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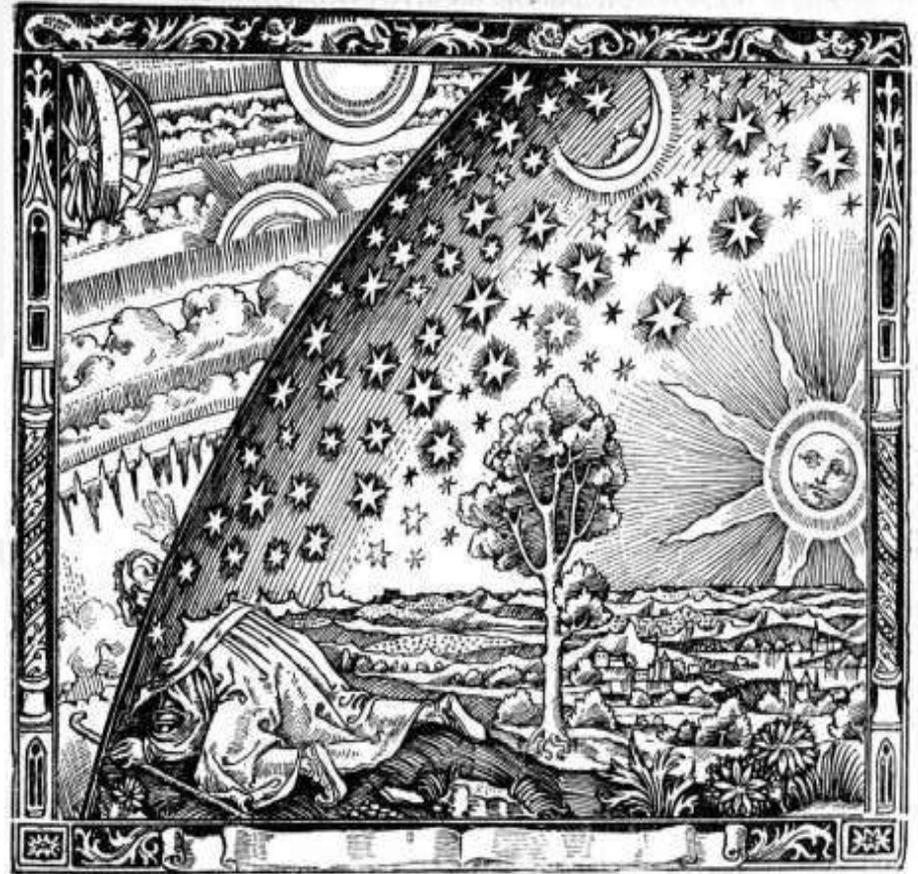
A TRANSPERSONAL EXPLORATION OF EPILEPSY & ITS NUMINOUS, COSMIC STATES

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Psychological Processes



This talk

- The transpersonal
- Numinous, cosmic states of epilepsy
- My research
- Autoethnography
- Dreamwork



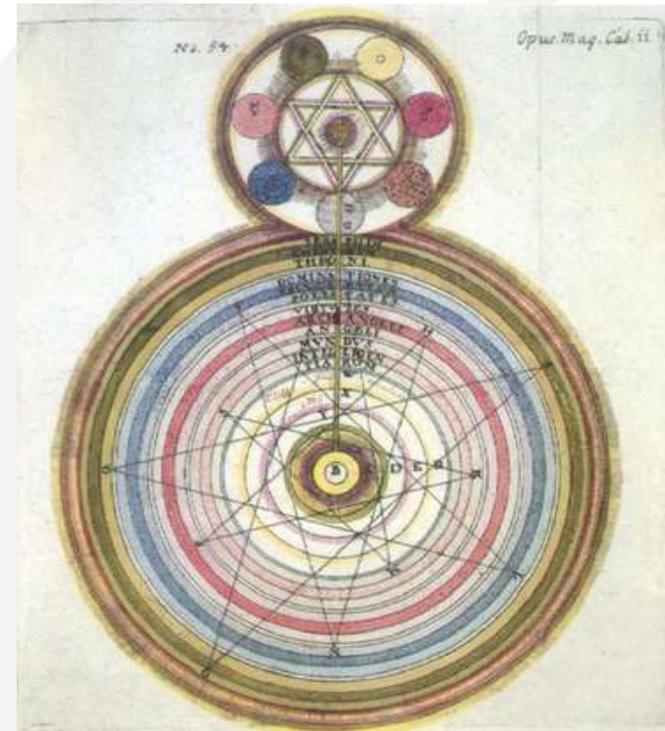
The Transpersonal

- Previously been regarded as irrational or pathological, (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993)
- Trans - beyond; ego - personal
- Contrast between felt experience & previous self-identity & world paradigm (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980)
- Sacred encounter (Anderson, 1996)
- Bridge between science & spirituality
- Transforming of self & others (Anderson & Braud, 2011)



Spiritual / mystical experience

- Blend of humanistic psychology, mystical and esoteric traditions & eastern religions (Houtman, 2007)
- Favours retrospection - falls into the remit of the esoteric (Fontana, 2003)
- “ far from being illusory, is ... something far more real than what he experiences normally through his five senses or thinks with his finite mind” (Zaehner, 1971)
- Types: religious, humanistic, nature, cosmos (Worthington, Hook, Davis & McDaniel, 2011)



Epilepsy

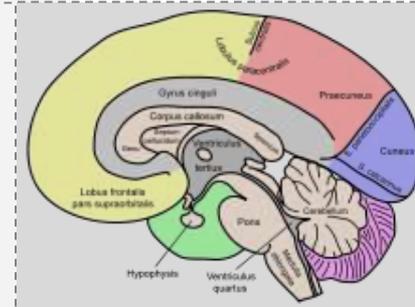
Suspicion

- Sacred – Greek, Aztec
- Demonic – Ottoman, Medieval



Materialism

- Medicalised
- Reductive



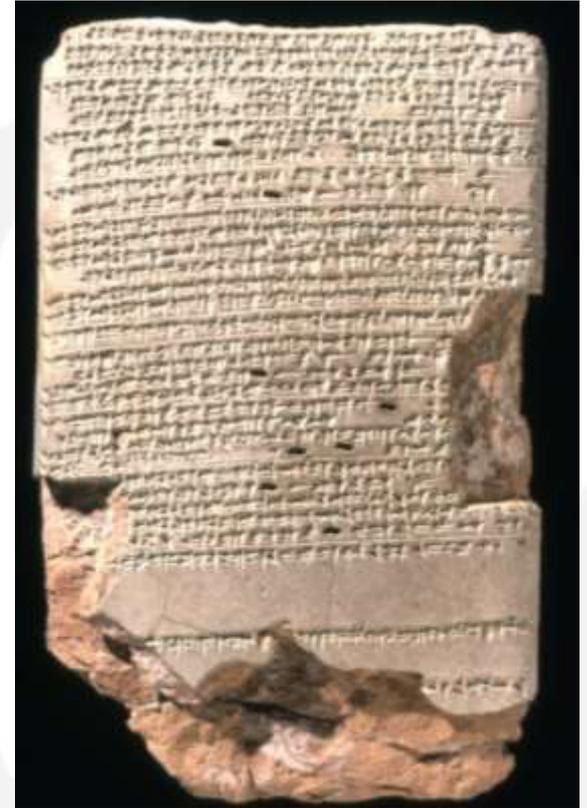
Pathologising

- Hallucinations
- Psychotic



Temporal lobe epilepsy

- Temporal lobe epilepsy: auras
- “...a man evolves his own religion...”
(Temkin, 1994)
- Dostoyevsky
“...suddenly amid the sadness, spiritual darkness & depression, his brain seemed to catch fire at brief moments...His sensation of being alive and his awareness increased tenfold at those moments which flashed by like lightning. His mind and heart were flooded by a dazzling light. All his agitation, doubts and worries, seemed composed in a twinkling, culminating in a great calm, full of understanding...” (The Idiot)



The 'God Helmet'



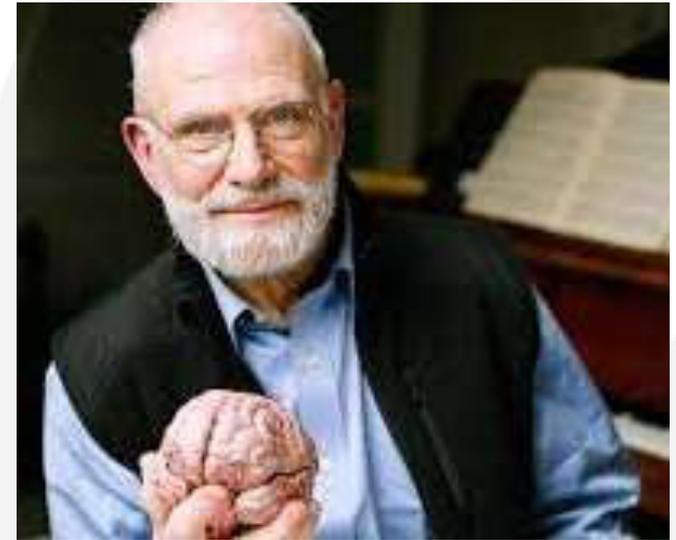
Numinous, cosmic states

- ‘Dreamy states’ (Penfield, 1954)
- Established link to spiritual experiences (e.g. Sensky, Wilson et al., 1984; Devinsky & Lai, 2008)
- ‘Numinous states & cosmic spirituality’ (Dolgoff-Kaspar et al., 2011)
- Transpersonal: links to psi & ASC (e.g. Neppe, 1983, Persinger 2001; MacDonald & Holland, 2002)
- Veracity of experience above pathologisation

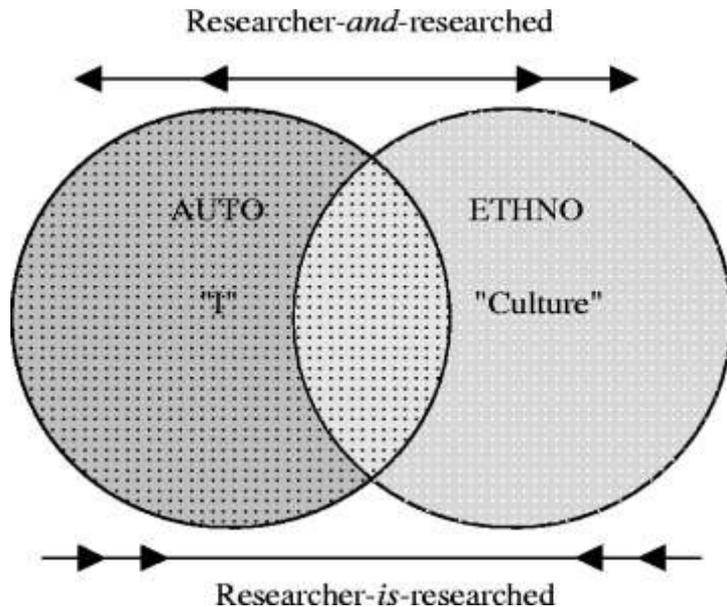


Value & meaning

“Ecstatic seizures shake one’s foundations of belief, one’s world picture, even if one has previously been wholly indifferent to any thought of the transcendent or supernatural...they may, like aesthetic feelings, be part of our human heritage. To speak of a biological basis and biological precursors of religious emotion – and even, as ecstatic seizures suggest, a very specific neural basis, in the temporal lobes and their connections – is only to speak of natural causes. It says nothing of the value, the meaning, the “function” of such emotions, or of the narratives and beliefs we may construct on their basis.”
(Sacks, 2012, p.163)



Autoethnography



- An 'anthropological-insider' (Hayano, 1979)
- Voice to **personal experience** (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002)
- Researcher & their socio-cultural approach **are the data** (Davies, 2008)
- **Embodied** - Usually involves a personal epiphany (Denzin, 2014)
- **Reflexive** - Multiple nature of self-hood, dualistic view of shifting identities (Reed-Danahay, 1997)
- **Empathic** - New way of understanding what may already be known (Ellis, 2000)
- Relationship between autobiography & culture makes auto-ethnography a **distinct research method** (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013)



Dreamwork

- Use of dreams in transpersonal psychology not new (e.g. Jung, 1961; Watkins, 1976; Walsh & Vaughn, 1993)
- ‘Waking dream technique’ (Hamilton, 2014)
- Transpersonal therapeutic tool
- Reflexive, symbolic, embodied
- A means of entering & exploring ASC



My research

- Brings together ASC, mystical /spiritual status, neurological literature in epileptology & investigations into paranormal abilities / psi
- Deconstructive stance – focus on meaning
- Waking dream technique as a research tool
- Access phenomenological, autobiographical data
- Methodological tool for analysis – autoethnography -best suited for personal topics
- Qualitative research method - data resulting from a transpersonal method of creation



Summary

- Unique access to transpersonal phenomena in epileptic events
- Similarities with other spiritual experiences & ASC
- Use of dreamwork to provide deep phenomenological data
- Transpersonal transformation

“...inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experience you are released from the curse of pathology” (Jung, 1906-1950, Letters Volume 1, p. 377)



THANK

YOU

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