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“My Brother, the Insect”: Ethnographic Research on the Indigo Children, Their New Age Cosmologies, and Spiritual Guides

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ABSTRACT

This article reflect upon fieldwork among the ‘Indigo Children’, the researcher’s encounter with them as self-identified non-ordinary beings, and the changes in the researcher through the ethnographic experience. The ‘Indigo Child’ is a concept that emerged at the beginning of the 1980s: self-proclaimed psychics, channellers and therapists such as Nancy Ann Tappe, Lee Carroll, Jan Tober, and Doreen Virtue wrote books explaining the Indigo Children as a more spiritually evolved generation. They are described as being here to bring about a golden age of higher consciousness and advanced human evolution. The Indigo Child concept is presented through examples of special or psychic children in the primary texts of the community. It is also expressed by individual adult adherents of the concept who identify themselves, or their own children, as Indigo.

During fieldwork amongst the Indigo Children accounts were received of their relationships with entities seemingly representing “non-ordinary realities” (Harner, 1992), including spirit guides and Ascended Masters, which have historical antecedents including Spiritualism and Theosophy. Other non-ordinary entities described during interviews will be presented as examples of the diversity of non-ordinary entities in the Indigo community and discourse. Moreover, an examination of the Indigo Children’s place within the wider cosmologies that they are describing suggests that they are distancing themselves from mere ‘normals’ and are redefining themselves as non-ordinary beings. This article will therefore consider the issues around writing ethnography about these self-defining non-ordinary beings, and will argue that there is a methodological similarity with the anthropological study of spirit possession. This article therefore contributes to a wider discussion on the study of non-ordinary realities among contemporary anthropologists and religious studies scholars.

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Introduction

This is a reflection upon the fieldwork I undertook among a community known as the Indigo Children between October 2011 and October 2014, and the methodological shifts that my ethnographic approach took during that time. A question arose from this research: how should we study and write about individuals who claim non-ordinary status? This question has impact on the study of spiritual communities and new religious movements where a supernatural or divine nature is claimed by members, or by their leaders. Moreover, through the example of the Indigo Children we can further the wider debate about how we should study experiences of “non-ordinary realities” (Harner, 1992). The Indigo Children are a significant case study for this debate because they are a contemporary technology and social media adopting community in affluent Anglophone countries. As such their words are not so easily “domesticated and dismissed”, as ethnographic accounts of the transpersonal from among “indigenous wisdoms” have been (Glass-Coffin, 2013, pp. 117-118).

This article primarily argues that the issues and methods involved in the study of a group of self-defining non-ordinary beings are similar to those of research into the ‘spirit’, spirit possession, the supernatural, or “psi” phenomena (Turner, 2006). Edith Turner’s definition of psi outlines some of the non-ordinary realities potentially encountered in the field. Not only in informants’ accounts, she argues, but also in the personal experience of the researcher. Psi is, “not only telepathy and present-day psychic crafts, but the possibility of conveying energy to a person in healing and, generally, the gifts of a shaman, finding lost objects and people, changing the weather, speaking with the dead, and second sight” (2006, p. 55, n. 4). Even in the face of scepticism from the academy such non-ordinary experience, “proved ineradicable from researcher’s reports and keeps coming back” (2006, p. 37). In fact, during my own research with the Indigo Children I did not personally have an experience of a non-ordinary reality. This is not erasure for the appearance of professionalism, but an absence due to a misperception of the Indigo Children. I came to see that the non-ordinary reality was manifested within the identity of the individuals I was encountering, according to their definition of themselves. This article therefore also includes consideration of the effect of research on the individual academic and how the transitions in methodology during and after fieldwork are a part of larger transformation into ‘the ethnographer’. First, it is necessary that I begin with an explanation of the concept and community that I have been researching; the Indigo Children.

The Indigo Children

The Indigo Child is a concept from within the New Age movement. First, this latter term requires delineation as its characterisation relates to the community and concept being analysed. Academics have proposed that there was a ‘crisis’ in this loose network of associated spiritual ideas and people in the late 1980s: as predicted world changes failed to manifest, the term ‘New Age’ declined in emic usage (Melton, 2013; Gilhus and Sutcliffe, 2013). My own

research supports this shifting linguistic framing of the ideas we might categorise as being of the New Age movement, which includes the Indigo Child concept, arising in the early 1980s. Although the term 'new age' appears in Indigo Child books, and there are variations used such as 'new time', among my informants the specific term 'new age' was rarely used, and survey work among Mind, Body, and Spirit Fayres indicated some apathy towards it and I explore this data further in my forthcoming PhD thesis. However, the persistence of teleological, millennial, and utopian ideas among the Indigo Children suggests the terminology is still viable etically, with an awareness of these internal changes in the community. Other options proposed by scholars such as "Cultic Milieu" (Campbell, 1972), or the description of adherents as "New Metaphysicals" (Bender, 2010) draw attention to the ambient structure and the historical antecedents of the subject respectively. Both are also applicable to the Indigo Children as an ambiently affiliated community with spiritualist and Theosophical roots, but they ignore the evolutionary and millennial model still being applied to 'History' as an object in community discourse. Therefore 'New Age movement' and 'New Ager' will continue to be used.

The Indigo Child concept intrinsically supports this evolutionary model for history. The first to define the Indigo Child was Nancy Ann Tappe, who passed away in 2012 during the course of this research. She described herself as a psychic who could see auras, and she wrote that in the late 1970s she had become aware of children being born with a new colour of aura that defined their "life-mission": indigo (Tappe, 1986). Previous lower consciousness life-missions and their associated aura colours had passed away as humanity had progressed upwards in its spiritual evolution. The Indigo Children are significant in this evolutionary scheme as an especially psychic, sensitive and technologically innovative generation here to help bring about a wider spiritual awakening. The idea that indigo is the colour associated with the third eye chakra and with psychic ability originates in Theosophist Charles Leadbeater's (1854 – 1934) descriptions of the chakras, as seen through his own clairvoyant sight (Leadbeater, 1927). The generational model underpinning the Indigo Child concept also owes a debt to the Root Races of both Blavatsky's Theosophy and Edgar Cayce (Blavatsky, 1888; Day and Gale, 2004).

Subsequent to Tappe, psychics and therapists Lee Carroll and Jan Tober wrote *The Indigo Children: The New Kids Have Arrived* in response to what they described as a "new kind of problem for the parent", the Indigo Child (Carroll and Tober, 1999, p. xii). They claimed that other child therapists were not capable of fully understanding this problem without their unique access to spiritual realms and entities. The social and medical difficulties that these new children experienced were described as the result of their Indigo nature and were redefined and demedicalized into signs of that true nature. The original concept has been expanded upon, resulting in materials such as books, therapeutic and divinatory card sets such as Doreen Virtue's *Indigo Angel Oracle Cards*, courses, and as further evolutions and variations of the concept given names such as the 'Crystal Children', the 'Rainbow Children', the 'Platinum Children' and 'Starseeds'.

Methods

My research has primarily been ethnographic, involving prolonged contact with a community. However, the Indigo Children community is best described as ideologically rather than geographically bounded; the concept traverses geographical boundaries but its adherents often find that they are alone in their beliefs and interests within their immediate society. Subsequently the community primarily interacts through computer mediated communication (CMC). The materials produced by the community are themselves unbounded by location, as well as existing in diverse textual and graphical forms. These include webpages, forum boards, web logs or diaries ('blogs'), videos, and posts and groups on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Levels of interaction with these materials vary between visible engagement, through commenting or sharing, to passive observation that can be hidden from the researcher; resulting in an ambient audience of consumers. The overall corpus of 'Indigo material' is unbounded, iterative, diverse, and occasionally unknowable by the researcher.

Therefore in terms of methods it was decided to engage with the Indigo Children community through its public spaces such as forums such as *Indigosociety.com*, as well as to publically request interviews. Interviews took place face to face, but also through CMC technology such as Skype. Events were also attended that had Indigo themes or speakers, and where further informants could be encountered or interviewed. The overall methodology of this research was intended to replicate the browsing seekership of the Indigo Children themselves and to be open to mixed method approaches. Among the Indigo Child community, and the New Age movement more widely, there is a rhetoric that supports the idea of being a spiritual seeker. Campbell defines this as the adoption, "of a problem-solving perspective while defining conventional religious institutions and beliefs as inadequate" (Campbell, 1972, p. 123). Sutcliffe expands Walter Burkett's argument that biological necessities underpin the quest structure and seeker-ship, including in social formations (Burkett, 1996, p. 56) to argue that, in this perspective, "new age seekership is no longer the superficial and whimsical 'dabbling' represented by Lofland and Stark (1965, p. 869) in which the seeker is seen to be 'floundering about among religions', but a proportionate response to a cultural environment characterized by enhanced stimulation and even information overload" (Sutcliffe, 2013, p. 32). Likewise, in the case of the Indigo Children 'seeker' as a characterisation is also more apt due to the diversity of modes of engagement with these materials, even though we note that levels of transience vary: some groups involve technological and/or social mechanisms for joining and ongoing membership, such as those on Facebook. In on and offline fieldwork it was necessary to "be very agile - both conceptually, in our theorizing, and literally, in our fieldwork - to identify or 'catch' extraordinary phenomena when they happen" (Seale-Collazo, 2012, p. 185), and to avoid this "information overload" (Sutcliffe, 2013, p. 32).

Understanding such extraordinary phenomena required a contextualised understanding of the forms that such phenomena could take and their historical and mythic roots. Academics such as Hanegraaf (1997) have attempted to create typologies of the wider New Age cosmology. The following list that Hanegraaf drew from an emic account by Ridall (1988) highlights many of the supernatural, or preternatural entities familiar to the Indigo Children that I needed to be knowledgeable of during this research:

...such as ascended masters, spirit guides, angels, extra-terrestrials, various historical personalities (Jesus, Paul etc), God/the "Ultimate Source", gods and goddesses of antiquity, and the collective unconscious or Universal Mind, but also "group entities", incarnate or discarnate animals (dolphins, whales), nature spirits or "devas", gnomes, fairies, plants, and finally the "higher self" (Hanegraaf, 1997, p. 23, n. 2)

Given that each of these non-ordinary beings is presumed to be able to act on the 'ordinary' world, we can deduce that there is a large potential for phenomena that the researcher could potentially experience. In the Indigo Child cosmology this list could be expanded. Examples will be provided from this research to demonstrate some of the diversity of Indigo experiences as well as the kind of non-ordinary beings that exist outside typology in their cosmology. However we will first consider methodological and ethnographic approaches to the non-ordinary, specifically in the light of the reflexive turn.

The Non-Ordinary in Ethnography: Reflexivity and Professionalism

The reflexive turn in anthropology appears to give methodological permission for the expression of the researcher's response to non-ordinary experiences in the field. Initiated in the 1970s in response to the positivistic methodologies of the first five decades of the 20th Century according to Foley (2002, p. 473), reflexivity also allows the ethnographer to recount the disjoint between their own epistemology and the biography that informs it, and the epistemology of their informants. In effect, it places the ethnographer at the centre of their account of their field. Edith Turner in particular talks of a period after this reflexive turn when, "ethnographers were out there testing spirituality on their own pulses" (Turner, 2006, p. 44), as the subjective instruments of their own research.

However, ethnographers are also writing instruments within a professional community. For example, Edith Turner's early epithets referred to her in terms of her professional status, describing her in relation to her anthropologist husband Victor Turner as "just a faculty wife", "Vic's wife", and "the untrained wife", as she had no degree in anthropology herself. She did in time become known in her own right as an "anthropologist in the newly emergent experimental tradition of the 1980s" (Engelke, 2002, p. 125). With regards to what she termed "psi", defined in the introduction, she made a clear distinction between the experience of the non-ordinary in the field and the written account given of it, arguing that just "Because an ethnographer

chooses not to write about it, that does not mean it does not exist" (Turner, 2006, p. 53). This raises an important question: why would the ethnographer choose not to write about their experiences? Janet McIntosh's account of her non-ordinary experiences in Malindi, Kenya, among the diviners and healers as an "agnostic, humanist" (McIntosh, 2004, p. 63) appears to declare for the reflexive turn, but with a caveat:

"The reflexive turn gives us license to reflect on our roles as we write, but does not specify how we are to navigate the differences between the ethnographer as a human being "on the ground" and the professional identity that ethnographers must at some point inhabit to succeed in the academy." (McIntosh, 2004, p. 63)

Contemporary anthropologists do recount their experiences of moving into the same epistemological frame as their informants. However, these can be tidied up by the end of the ethnographic text. For example, McIntosh claims that her purpose in her fieldwork was "not to test the diviners but to understand their cultural roles and the ways in which they used language and responded to social change". However, McIntosh also tells the reader that "I began to think that the membrane separating disbelief from belief was thinner than I had realised, and that my subconscious was making brief forays to the other side". At one point she even asked the question, "who has bewitched me?" when she found herself locked in her flat and the lights went off on their own accord. (McIntosh, 2004, p. 68, 70). By the end of her account she dismisses these experiences as the result of the malaria medication she was taking during her fieldwork, reverting perhaps to a more distanced approach. It is worth noting that, the "criteria for judging a good account have never been settled and are changing" (Clifford, 1984, p. 102): in the Academy there is an ongoing debate around where the ethnographer should stand in their account, which this article on my experiences in the field, intends to contribute to.

Fieldwork amongst the Indigo Children

In my own fieldwork I never had the occasion to ask "who has bewitched me?" I began my research among the Indigo Children with the methodological aim of being involved in the "embodied enactments" of the community that Wood argues are essential for avoiding the blind adoption of the insider's written accounts, and aimed instead to "present contextualized analyses of practice and discourse" (Wood, 2010, p. 160, 165). I took part in various meditations, visualizations, and received several psychic readings and therapies. I have opened my chakras and tried to see auras with the members of an Indigo Child discussion group. At a large event in London with several hundred attendees I have called upon the Archangel Michael to give me a fifth dimensional aura protection. I have danced with New Agers who were raising the planet's cosmic awareness before the 12th December 2012 end to the Mayan Calendar. I have had my life-mission assessed by Indigo Children who concluded that my thesis was necessary to its fulfilment. I have been diagnosed as an Indigo Child by my informants. However, I had no experience of psi phenomena or of the non-ordinary during this fieldwork.

This was not due to a bias against such experiences or their reality to those who describe them. I have previously experienced psi, supernatural or uncanny phenomena, and I have a background in the New Age movement, having worked at an 'Esoteric Centre' as a retail assistant immediately after my undergraduate degree. Nor is this an attempt to present a detached, scientific ethnographic style of writing. For when the rhetoric of empirical investigation is employed, and it often is in anthropological works, it is an allegorical interpretation or transcription of what is actually an imaginative process of lived experience (Clifford, 1984: 102). During fieldwork therefore I opted for a lived experience approach and disclosed my background in the New Age movement, and my current, perhaps muddled, agnostic beliefs. In particular, when asked about the Indigo Children and whether they were 'real', I stated this agnosticism with a joke. Paraphrasing a popular maxim used by sceptics, I often replied that, "I am so open-minded I am afraid one day my brain will fall out!" This was intended to reassure my informants that I wasn't simply going to "call them all a bunch of whackos", as one Indigo Child asked of me, but that I was open to their non-ordinary experiences. It is also indicated that even as a social *sciences* researcher I was not a member of the scientific community they often characterized as dogmatic, corporate and inhumane (see also Singler, 2015).

However, as Diego Escolar was told by one of his Argentinian muleteer informants as they watched mysterious lights in the night sky, "Each matter has its own secret" (Escolar, 2010, p. 28). His ethnographic report of this experience again tests the boundaries of what he terms "ethnographic objectivism" and he comes down on the side of an honesty that for him meant "to be faithful in the ethnography to record, to show the open wounds of disciplinary formation or the impossibility of making coherent sense, or of constructing something similar to a 'model' to explain the events." (Escolar, 2010, pp. 42-43). With the Indigo Children I came to understand that the secret of this particular matter was that their nature as non-ordinary entities could be modelled after existing patterns of the transpersonal. This could only occur after I had shifted my understanding of their nature from the reified object presented in the primary Indigo texts to the individual's account as it interacted with the wider Indigo community that operates as a collective of diagnosticians. Only then did I realise that I had experienced supernatural phenomenon: in the Indigo Children themselves. There is an 'Indigo Cosmology' which centres on the Indigo Child him or herself as a non-ordinary being capable of acting on the world and producing psi or spiritual phenomenon. The following examples from interaction with Indigo Children are therefore included to demonstrate variations on view of the Indigo Children as a non-ordinary entity in a larger cosmology.

Case Studies: Julian, Sally, Emma, Scarlet, and Zeon

Julian's account provides an example of an Indigo Child claiming the ability to see the truth of reality, as well as details of his relationship with a non-ordinary being who is also a living human being. I first met Julian through the forum

board, *Indigosociety.com*, where he was advertising a Crystal Children discussion group that he had founded in Fulham, London. During the meetings of the group that I attended as a participant observer Julian let the choice of subjects flow organically. Many psi phenomena and experiences were discussed by the members, such as contact with angels, auras, healing and channelled messages. I also interviewed Julian separately from the group and he talked about his perspective on what he called the “spiritual” but which we might continue to term ‘non-ordinary reality’, from an etic perspective. He explained that we can see this reality in the moments between the normal, as though it was extra frames slipped life’s analogue 35mm film. He claimed that only very few people can see these frames, and he indicated a special or non-ordinary status for those who could. However, no one would want to be able to see all of the frames, as they’d likely go insane from the flood of knowledge, according to Julian.

Julian believed that he had attained a safe level of this superior awareness of the truth of reality and of what was really happening in the world. This connected him with other beings with the same spiritual abilities and higher consciousness. Julian claimed a spiritual connection with an insect like non-ordinary being whom he called his “brother”. These beings could also be living humans, and he described a psychic connection with a living “healer, alchemist, warlock” in South Africa with whom he is undergoing an apprenticeship, primarily telepathically.

At Julian’s Crystal Children discussion group I also met Sally. During a conversation that we had on our way to the tube after an afternoon meeting in Clapham she told me that her former employer threatens her verbally through her fridge, as a disembodied voice. Without me asking her, she also told me that she wasn’t schizophrenic as doctors had “tested” her for that. I presume she meant a mental health assessment by a specialist as there is no single test for schizophrenia. Like Julian, Sally’s spiritual connection is with a living person who she considers to be acting as a non-ordinary being producing psi phenomena.

During the writing of my field notes I reflected on my conversations with Julian and Sally, and their descriptions of their living guides and antagonists, as well as my own reactions to their statements. It appeared more difficult for the researcher to remain open to the non-ordinary when the transpersonal claim involves a living person rather than a more traditional ‘spirit’ from the New Age cosmology outlined by Hanegraaf, above. Moreover, this difficulty is enhanced when it is the person you are speaking with who claims to be one of the entities from a non-ordinary cosmology. This ‘living non-ordinary being’ problem appeared in accounts by Emma, Scarlet and Zeon during my research.

Emma responded to a request for interviewees that I posted on the message board for the *Indigo Adults* Facebook group. Alongside a full time job she also works as a Reiki healer, and as a certified Angel Oracle Card reader, after receiving training from Doreen Virtue’s school. Emma has two daughters whom she describes hesitantly as a “Rainbow Child” and a “Starseed”, both of

which are further Indigo Children iterations. Her response to my request for Indigo Children to speak to also places her and her daughters within the ambient Indigo Child community that has coalesced around the concept as described by Tappe and subsequent authors, including Virtue. About her daughters she told me that she felt, “so blessed to have these special children in my life. They blow me away every day with their knowledge, maturity and open hearts.” She sent me a long account of their personalities and the particular events that had demonstrated her daughters’ non-ordinary abilities to her. Of one, Lizzie, she explained:

She can manifest what she wants... We happened to be in Ft. Lauderdale while the Day of the Dead processional was about to start [...] Lizzie said that she wanted to be in it and carry a sign. We told her that maybe next year we could find out how to apply and organize costumes etc and this year we could just watch. With that, somebody came over to us and asked if we would like to LEAD the processional and they gave Lizzie a sign to hold. It said Los Angelitos (little angels in Spanish)!! Incredible!!

Emma described Lizzie as a Rainbow Child, however her discussion of Lizzie’s role in the procession suggests at least a metaphorical angelic persona. Other Indigo Children were more specific, claiming that they were ‘Angels on Earth’ or ‘Earth Angels’, incarnating here to help humanity to its spiritual awakening as a part of a divine mission from the source of the universe, also sometimes known as ‘God’. As Scarlet explained in a post about incarnated angels and Indigos on *spiritualforums.com*:

I'm an incarnated angel – an angel who has dropped vibration to be born as a human. We are quite rare, and we're not all aware of what we are. We don't always need to be ;) [winking emoticon]. Helping mankind means being whatever we're needed to be – including human. We're a human hug, a friendly hand, an open ear, a kind word, comfort in tough times. We're messengers, mirrors for growth and we hold the vibration of ascension or enlightenment for others to use.

Finally, the Starseed iteration of the Indigo Child concept involves claiming extra-terrestrial origins; either in this life or in past ones. During my fieldwork I disseminated an online survey among online forums and groups of Indigo Children. One respondent claimed the following non-ordinary identity:

I am a Star Child, son of the King of Saturn, Zeton Telaion Tel. My name is Zeon Teon Sheson Tel, and my title is Prince of Saturn and future Master of the Universe. I have the "gift of tongues"... But I digress - to answer your question, I guess the closest you have to what I am in your list is "Starseed" so I'll go with that...

Emma, Scarlet and Zeon are therefore also examples of this ‘living non-ordinary being’ problem. Moreover, through their accounts and those of the other Indigo Children I interacted with both on and offline I began to see parallels with the forms and processes of spirit possession, and I propose that

this model presents us with a framework not only for the concept, but also for the methodological approach we employ as ethnographers.

The Indigo Children and Spirit Possession

Describing the very modern phenomenon of the Indigo Child concept as an example of spirit possession might perhaps be problematic in the contemporary Anglophone context that they are ordinarily found in. Perhaps it would also be problematic for the informants of my fieldwork who do not use the term 'possession' except in a negative context. The application of the modes of the transpersonal found among the shamans and other spiritual practitioners of the indigenous cultures most associated with these possession forms might seem incongruent when discussing a community of early adopters of technology and entrepreneurial holistic practitioners. There are concurrent assumptions here that I take issue with. First, that possession is symptomatic of less civilised, less rational cultures than the contemporary West and cannot operate in the same way here. Spirit channellers, such as Indigo authors Carroll and Tober, and spiritualist mediums seem to 'redefine shamanisms', or spirit possession, for a place in the allegedly modern world (see Wilson, 2013; Skultans, 1974; and Brown, 1997). The second assumption, that such forms of possession have already been explained away by 'our' modern sciences, e.g., by psychiatry, as highlighted by Sally's defensive statement about schizophrenia during our conversation, is dismissive and reductionist. Further, if we examine the parallels between the Indigo Children diagnosis and the stages of spirit possession this similarity will become clearer.

There are broad stages in spirit possession that repeat throughout all the many cultures that engage in the process. First, in many of those cultures possession is interpreted as something that happens to the individual, caused by external force, and presenting as a deprivation or illness. In Sinhalese Buddhism for example the possessed might be described as being "caught in the gaze of demons" (Leistle 2014, p. 60). The person afflicted then suffers a, "dissolution of the social self" (Kapferer, 1979, p. 119) as their perspective on the world changes and they can no longer engage with kin and wider society in the same way. A healer figure, be it a priest, shaman or witch doctor, must then "identify the responsible agent by a process of 'discernment'" (Csordas, 1994, pp. 181-185). In the case of evil spirits such as demons, this is also the first step in exorcising the problem; thereby 'curing' the individual. In shamanism "the acceptance and execution of one's calling is synonymous with the achievement of a cure from the initial illness" (Lewis, 2003, pp. 59-63). Further, retrospective reassessment occurs, "what begins as an illness, or otherwise deeply disturbing experience, ends in ecstasy; and the pain and suffering of the initial crisis are obliterated in its subsequent re-evaluation as a uniquely efficacious sign of divine favour" (Lewis, 2003, p. 63). Discernment is key in both forms of cure as any "cure or redemption cannot be achieved by assigning any name; it has to be the right name and the problem is finding it" (Leistle, 2014, p. 73). Likewise, there is a grammar or syntax to the rituals that needs to be learned, akin to learning a language that the name sits

within, or a new symbolic system that can replace the social self and system that was dissolved during the early stages of the possession. This liminal phase as described by Victor Turner, highlights the subjects state “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1967) during this process of discernment and restitution. Is it a complete restitution? Lewis suggests that even after this process the subject remains in a peripheral position to mainstream society (Lewis, 2003, p. 80). Although it can also be argued that the “possessed self” persona becomes the most stable form of self still available to them (Leistle, 2014, p. 81)

I propose that in the case of the Indigo Children there is a similar chain of illness or disruption, diagnosis, and partial restitution. During interviews in the field many informants told me that their ‘awakening’ or realisation that they were Indigo Children was initiated by an illness, accident or disease. Several of the Indigos interviewed also described having some of the same symptoms as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), or autism, and several had been medically diagnosed with these conditions. There was debate in the community as to whether these conditions actually existed or had been created by pharmaceutical companies, but the overlap with Indigo ‘symptoms’ meant they could be reinterpreted, or ‘demedicalized’, into signs of being an Indigo Child. Informants also reported that in their past they had often felt like an ‘alien’ or an ‘outsider’. This alienation could also take the form of a ‘dis-ease’ with society; its structures, strictures and expectations. This was a part of the rhetoric of the Indigo Child as paradigm buster as presented in the primary literature. But even when retrospectively identified this dis-ease could serve as the catalyst for the individual’s transition, and as “efficacious” signs of their Indigo nature that they could only fully appreciate after their spiritual awakening.

Discerning the true cause of this illness or dis-ease frequently requires a peer from within the Indigo Child community or the wider New Age movement. This peer can be another individual met online or offline, a published author encountered through their work, or even an automated voice such as an online quiz or checklist of Indigo traits. In the case of American comedian and actress Jenny McCarthy this peer was a woman on a Los Angeles street. Rather than asking for an autograph the stranger suddenly declared that McCarthy was an Indigo, to which McCarthy instinctively shouted out “yes!” (McCarthy, 2013). However, the peer on the street also claimed that McCarthy’s autistic son was a Crystal Child, a further iteration or evolution of the Indigo Child. As in spirit possession identifying the correct name is important; discernment is at play. McCarthy’s own research into the Indigo Children supported the stranger’s diagnosis while also introducing her to the language of this new symbolic system.

Those who are diagnosed as Indigo are also not restored to mainstream society, but subsequently exist in a self-made peripheral community. There their self-proclaimed higher consciousness and greater understanding of the truth of reality and the spiritual continues their alienation from the social centre, which can respond with cynicism or parody. Now that the good Indigo spirit that they possess has been identified, rather than a bad spirit or demon,

they are considered to be 'awake' whereas the rest of the lower consciousness, mundane entangled 'sheeple' are still asleep to the truth. Out on this periphery the Indigo Children bond in their moments of liminality and form their own anti-structure *communitas* (Turner, 1967). These communities are seen online in forum boards given concise names like Indigosociety.com, but also appear as Facebook groups, Twitter hashtags and Tumblr blogs.

Conclusions

In the process of doing this research I went through a process of discernment and learning of a symbolic system identical to that I have described for the new Indigo and the spirit possessed. In fact, many times I was told by Indigo Children, the experienced voices in this field, that writing this thesis was my 'life-mission'; just as Nancy Ann Tappe talked about the Indigos having life missions. The good spirit that possessed me, my ethnographer self, was named and described by my informants as a producer of truthful information and legitimacy about their nature. I have not however ascribed to the Indigo Child identity and I don't believe that I have a superior consciousness or awareness of the world after this act of diagnosis by peer.

However, much as the Indigo Child is thought to, the new (academic) identity I have come to after being in a liminal phase (fieldwork) comes with a raised level of knowledge and awareness. It is worth noting the initial response to Victor Turner's concept of liminality itself, "The concept of liminality was received in puzzlement by Max Gluckman, Turner's old professor, and by other colleagues" (according to Edith Turner, 2006, p. 39). Victor Turner eventually found an academic space for his discussion of liminality at Cornell, creating with colleagues a *communitas* of those who had not only witnessed this process but had also experienced during fieldwork (Turner, 2006, p. 37). This comparison between the anthropologist and the spiritually possessed has also been remarked upon by the authors I have cited in this paper. Understanding the non-ordinary reality, or being, opposite us in our fieldwork involves recognition of the other inside us as researchers. Contemplating a cosmology that includes traditional spirits as well as living non-ordinary beings such as the Indigo Children requires involves avoiding a condescending, nihilistic or reductionist attitude, and reflexively placing ourselves within that cosmology. As I have attempted in this article, and in my wider ethnographic research.

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