

In seeing the “review” of my book *The Varieties of Ecstasy Experience* I was disappointed to see that it was not a scholarly book review that was published in this journal.

I had sent my book on goodwill to this journal at my own expense and was informed that a reviewer would be found... and... the result.... a nothing-nothing. There is not one single iota of scholarly statements pertaining to the actual work. What is given is a wholesale rallying against the publisher Lambert Academic Press. The rest are scraps of debris best left in the junkyard. Now to my mind, whatever the (de)merits of this particular publisher, a book review is meant to be exactly that, a *book review*. I suppose to be fair... the title of the book does reappears in this “review”... and that is something. Ironically, Langridge believes there are problems with review processes in academic works.

Contrary to Langridge’s assertions, this book was published one month after the Ph.D. was completed at The University of Sydney (2011) under the supervision of Dr. Jadran Mimica. The book was examined (and thus was carefully reviewed) by Prof. Marlene Dobkin De Rios, Prof. Ralph Metzner and Dr. Dan Merkur. Additionally, an honorarium was written after Prof. John Baker (President of The Society of the Anthropology of Consciousness), who writes *in the preface to the printed book*: “this is anthropology at its finest. The field reports are honest and unflinching, the interviewees are real people with real lives. The ethnographer is a real person as well, and he lets you feel his presence without letting his voice take over. He is part of the action. His descriptions of his own experiences in Sydney’s club culture ring true, and they put you right on the dance floor.”

I was shocked that this blog entry was accepted as a book review at all. Then the eristic gratuity really gets going as Langridge opines:

The methodological claim of the author is that those who reduce ecstasy to a chemical and the effects it has on the brain miss an essential aspect of the drug, which is the experience of those who use it. The experience is an intentional object constituted by a group, so only interviews with a variety of users could convey a sense of the drug’s meaning. Unfortunately, this is where methodology ends.

The detailed methodology of this work spans some nineteen pages (p. 19-38) and is succinctly summarized in the back cover of the text. Langridge goes on to say that “The interviews are almost exclusively conducted with the author’s fellow graduate students and friends”. Actually, in Appendix 2 (p. 226), I clearly and openly state that “due to the sensitive nature of this research, a number of participants preferred to remain anonymous (Anon.)”. That is, this was a ‘random’ sample, of ecstasy consumers that I met in the duration of three and a half years fieldwork. The comments on phenomenology are completely misleading, irrelevant and sterile.

The holistic organismic approach advocated in the phenomenological and empirically based works of thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Buytendick, Goldstein and Ey unreservedly reject the ideologically charged mechanistic-materialist paradigms (humans as determined by the brain) that are celebrated in the academic marketplace of post-modern capitalism. These reductionists, who have been promising us all a free shave, if their shop ever opens tomorrow, do not, and indeed *cannot* demonstrate that our actions, thoughts, feelings and so on, are the result of “underlying neurological processes” (mechanistic science). If the reader of this article is in doubt of these claims – they need only to reflect that one’s own life is lived independently of any claims made by the “it’s-in-the-brain-scientists”.

The following is a brief exercise on phenomenological philosophy (the latter I take to be concerned with the pursuit of truth). Who could claim after a cursory reflection on their own existence, that anything that one has ever done, thought, or felt, or any human being they have ever met (parents, friends, or wo/man you meet on the street), that at any point one’s life, that anything you have experienced is determined by underlying brain states? Only people diagnosed as schizophrenics, who come to experience themselves as machines, claim that parts of their bodies are making them do things (see Bettelheim’s ‘Joey: the Case of a Mechanical Boy, 1959).

The correct answer is that it is ‘I’ (Sean) who is typing this article – not the brain. It is a fact that human beings are intentionally directed in the world; which is to say that the thoughts, feelings (desires) and representations that arise in our experiential stream of consciousness (the sense of the continuity we have of our experience) and its articulation (not everything that comes to mind, is said – even on ecstasy) are not produced by the brain.

Hence, this indeterminate flux of consciousness is characterized as the existential indeterminacy of organismic consciousness (p. 29). The rejection of mechanistic biology by the great vitalist Jacob Von Uexkull – who rejects seeing organisms as an assemblage of parts (mechanistic science) – redirected biology (and by implication anthropology) towards the *organism as subject* (p.25-27), I trace the lineage of existential-phenomenology to modern neuroscientists such as Gerald Edelman (who shared the Nobel prize with Rodney Robert Porter for work on the immune system), who is aware that every human being’s brain contains incomparable complexity. Without including the complexity of the central nervous system, the brain weighs only three pounds but contains nearly 30 billion neurons (nerve cells) with one million billion connections (synapses) which reflect the exquisite individuation of a given organism, i.e. the dynamic uniqueness of every human being’s biology

Langridge then arbitrarily selects one excerpt from the nine chapters of the roughly 65,000 words of “raw” self-reports of ecstasy users (primary dialogical phenomenology), going on to suggest these people (and myself!) were simply getting “fucked up”. This is arrant nonsense and is grossly misleading. The project of ecstasy use by drug consumers is invariably multifaceted: hence the title “The *Varieties* of Ecstasy experience” (italics added) and the hundreds of states and modalities recorded in the dialogical phenomenology.

Moreover, far from being “six-degrees-of separation”, my use of phenomenology drew on the works of Prof. Stephan Strasser in applying this discipline to ethnographic research (anthropology). In fact, Strasser worked directly at the Husserl-Archives at Leuven, wherein the ambit of 25 months, Strasser, and his wife and mother-in-law, transcribed some 20,000 pages of Husserl’s shorthand into ordinary text. In 1949, Strasser received an appointment in Philosophical Psychology and Anthropology at the University of Nijmegen; somewhat less than six-degrees-of-separation (and closer to the home of this journal). Finally, as far as the price of academic books goes... a few minutes surfing the web he would have found the book on the University of Sydney’s free digital dissertation link. Mr Langridge may want to reflect on the old folk wisdom of the past: that no duck may be an eagle until it abandons its webbed feet and bill for talons and a beak.