

Anthropology, Shamanism, and Alternate Ways of Knowing–Being in the World: One Anthropologist’s Journey of Discovery and Transformation

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SUMMARY *From over 20 years of working with shamans and their apprentices in northern Peru and the United States, this article describes my own journey from scientist and skeptic to humanist and adept. It tells of the fundamental shift in consciousness I experienced as a result of a specific instance in which the veil between the seen and unseen worlds temporarily lifted, allowing me to engage with Spirit in new ways. It presents, as a result of this shift, the struggles I have faced in redefining my own relationship to my work as an anthropologist. Finally, it suggests some of the advantages to our discipline that can come from thinking outside the paradigmatic box that has, for much too long, kept us disengaged from the world in which we live. [Keywords: shamanism, radical participation, anthropology, paradigm shift, consciousness]*

As an anthropologist who has written for more than twenty years about shamanism in northern Peru, I have never shied away from stories about how my own life has been transformed by my research (Glass-Coffin 1998, 2000, 2003, 2009). In part, the tendency to weave my own experiences into my accounts has stemmed from the exhortations of my first informants. As I recounted in my first book, these female healers conceptualized shamanic illness and strategies for curing differently than did their male counterparts. The focus of this difference, I argued, was in the way they encouraged their patients to awaken the healing potential in themselves through coming to accept their own life experiences as valid (Glass-Coffin 1998:171–203). Recounting stories of shamanic healing through the lens of personal experience became a way of honoring the perspective that these women shared with me (Glass-Coffin 1998:xi–xv).

Throughout my career, I have found increasing theoretical justification for my decisions. In the late 1980s, feminist paradigms of spirituality were diverging from more androcentric models. Instead of rejecting and turning away from the realities of this world to find the divine, feminist writers concerned with how women engage with spiritual transformation and healing were echoing this same engagement with “lived experience” that my shaman friends had advocated. Many of these scholars suggested that spiritual growth and development was, for women, more about “coming into a relationship with lived reality and embracing . . . the actual experience of living in this world” than about transcendence or rejection of either life’s pleasures or of suffering (Glass-

Coffin 1998:188). Thus, my insistence on writing myself into my own ethnographic stories of shamanism derived at least in part from my allegiance to feminist paradigms of spiritual transformation and healing (cf. Bynum 1986; Christ 1980; King 1995; Ochs 1983; Ruether 1987).

Similarly, it was during this time period that feminist perspectives in anthropological method and theory were emerging and gaining acceptance in the discipline. Discussions of position and location, relationship and engagement between ethnographer and research subject, were beginning to supplant omniscient and objective narratives among cultural feminists and poststructuralists alike. The "postmodern turn" in anthropology that contextualized and "complexified" ethnographic research as a product of relationship more than an observation of a fact was gaining credence during the very years that I was defining myself as anthropologist and scholar (cf. Abu-Lughod 1991; Alcoff 1994; Behar 1993; DiLeonardo 1991; Ortner 1984, 1996).

The appearance of works like Stoller and Olkes (1989), Jackson (1989), and especially the collected essays of Young and Goulet (1994) also provided me with the courage to write myself into my fieldwork. This turn toward "experiential ethnography" began to challenge more traditional ethnographic methods by asserting that the interactions between informant and ethnographer that often resulted in the ethnographer "being changed" by the process should not be purged from ethnographic accounts. Instead, experiential ethnographers were asserting that the recounting of experiences gained while "in the field" were fundamental to good reporting, and that these experiences were even "a condition of ethnographic knowledge" (Goulet and Miller 2007:2). "In the field," here, has a double meaning: as "both the home environment of our hosts and . . . the discipline that defines our intellectual horizon in our pursuit of knowledge" (Goulet and Miller 2007:2).

In the last 20 years, this validation of the researcher's experience as part and parcel of what is lived and what is communicated back to reading audiences after the ethnographer returns home has only continued to expand. This is especially true of the kind of research I have conducted with practitioners who regularly interact with "unseen worlds" on behalf of their human communities. In this kind of work, as the contributors to Goulet and Miller's excellent collection on "extraordinary anthropology" attest, the types of experiences that are very likely to transform the ethnographer are those lived experiences or encounters that challenge the spiritual and cognitive maps she brings with her to the field. Whether considering encounters with "spirits" in Zambia, like the one Edith Turner recounted in Young and Goulet's 1994 collection (Turner 1994), or the awakening of abilities to "see" in unexplainable new ways (Gardner 2007), it seems that a willingness to really engage with cognitive and spiritual maps that fundamentally challenge how knowledge is produced, and even how reality is shaped, may be a prerequisite to the experience of really "being changed" by our encounters. As Barbara Wilkes describes it:

Cycles. Circles. Ages. Stages. Relations. Interdependence. Balance. Harmony. Flux. Change. Growth. Knowledge. Concentric circles and interrelations. These are the preconditions of knowledge production among the Kainai. Although I understood that at an intellectual level before the Sundance, only having lived these principles . . . made them real, a part of who I am and, thus, made them available to me as tools

in the production of knowledge and ethnography . . . [The willingness to step outside of oneself in this way is not] unscientific, or non-objective. . . . Nor does it signify that one has "gone native." Instead it is an opportunity to glimpse the moral, emotional, physical, intuitive, and spiritual realities and experiences of others firsthand as we take part in the transformations our hosts experience. Thereafter, we have an obligation to determine what such experiences may add to our perceptual and conceptual understanding, not only of our fieldwork cultures, but of all human phenomena including ourselves. [Wilkes 2007:75–76]

In short, because ethnographers have begun embracing the value of stepping outside themselves and of being changed by the process, the tired assertions that anthropology cannot be good science unless the participant-observers remain "detached" from the cognitive and spiritual worldviews of their informants can no longer be accepted at face value. Johannes Fabian's works have been key to this shift in perspective.

In Fabian's view, stepping outside of oneself (which he calls "ecstatic anthropology") to truly enter the life world of the Other should be considered a "prerequisite for, rather than an impediment to, the production of ethnographic knowledge" (Fabian 2000:8). As reported by Goulet and Miller, Fabian further suggests that the theoretical artifices that are built on the ground of objectivity and detached reporting are better understood as institutionalized senselessness than as science (Goulet and Miller 2007:11). A methodological starting point of radical participation (rather than participant-observation) has the advantage of obviating the theoretical conundrum that arises when experience is represented. Instead of "freezing" experience through the act of writing about it, "one advantage of radical participation as a method is that it allows us to fashion representations of other cultures that do not erase their immediacy and presence" (Fabian 2000:120).

Finally, a methodological perspective that emphasizes intersubjectivity, engagement, vulnerability, willingness to lose control, and the ethnographer's willingness to be transformed by spiritual and cognitive maps different than her own is more ethically defensible and decolonizing than the detachment typical of participant observation (Wilkes 2007). An experiential anthropology builds on local ideas, revealing "the beautiful, powerful, and engaging features of local cultures" (Miller 2007:206). It challenges "one of the central myths of the modern period in the West [which] is the idea that the opposition between religion-superstition-revelation and logic-science-rationality divides the world into then and now, them and us" (Goulet 2007:210–211). It can begin to transform academic life on campuses and make universities less hostile to students and faculty whose views about matter and spirit differ from those of their professors and peers, and it can make academe more open to their contributions (from Miller 2007:206–207). To simply dismiss "unseen worlds" as not empirically defensible strips the assertion of authority from the researcher. Experiential anthropology, however, challenges ethnographers to think beyond "our taken-for-granted notions of the real" (Goulet and Miller 2007:11). It requires the researcher to acknowledge the realities of entities who inhabit unseen worlds, to accept as important the connections and relationships between natural and so-called supernatural phenomena, and to stop bracketing explanations of the causes and effects of sickness and prosperity that occur at

the interstices of physical and meta-physical worlds with “as if” qualifiers. As many of the contributors to Goulet and Miller’s recent collection argue, a truly decolonizing ethnography often requires us to simply accept at face value those spiritual and cognitive maps that are very different than our own (Goulet 2007; Miller 2007; Wilkes 2007).

For all these reasons, I continue to utilize a paradigm of inclusion and engagement to portray my work. Over the years, this stance has allowed me to accommodate what my shaman informants have insisted all along, that healing comes through directly engaging one’s own experience, rather than vicariously. It has also allowed me the space to explore and validate the intersubjectivities I have experienced in my own work as an ethnographer, and has nourished my own proclivities to consider myself more of a humanist than a scientist in this sometimes schizophrenic discipline we call anthropology. Finally, it has certainly allowed me to decolonize my own stance to engage more fully the transformative power of healing, as defined by the female shamans who have cast me in the role of patient and who have deigned to heal me time and again over the last 20 years (Glass-Coffin 2003).

Not surprisingly, then, a key theme of my research and reporting has been that of the change that transpires through engagement. More generally, the bulk of my accounts have been about “transformation,” which I have explored as it applies to Peruvian shamanism in a variety of ways. Some of what I have written has focused on the paradigmatic transformations that result when considering Peruvian shamanism through a gendered lens (Glass-Coffin 1998, 1999). Sometimes I have focused on the transformative impacts of European conquest and colonialism on the lives and practices of indigenous, mestizo, and even African healers (1999, 2002, 2006). At other times, my focus has been on the transformations that occur when shamanic healers are catapulted into the limelight of exotic “Otherness,” as a result of the researcher’s gaze (1994, 2003). Most frequently, however, I have written about the very personal psychological and social transformations that have occurred in my life as a result of my prolonged contact with Peruvian shamanic worlds (1993, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2009).

Shamanism, Cognitive–Spiritual Maps, and the Reticent Ethnographer

The defining characteristic of the shamanic practitioner is, of course, his or her direct access to the normally unseen worlds of spirit and divine power, as well as the ability to channel knowledge garnered from these experiences for the good of a human community. To truly convey how shamans facilitate transformation in the lives of their patients, it behooves the ethnographer to attempt to access those “other worlds” just as their informants do, and it is, therefore, not at all unusual for ethnographers to attempt full participation in the ceremonies that allow their shamanic mentors to effectively alter states of awareness and engage other worlds.

There are multiple examples of ethnographers who have stepped into the world of their shaman informants and who have been changed by the process. Perhaps the most famous of these ethnographers is Michael Harner. His experiences in the late 1950s and early 1960s with Conibo and Shuar shamans, and

especially with the *ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) they utilized to open their awareness to unseen realms that lie beyond “ordinary” consciousness, so impacted him that he left his life as a professor of anthropology at the New School in New York City to devote himself to full-time study of shamanism and to create the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (Harner 2005). More even than Castaneda’s early books (cf. for discussion Glass-Coffin 2009), it was Harner’s *The Way of the Shaman* (1980) that truly embodied the experiential aspects of ethnography described above. His book, together with the educational mission of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, has transformed the field of shamanism from an esoteric, rarely accessed object of ethnographic accounts into an intersubjective way of being in the world that has imprinted itself on Western awareness. As Roger Walsh and Charles Grob have noted: “What Yogananda did for Hinduism and D. T. Suzuki did for Zen, Michael Harner has done for shamanism, namely bring the tradition and its richness to Western awareness” (Harner 2005).

In fact, it was Michael Harner’s *The Way of the Shaman* (1980), as well as Castaneda’s first four books about his apprenticeship with don Juan, that inspired me to become an anthropologist and a student of shamanism (Glass-Coffin 2009). As I was preparing my dissertation research proposal in 1986, I remember telling my mentor, renowned shamanism scholar at UCLA, Dr. Johannes Wilbert: “What I really want to do with my dissertation is something like what Harner and Castaneda were both able to do. I want to enter the life worlds of shamans and bring back that knowledge to larger audiences like they did. Too bad it’s already been done.”

As fate would have it, those words would haunt me for almost 20 years. Yes, I was able to study with Peruvian female shamans called *curanderas* for almost 24 months, from 1987–89. I have continued to work with a pair of these healers, Ysabel Chinguel and Olinda Pintado, almost every year since 1988. And yes, during all these years, I have participated time and again in all-night ceremonies, called *mesas*. With the healers, I have ingested gallons of the psychoactive *San Pedro* cactus (*Echinopsis pachanoi*), in an attempt to access the normally unseen worlds of spirits and *encantos* (magical landscapes) that these curanderas invoke to heal their patients of the sorcery from which they are believed to suffer. But, in my case, and in spite of every attempt to enter into their life world and to gain access to the spiritual and cognitive maps that guided their journeys into the unseen, I was blind to their world of *vista* (magical “sight”) and unable to “cross over,” as Harner did on his very first ayahuasca journey (Harner 1980:1–7). I was, as Meintel describes it, envious of the spiritual experiences of my shaman mentors, yet unable to “let go” or “lose myself” to the process (Meintel 2007). For me, it was not until much later, when I was finally able to let go of the conventional researcher role, that I was finally able to experience what my shaman mentors regularly recounted to me. So, the reason I have not usually written about my consciousness of human–spirit connections or about the ontological reality of normally invisible worlds is really quite mundane. At least for me, the barrier to truly participating in what Harner (1980:26) first called a “shamanic state of consciousness” has been simply this: being an ethnographer and being a shamanic adept have been, until very recently for me, mutually exclusive ventures. I had certainly tried to “cross-over” by joining my shaman

informants in their ingestion of psychoactive catalysts, but, because I had been intent on describing and analyzing, framing and translating, rather than completely surrendering to the experience as one who would be transformed by it, I had always been unsuccessful in accessing their worlds. Indeed:

More observer than participant, translator than advocate, patient than initiate, until recently I had never had the privilege of “seeing beyond the veil” that separates human and spirit worlds. . . . That is not to say that I hadn’t had a lot of strange hallucinations, seen pretty colors, or experienced the neurological effects of psychoactives. [But] even with all the altered states I’d had with shamanic guides . . . I never really understood how worlds connect because I had never . . . perceived the *realities* of unseen worlds firsthand. [Glass-Coffin 2009:58]

Ysabel’s explanation for this ineptitude on my part has always been very simple. As she has often told me in the years since I first began lamenting my inability to enter her world: “Even if you ingest gallons of San Pedro, if you do not have faith and truly believe in its power to take you to the other side, you will see nothing.”

A Personal Awakening

So, after more than 18 years of this ineptitude, imagine my surprise when on the day after my 49th birthday in 2006, in West Palm Beach, Florida, I finally “got it.” On that day, I finally came to understand first hand the cognitive and spiritual maps of *relatedness* and of human–spirit connection that Wilkes so beautifully describes (2007) and that had been eluding me for all those years. It is more than somewhat ironic, given the concerns I had expressed in my writings about the validity of neo-shamanism (Glass-Coffin 1994, 2004), that my first “ah-ha” moment came while working in suburban Florida rather than in Peru. Nevertheless, come it did—with Oscar Miro-Quesada, a shamanic healer who, although Peruvian by birth, and a seasoned apprentice to both coastal and highland Peruvian master healers, is at least as versed in clinical and transpersonal psychology as he is with the traditions of his homeland.

On the day of my awakening, I had thought I was going to Florida to interview him for the book project on which I was working. When I asked him if he would be willing to participate in this ethnographic project, whose working title was “transformation and healing from the heart of the Andes to the American heartland,” he said quite simply: “Sure, I’m happy to have these transformations be the subject of your ethnography, but, before I do, are you also willing to be transformed?”

So, on that day in February, in response to his call for my own transformation, and in a ceremony designed to encourage rebirth, we partook in a medicine ceremony with ayahuasca. Unlike my previous experiences with visionary plants, on that night I finally saw beyond the veil and came face-to-face with the power and awe-inspiring awareness of a truly animated cosmos. As I have recounted elsewhere:

In a particularly clear-headed moment I had walked outdoors and sat in silence. There, beneath a waning gibbous moon on a cool Florida winter night, the scene

before me was completely ordinary except that every plant, from the tallest coconut palm to the smallest blade of grass acknowledged and honored my presence. Like a crowd of well-wishers at an acceptance speech, all turned towards me in unison when I appeared, bowing in a sign of respect. When I returned the nod, the gesture was repeated. When I looked away, their undulations of stem and flower, of bark and frond became less focused, marked by private conversations and shared whispers between those plants in closest proximity to one another. But when I returned my gaze again, the coordinated movements were repeated. Bowing and swaying like schools of fish or flocks of geese on a common flyway, the multitudes repeatedly bowed and I reciprocated. We were equals honoring one another.

As this polite greeting continued, I suddenly realized, viscerally, what I had been writing about for many years: that all Life is co-created as willing humans interact in reverence with the very Ground of Being that sustains us. This co-creation is reflected and nourished by the ways in which we interact with one another, by the ways in which we care for the material world that provides for us, and by the ways in which we relate to a firmament which both inspires and humbles us as we journey. Quite simply, I learned that night that, "as ye sow, so shall ye reap." Literally, I realized that if we want to change international politics, we would do well to start by honoring the earth as the Mother of us all. While this stance might be thought of as cliché (yes, we should plant and harvest organically, stop polluting the rivers, and make efforts to slow down global warming), what I learned when I peeked behind the veil that night was more profound. Because we are all related and part of a giant web of belonging, the way we honor each element of creation, with offerings, with thanksgiving, and with prayer, has repercussions that are felt on many levels, from tectonic movements to pan-national awakenings. All life vibrates when the string is plucked regardless of which note is played. [Glass-Coffin 2009:64–65]

The Aftermath

The implications of the awareness with which I was gifted that night have been profound, inverting my understanding of cause and effect in significant ways. As a result of that transformative moment, I have had to reassess my understandings of how cultural attitudes and beliefs about the world shape or are shaped by material conditions and constraints. Even though I had sometimes been called an ontological relativist by my anthropological peers because of my allegiance to what I now understand as experiential anthropology, I was, until that moment, not prepared to assert that the material conditions of the world we inhabit are not at all separate from our gaze. Furthermore, even though I have long regarded myself as more humanist than scientist in my orientation to anthropology, for I have long been more comfortable with intersubjective than with objective accounts of my relationship to my research subjects, I never expected to encounter trees and grass and earth as conscious and responsive to my presence as a participant-observer in the world.

This threshold experience also gave new meaning to the term ontological relativism, and to the anthropological debates of the relationship of Self to Other with which I had wrestled over the years. Like many in our discipline, I had come to anthropology early in my life as a response to my own feelings of dislocation and disconnection from the world. Early experiences living abroad had changed me in profound ways and had kept me from "ever going home again." In my case, these experiences led me to Peru in 1975 when I was just 18 and, through a series of "coincidences" I have reported elsewhere (Glass-Coffin 2009:60–61), provided an opening for me to come into contact with Peruvian

shamanic worlds. It was because of the cross-cultural experience that had resulted in my own sense of dislocation that I decided in the early 1980s to pursue studies in a discipline known for the study of the Other as a kind of projected yearning to find one's own lost Self. I considered it just coincidence that I stumbled on the anthropology program at UCLA in 1982 where two graduate students had recently completed or were just completing doctoral studies with Peruvian shamans.

After my experience with Miro-Quesada in South Florida, however, I began to reassess the relationship between my experiences as a teenager in northern Peru and the opening of an opportunity that led me back to Trujillo to study connections between Self and Other, seen and unseen worlds, all in the name of anthropology. I began to reassess the ontological relativism to which I had been accused of subscribing during all the intervening years, as I realized in that moment that, as don Oscar is very fond of saying, "consciousness structures matter." I even began to view myself as a character, rather than as the only director, in the story of my own becoming, infused as it was with the same kinds of "right timing" and "universal flux" that Wilkes described so eloquently in her account of sun dancing with the Kainai (2007). Thus, after the threshold experience that I describe above, I began to rethink those relationships of Self and Other, as I began to realize that I am an intimate part of a greater whole, rather than standing somehow separate as a "being apart" from the world in which I live. To put it mildly, this experience turned my world as an anthropological isolate, as a Self observing Others, upside down.

In that one moment, also, I found myself abandoning once and for all the cultural materialism that had shaped my understanding of how infrastructure, structure, and superstructure interact to organize and make sense of cultural worlds. Instead, I became aware that we are part of an animated cosmos, and that what we think, what we do, and what we leave behind (which is the way I often define the term *culture* to my students) structures a reality that responds to our actions and intentions. Furthermore, I became aware that what we often describe as existing beyond our conscious mind changes according to our intentions, and that what we often refer to as the "material world" has the same awareness that most of us—until recently—have reserved for ourselves as the only truly sentient beings in the cosmos. Moreover, I began to realize that my relationship to anthropology would have to change, or I would have to abandon my allegiance to the discipline for something else.

More than anything, though, with that extraordinary experience, I began to question the contexts in which an ecstatic anthropology (to use Fabian's term) might be applied. Stepping outside of oneself is celebrated by Fabian, as well as by the authors in Goulet and Miller's edited volume (2007), as a way to better engage with the cultures of the communities that we study, and hence to "discover new forms of engagement with others in the everyday world" (Goulet and Miller 2007:11). But, does the invitation to explore radical participation and even coactivity (to use Goulet and Miller's terms again) extend beyond the human community? What happens, as I experienced, when the inter-subjectivity and engagement that results in change (for Self as well as Other) is with the unseen realm? What is my responsibility as an ethnographer when I realize that reciprocity and relationship occur between human and

nonhuman consciousness as well as between ethnographers and the human communities with whom we engage? How does this kind of coactivity challenge us to think beyond the generally accepted canons of the discipline to create new registers of radical participation and intersubjective relationship that are meaningful and emergent? These, to me, are the important questions.

Although the debate continues about what to make of these extraordinary encounters and about the reality of the spirit world as expressions of transpersonal consciousness, or simply as exogenous Beings normally hidden from human view, I find myself caring less about what to “make” of these encounters and more about what to “do” with them. As I continue down the path of engagement, which surfaced for me that cool February night in Florida, I often find myself wondering if experiential anthropology can provide me with a useful model for the kinds of encounters, vulnerabilities, and commitments to unlearn that are required of me. Can the discipline that has nurtured me for so many years stretch to embody a new cognitive map, so that it becomes truly postcolonial with regard to relationships between the human and the nonhuman or the seen and the unseen worlds? Or, have I reached beyond the limits of acceptable inquiry, so that I will, like Michael Harner, the late Felicitas Goodman, Angeles Arrien, and so many others who have come to take their relationships with the unseen world seriously, choose to leave the academy?

I pose these questions because the direction in which I find myself traveling transports me quickly from the realm of science—however humanistically construed—to the realm of religion and spirituality. When I move from a concern about how to engage with the human communities that I study to concerns about how to ethically interact with an unseen world, I have clearly moved beyond the canon. Further, when I begin to accept that outcomes of my actions and my intentions toward normally unseen forces and powers have consequences in the material world, I have probably, at least for most of my colleagues in anthropology, “crossed over.” Even experiential ethnography pioneers like Fabian are hesitant to move into that arena. As he muses in his extraordinary introduction to Goulet and Miller’s recent collection,

Finally, I must confess that reports of ethnographers embracing either the religion of those they study or some other religious faith . . . following their experience of rituals, both of healing and of initiation . . . make me uneasy. . . . [While] I would not for a moment deny the importance of religious knowledge . . . that comes from participation . . . in ethnographic inquiries of religion . . . [let us not] ignore the fact that the discipline that got us to where we are now had its beginnings during the Enlightenment as part of a movement of emancipation from religion. Arguably, that movement has not ended with success, but it should not be abandoned either. Does this not also hold, analogously or homologously, for anthropology itself? Crossing boundaries between faith and science, dream and reality, reason and madness is fine, but for the time being at least, I expect society will let us earn a living as explorers rather than crossers of boundaries [even if] we no longer have to act as guardians and defenders of these. [Fabian in Goulet and Miller 2007:xi–xii]

Regardless of this admonition, however, I cannot deny the call to action that my own extraordinary encounter engendered. Thus, although I have continued to struggle with whether or not experiential anthropology can expand its reach

to include the kinds of interactions and relationships to which I gained access that night, I continue to move down a path that for me, at least, seems the only ethical path to follow.

Since that threshold moment in 2006, I have had a number of experiences that have deepened my knowledge of the interconnectedness that I witnessed for the first time that cool Florida night. I have, like many anthropologists before me, found myself shifting my focus from ethnographic reporting to a more explicitly shamanic course. Along the way I have facilitated pilgrimage and ceremony, and I have apprenticed more deeply with the plant spirit of San Pedro. I have become certified as a teacher of the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition that Oscar Miro-Quesada founded. Most recently, I have begun teaching others how to ethically engage with elements of the unseen world to foster healthy relationships with those forces and powers. Moreover, because, along the way, I have become more and more aware of the intimate ways that we are connected in thought and its consequences to a universe "in flux," I have expanded my net of services to include the task of teaching others to awaken to this consciousness of connection. I have come to live the dictum that I first heard expressed by my friend Oscar, that "consciousness structures matter."

During one of the experiences that have deepened my awareness of these connections, I had a vision of a coming together of many worlds. In this vision, of which I first became conscious on a Continental flight from Atlanta to Peru about six months after my Floridian "awakening," the plane lurched sideways as we passed through extremely high winds on the Gulf Coast. I felt myself propelled downward toward the earth, carried by the power of the upper world, as manifest by sacred wind that oxygenates and penetrates, infuses, and recharges. As I prayed for calm nerves amid the rising panic of passengers whose exclamations intensified with each jolt of our flying chariot, I crossed the veil yet again. I became the wind, but also the heat and light of sun and lightning bolt. Simultaneously, as I surrendered to whatever fate lay before us in the skies, I felt myself also become the water that originates deep within the earth. I was the life-giving elixir that bubbles upward and outward to quench the thirst of all who live on the planet, as this liquid life springs forth. As winds and water met on the surface, in a flash of visions that flooded over me, these forces of movement and stillness, raw power and deep nurture, collided and created new life that spread outward across the surface of our planet, flowing in channels from north to south, carving on the land a path for the return of the Creative Power of the amorphous god that Andeans call "Wiracocha." It was the vision of a *tinku*, or a collision and restructuring of elemental forces, to create new possibilities for exchange, communication, and connection between worlds that are too often viewed as dichotomous or opposite.

In reflecting on this experience, and as I move into a deeper understanding of my own connectedness to the world I used to gaze on as separate, I find myself rethinking my relationship to the discipline of anthropology. I find myself wondering if I am alone in suggesting that experiential anthropology can extend to this decolonizing project of unlearning all we thought we knew about how consciousness interacts with matter. Yet, I am hopeful that experiential anthropology can make the necessary leap between worlds of science and

spirit, just as it has already done between the worlds of Self and Other. For, as Creighton reminds us in the closing chapter of *Extraordinary Anthropology*:

Anthropology has been the discipline long teaching that different human beings have different valid ways of understanding what it means to be human. Perhaps the time has come to accept the possibility that anthropologists might validly have different ways of understanding what the anthropological project means and how it should be carried out. . . . Perhaps, as anthropologists have long argued is the case within cultures, it is possible to have engagements in magic and science at the same time. [2007:415]

In terms of my identity as an anthropologist and author, I have, of course, begun seriously rethinking the implications of an anthropological gaze that originates from the premise of "connection to" rather than "separation from" the world. To this end, I have become committed to reporting what I know in a way that better honors the validity of hidden truths. For example, I have dropped the "as ifs" and the "likes" from my explanations of spirit, magic, sorcery, and soul. To some, this practice constitutes heresy, for they believe that the conventions of intersubjectivity that it requires extend far beyond that which our discipline ought to handle. Nonetheless, since that first night, when I saw palm trees and crab-grass bow before me and reciprocate to my repeated bowing, when I understood the reason that Native American oratories so often end with the phrase "all my relations," and when I finally realized the profoundly significant implications of those connections, I have been unable to write and think in any other way.

Some changes to my scholarship I make willingly, including owning my own experiences as I now move from the role of anthropological observer to shamanic initiate, and as I accept my birthright as a full-member of an earth-honoring spiritual community. Others, I fear, but cannot reject, wondering only whether the record of my adventures with a family that includes plants and animals, rocks and trees, can ever be made palatable to my academic peers. Yet others will emerge as a result of the narrative risks I am willing to take each day. In all these changes, I am quite certain of only one thing: I can no longer stand on the fence of participant or observer, impassioned subject or detached recorder, wounding the very feet that must carry me forward to my destiny. Whether I am deemed dangerously deviant or shamanically gifted in the accounts I finally render will very much depend on how well I am able to mediate between those worlds to which I now have access, as well as to the needs of a community of readers willing to be served.

Furthermore, I believe that in our discipline, as in my own orientation, the time has come for new beginnings and a new acknowledgment of belonging. I believe that it is time to proudly verbalize the perspectives of engagement, transformation, connection, and consequence that some of us have experienced, rather than to sweep them under the rugs of "interpretive drift," "the dismissals of 'going Native,'" or even under the rug of "sheer delusion," of which some of our peers accuse us when they speak critically about the perils of humanism within our discipline. I believe that the power of culture, as defined by what we think, what we do, and what we leave behind, is a powerful force in the world today, if we are willing to use the insights gained when "peeking behind the

veil" to consciously imagine a universe that is becoming conscious of itself through our own participation in it. I believe that to ignore the consequences of the way that we walk in the world or to forget that we are part of a web of interconnected action is, as most Native traditions have often told us, just plain dangerous.

Not long after a ten-day pilgrimage that I undertook following the vision I described above, I again saw my friend Oscar Miro-Quesada at the airport in Chiclayo, Peru. I was tired from many miles of travel, and from many very long days and nights. I was thinking of all the complexities that our pilgrimage had revealed, and of all the worlds through which our encounters had reverberated. I was wondering how best to summarize our experience in a few words, so that he would understand. We hugged, and then, as our gaze met, he said simply: "Sister, we are in a new time, you know, and some of those old patterns just have to fall away to make room for the change that is coming."

Indeed, I agreed. So simply put, yet so profound was his message. What I heard in his words was that the time for separation has passed, and the time for judgment is over. Instead, the time has come to embrace and welcome this creative collision of scientific and humanistic forces in our individual and collective lives, and to realize the power that will be released as a result of this reencounter. Self and Other, participant and observer, the world within and the world without, even Science and Spirit have come together and are both necessary to a new way of Being.

As I reflected on his words then, and as I continue to ponder them now, my humble prayer is that as we welcome and prepare for this new beginning, that we focus our attention on love rather than on fear, on creation rather than destruction, and on an inclusive vision of planetary wholeness rather than of individual need.

These are the narratives that I am willing to articulate. They are narratives informed by Spirit, by deep awareness of relationship with other sentient beings (not all of whom walk on two legs), and by service to a greater whole. They are narratives that may or may not be accepted by my academic peers. Whether or not my peers choose to accept these narratives, however, they continue to serve as bridges between consciousness and matter, between Self and Other, and between participant and observer, in ways that I am confident reflect the resilient legacy of our discipline. As I think about new materials with which to construct narrative bridges between myself and those others who may listen, I have finally reconciled myself to the ambiguous legacy left by Castaneda. In seeing beyond the veil, I have replaced anthropological detachment with engagement and embraced the understanding that comes through surrendering to the unknown. I am ready to reaffirm the power of anthropology as a force to be reckoned with, as we open ourselves to the possibility of shaping material futures through our conscious engagement with the world.

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