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Psychic Cartography: A Review of *Tantric Psychophysics: A Structural Map of Altered States and the Dynamics of Consciousness*

by Shelli Joye

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Michael Pryzdia, PhD

In 1920 Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture entitled *Healing of the Social Organism* which is collected in a small and fairly obscure book (*Oswald Spengler: Prophet of World Chaos*). The lecture was given after Spengler's *The Decline of the West* had become a best-seller. In the lecture, Rudolf Steiner takes it upon himself to "deconstruct" his fellow German scholar/intellectual. In the piece, Steiner attacks Spengler's opposition between "the man of blood" – the man who gets things done, the man of action -- versus "the man of contemplation" -- the theologian, the priest, the scientist with his concept world. Steiner points out that apparently for Spengler, the only thing that really matters in this opposition is the man of blood, the man of action – the Napoleon, the Julius Caesar, the statesman, the gambler – the person who gets things done; this is the person who makes world history, who brings history into being and makes it happen – thought/contemplation means nothing to this man.

This opposition can be traced all the way back to the paleolithic age with "the Hunter" -- the person who goes out and kills the mammoth versus "the Shaman" -- the person who goes into the astral plane. Steiner makes the point in his lecture that there is a problem with Spengler's opinions regarding the distinction he has made. Steiner points out that our earliest societies could not have existed without their shamans – without the relation to "the other side," the astral plane. For our ancestors, our shamans (our healers) were crucial, for it was vitally important to find out how and why people are sick -- and how healing involves astral and etheric forces and relating to them. Our earliest societies would have been doomed without the prototype for the man of contemplation -- which is of course the shaman.

Steiner deconstructs Spengler by showing that Spengler's metaphysical bivalent opposition just doesn't hold water because there are plenty of examples all through history where we have a man of contemplation who is also a man of action. (And it is interesting to note that many people consider Rudolf Steiner himself to be both the man of action and the man of contemplation – the doer and the healer -- a man of high theoretical German intellect and mysticism; but also a man of action who had concrete effects on the physical world; for example, Steiner invented the Waldorf schools which are still around to this day). Steiner's point is that there is no need to romanticize the man of action and separate him from the man of contemplation. It is possible to encounter

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human beings who have been able to integrate aspects of both these types of human beings. Enter Shelli Joye.

Shelli Joye is a prolific writer and pioneer in the field of consciousness studies, who, because of her very diverse background, takes an “integral approach” to the field. One cannot be but amazed once one encounters her story. Shelli was born on the island of Trinidad in the British West Indies, and grew up in London and northern Virginia. She received a degree in Electrical Engineering and worked as an Electrical Engineer -- bent on living “a life of action” -- who then encounters LSD on a beach in California in the 1960s. Shelli tells the story of what a profound impact the event had on her life – how there was an immediate motivation to explore the nature of consciousness with an intense passion – how she really had no choice in the matter, for she always had the courage to allow her passion to guide her. And along the way she works as an engineer in New York City, then befriends Andy Warhol and works as an artist in his loft, then finds herself working as an engineer in the Middle East (while also successfully selling her art).

She then encounters John Lilly and his extensive research focused upon interspecies communication between dolphins and humans – which then launches a lifelong exploration of the interface between consciousness, yoga, electromagnetic theory, and mathematics. Eventually, she decides to go to graduate school and is awarded an M.A. in Asian Philosophy from the California School of Integral Studies (CIIS) under the guidance of its founder, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri. In the early 1990s she studied with Fr. Bede Griffiths in South India. She completed a Ph.D. program in the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program at CIIS under the guidance of Drs. Allan Combs, Brian Swimme, and Dean Radin.

Shelli Joye has always been able to absorb a vast amount of information from a diverse array of fields, allowing her to discern larger patterns among different disciplines. She is able to overlay transparent maps on a terrain which then allows her to see things in a new light. I suspect that this began when she was an engineering student who had become fascinated by the subject of “pattern recognition.” Her methodology has always been to overlay information from diverse fields (physics, metaphysics, religion, art, shamanism, psychotropic experience, etc.) in search for collaborations, things from one discipline that validate the observations made in another discipline. And in her various works (see, for example, *Tuning the Mind*, (2017), *Developing Supersensible Perception: Knowledge of the Higher Worlds through Entheogens, Prayer, and Nondual Awareness* (2019) and *The Electromagnetic Brain: EM Field Theories on the Nature of Consciousness* (2020)) she is continually attempting to express the patterns that she has discovered -- and she does this while simultaneously deeply engaging her readers through her elegant and yet straightforward prose – a prose grounded in solid philosophical and scientific research.

Joye’s books are always “practical.” Indeed, a few are designed to operate as manuals as it were, for Joye is a “psychonaut”; and *Tantric Psychophysics* is literally a “handbook for psychonauts.” In my mind, Joye is a *consciousness cartographer* whose works appeal to those with a courageous soul and an adventurous spirit.

She writes:

But while the study of pure consciousness is relatively new to material scientists and professional philosophers alike, exploring the mysteries of consciousness has been at the

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heart of shamanic inquiry throughout history, although in religious writing and discourse we seldom find the word consciousness. Instead, the words most frequently encountered throughout the world in discussions and written records dealing with the exploration of consciousness are terms such as spirit, soul, anima, prana, or chi.

Perhaps it is this wide-ranging difference in terminology, or the fact that the subject matter is found deeply embedded within specific religious and cultural traditions (and often “dead” languages) that is preventing modern-day academics from investigating the maps of consciousness [italics mine] laid down by contemplative saints, mystics, and shamans over the many centuries through direct experiential, first-person observation and experience. Yet throughout history psychonauts have availed themselves of rich cultural-specific ancestral knowledge.*

(*Tantric Psychophysics* xvi) ¹

Like the works of Steiner (and note that Steiner appears in virtually all of Joye’s own writings), Joye’s findings are to be **applied**. Again, *Tantric Psychophysics* is a handbook – a tool that the person of action can utilize in order to transform the given landscape (psychic/material). Joye’s mysticism is always grounded in science – and then to be practiced – to be put to good use. What did the hunters and shamans of ages past encounter when they moved into the “zones of the unknown,” the unexplored horizons? This was anyone’s guess. Nothing has changed today. One thing is certain though: the contemporary “contemplative doer” -- like his or her ancestors – still needs a centered courageousness in their explorations -- this is required. Having maps and techniques to guide us, as far as they can take us, is always a good idea. Joye’s latest book is a collection of all the different methods that mystics have practiced in order to explore and understand the nature of consciousness.

When one examines Joye’s oeuvre, one notices that she fundamentally focuses on certain themes. Her approach to consciousness studies can be labeled “panpsychist” – but her panpsychism is, once again, very much grounded in science. In *Tantric Psychophysics*, it is safe to say that she is attempting to integrate mysticism and science by comparing and contrasting various methodological procedures. Her approach to consciousness studies focuses on the role of electromagnetism and the frequency domain. For Joye, what we call electromagnetism is a phenomenon observable (measurable) within the space-time domain – what the quantum physicist David Bohm called the “Explicate Order.” But electromagnetic fields in the space-time domain have a correlated component property equivalency within what is called the frequency domain. Joye is always quick to point out that Electrical Engineers use the Fourier Transform relationship to solve problems in the frequency domain that cannot be easily solved in the highly nonlinear sphericity of the space-time domain. Within the frequency domain, all information signals manifest as pure frequency spectra, super-positioned linearly, and the math becomes quite simple (as

¹ Joye writes: “The term *psychonaut*, from the Greek words ψυχή *psychē* (‘soul, spirit, or mind’) and ναύτης *naútēs* (‘sailor, navigator’), denotes an individual who intentionally explores wide ranging states and stages of non-ordinary consciousness through a variety of means, including the skillful application of traditional religious or shamanistic contemplative techniques, extreme physical exercise, fasting, and through the ingestion of entheogens (e.g. LSD, masculine, psilocybin, ayahuasca, cannabis).”

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compared to complex nonlinear equations required when doing the math in the space-time domain.)

Joye's basic question is the following: **“How does one regard the ontological reality of the frequency domain?”** Identity resonance between electromagnetic signals in space-time and their equivalent resonant manifestation in the pure frequency domain provide the basis for concluding that a component (the frequency information component) of space-time electromagnetic signals reside in the non-temporal, non-spatial, and therefore “nondual” frequency domain, Bohm's “Implicate Order.” According to Joye, that the frequency domain might be an additional dimension as valid ontologically as are the four dimensions of space and time accords well with a major hypothesis in contemporary physics. Based upon the data from innumerable experiments in particle physics conducted in large scale apparatus such as the Large Hadron Collider, there has been posited that there must be numerous additional dimensions beyond the three spatial dimensions (x, y, z) and the single dimension of time. And Joye points out in *Tantric Psychophysics* that certain of these dimensions have been explored and “mapped out” by our mystics. As Joye herself writes in the first chapter of *Tantric Psychophysics*, a chapter entitled “Tantra: An Integral Approach to Esoteric Practices”:

The detailed descriptions of stages and states of consciousness set forth in this book emerge from generations of experimental, experiential knowledge handed down by practicing psychonauts in numerous cultures. While we shall focus upon the philosophies and practices of Tantra that have emerged from within Indian and Tibetan cultures, we shall also examine Western metaphysical approaches to mapping consciousness. We conclude the book with a chapter, ‘Practical Advice for Modern Psychonauts,’ that lays out an integral map of consciousness through weaving principles of cosmology, brain physiology, quantum mechanics, and holography into a synthesis that should be of significant utility for those who may be active in, or interested in beginning, psychonautic exploration. (5)

She goes on to summarize the scope of the work as follows:

Tantric psychophysics should appeal to anyone seeking a cohesive map of human consciousness and practical guidance as to how to proceed at any stage in the development of new modes of perception and new regions of awareness. The material offers a variety of integrated approaches useful not only to the contemplative practitioner but also to those seeking a deeper understanding of consciousness itself: what it is, and why it is, and what might be done with it [italics mine]. Congruent maps of consciousness developed in Tibet and India are laid out in detail to provide a practical framework of understanding for scientists, philosophers, and the general reader, but should be of particular interest to those who are actively exploring these new regions of consciousness. (22)

When compared to Joye's earlier works, *Tantric Psychophysics* stands out in that Joye brings much more of herself in – her personal biography. For example, the story she shares with regard to her own experience with Nada Yoga Meditation (the meditation of inner sounds) is fascinating. And of all her works, *Tantric Psychophysics* is by far the most detailed when it comes to providing the reader with detailed photos and various graphics/illustrations. The various “maps”

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included in this work renders it the most PRACTICAL of all of Joye's books. Once again, this is the book for the "contemplative doer." Rudolf Steiner would have been proud!

Does *Tantric Psychophysics* illicit certain questions regarding the nature of consciousness? Yes, it certainly does. But that it is the joy of the book. There can be no doubt that what is laid out here provides one with a foundation by which to examine the nature of consciousness. Joye provides us with a "jumping off point." The reader can use her maps and the practices she shares to explore the various known and unknown dimensions of being. Joye invites us to make our own discoveries and come to our own conclusions.

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