in the empirical research and utilization of psychedelics thus represent one of the main roots of psychonautics.

The second important source of psychonautics is the modern colonialism. Having discovered and explored new territories and non-European cultures,

7 The history of psychonautics represents a rich terrain that is still waiting for its systematic elaboration. I will return to the question of psychonautics as a recent context of psychedelic praxis in the contemporary society repeatedly. For basic orientation, see: Sessa, B. 2012. *The Psychedelic Renaissance. Reassessing the role of psychedelic drugs in 21st century Psychiatry and Society*. London: Muswell Hill Press.

8 Jünger, E. 1970/2014. *Annäherungen. Drogen und Rausch*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, p. 356–364.

modern Europeans became curious about new plants and substances, as well as about encounters with various kinds of ritualized ecstatic practices in many pre-modern societies. Travellers, merchants, adventurers, and last but not the least, anthropologists still form an important part of psychonautics until today. However, current post-industrial societies witness the opposite movement – the diffusion process when shamanic types of psychedelic praxis permeate our techno-informational cultures.

The third source of psychonautics can be found in modern art. Starting with romanticism, art has thematised the schism between the modern and traditional, and generally between culture and nature, to tackle the issues hidden in the depth of nature and human unconsciousness, the processes that escape the light of reason. This motive closely relates modern art to psychedelic experiences. This tendency to transcend the boundaries of reason, to derange senses and seek for limit experiences, including psychedelic ones, is present in the experimental ethos of modern art. Many psychonauts are therefore painters, musicians, or writers.

The last ingredient of this psychonautic concoction is philosophically oriented or speculative psychonautics, a rich variety of thinkers ranging from psychologists, philosophers, novelists, alchemists, modern mages and writing shamans, to original metaphysicians and casual authors. What they all have in common is the experience of a *psychedelic* impact that made them confront their existing worldview and their self-understanding. They are theoretical psychonauts who believe that understanding the states of drug intoxication can be beneficial and useful for understanding human mind, culture, and religion. They are, to name only the most famous ones, important philosophical and literary figures such as Aldous Huxley, Ernst Jünger, Walter Benjamin, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, William James, Havelock Ellis, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Henry Michaux, Antonin Artaud, Charles Baudelaire, and many others.

In this book, I draw on this speculative tradition. I take the courage for such an enterprise namely in view of the contemporary “psychedelic science”, which by now comprises a multitude of scholarly articles, studies and collective monographies, dissertation theses, institutionally organised research, and other activities in the wide spectrum of academic disciplines, ranging from physics to religious studies. In this light, I join this ongoing dialogue by addressing psychedelic experiences via the anarchic form of the transdisciplinary rhizome: a decentralized and non-hierarchical set of explanations, an intertwining of several explanatory lines without any central strain. This book presents an explanatory system with more independent centres connected by multiple links. Yet, I don’t aim to formulate a uniform general theory of psychedelic

experiences. Instead, I want to uncover the domain of psychedelic experiences as the source of multiple interpretations, as a self-contained element which can't be fully expressed in words, but which can be addressed indirectly. It is an element one can think from and according to.

Another source of this inquiry is the experimental psychedelic use by so called recreational, or I would rather say, wild users who produce a rich set of descriptions of psychedelic experiences ranging from literary works to occasional reports and interviews on wide internet databases. This set includes the so called "drug protocols"^{9,10}, i.e. notes, descriptions, and records of impressions and images encountered during the experiences. Such testimonies complete the reports of my subjective experiences and represent the second source for the following theoretical considerations. My aim is to think from not only my own psychedelic experiences, but also those of others to delineate a field of corresponding possibilities, thus conceiving a model of the entire field by confronting and comparing experiences. My own experiences allow me to assess and falsify assertions of other users, and their descriptions and explanations become necessary correctives of my understanding. In other words, although psychedelic experiences can not be fully articulated, they are never purely private events since they are situated in particular discursive and practical context of actual psychedelic praxis.

Contemporary psychedelic praxis in Europe is rather complex. During the last twenty years¹¹, hallucinogens, and the experiences they induce became a subject of scientific research again. We can witness renewed interest in psychedelics in anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, addictology, neuroscience, archaeology, history, philosophy, and in many other disciplines whose purpose is to destigmatize psychedelics and critically evaluate them. At the same time, psychedelics have been quite dramatically spreading in wider society and have become linked

9 For the origins of this genre see: Benjamin, W. 2006. *On Hashish*. Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

10 Beside many interviews I have conducted myself, I mainly used internet databases: *Erowid. Documenting the complex relation between Humans and Psychoactives* [online database]. Accessible from www.erowid.org; *Shroomery. Magic Mushrooms Demystified* [online database]. Accessible from www.shroomery.org; *Nyx.cz* [online database]. Accessible from www.nyx.cz; *Enpsyro. Encyklopedie psychotropních rostlin* [online database]. Accessible from www.biotox.cz/enpsyro.

11 See Sessa, B. 2012; Yensen, R., Dryer, D. 1992. *Thirty Years of Psychedelic Research: The Spring Grove Experiment and its Sequels*. Göttingen.; Walsh, R., Grob, Ch., eds. 2005. *Higher Wisdom. Eminent Elders explore the continuing impact of psychedelics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

to various subcultures and their corresponding lifestyles. Nowadays, psychedelic experiences are reported by people from all social classes and wide range of social groups, including high school and university students, farmers, musicians, political activists, craftsmen, gardeners, artists, salesmen, as well as prosperous businessmen, IT specialists, bartenders, academics, or teachers.

This ample social distribution of substances that are mostly considered illegal and dangerous is no less than striking. Among other things, this phenomenon can certainly be related to the transformational processes in globalised information societies, namely the global availability of any goods, their easy accessibility and transport, and instant and incessant communication. Together, these aspects of globalisation support the rapid spread of various cultural practices and patterns of action across interconnected societies and facilitate extensive transcultural processes. Diverse types of psychedelic practices with their corresponding narratives not only radiate across individual societies but traverse the boundaries of different social and cultural spheres. Neo-shamanic practices spread throughout Europe from South and North Americas, Asia and Africa, and blend with the artistic, religious, psychotherapeutic, and spiritual tendencies of our times. Psychedelia meets Buddhist meditation¹², astrology¹³, and tarot¹⁴, it mingles with modern magic and sorcery¹⁵, ecological thinking¹⁶, or conspiracy theories¹⁷, it intertwines with mysticism and postmodernism¹⁸,

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- 12 Konik, A. 2009. *Buddhism and Transgression. The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
 - 13 Grof, S. 2009. Holotropic research and Archetypal Astrology. *Archai: The Journal of Archetypal Cosmology*. Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 1 (1): 50–56.
 - 14 Eremitus, A. 2009. *The Psychedelic Tarot*. New York/Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.
 - 15 Hatsis, T. 2015. *The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History of Psychedelic Magic*. Rochester: Park Street Press; Dobkin de Rios, M. 2009. *The Psychedelic Journey of Marlene Dobkin de Rios. 45 years with Shamans, Ayahuasceros, and Ethnobotanists*. Rochester/Vermont/Toronto: Park Street Press.
 - 16 Brown, J. D., ed. 2009. *Psychedelics and Ecology*, MAPS Bulletin, XIX (1).
 - 17 Irvin, I. 2014. *Entheogens: What's in the Name? The Untold History of Psychedelic Spirituality, Social Control and the CIA*. [online] Gnostic Media. Potent News. Accessible from www.gnosticmedia.com.
 - 18 McHale, B., Platt, L., eds. 2016. *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

with the paranormal research¹⁹, electronic music²⁰, or cyberpunk²¹. As I read it, even this ad hoc list suggests that to unravel complexities on the socio-cultural level of the psychedelic domain represents a major challenge. Still, it is an indispensable step in my attempt to elucidate a more general cultural context for personal psychedelic praxis, and hence I pay attention to this psychonautic line throughout the entire text.

Anthropological approach

The context of psychedelic praxis interlinks the psychonautic line with the anthropological one, namely with the problem of relations between an individual, society and culture. The anthropological line develops in two directions. In particular, I seek to understand: 1) how sociocultural context influences psychedelic praxis, and; 2) how psychedelic experiences permeate society and influence its order. It is the task of cognitive anthropology which elucidates the relation between individual experiences and sociocultural processes. I set out to elucidate these interconnections and suggest that the relationship is hermeneutic, meaning that each individual experience is already formed and organized by patterns shared in society and culture; at the same time, these shared patterns are produced a reproduced at the level of individual cognition and action.

In this anthropological context, the relationship between experience, society, and culture can be also conceived as a relationship between live dynamic systems organized on different levels. Every individual and its lived world constitutes a living system that preserves itself in a dynamic equilibrium as it relates with its environment. The connection between individual lived worlds and collective structures is the connection between parts and a whole, existing in mutual co-dependency. Culture then represents a socially formed interface between a society and other artificial and natural systems that shape a landscape

19 Paraanthropology. *Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, 2011, 2 (4); Luke, D. 2017. *Otherworlds. Psychedelics and Exceptional Human Experience*. London: Muswell Hill Press.

20 Brown, J. D. 2013. *The New Science of Psychedelics*. At the Nexus of Culture, Consciousness and Spirituality. Rochester/Vermont/Toronto: Park Street Press, pp. 266–300.

21 Leary, T. H., Horowitz, M. (ed.), Marschall, V. (ed.) 1994. *Chaos and Cyber Culture*. Berkeley, CA: Ronin Publishing.

inhabited by a collective. A culture represents a mode of habitation for a given society, it shapes how a society relates to other societies and non-human systems, how it negotiates its way of life with others.

There is a deep analogy between such conceptualisation of culture and the nature of psychedelic experiences. They are always personal and entail a profound perturbation of an individual living system. Psychedelics activate and bring forth the inner stream of our bodily sensations, emotions, and images, they allow us to access unconscious processes like hidden fears, conflicts, desires, ideals, or memories. However, since our consciousness is not a closed and purely internal process, but essentially our relationship with the world, the alteration of our consciousness also entails an alteration of our environment. And since the environment of an individual is interconnected with the environments of other beings, extraordinary subjective experiences tend to resonate through the shared world as well. Subjective psychedelic experiences thus have the capacity to penetrate the social and cultural environment, especially when a psychedelic praxis become widespread. Psychedelic experiences then acquire a cultural meaning, they can become sacred²² or revolutionary²³.

Therefore, the general anthropological context of how we conceive of human experience is the focal point in this text. It works with the hypothesis that our understanding of human nature must include the idea that as humans we are also beings of hallucinations and dreams, ecstatic trance, meditative immersion, or psychotic disruption. In short, we are beings capable of achieving borderline experiences that are integral components of who we are as a species. Borderline experiences, such as psychedelic ones, demonstrate that our experiencing is not one dimensional, but potentially subject to many and varied states which differ in structure and content. From this perspective, our common everyday experience with the world is organized by individually, socially, culturally, and ecologically relative habitual patterns, and thus it represents an open set of dynamic processes whose integrity is constantly endangered by possible disorganisation. Borderline experience induced by psychedelic intoxication can be considered a menace in that they alter brain activity patterns including our orientation and movement when performing our daily activities. They can also lead to a tem-

22 Gordon Wasson, R., Kramrisch, S., Ott, J., Ruck, C. A. P. 1986. *The Persphone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

23 See interesting deliberations on the relation between psychedelics and revolution in Grey, Ch. 2010. *The Acid Diaries. A Psychonaut's Guide to the History and Use of LSD*. Rochester/Vermont/Toronto: Park Street Press.

poral disintegration of personal identity that disrupts our normal behaviour to even a greater extent. Our ability to integrate borderline experiences, use them for our own good, and include them as a component of a collective relational networks opens a new perspective on human experience in general. From this perspective, humans are not simply rational and logical, but full of conflicts and contradictions; they are beings of ecstasy, rave, inebriation, dreaming, and insanity, and beings that experience death, hallucinations, or mystical vision, or connect to the inner void in meditation. Borderline experiences expose the limits of our normal everyday world, which suddenly appears as a fragile and temporary product of habit. In this context, to study psychedelic experiences means to study humans as beings of boundaries.

To investigate humans as beings of boundaries, I do not aim at formulating a general anthropological theory of borderline experiences; instead, I explore one experiential domain drawing on E. M. Bruner's anthropology of experience. Bruner describes this branch of anthropology as hermeneutical, interpretative, or symbolical anthropology and defines it by questions such as "How do individuals experience culture?" or, "*how are events received by consciousness?*"²⁴. However, such formulations suggest that culture is nothing but a ready-made sum of things and events that can be represented in our mind. This representational view²⁵ would reduce anthropology of experience to a mere study of inner representations. Nevertheless, culture can not be reduced neither to a system of cognitive representations, nor to a system of external entities since culture is both internal and external. Culture is a series of events that undergo a constant change, it transforms and even dies in dancing, working, speaking, love-making, eating, fighting, or getting dressed. It emerges in the process of our bodily encounters with the world and others. We constitute culture in daily activities of our lives, but these are not simply inner cognitive processes, but conscious actions directed toward our environment. Experienced culture is irreducible to an inner system of meanings, or the outer system of things, it emerges in between.

24 Bruner, E. M. 1986. Experience and its expression. In Bruner, E. M., Turner, W. V., eds. 1986, pp. 3–32.

25 For the critique of the representational approach, see: Hutto, D. D. 2013. *Radicalizing Enactivism. Basic Minds without Content*. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press.

Obviously, there is an inner, private layer of our experience with the world, that of “I always know that I know, I am aware of my thoughts and feelings”, but these inner states constitute only one thread of the overall fabric of our experience. For example, even the innermost type of experience, such as pain, has its own way of outer expression like a grimace or a scream. Experience is always expressed somehow through our body or through other objects. Its expression in turn reveals experience to us, it makes it concrete, and is indispensable for forming its meaning. The meaning of an experience is therefore not enclosed within itself, because it is always open to the world in which it actively participates. All experiences make sense as expressions depending on a certain context. They cause something and lead to something as they are embodied in a shared, collectively and culturally shaped space of words, events, pictures, and things.

In other words, an anthropology of experience should deal with experience in terms of pragmatics, praxis, and performance. It is the nature of any experience that it is not only conscious, but also performed in the world, and as such it constitutes culture as a type of praxis. Unexpressed experience resembles an unread text which remains silent and invisible because its meaning is not expressed and has no consequence in action. Only once it begins to operate through expression and context may an experience start spreading among more individuals, influence their behaviour, and become part of a collective network. The wider its influence, and especially its destabilizing potential, the more urgent is the need to repeat it and institutionalize it. In case of difficult and abnormal experiences such as psychedelic ones, a community always needs something what D. L. Williams calls “the consciousness contract”²⁶, a shared understanding of their meaning and of the way they penetrate a social web, influence institutions, rituals, artistic creativity, or politics.

Anthropological research into experiences, especially the psychedelic ones, cannot be conducted by observing someone else’s experience from the outside. To understand forms of psychedelic praxis in contemporary society, the explorer will not achieve the research goal by providing only disinterested descriptions or conducting interviews. Any uninvolved and disinterested observation will simply miss the live experience, and the essence of what it is like to be on an “acid trip” will stay hidden. Therefore, a psychedelic explorer must get involved in the process itself. Nevertheless, however involved he or she may be, the researcher still needs to overcome the major obstacle, namely the ineffable nature

26 Lewis-Williams D., Pearce, D. 2005. *Inside the Neolithic Mind. Consciousness, Cosmos and the Realm of the Gods*. London: Thames and Hudson, pp. 37–59.