

THE FESTIVAL OF SAN LÁZARO AND WILLIAM JAMES: FOUR KINDS OF FIELDWORK

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William James is almost exclusively treated in terms of his thought, an approach at odds with his own writing, which he always immersed in his own experience. The present paper asks about the relation of William James's writings to that experience and it examines his experience as "fieldwork," proposing that four different kinds of fieldwork are integral to James's work.

The paper illustrates the usefulness of Jamesian fieldwork through a visit to the Festival of San Lázaro, a celebration in Hialeah, Florida that is simultaneously focused on the Catholic saint and on his Santería double, Babalú-Ayé. Jamesian fieldwork makes that festival valuable, even for one not a student of that tradition.



The Festival of San Lázaro takes place yearly on December 17. One of the largest celebrations takes place in Hialeah, Florida, a largely Spanish-speaking city near Miami, populated principally by Cuban immigrants. Thousands of the devout congregate at a shrine called Rincón de San Lázaro to give offerings of flowers that pile more than six feet from the floor and must be removed periodically lest they collapse in a soft-petaled avalanche. The faithful, most dressed in purple or yellow, the colors of the saint, line up and patiently wait to kneel and light a candle. Some are barefoot in penitence, some come on crutches or in wheelchairs, and some crawl to the shrine from a considerable distance in extreme penance, for the devout see San Lázaro as a healer. On the evening of the festival in 2016, the throng processed through the streets of Hialeah for an hour or more, the police stopping traffic as the devout followed a large and vividly depicted statue of the saint, himself on crutches, marked by sores, and accompanied by two dogs.¹

Thus described, the scene isn't far different from those festivals depicted by Robert Orsi or other anthropologists of religion in Little Italy in New York or other ethnic Catholic neighborhoods.² What makes the San Lázaro Festival distinct from most of what Orsi studies is the fact that San Lázaro is simultaneously a Catholic saint and a Santería *orisha*, Babalú-Ayé, who is experienced as the embodiment of healing power by those in the tradition. Hidden within or behind the Catholic saint is the *ashe* of the West African spirit brought by slaves to the New World in the hulls of the slave ships, the *ashe* of healing, in this case, one that those in the unthinkably horrific passage much needed and that is, of course, needed in the current day, as well. To one raised in a more mainstream Catholic tradition in the United States, such as myself, there is a certain familiarity when it comes to statues of the saints and the devotion to otherworldly powers depicted in a multi-sensory manner. Dramatic scenes of suffering utilizing vivid colors and pungent smells, as well as communal chanting and singing, and an embodied immersion in the encounter with the holy—all of that was part of my pre-Vatican II childhood.³ I find the vivid sensory drama

both familiar, and yet strange, for while my experience of it goes back to my childhood, it also contains a power sufficiently out of the everyday to make the word “otherworldly” seem apt. And yet. The strangeness of the San Lázaro Festival does not simply multiply in comparison with my own experience, it’s *qualitatively* different because what the people parade through the streets with, make offerings to, and pray before is a spirit *not* of my experience but a potent *orisha* that applies severe and valuable pressure on my very sense of “otherworldly.”

Add to all of that the fact that I am a professor of religion, and the situation is a mixture and not a compound. That is to say, we might expect that I simply may apply the skills and experience I have accumulated through many years of studying religion to a new situation: I’ve understood *this*, and now I understand *that*. In our usual view, it’s as though we apply old knowledge to a new substance to create a fresh compound of knowledge, reliably within the molecular bonds of understanding; but that is not, I believe, the case. It’s a crucial aspect of our understanding today that context matters, and thus, the knower and the known are highly variable. As a result, understanding can be—and perhaps even should be—very unstable.

I generally study texts and not festivals, so that is one aspect of my reaction to the peculiar mixture of the San Lázaro Festival. Another is the African dimensions of the event, not to mention the context of slavery, the socio-economic environment of San Lázaro’s worship in the Americas, and the multiethnic identities of those who found his presence in Hialeah (for those at the Festival were not only Afro-Cuban Americans but Latino-Americans, and, I believe, Haitian-Americans, no doubt among many others). For many reasons, I would not (and could not) simply carry my well-burnished PhD and tenured professorship to the Festival and some months later publish the pure salt of a peer-reviewed article of knowledge. What I present here is a mixture. That’s not to say that if it’s *not* solid, pure knowledge, it’s just something loose and worthless, individual elements rolling around in a sack without encountering each other. Instead, I hope that as my religious knowledge mixes with the San

Lázaro Festival, useful encounters occur—chipping and bumping, some useful *change* in all of the elements. And that is, I believe, a good enough metaphor for knowledge: fresh friction of some value.

I draw a lot of my inspiration as a student of religion from William James, and the principle friction that results from my visit to the San Lázaro Festival is that it forces me to reflect on what it means to study for James, including using him to study religion. What I wonder about is the place of fieldwork in James studies. Something very much like fieldwork is integral to James, and he lets us know why we need to engage in that sort of study—not that we *may* but that we *must*. *William James Studies*, which has published work on James since 2006, contains no ethnographic studies. No one visits a community, no one participates in religious practices, no one encounters or immerses themselves in unfamiliar rituals or meets people who make claims of experience significantly foreign to those of the academy. The articles in the journal are overwhelmingly philosophical. And we might expect nothing else, for James is a *thinker*, right? He provides us with the theory of pragmatism or with theories of truth, with an ethics, and with early contributions to phenomenology and psychology. But the generalization that James is, above all, a thinker, is simply inaccurate. It's just how we've used him, predominantly. Those with a philosophical bent are attracted to him and find much to value, but James also did fieldwork and included it in his studies. Not only can we go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James, but I would insist that we *must* attend such festivals, broadly conceived, in order to be truly Jamesian.

James Clifford points out that ethnography was a product of the late nineteenth century when “down-close, empirical, and interactive” work was presumed necessary “to put theory to the test: it would *ground* interpretation.”⁴ So the affinity of James with ethnography brings him back to his own time. Nonetheless, we'll find Clifford's fluid sense of the boundaries of ethnography of great value when we consider James as a kind of ethnographer, as the traditional qualities of fieldwork are “an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter.”⁵ An “act of physically *going out* into a *cleared place of work*” is also necessary.⁶ In addition, we

do not achieve “depth” simply by “passing through” but by “physical, interpersonal interaction with a distinct, often exotic world.”⁷ These are the qualities we need to keep in mind as we consider whether James does fieldwork and whether fieldwork is integral to his ideas and his practice. We can’t ignore the fact that ethnography involves an *ethnos*, a “folk, people, or nation,” and the culture of such a group—and, with one crucial exception, James does not himself study groups with distinct cultures.⁸ But James most definitely does value fieldwork because theories are both tested in and subjected to a broader, non-theoretical experience. In fact, James’s sense of experience can approach and perhaps include what ethnography itself includes. In those senses, James was an ethnographer of a kind, and if we are Jamesian, we *must* engage in fieldwork.

In 1996, Michael Jackson urged the relevance of a Jamesian phenomenology for anthropology.⁹ Jackson states that “[m]any contemporary anthropologists have expressed dissatisfaction with the arcane, abstract, and alienating character of much theoretical thought.” What we need, he says, is

detailed descriptions of lived reality [which can serve] as ways of resisting the estranging effects of conceptual models and systematic explanation which, when pushed too far, disqualify and efface the very life one wants to understand.¹⁰

James serves as a resource for Jackson because of three of his qualities: He is acutely aware of and points out the weaknesses of the “intellectual fallacy” that presumes ideas are all that matter; he recommends we pay attention to the holism of our experience, in his radical empiricism and elsewhere, with a broad sense of experience; and he argues for a pragmatic instead of a realist evaluation of our broadly experiential theories. I would argue that James offers a justification for fieldwork as a *necessary* complement to theorizing. But how does James do fieldwork?

James is far from opposed to theories: His books *are* theories (though it’s crucial to notice that they’re not *only* theories). What he

fights against is the notion that we will ever have a final version of what's true. Instead, he sees a theory as "a program for more work."¹¹ There is no last word. We cannot rest. Rejecting a copy theory of truth—which means we can simply come up with a static and final answer—our theorizing must instead remain provisional, and we must always test it against experience, because our theories are always a part of our greater experiencing. That is the most important aspect for the relevance of ethnography. In James's memorable phrase, we must put our ideas "at work within the stream of [our] experience."¹² I would claim that stream of experiencing roughly equals fieldwork.

We must test our ideas to see how well they handle the fullness (and relative chaos) of our experiencing, according to whatever interests we might have. For Jackson, intellectuals must undercut the pretense that they have reached a fully adequate and final insight into human behavior, for there is a "'natural failing' of intellectuals to exaggerate the significance of their theoretical knowledge."¹³ As James puts it,

When the first mathematical, logical and natural uniformities, the first *laws*, were discovered, men were so carried away by the clearness, beauty and simplification that resulted, that they believed themselves to have deciphered authentically the eternal thoughts of the Almighty.¹⁴

If ideas are removed from experience, they've lost their truth. They haven't gained timelessness.¹⁵

We might debate whether all theorizing assumes the same finality as Jackson and James assert, and, in fact, the dominant views of theorizing these days acknowledge fallibility and context dependency which make finality impossible—yet most theories make do with simply encountering other theories. One reads multiple works in a small field; one submits to peer review that asks whether one has read the most relevant articles and books; one's article has to run the gauntlet of others with contrasting or competing views. It's generally theory versus theory in a rationalist world, and

the presumption is that a world of multiple theories is all we need in a marketplace of ideas. Jackson (and James) disagree.¹⁶

The counterforce to theory for Jackson is not just other theories (even in contestation) but “life as lived.”¹⁷ What he means is

that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies. . . .¹⁸

James’s radical empiricism, which “include[s] the plurality of *all* experienced facts” is similar both in its plurality and in its treatment of all experience “on the same existential footing,” rather than a privileging of the rational.¹⁹ Jackson cites from James the “conjunctive and disjunctive, fixed and fluid, social and personal, theoretical and practical, subjective and objective, mental and physical, real and illusory,” as the breadth of experience that would benefit theory.²⁰

Clifford emphasizes the importance of “going out,” which involves “a spatial distinction between a home base and an exterior place of discovery.”²¹ I don’t think we can always find a spatial movement in James, though sometimes we can, and Jackson doesn’t ask for one. Rather, “going out” involves exposing our ideas to the effects of a broader experience, the experience of the second half of the pairs he cites from James—the disjunctive, fluid, personal, practical, illusory, and others—when we usually desire the first of the pairs in a definite, clear, generalizable, and real-seeming theory. Those are our academic homes. But we need to “go out” from our offices, from the home of our conceptualizing that, we usually think, works best if we close the door and eliminate all distractions. And neither James nor Jackson entirely disagrees with our usual preference, for clear, precise ideas are very valuable and hard to achieve (which we realize both when we teach and when we write), but they believe we still need to “go out” with those ideas, both physically and mentally, to test them in the disjunctive, the fluid, and the practical (how well do they make sense of the “stream of our

experiencing”) *and*, even more important, to subject them to that stream. To test them and to subject them to the effects of what James calls “weather.”²² To change them as we discover the valuable ways in which they fail. For it’s not equality that Jackson is after—that the theoretical and the experiential are equally valuable—rather, he privileges the “power to destabilize and unsettle received ways of seeing the world.”²³ What he urges is the “prioritizing of lived experience over theoretical knowledge.”²⁴ Jackson advocates a Clifford-like “going out” into experience, and one that is far enough from our “homes” that we can have a “deep, extended, and interactive” experience.²⁵

A more careful account of the relation of theory to “lived experience,” or to a term she likes better, “concrete experience,” appears in Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*.²⁶ Seigfried says that “[t]he rational explanations of philosophy, which privilege the articulate, are still rooted in the pre-reflective world of experience.”²⁷ That is to say, our concepts are within a whole that is rich and multifarious, “an aboriginal flow of feelings” that is “always much-at-once.”²⁸ This is what James refers to as the “rich thicket of reality,” along with many other pungent and vivid images.²⁹ The two dangers that concern Seigfried are “sterility” and the essentializing of ideas. Both come about when we remove our coherent thoughts from concrete experience, and we can remedy both by subjecting those ideas to concrete experience. What Seigfried sees in James is a “radical reconstruction” as he places ideas within “concrete experience.”³⁰ What she and James both want is a therapeutic treatment for theory by the effect of concrete experience, and I would suggest not only that fieldwork can perform this treatment, but, more strongly, that we can consider the therapeutic treatment for theories as fieldwork.

Seigfried is certainly right when she sees concrete experience as central in James, as well as how that experience relates to theorizing, for theory is a valuable process but one in need of the input from broader and messier experience. Many of James’s most striking and least philosophical expressions are his depictions of concrete experience. He claims that pragmatism, like empiricism, “can

preserve the richest intimacy with facts” and that those facts are “multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed.”³¹ Experience can be “intolerably confused and gothic,” yet, in spite of what we might gather from the use of the term “facts,” James’s description presents something he isn’t simply passively compelled to acknowledge. Rather, he selects “rich thicket of reality,” as the term “rich” indicates, because it is *valuable* to him.³²

As Seigfried points out so well, while we need to organize our worlds (“weaving chaos into order,” according to a variety of interests), we need to remember that the theory is a theory only and, crucially, to critique and vitalize those theories.³³ As she says, quoting James, “our finite world, which is abstracted out of the concrete fullness of experience, is always less than, and therefore often a ‘rotten or miserable substitute’ for the encompassing reality.”³⁴ Even if our ideas about the world are productive ones, they’re still in need of revitalizing.

I would suggest that we can encounter the “concrete fullness of experience,” that “rich thicket of reality,” with some success, through fieldwork. More boldly, I want to ask whether that encounter with the rich thicket might itself be considered fieldwork. For one thing, our experience out of the refinement of our theoretical texts is personal, multisensory, embodied, social, and, sometimes, public. Yes, a book is tactile and its letters are black and the spaces white, but none of that compares to the sensory experiences of the San Lázaro Festival. After all, when James says concrete experience is “multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed,” he’s describing the street—“The world of concrete experience to which the *street* belongs.”³⁵ James encounters the “much-at-once” in the street, at least to a significant degree. James’s concreteness is poetic, for while “multitudinous” is an abstraction, the rest of his terms are vivid and concrete, and they convey the experience of the thoroughfare in his day with its tangled vegetation and muddy, unsteady traction, and with the physical and emotional consequence (“painful and perplexed”) of the “too muchness” of the street. James’s study, with its large windows in his house on Irving Street in Cambridge, was the place of his thought (and of the

composition of all his writings post-1889), but the street was the world, and a very chaotic and valuable complement to that study of thinking.

But there are several kinds of “concrete fullness of experience” in James, and while each dovetails in ways with Clifford’s sense of ethnography, they do so unequally. There is the “too muchness” of the external world in some chapters of *The Principles of Psychology* and elsewhere; the “too muchness” of the internal world in *The Principles*; the “too muchness” of the social and literary worlds in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; and the “too muchness” of sub-cultures that were strange to him in his psychic research. Each benefits James’s theorizing in different ways and will benefit our own, too, if we are really to be Jamesian.

JAMES’S FIRST FIELDWORK

To begin, the imagery James uses in *The Principles of Psychology* to illustrate the external world “depicts a rich whirl of raw materials in which we cannot live, but that not only enables us to live but stimulates us constantly to live better by making our constructions more adequate to its fullness.”³⁶ James writes that “[w]hat we experience, what *comes before us*, is a chaos of fragmentary impressions interrupting each other.”³⁷ It is a “black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms.”³⁸ It is a “plenum,” utterly full.³⁹

It’s not exactly a “going out” that takes place, for we can’t reside there. There’s something inhuman about it, and, in fact, James notes that we want to “get away from it as fast as possible.”⁴⁰ “The condition of [our] mental sanity” requires that most of the “utter chaos . . . of actual experience . . . should become nonexistent.”⁴¹ Nonetheless, we benefit from the pressure of that “too muchness,” so we need to experience its effects and be open to it; otherwise we will have the sterility and essentialism that Siegfried points to. The “too muchness” provides the “power to destabilize and unsettle received ways,” as Jackson says.⁴² In addition, the plenum has aspects of the “distinct, often exotic, world” that Clifford sees in fieldwork, for it is certainly *other* than the selections of our

concepts.⁴³ Clifford distinguishes fieldwork from tourism, defined as a kind of travel “incapable of producing serious knowledge,” but I don’t think we can say James sees our encounters with the plenum as in any way superficial, in spite of the fact that we don’t take up residence.⁴⁴ As for the “deep, extended, and interactive” encounter fieldwork provides, I think we can, with some generosity, apply all of the characteristics to our experience of the plenum. In fact, those adjectives are all crucial characteristics of the plenum. “Deep” is a fuzzy term, but the plenum seems to qualify eminently. Whatever science has said of nature, from Ptolemy to Newton to Einstein to string theory, the world supports all of it, but there is more that can and will be said. It is that “more” that is the benefit of the plenum’s fullness. We might see the encounter with the plenum as both a “No” and a “More,” somewhat as postmodern thinkers see *differance* within discourse. Without the concrete experience of the too muchness of our experience of the world, we feel as though our theories are sufficient. As Jackson says, we “exaggerate the significance of . . . theoretical knowledge,” or, as Seigfried says, we essentialize.⁴⁵ But subjected to the plenum of concrete experience, those discourses destabilize and fail. Crucially, in addition, the plenum revitalizes our theories. They’re richer, they’re *more*, because of being subjected to experience. I think we’re justified, then, in seeing our encounter with the plenum as serving the role of fieldwork, even if we might not be ready to call it ethnography.

In an introduction to religion course, for many years I taught Joseph Murphy’s *Santeria: African Spirits in America*, and what struck me principally was how “wholly other” the world of the spirits was, in accord with theories of religion from Otto to Eliade to Tillich to the postmodernists. In presenting the *orishas* and his ethnographic encounter with them, Murphy writes about the importance of stones, “alive with the *orisha’s ashe*,” or power.⁴⁶ “As embodiments of the *orishas*, the stones must be treated as the living things they are, and so they are lovingly bathed in cooling herbs, cleaned and oiled, and fed with the blood of animals.”⁴⁷ I led my students through a careful consideration of Murphy’s description. “What is usually bathed and cleaned,” I asked? “Babies, right? And

they're oiled with baby oil, too. And fed, right? Spoon fed. See how intimate the *orishas* are? And then they're fed with . . . the blood of animals!"—I'd conclude in triumphant climax, proving that the *orishas* are otherworldly, and in a dramatically disruptive way. Do we think we can understand the divine? Absolutely not. Like Otto's *mysterium tremendum*, Eliade's sacred, and Tillich's ultimate concern to varying degrees, the *orishas* are, in Derrida's expression, an absolute interruption.⁴⁸

But there is a problem with my theory, a theory with a long pedigree in the study of religion. I discovered it in 2001, when Murphy and I visited communities of practitioners in Santiago de Cuba and Matanzas in Cuba, and I encountered it again at the San Lázaro Festival in Hialeah. Disturbance isn't all that's going on. Yes, while at a *bembe*, a drumming celebration centered around the appearance of *orishas*, I saw a man sway and writhe in a way that made it seem like something "other" was overpowering him when he went into a trance. Yes, too, when Murphy and I attended a day devoted to animal sacrifice in the seven-day initiation called an *asiento*, the man whose head was being "seated" with an *orisha*—which involved anointing his head with the fresh blood of numerous animals—looked utterly dazed. But more was going on here than just disruption, because those present at the *bembe* also delighted in the appearance of the spirits. The manifestation of the spirit seemed more to confirm hopes and expectations than to disrupt them. Those praying at the Rincón de San Lázaro in December 2016, and processing through the streets, seemed variously serious, determined, joyous, fervent, and relieved. More existed here than my neat theoretical preoccupation with disturbance had prepared me for. In the expression from James that Seigfried makes much of, there was "much-at-once," and even the list of adjectives in my previous sentence is selective.⁴⁹ I selected "serious, determined, joyous, fervent, and relieved" because they harmonize with what I know of religion and with the plenum of the Festival, but on another visit I might amend that list. I hope I would.

Seigfried points out that our reasonings have limitations due to the interests that motivate them but that a remedy exists for the

partiality in reasoning: an awareness of how limited our interests are and, even more crucially, the experience of reverie or contemplation. “We must have the creative moment of free association in order to multiply the chances that some fortuitous coupling will arise. . . .”⁵⁰ That is the benefit of fieldwork of the first kind, within the “much-at-once” of the plenum, though, in my case, at the San Lázaro Festival, it consisted of the social and not the physical universe. William James’s plenum was saying “no” to my theory derived from Otto, Tillich, Eliade, and the rest, and I was able to add “more” impressions to help myself suggest ideas that might be more adequate to the San Lázaro Festival. And I would need to refresh my new ideas on another visit to the Festival, and then, yet again, because the plenum is always more.

While the fieldwork I describe in parallel with James’s experience of the plenum has clear value in relativizing and vitalizing our theories, we might ask more from the term “fieldwork.” It’s not really ethnographic. There is no ethnos, no people or culture or customs. The plenum certainly fulfills Jackson’s recommendation for a counterforce to theory, due to the “no” and “more” from this sort of fieldwork. And the experience of failure is invaluable, and it’s one I’m glad I experienced at the San Lázaro Festival. But justifiable use of the term “fieldwork” might require more of the multisensory, embodied, social, and public, and for those we need to look at other manifestations of James’s “concrete fullness of experience.”

JAMES’S SECOND FIELDWORK

As opposed to the plenum, the inner world that James depicts in *The Principles of Psychology* is thoroughly human. It is far from the “black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms” in which we cannot live.⁵¹ It is suffused with personality, one of the five characteristics of consciousness. As he says, “the universal conscious fact is not ‘feelings and thoughts exist,’ but ‘I think’ and ‘I feel.’”⁵² And it’s important to notice James doesn’t just say that each feeling or thought has the “tag” of “I” attached but that “every thought tends to be part of a personal

consciousness,” for “the personal self rather than the thought might be treated as the immediate datum in psychology.”⁵³ Our mind is a personality, but it’s also very rich and broad, and analogous to the plenum, for it is also a “teeming multiplicity” of objects and relations.⁵⁴ Significantly, James must use images to convey consciousness, for delineating it with precise and exact rational concepts is not adequate.⁵⁵ And so he provides the very influential stream of consciousness, the similarly natural metaphor of the flights and perchings of thought, and a grammatical metaphor of the mental reality of all parts of speech, not just nouns and verbs, but propositions and conjunctions, adverbs and adjectives, as well. Each metaphor conveys that the self is full and also indeterminate.

It’s important to notice that James still sees the mind as composed significantly of ideas, if only in part—the “perchings” of our mental activity, and the nouns. James’s own writing is a fine example. He makes an argument, and he does so with logical force, using concepts that are clear and distinct—again, at least in part. He does his best to make each of his five characteristics of consciousness (it is personal, always changing, continuous, concerned with objects, and always interested) clear to readers and to persuade them of their accuracy. But he also argues that the mind is more than its concepts, for it is awash in “numberless relations.”⁵⁶ It’s that “free water of consciousness” that’s analogous to the plenum, and it’s our participation in *that* experience which comprises the second sort of fieldwork.⁵⁷

What is in that “free water of consciousness”? James says it’s hard to be aware of it, for we tend to emphasize the definite, the nouns of our thought, the objects in our experiencing, and not the context or the relations among concepts. But, for one thing, our accumulated experience affects each definite thought, so our impressions of objects change. “The friends we used to care the world for are shrunken to shadows; . . . the pictures so empty; and as for the books, what *was* there so mysteriously significant in Goethe, or in John Mill so full of weight?”⁵⁸ Context is crucial, as is our physical state (“We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired. . . .”).⁵⁹ Even what

seems to be utterly distinct, like a clap of thunder, is felt *in relation* to the silence that came before, and differently if there had been a prior rumble of thunder.⁶⁰ Perhaps because of my greater affinity for language than for thunder, what James says of grammar seems to communicate his point especially well: “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*.”⁶¹ All of those non-substantial, relational words are part of the free water of our experiencing, and the relations within our minds “are numberless.”⁶²

I have spent so much space discussing this free water of consciousness because James spends so much time on it in *The Principles*, and because it is such a crucial instance of the kind of fieldwork I have been discussing. James says he wants to reinstate this multitude of “anonymous psychic states” to their “proper place in our mental life,” but why? It’s not, I think, an attempt to be accurate and realistic, but because this “too muchness” is so valuable. We need to experience it, as Clifford says of fieldwork, so we “go out” from our usual worlds into “a distinct, often exotic world” and there encounter something “deep, extended, [and] interactive” that can “ground interpretation.”⁶³ Since James feels we commonly ignore the vast majority of what goes on in our minds, the free water of consciousness is certainly a ‘place’ into which we need to “go out.” We can see its exoticism—or strangeness, a better term—by looking at the modernist novels of Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, for they present very strange internal worlds influenced by James’s stream of consciousness. Moreover, the Jamesian stream is certainly deep—“the relations are numberless”—and James wants our encounter with it to be extended and interactive. In fact, interaction with it is the very point, and that has to do with how it “grounds” our ideas.

I want to pay special attention to the “grounding” of interpretation, not in the sense of giving a solid foundation for our ideas but as providing something as sensory, personal, and experiential as the dirty ground under our shoes. James’s own manner of writing shows us the value of the “free water of

consciousness.” To an unusual degree in modern academic writing, James fills his *textbook* with a great deal of his own stream of consciousness to drench his arguments with the “free water” of *him*.⁶⁴ His ideas *are related* to his multitude of experiences. *The Principles* contains frequent examples that strike me as very personal to James. When he says that our experience of the note of the piano key, the green of grass, and the scent of cologne never repeats, those examples seem actually drawn from James’s own experience, as do his examples of how being sleepy, hungry, or tired affect perception, or how time affects affection for friends, literature, and philosophy. I bet that James really did lose regard for Goethe and John Stuart Mill and that he really did recall “[putting his] nose to the . . . flask of cologne” when he wrote the sentence. James may not be confessional, but he is personal.⁶⁵ Readers see him associating his own experiences with his theories, and in this way, James’s thoughts are “grounded.” We can’t eliminate this ground in order to have just the ideas, if we are to remain Jamesian. If we eliminate the ethnography, Jackson says, our ideas become “arcane, abstract, and alienating,” adjectives that might come to mind when reading many studies of James today.⁶⁶

James seems to love the stream of his own consciousness. In part, it’s because concepts can be richer and more effective if there are more connections made, as James says in his discussion of genius and as Seigfried emphasizes, but it’s also because he seems to associate “more” with more life. Look at what he says of the narrow and sympathetic people: “All narrow people *intrench* their Me, they *retract* it—from the region of what they cannot securely possess.”⁶⁷ On the other hand,

Sympathetic people . . . proceed by the entirely different way of expansion and inclusion. The outline of their self often gets uncertain enough, but for this the spread of its content more than atones. *Nil humani a me alienum*.⁶⁸

It’s like James’s praise of his house in Chocorua, New Hampshire in a letter to his sister Alice, “It’s the most delightful house you ever

saw; it has 14 doors, all opening outwards.”⁶⁹ The internal “teeming multiplicity” is valuable for improving ideas but also because it gives us life. James seems nourished by the psychic stream.

This is the second type of Jamesian fieldwork, one we might call auto-ethnography, the personal and particular experiences of the topography of his own thoughts.⁷⁰ James doesn’t need to go to Brazil with Louis Agassiz (or to the Trobriand Islands with Malinowski or to the Ndembu in Zambia with Victor Turner), for he can experience the rich thicket of his own mind anywhere. And yet, the relation to conceptualizing makes this fieldwork and not tourism. It’s not fieldwork for James (or anyone else) to just noodle in his journal or simply enjoy the mental play. It’s not sufficient that it’s “especially deep, extended, and interactive,” in Clifford’s words, but, to complete the passage from Clifford, it also has to be a “research encounter.”⁷¹ There do have to be theories. And yet, as I’ve emphasized throughout this essay, the point isn’t simply to get to the theory or to have a theory that’s improved through reverie (as Seigfried says). Concepts need to be en-livened by remaining in experience (mental life, in this case). James writes in such a way that we *always* see his auto-ethnology, and then we can see our own ideas as *always* in the free water of our own minds. Better concepts isn’t the point; concepts within a rich and inclusive life is.⁷²

I experienced the San Lázaro Festival in a complex and idiosyncratic way—in quite specific culturally patterned ways interrelated with details of my personal history that can often be extremely idiosyncratic. None of that is irrelevant. If we think it is irrelevant, we may feel that an understanding of religion alone is what matters, a knowledge that we can apply at any time or place. But as we’ve learned, understanding is patterned by culture, gender, economics, race, and much else, and thus understanding needs context. But that’s not what James is saying. He’s saying that even the personal and idiosyncratic (my mother’s skepticism about the saints or my own embarrassing bowel movement during the Mass) affect our understandings. We shouldn’t eliminate them so that we can universalize (though that seems noble), or take them into account so that we can have richer theories (though that’s valuable),

but we should strive to see how the whole panoply is at work. All of our theories are steeped in the free water of us, and thus they change as we do, and that's a good thing. Moreover, the independent life of that free water deeply affects our theories, for it is also foreign to our conceptualizing. We need to stay vulnerable to it and intimate with it (that is, vulnerable to and intimate with *ourselves*), and to do so continuously, not as a one and done. We'll never arrive at the end of our theorizing because we're never at an end of our living—until we are, of course.⁷³

I traveled to the Festival of San Lázaro with someone who responded to it quite differently than I did. My childhood parish, St. Boniface, on Long Island, largely consisted of second-generation Irish and Italian Catholics, and though it lacked the public festivals of the saints, they don't feel foreign to me. Seeing the vivid statues of San Lázaro with his crutch and sores and dogs felt familiar enough, as did the crowds lacking decorum, and the multi-sensory engagement. I experienced the saint and his devotion mixed with the dark and incensed interior of old vine-covered St. Boniface, and I felt an uneasy pleasure in that return to a largely unintelligible language, to physical manifestations of sacred power, to anonymous community, to the sense of being watched and judged for proper devotion, and to the curious mix of being both embraced and excluded. The facts of the Festival mixed with the free water of my own psyche.

We would usually consider any fieldwork in Hialeah a “deep, extended, and interactive research encounter” with the *participants* in the devotion to San Lázaro, and not with one's own psyche, but that encounter with the devout is an aspect of the first, third, and fourth kinds of ethnography in James, the participation with the plenum, already discussed, and with the social, interpersonal, and public, which I've yet to address. Less appreciated and more typically Jamesian is the role of auto-ethnography in our study, and it plays a crucial role. I think we can see it by contrasting my engagement with the San Lázaro Festival with that of my companion on the trip. Simply put, he could both participate and observe, and in ways both deep and physically, interpersonally interactive, and I

could not. Those, in spite of very similar demographic backgrounds. We share the same age, race, gender, religious, and, for the most part, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics. And yet, he was able to develop conceptual understandings of great vitality and value, and I was not.

There's an easy explanation: It's his field. He finds the topic of great interest, and has been personally involved in it since graduate school. Demography isn't destiny, as we know. As James would put it, it's also a matter of temperament, or of what becomes a "living option," but that's exactly why auto-ethnography is so important. The cultural patterning caused by gender, race, age, economics, social class, and religion are strong currents in the stream, but they're not all of the water. It's some of the rest of that free water that accounts for the divergence between my companion and myself, and it's auto-ethnography that allows us to understand and affect it.

Participant observation is the dominant method of fieldwork, and the fact that my companion was able to participate and I was not strongly affected our ability to observe. A professor in graduate school introduced my companion to Santeria, and he became deeply involved with a community in the Bronx, going through several stages of initiation into the religion, and a prominent priest, or *Babalawo*, accepted him into his family *en santo* as he wrote a dissertation on the religion, as well as many books and articles since that time. When this scholar of Santeria visits my class and students ask him if he "believes in Santeria," he replies that he doesn't like the word "believes." He prefers to say that he "speaks" Santeria, he says, much as one might speak English or Spanish or Arabic. He can understand and make himself understood. He can live in the language. "Speaking Santeria" shows the involvement of a lot more of his stream of consciousness than does "belief." At the Festival of San Lázaro, I saw him speaking Santeria.

I mentioned at the start of this essay that the devout gave offerings of flowers at the shrine, where they knelt, lit candles, and prayed. When we arrived at Rincón de San Lázaro, my companion bought flowers at a shop that overflowed with yellow and purple bouquets. Then I stood and watched as he approached the front of

the shrine, handed the flowers to an attendant, knelt, lit candles, and remained kneeling with clasped hands for many minutes. An hour or more later, I struggled to convince myself that I could light a candle at the shrine. It was a threshold moment, as I fought to push myself “inside” while I strongly resisted my own efforts. What was the problem? My companion showed no such struggle, and he seemed to worship as he offered the flowers, lit the candle, and knelt. I can’t say my resistance was different than if I’d been in a more conventional Catholic church. It wasn’t *orishas* that was the problem, it was worship. This wasn’t an art exhibit and it wasn’t a display at the Botanical Garden. Kneeling signified something I was unwilling to get too close to. There wasn’t “nothing” there, there was a “something” that I resisted. Eventually I joined the line that led to the altar, received a candle, and then knelt and lit it. At that point, I felt seven years old, and also seventeen, both present like a child and distant like an adolescent. There was power of some sort, and I can only say that it held me “in thrall,” if thrall was something long past but still present. But at the same time, I predominantly noticed how weak the effect was. I told friends later that I felt nothing, except for the heat from the candle’s flame. But it wasn’t nothing. It was nostalgia and also refusal. “Altar,” “worship,” “Catholicism,” “spirit,” even “candle” and “flower,” were nouns related to mental and experiential contexts that were both culturally patterned and idiosyncratic. That “teeming multiplicity” matters a lot, and we can’t ever forget it. Remembering it stops us from essentializing, as Seigfried says, and it also vitalizes with the power and independence of the stream.

James would say there was something in my companion’s temperament or that the worship of *orisha* saints (or more conventional Catholic saints) is a “live option” for him. More fully, as he knelt, his own experience harmonized with the particulars of this experience at the Rincon. Significantly, (and somewhat brilliantly, I think) my companion incorporates them into some of his writings. He includes an emotionally warm relationship with his Santeria godfather, or *padrino*, and with his *madrina*, as well, and a sense of being in a real family. There is a love of ritual with all of

its sensory elements. There is a powerful receptiveness to the drumming of the tradition, to the physicality of the rhythms. We would need to put him on a psychoanalysis couch to reveal all of the elements of his psyche that welcome Santería, and that's the point: Though James is not Freud, and there are significant differences between their views of the mind, the two founding psychologists share views on the "teeming multiplicity" of the mind and its presence in *all* of our living. Mind is not just its matters but all of its flows, and we need to include that context to keep the thoughts alive.

JAMES'S THIRD FIELDWORK

A third kind of fieldwork in James, one more similar to what we're accustomed to, is evident in *The Variety of Religious Experience* where James presents over 300 quotations, usually of religious people speaking in the first person of their own experiences and often at length. The average length of the quoted passages is a striking 240 words, with fifty-two quotes over 390 words, six over 1000 words, and one 1400 words long. An astonishing thirty-six percent of the book is quotation. Seigfried points to a kind of natural history in James, a "gathering together of a wide variety of relevant data" much as happens in the empirical sciences, but with a broader sense of human experience than the sciences usually consider, "including the many realms of reality he discusses in *Principles*, and a whole range of beliefs, intentions, feelings, and needs."⁷⁴ I mentioned earlier that Kuklick traces the origins of anthropological fieldwork to the late nineteenth century, a century when natural history largely characterized the method of many of the sciences, so the link between natural history and ethnography is close.⁷⁵ Crucially, however, James did not collect specimens, and calling what he did natural history is misleading. Yes, it's a broad collection, and reminiscent of the collections of birds by John James Audubon, or the field collections of Alexander von Humboldt or Charles Darwin, because of the sheer number of quotations in James's book and their miscellaneous character. A contrast is often made between natural history and experimental science, the latter of which dominates science today, and to a significant degree, that

difference comes down to control. Experimental science tests a hypothesis as narrowly as possible with strictly limited variables, whereas natural history is inductive and broad: birds of America; underground plants in Freiberg; finches of the Galapagos. James and natural historians have a similar enthusiasm for variety, but James does not treat the varieties of religious experiences as just specimens. Audubon killed enormous numbers of birds so he could paint them. The proverbial butterfly collector pins each to a display. Darwin's servant Syms Covington shot the finches to take them back to England.⁷⁶ James exercises far less control. He allows people into his pages who are very much alive and both powerful and independent. He collects "developed subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men" and then quotes them at unusual length so that their own words occupy the attention of readers, instead of clipping and managing them, as is the custom today.⁷⁷ It's worth pausing to consider the contrast to current academic writing. I can think of no writings on James (and few, if any, in philosophy or theology) with the number or length of quotations as appear in *The Varieties*. Editors would likely reject such a manuscript, which just emphasizes that studies today might be *on* James, but they are not Jamesian. And, I would claim, that is at a cost.

In addition, he has selected individuals who experience religion as an "acute fever" and with "a discordant inner life" and "exalted emotional sensibility."⁷⁸ In part, he does so because he subscribes to the view that we can see a phenomenon best in its "more fully evolved and perfect forms" but also because encountering such people is, indeed, an *encounter*, and one that is with a person and not with a concept.⁷⁹ What matters to James is not just the nouns used by those he quotes but the writers' relation to those nouns in, for example, the prepositional phrases that denote enthusiasm. James does not seek to simplify or attenuate, editing a quote to reveal the bare concept. It reminds me of his practice of keeping photographs of those writers who interested him.⁸⁰ And it means that the people he quotes had a full personality that we saw in auto-ethnography.

To his vast credit, James does not shy away from those with mental illness but prefers them, no doubt exaggerating their prevalence, but not in order to gain explanatory or moral power over them by pathologizing or pitying, but out of an attraction to the “teeming multiplicity” of humans. James’s presentation of George Fox crying “Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield,” as he walked barefoot through the winter streets of that city, is not, we should remember, James’s story of him but Fox’s own (and over 500 words in length), and James directly repudiates a psychologically reductive explanation of Fox and the others. James’s pragmatic method, which he presents with greater effectiveness in this chapter than in many of his other works, compels us to assess Fox and the others according to a “spiritual” and not an “existential” judgement, that is, according to the significance of the utterances for us as people and not according to their “morbid origin.”⁸¹ That kind of assessment is only possible because James surrenders so much control by presenting such powerful voices at such length, that is, by bringing *people* into his pages and not simply concepts.⁸²

James’s third kind of fieldwork is, again to use Clifford, “an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter” that involves a “physical, interpersonal interaction with a distinct, often exotic world” but differently than in the first two types of fieldwork.⁸³ There is a deep, extended, and interactive encounter because the people in his pages have such independence and substance. One just can’t read Tolstoy writing about his depression for over 300 words without being deeply affected, which might be one reason so many readers of *The Varieties* skip the quotations. (Be honest, don’t you, too? I usually do.) The crucial difference from the usual fieldwork is that James doesn’t “go out” except for his excursions into books.⁸⁴ There is no New Caledonia; instead, James’s library includes Tolstoy’s *My Confession* (or Auguste Gratry’s *Souvenirs de ma Jeunesse* or John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* or much, much else). It’s exactly the sort of armchair research that the nineteenth century movement into the field was supposed to replace. And that’s important: James doesn’t go into the field for most of what he writes about in *The*

Varieties. If we're Jamesian in this sense, there is no fieldwork, no ethnology in the proper sense (with an important asterisk, as we'll soon see). There is no need to go to the San Lázaro Festival. For James, we'd read first person accounts of the Festival by its most "fully evolved and perfect forms" as we sat in our libraries.⁸⁵

Yet, as with his other types of fieldwork, it does impact how we study, if we're Jamesian. We study, first, in a library—or, at least, we have literary antecedents in mind as we study. Our "informants" are people who composed their experiences into established forms and revised and polished their manuscripts, and then those compositions went through the entire publishing process of acquisitions and editors and distribution and reviews and sales. The informants have had a cultural impact, as befits "developed subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men." There's a kind of literary modernism in this third kind of Jamesian fieldwork. Think of the interwoven allusions in Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley": Homer and the Pre-Raphaelites, Max Beerbohm, Ford Madox Ford, Sappho, Flaubert, Shakespeare, Heraclitus, Wilfred Owen, John Ruskin, Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and, of course, so many more. For academics, the modernist model is still common, but the allusions are to James Clifford and Charlene Hunter Seigfried, Michael Jackson, Robert Orsi, Joseph M. Murphy, Jacques Derrida, Ralph Barton Perry, Linda Simon, and, of course, William James, himself. Whatever we study, we do so with our academic antecedents, with our "school" or our sub-discipline, comprised of "developed . . . phenomena . . . produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men." We study from and in libraries. These established and reputable, library-worthy sources limit the degree to which theories are "tested" by the field. To use the expression that James himself proposes in *The Varieties*, theories are more likely to be "philosophically reasonable."⁸⁶

But what makes James different is that while his field might be his academic sources who are the "more fully evolved and perfect forms," they're also literary *people* in this kind of fieldwork, writing in the first person about their religious "fevers," as I've been

emphasizing. James loosely circumscribes the topic, and that topic is religion as it's experienced by individual people. That is, to think about religion is to put oneself in a teeming crowd of those who experience it personally and in a great deal of variety, and not simply to reside within a group of theories that go by the names of people ("Kant says . . ." "Kierkegaard claims . . ." "James argues . . ."). James performs his fieldwork among people, not disembodied and de-personalized concepts grouped metonymically by people's names.

Cornel West and many feminists are right that James excludes many, for race, class, and gender are sieves for full inclusion into his "varieties." Jeremy Carrette, for instance, critiques James for deploring Teresa of Avila's worth as a mystic due to being "overly embodied . . . [and] connected with sexual states and . . . caught in a pathology of pain."⁸⁷ It's one example among many of the "pervasive and explicit sexism in James's philosophy."⁸⁸ West describes James as a "patrician of the street" who is principally interested in "lessening the shock of the new for the educated middle class."⁸⁹ But, as both West and feminist critics point out, there are enormous resources in James.⁹⁰ West puts it well when he says that James, like other pragmatists, is preoccupied "with power, provocation, and personality" and incorporates "contingency and revision into a theory of truth" so that there is a built-in mechanism for his own subversion.⁹¹ The third fieldwork in *The Varieties* exemplifies the role of "power, provocation, and personality" due to the high degree of independence of the words in the book (words so sufficiently personalized that we can call them voices). James models a thinker as one who is surrounded by others' powerful experiences but to a high degree does not subsume them into his own voice. We are Jamesian when we pay attention to the valuable weather of others and remain open to the failure and revision of our theories because of those others.

At the San Lázaro Festival, my first inclination was to use collective nouns to see what was going on—"religion," "Afro-Cuban," "crowd," "festival," "Hialeah," "Miami." If you look back at my opening paragraphs, you'll see the objectifications of narrative

presentation, a scene I depicted from the safety and clarity of the outside, however much that description might value the festival's vivid sensuality and its cultural otherness. But I would cross a power gradient if my description of them, in my own words, became their own words, especially if I were to amass their words in an average of 240 words (or to a maximum of 1400 words), as in James. Yes, those words would be quotations and not spoken words, and I would have curated them, as did James, but they still would have an undeniable power.⁹² After all, thirty-six percent of James's book was not his words. What if thirty-six percent of this essay were the words of Festival participants? The implication is stunning, and we do not understand James and the importance of fieldwork in his writings if we don't recognize that powerful effect.

Jamesian fieldwork in the third sense, then, is encountering people with words, individuals who usually suffer, people who are *not* just members of groups (Santeras, Afro-Cubans, Christians) but individuals we experience as personal and autonomous, speaking of experiences that are to some degree impenetrable yet valuable. As West says, James had a "genuine empathy with those undergoing hardship,"⁹³ and he also saw that "religion . . . generates human heroic energies and facilitates personal struggle in the world."⁹⁴ There are many ways to depict persons. The third Jamesian fieldwork sees persons as solitary individuals struggling and seeking empowerment. That dovetails well with the San Lázaro Festival, for to be Jamesian would mean listening to individuals' own accounts, not the categories of collective nouns, and to hear the hardship and the struggle for a personal access to power. The Festival was one of healing. There were the barefoot, the people in wheelchairs, the man crawling through the street, the many with illnesses and sufferings less visible.

There is the obvious and important problem that James did only library research in this third fieldwork, for he did not, in *The Varieties* go anywhere but to books, a problem I will get to shortly.⁹⁵ But as a model for encountering "concrete experience" and benefitting from it (as we saw in Jackson and Seigfried), by "destabilizing and unsettling" theories as well as vitalizing them,

James still informs our study of the San Lázaro Festival and the nature of study more generally. To study it is not to study the theories of it but the accounts of participants, of the devout. I would need to find and read people writing in the first-person about their diseases, their cancers and heart disease, and that was something I did not do. It's another way in which, for me, to be Jamesian is to fail, for it's to be open to people to a much greater degree than I am. It's also to be more passive than I am, not collecting the writings into patterns ("the barefoot, the people in wheelchairs, the man crawling through the street, the many with illnesses and sufferings less visible"). Notice how loose James's collections are, the "healthy minded" and "sick souls." They are largely useless categories because his impulse simply to collect independent, strong first-person accounts is more powerful in him than the impulse to categorize. I can imagine a Jamesian "fieldtrip" to the San Lázaro Festival simply by reading the many "I went there because" statements. Those would test my theories as Jackson wants. They would "destabilize and unsettle" my own "received ways of seeing the world" through the power of others' words.⁹⁶ I might de-essentialize my own high culture theories, and, more importantly, revitalize my understandings.

JAMES'S FOURTH FIELDWORK

The central question of this paper is whether fieldwork can be Jamesian, and I'm claiming that an intimate and necessary relation exists between James and fieldwork. In fact, I'm claiming that being "Jamesian" is not a philosophical position concerning pragmatism or pluralism or a certain kind of ethics or a view of truth, but a relationship of such ideas to various kinds of non-theoretical experience. Fieldwork or, arguably, ethnography, is integral to James, and not simply because the inclusion of experience is part of James's style, but because of the value of fieldwork to our ideas, of our ideas to our experience. To this point we've seen the importance of the plenum, the teeming variety of the world that date-stamps our ideas of it and provokes conceptions that will work better for us. We've seen James's "auto-ethnography," his stream of

consciousness that always washes through our concepts and influences and challenges them. Both kinds of fieldwork de-stabilize and revitalize the theoretical. Both kinds of experience (and fieldwork) are personal and multisensory, various, and chaotic. His third fieldwork represents much more what we expect when we see that term, an encounter with “others” in their beliefs and practices, and it adds the social to James’s fieldwork, for *The Varieties* is a massive collection of people with remarkable independence from his authorial, conceptualizing voice. The 300 quotations (thirty-six percent of the total text) occupy his writing (rather than being integrated into it), not as an error of editing or vestige of period style, but as an illustration of the combining of theory and fieldwork that comprises the Jamesian method and practice. These three kinds of fieldwork are *within* James’s books and not simply in the background of them. The dependence and the revitalization are visible in James, as it must be if we’re Jamesian.

But there is a fourth kind of fieldwork in James, one more recognizable to us today since, as in Clifford’s definition of ethnology that I’ve used throughout, it physically “goes out.” This fieldwork came into play when James studied psychic phenomena—something, by the way, he did throughout his career, that is, for nearly thirty years. He took seriously the popular interest in psychic phenomena—“mediumship, clairvoyance, mesmerism, automatic writing, and crystal gazing.”⁹⁷ Such phenomena swept parts of the United States and European countries in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, and many serious thinkers and scientists dismissed them, but not James, who was one of the founders of the American Society for Psychical Research and the president of the Society for Psychical Research (headquartered in London).⁹⁸ He emphasized that it was not the “philosophy” (or the belief system) of spiritualism that interested him but its collection of evidence and facts, and in order to investigate them, he went to numerous séances.⁹⁹ His interest, then, was broadly experiential and not just theoretical.

This was most assuredly fieldwork, and one that involved participant observation, primarily at séances conducted by Leonora

Piper, which he attended from 1882 until the year of his death. As Linda Simon notes, James and his wife Alice became interested in the possibility of communication with spirits following the death of the James's infant son, Herman.¹⁰⁰ So James's interest was personal, as we might expect from his second sort of fieldwork, auto-ethnography. Though James's approach was scientific, and he insisted on the most conservative and naturalistic conclusions possible, he was not impersonal. He studied what interested him personally, as in his study of religion, psychology, or the nature of truth.

In addition, as in the "lived experience" we saw in Jackson and the "concrete experience" of Seigfried, James's fieldwork has enormous variety. It's as much a "rich thicket" as psychology was in *The Varieties*, for, as Robert A. McDermott says, James wanted to teach "himself and others to attend to the margins and unusual modes of consciousness."¹⁰¹ Both of those areas of "the world's concrete fullness" provided just the sort of richness that could vivify conceptual understandings and "forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality."¹⁰² This is exactly the value of James we saw Jackson and Seigfried urge. But James's affinity for the "rich thicket of reality" isn't distinct from his personal desire for assurances about Herman, I would think.

James's participation in Leonora Piper's séances was very close to classic ethnographic fieldwork. It was "down-close, empirical, and interactive."¹⁰³ Many commentators mention how tedious James found it, and even the imagining of it prompted McDermott to write, "We can be grateful to James for having spared us the thousands of verbatim stenographic records of the countless sittings that he endured."¹⁰⁴ Jacques Barzun, who presents James the person more effectively than any other, writes that

James did not enjoy this kind of inquiry . . . [The] work itself James found . . . undignified, often disgusting—'a human rathole life.' He reflected that there was no reason why spirit messages—or counterfeits either—should be entertaining or dramatic, any more than ordinary backyard conversation.¹⁰⁵

But tedium seems to be a touchstone of fieldwork. Malinowski's boredom is well known.¹⁰⁶ Inger Sjorslev argues that the "deep hanging out" coined by Clifford Geertz must involve boredom on the part of the fieldworker, for the "lack of opportunities for [mental] action" leaves one open to "the occurrence of the unexpected."¹⁰⁷ While James personally does not praise the "rathole" tedium, all of his types of fieldwork highly value something very similar to it. We have to "leave," by any means possible, and be changed by what we're subjected to in the field. "Close-up" and "extended" involve much of Seigfried's "much-at-once," and it can induce a stupor. But if tedium means losing focus, which is to say, losing the ability to select, in James's sense, its benefit is that it can make us susceptible to what we've excluded or never looked at—the margins McDermott mentioned. It makes Seigfried's reverie possible, but not just because "free association [will] multiply the chances that some fortuitous coupling will arise . . . ," but because we need to lose control and make ourselves vulnerable to the other before any fortuitous couplings might take place.¹⁰⁸

Second, James clearly "[goes] out into a cleared place of work," for he not only leaves his library, but his home, and goes to a place with its own culture, its own set of rules to which he must submit himself. He has an established ritual and set of roles. So Piper is the "medium," and a passive one (not an active medium who levitates or causes spirits to materialize), and a "control" speaks through her to a "sitter," such as James, Alice, or one of James's other investigators (James's preferred term). James doesn't question this arrangement, though he certainly does try to understand it.¹⁰⁹ The authenticity of what he participates in persuades him, for he writes to the American Society for Psychical Research that "I now believe [Piper] to be in possession of a power as yet unexplained," and he attempts numerous theories to understand what he's witnessed.¹¹⁰

Finally, James achieves something he feels is "deep" in this fieldwork. While he isn't persuaded that he's encountered scientific evidence of the persistence of life after death, he has encountered a "More" that deeply affects him and his theories of religion. As McDermott says, James's attention to the subconscious or

subliminal in his study of psychical research “exemplifies the way in which James’s psychical research contributed first to his study of exception mental states, and subsequently to his study of religious experience.”¹¹¹ There is nothing of the tourist in James’s visits to Leonora Piper, and there is nothing of the mere intellectual trying to understand, an equally superficial encounter.

This fourth kind of fieldwork isn’t uniquely Jamesian, and it has more in common with the ethnographic fieldwork we might commonly find. What’s important about it is that James includes it, too. He’s not just the proto-postmodernist we might see in his view of the plenum, the self-reflective psychologist we might suspect on reading *The Principles*, or the armchair natural historian of religion we might see in *Varieties*. Experience for James is personal, multisensory, embodied, social, and public (though not all of those at the same time). We find value in experiences of those types because they destabilize and revitalize our theories. And, finally, experience is ever-present. It’s not something we just theorize about. It’s something that’s always present, even—no, especially—in our writing. That is to say, our theorizing must also include the more familiar ethnographic fieldwork, “physically going out into a cleared place of work for an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter.”¹¹² To be Jamesian, we need to get out of our libraries and out of our heads. We need to be with people in practices that prompt “the equally unacceptable extremes of skepticism and uncritical acceptance,” people “both commonplace and bizarre,” as McDermott says.¹¹³

In Hialeah, at the San Lázaro Festival I saw ostensibly very little of James’s fourth kind of fieldwork. I was an observer and not a participant, as I’ve said, and I only talked to the people who we could call practitioners (or the devout) to say “excuse me” if I bumped into someone or “thank you” for a candle. Still, I count the minor key ethnography as extremely valuable for me because it let me know that I study people and not simply myself. And it’s people who are significantly different than I am in the lives they lead and in their religious practices. If I want to claim I have any understanding of what it means to be religious, I need to subject my

ideas to people praying to spirits and not just to people a lot like myself reading Marilynne Robinson or Anne Carson or William James. After all, I felt baffled and quite skeptical when I was told that a candle to San Lázaro could cure my mildly arthritic knee, but I also felt oddly attracted to the suggestion. My view of standard medicine was unsettled in a way Jackson might see as valuable because I didn't take the suggestion as utterly crazy and spent a fair amount of time mentally justifying my commitment to orthopedics.

All four of James's field works have a great deal of independence, as he submits himself and his thought to experience rather than simply to ideas. Experience has to have a weight in order that theory not simply colonize what's other than itself, that is, in order that Jackson's unsettling and Seigfried's de-essentializing can take place. It's the necessary disparity of power between theory and experience that creates the friction I mentioned at the start of this essay. I wrote that "what I know about religion is mixed with the San Lázaro Festival [and] there are useful encounters [and some] useful *change* in all of the elements. And that is, I believe, a good enough metaphor for knowledge, fresh friction of great value." A lack of friction means that what is other than theory has no substance, no heft, no resistance to, and no pressure on our thought.¹¹⁴ Like the quotations in *The Varieties*, we have to be surrounded by others' powerful experiences, which we cannot simply subsume, and that creates the friction that heats and fissures our ideas.

And even though I didn't learn much about the Festival, I did feel surrounded, outnumbered, baffled, estranged, and insufficient. That, I think, is the "power [and] provocation" West says James valued. Not his own power and ability to provoke (that might better describe Nietzsche) but his love of being over-powered and provoked, and certainly not to the point of utter confusion, for James works hard to understand psychic phenomena. But, as McDermott says, he wants to "unlearn orthodox approaches to psychology, religion, and philosophy" by attending "to the margins and unusual modes of consciousness."¹¹⁵ And only margins with the power to provoke can affect that unlearning.

I learned from the San Lázaro Festival that fieldwork is crucial in dealing with James and in dealing with religion in a Jamesian manner. Can we go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James? We *need* to go to events like that festival (and not just to other theories) with William James. When we engage in the fourth kind of Jamesian fieldwork, the other three kinds can emerge, as I've detailed in this essay. In experience, we lose our mastery and submit ourselves and our theories to concrete experience—of the public, social, multi-sensory, and personal kinds. And one sort of experience opens us to another, as the presence of actual worshippers opened me to my personal history and preferences. We experience friction between theory and life, and that friction leads to the kinds of benefits detailed by Jackson and Seigfried: destabilization and revitalization.

CONCLUSION

When I began this essay, I asked about the role of fieldwork in William James, whether one could go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James, and I claimed that a kind of fieldwork—in fact, *four* kinds of fieldwork—exists in James. That fieldwork exists in James insofar as theories must be both tested in and subjected to a broader, non-theoretical experience, whether that experience is of the plenum, the stream of consciousness, the lives of others, or people and practices that might strike us as marginal. Those various experiences have value for revitalizing theories.

But I'd like to conclude with an additional claim, one that I've mentioned throughout this essay. I'd suggest there are real benefits, not only from James's ideas, but from his manner of writing—which is to say, from incorporating fieldwork into writing, as he does. It has become commonplace to write in the first person, abjuring the third person that once dominated all academic writing. No one has yet written a history of the shift away from third person to first in academic writing, to my knowledge, but at some point, maybe around the time of Clifford Geertz, the pronoun, "I" entered academic writing. And yet, the mere letter "I" is not only the skinniest letter but the skinniest presentation of self, and, if we think

we've acknowledged our presence in our writing through that device alone, we've asserted, in fact, a de-personalized, de-contextualized, de-historicized, disembodied, ungendered (and de-much else) self. The crucial exception to the skinny "I" is writing that is assertively situated in gender, race, and sexual orientation.

What we can learn stylistically from James, we can see in virtually any of his writings. *Pragmatism* is a fine example. James uses the pronoun "I" often in his opening pages, but he couples that "I" with emphatic verbs. Yes, there's "I think with Mr. Chesterton," but there's also "I confess to a certain tremor," "I have no right to assume," "I wish to fill you with sympathy," "I profoundly believe," and "I risk it." James is not just the rational "I" but the one with emotions, fears, hopes, beliefs, and desires. His "I" includes much of the stream of his experiencing, as we saw in the second of his fieldworks. I've claimed that the inclusion of such experiences has a value. The value is the admission that we always write as people with the limitations of our own psyches. It's not that we're forever caught in our own minds, but that whatever we theorize takes place within a personal context, and it's best to have that clear. Pretending we have no psychic context doesn't make that context disappear. And in addition, that personal context is of great value (and this is pragmatism, after all), for our ideas must work for us.

Contrast the "I" in some randomly selected articles from *William James Studies*: "I highlight commonalities," "In the end I hope to have demonstrated," "I propose another reading," and "I will not engage in a critical evaluation."¹¹⁶ There is no need to multiply examples, for the statements present the standard "I" of the standard academic essay. Yes, James is, as West says, "the patrician of the streets," but all academic writers have genders, races, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, a particular economic status, personal histories, geographic situations, political commitments, and much else. All of the "concrete experience," the "real life" of the "I" in the above quotes has been eliminated. James's own manner of writing indicates not only that our research takes place in "fields" of various kinds but that it needs to be presented with those fields visible, too. The "I" has to be shown to be vulnerable to context, and the "I" has

to surrender autonomy and control. Yes, sharp-edged and immaculately clean arguments will be lost, but there are also notable benefits of a Jamesian fieldwork: a re-contextualized, re-historicized, re-embodied, re-gendered, re-served self.

Let's go to the San Lázaro Festival with William James.

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NOTES

¹ The scriptural basis for the saint is Luke 16:19-26, not the Lazarus who was raised from the dead in John 11:1-44.

² See Orsi, *The Madonna; Thank You, St. Jude; and Between Heaven and Earth*. It should be said that there is a rich literature of religious practices in the Miami area and those studies are not simply of a European-based Catholicism. See also Tweed, *Our Lady*, and Rey and Stepick, *Crossing the Water*.

³ For the connection between the multi-sensory experience of the Afro-Cuban religion of the *orishas* and the pungency of pre-Vatican Catholic ritual, I owe a debt to Joseph M. Murphy, with whom I have had a great many conversations about Santeria and who visited the San Lázaro Festival with me in 2016.

⁴ Or fieldwork which Clifford uses synonymously with ethnography. Clifford cites Kuklick, "After Ishmael," on nineteenth century ethnography. See also Clifford, *Routes*.

⁵ Clifford, 54.

⁶ Clifford, 53.

⁷ Clifford, 59, 57.

⁸ That exception is James's research into psychic phenomena over the thirty years of his productive life.

⁹ Jackson, *Things as They Are*.

¹⁰ Jackson, 2.

¹¹ Jackson, 4; James, *Pragmatism*.

¹² James, *Pragmatism*, 32.

¹³ Jackson, 4.

¹⁴ James, *Pragmatism*, 33.

¹⁵ It's for this reason that James's books themselves are so experiential, but I'll deal with that later.

¹⁶ I should note that there is also currently the demand that we consider networks of power. Does a theory come from and perpetuate a situation of

privilege? Does it further social justice? The sufficiency of *sola theoria* is challenged by power dynamics, as well as by ethnography, though we might wonder if power can be introduced most effectively if it comes not through yet another theory but via the pressure of ethnography.

¹⁷ Riesman, *Freedom in Fulani*, quoted in Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 7.

¹⁸ Jackson, 7-8. Jackson groups Sartre, Wittgenstein, Bateson, Habermas, Turner, and Kleinman, as well as James's radical empiricism, but I'll deal with just James and with his thought in earlier works than *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, especially *The Principles of Psychology*, *Pragmatism*, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

¹⁹ Jackson, 7.

²⁰ Jackson, 7.

²¹ Clifford, *Routes*, 53.

²² James, *Pragmatism*, 85.

²³ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

²⁴ Jackson, 6.

²⁵ It's interesting, too, how many of James's images and expressions for chaotic "lived experience" are outdoors, such as the "stream of consciousness," the "blooming, buzzing confusion," the "rich thicket of reality," and "the everlasting weather of our perceptions." *The Principles*, 233, 462; *Pragmatism*, 39, 85.

²⁶ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*. More specifically, her preferred expression is "concretely derived structures of lived experience" (78). Seigfried rightly wants to maintain what James does not, that "concrete experience" is itself selected, "experience is constituted, not passively received" (76). At the same time, those structures of lived experience are at a more fundamental level than rational systems, which is to say, they are more various and more chaotic. They are the "rich thicket of reality." James, *Pragmatism*, 39.

²⁷ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 79.

²⁸ Seigfried, 79; James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*, 54.

²⁹ James, *Pragmatism*, 39.

³⁰ Seigfried, 78-9.

³¹ James, 17-18, 18.

³² Seigfried, 15-18. Seigfried discusses at length James's struggle with a scientific tendency to simply and passively accept the given nature of

concrete experience and his more characteristic, and to Seigfried, revolutionary, tendency to see selection operating even in the description of the world around us. The key is that James describes his *experience* of the world, and, as he says in *The Principles*, our experience is always interested, thus operates by active selection. Passive description is not possible.

³³ Seigfried, 100.

³⁴ Seigfried, 100; James, *The Principles*, 962.

³⁵ James, *Pragmatism*, 17-18 (my emphasis).

³⁶ Ruf, *Creation of Chaos*, 42.

³⁷ James, *The Principles*, 1231 (his italics).

³⁸ James, 277.

³⁹ James, 1231.

⁴⁰ James, 1232.

⁴¹ James, 1231.

⁴² Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁴³ Clifford, *Routes*, 57.

⁴⁴ Clifford, 65.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Santeria*, 41.

⁴⁷ Murphy, 41.

⁴⁸ Hart, ““Absolute Knowledge.””

⁴⁹ James, *Some Problems*, 53; quoted in Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 53 (*inter alia*).

⁵⁰ Seigfried, 115.

⁵¹ James, *The Principles*, 277.

⁵² James, 221.

⁵³ James, 220, 221.

⁵⁴ James, *The Principles*, 219.

⁵⁵ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 84.

⁵⁶ James, *The Principles*, 238.

⁵⁷ James, 246.

⁵⁸ James, 227-228.

⁵⁹ James, 226.

⁶⁰ James, 234.

⁶¹ James, 238.

⁶² James, 238.

⁶³ Clifford, *Routes*, 52-54.

⁶⁴ I hope James's example can remind us of why "academic" is not a compliment in literary or artistic circles but a synonym for soulless.

⁶⁵ The account of his "panic fear" in *The Varieties* is the most famous and powerful confessional passage in James, but, of course, it's not identified as his own but as that of a "French correspondent" (134-35).

⁶⁶ Jackson, *Things As They Are*, 2.

⁶⁷ James, *The Principles*, 298.

⁶⁸ James, *The Principles*, 298. Seigfried sometimes compares James to Nietzsche, and James's affinity for "more" is a strong point of similarity.

⁶⁹ James, *Diary of Alice James*, 68.

⁷⁰ I owe the term "auto-ethnography" to Kathryn Wade, who read versions of this essay. We could also call this second kind of fieldwork introspection, but I believe what James does is slightly more passive than we usually consider introspection to be, and I believe that "auto-ethnography" emphasizes the relation to other sorts of fieldwork.

⁷¹ Clifford, *Routes*, 54. (my emphasis).

⁷² We might compare auto-ethnography to psychoanalysis, a similar exploration of the self.

⁷³ James, *Pragmatism*, 11. James's remarks on temperament and on "living options" show the integral role of auto-ethnology in theories and beliefs. A philosopher "trusts his temperament. Wanting a universe that suits it, he believes in any representation of the universe that does suit it." Similarly, an option is living and not dead due to the streaming of our own minds. I cannot be a theosophist because it doesn't fit with what already streams within me. See James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*.

⁷⁴ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 141-43. Seigfried's central concern is to reconcile two tendencies in James. Sometimes he says that science can simply and passively observe nature, while other times he's aware of the prior shaping such observation has. I am glossing over that complexity and conflict in James. See Seigfried, Chapter 6.

⁷⁵ Perry, in *Thought and Character*, notes, "he had the old-fashioned attitude of the 'naturalist' who collects facts out of doors instead of in a laboratory." (52)

⁷⁶ Steinheimer, "Charles Darwin's bird collection."

⁷⁷ James, *Varieties*, 12.

⁷⁸ James, 15.

⁷⁹ James would seem to define a “person” as one who has the full five characteristics of the mind that he describes in Chapter 9 of *The Principles*.

⁸⁰ Perry, *Thought and Character*, 50-51.

⁸¹ James, *The Varieties*, 26.

⁸² “People,” defined by the full five characteristics of the mind that James describes in Chapter 9 of *The Principles*.

⁸³ Clifford, *Routes*, 54, 57.

⁸⁴ See Ermine L. Algaier’s reconstruction of James’s 1800-volume library in his 2019 *Reconstructing the Personal Library of William James: Markings and Marginalia from the Harvard Library Collection*.

⁸⁵ James, *The Varieties*, 12.

⁸⁶ James, 23.

⁸⁷ Carrette, “Perverse Kind of Pleasure,” 217.

⁸⁸ Tarver and Sullivan, *Feminist Interpretations*, 2.

⁸⁹ West, *American Evasion*, 55.

⁹⁰ Carrette, “Perverse Kind of Pleasure,” 226, points to the fact that for James, “the perceptual world . . . mediates something that escapes patriarchal control, an ‘unseen reality’ emerging at the level of sensation and the body.” What he is referring to is the “too muchness” that Seigfried pointed to.

⁹¹ West, *American Evasion*, 5, 65. Tarver and Sullivan’s entire volume is dedicated to the value of feminism for James and the value of James for feminism.

⁹² And, as it turns out, published accounts of the San Lázaro Festival are extremely difficult to find.

⁹³ West, *American Evasion*, 59.

⁹⁴ West, 66.

⁹⁵ There are a few quoted accounts in *The Varieties* of his final kind of fieldwork, his psychical research, which is much closer to how anthropologists like Clifford understand the practice.

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 4.

⁹⁷ Perry, *Thought and Character*, 154. It should be noted that there is evidence of other, somewhat more traditional fieldwork that was out of James’s usual turf. For example, in “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” James wrote of “journeying in the mountains of North Carolina

[and passing] by a large number of coves” (133-34). His psychical research, however, is more intentional and focused fieldwork.

⁹⁸ Perry, Chapter 61. See Sommer, “Psychical research,” and Knapp, *William James: Psychical Research*.

⁹⁹ See Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 190-91, 193, 194, 199-202.

¹⁰⁰ Simon, 198-199.

¹⁰¹ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxviii.

¹⁰² James, *The Varieties*, 308.

¹⁰³ Clifford, *Routes*, 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxi.

¹⁰⁵ Barzun, 240; quoted in McDermott, xxi.

¹⁰⁶ Young, *Malinowski*, xx, 113, 117, 152, 201, (*inter alia*).

¹⁰⁷ Geertz, “Deep Hanging Out,” and Sjorslev, “Boredom, Rhythm,” 100, 107.

¹⁰⁸ Seigfried, *Radical Reconstruction*, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 201.

¹¹⁰ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, 82.

¹¹¹ McDermott, xxix.

¹¹² Clifford, *Routes*, 54.

¹¹³ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxxix, xxxii.

¹¹⁴ See Winquist’s discussion of “incorrigibility” in *Desiring Theology*, 8-16.

¹¹⁵ McDermott, *Psychical Research*, xxviii.

¹¹⁶ Voparil, “Rorty and James on Irony,” and Zackariasson, “Justification and Critique.”