

EDITORIAL

A Festschrift for a Consciousness Hummingbird:

Charles T. Tart¹

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Abstract: Charles Tart was arguably the most important theoretician and researcher of altered states of consciousness (ASC) during the second half of the 20th century. His vast output included books and articles extending the frontiers of study of states of consciousness in general, and of the hypnagogic state, dreaming, meditation, hypnosis, and minor and major psychedelic drugs, among others. Rather than a specialized scientist, he was a fast and agile hummingbird who did not visit only a flower or two but extracted noetic nectar from many more and proceeded to pollinate a wide field of study that had mostly lain barren since the early contributions by William James and a few others. In this editorial I provide a general introduction to his work and its influence on mine.

Keywords: Charles Tart, consciousness, altered states of consciousness, anomalous experience, anomalous cognition, parapsychology

The university library was a refuge during the dense hours of wait between the first and second lectures in my Mexican alma mater (our home was 1-2 hours away by multiple buses, so I would arrive early in the morning and stay on campus until night). My interests were wide and disperse and I recall reading excellent books about Kafka and about the sociopolitical influences in art. Simultaneously I worked as an actor in classical

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plays and, more to the point, was a member of a group of practitioners of transcendent ritual theater. During some of the dizzying activities of the *Taller de Investigación Teatral*, which continues its activities to this day, my consciousness was radically transformed and I was able to achieve a bodily know-how and imperviousness to pain that had been unknown to me (Cardeña, 2019). My psychology textbooks and courses did not help me understand the extraordinary experiences (not drug induced, by the way) I was having, as the only other states they mentioned were sleep and intoxication, under the assumption that any other state than the waking one was delusional if not outright pathological. The university library, though, came to my rescue and offered me two books that changed my life: Robert Ornstein's *The Nature of Human Consciousness* (1973) and Charles Tart's epoch-making anthology *Altered States of Consciousness* (1969).

Ornstein's book had 41 chapters (with two contributions by Tart, one on state-specific sciences and one on the nature of psi) that challenged a narrow, rational view of science and human consciousness. It emphasized what Ornstein called "two modes of consciousness" (including the then novel split-brain research by Sperry, Gazzaniga, and others), along with meditation and Sufism. Tart's book was not as programmatic and included papers on general considerations of states of consciousness (including a concise but amazingly rich discussion of altered state by Ludwig, 1966), the hypnagogic state, dreaming, meditation, hypnosis, minor and major psychedelic drugs, and the psychophysiology of some altered states. Not only did Tart's book become a widely influential academic classic (close to 2,000 citations according to scholar google in August, 2023), but his work reached an avid general public looking for serious discussions of alterations of consciousness and Eastern philosophies and practices. For instance, in Ken Russell's film *Altered States* (1980), the main character, portrayed by William Hurt and modelled after another noetic explorer, John C. Lilly, mentions Tart as one of only a couple of researchers doing interesting work in the area, a scene that thrilled me when I watched

it in a Toronto cinema before actually going to work with Tart at the University of California, Davis.

Those two books and conversations with two inspiring professors in México revealed that my future as a psychotherapist was not as enticing as gaining a better understanding of the alterations of consciousness I was experiencing during my theater activities. I had previously decided that I should do graduate work in a better university and ambitiously set my sights on working with Tart in the US. It took me three tries (and an M. A. in clinical psychology from York University in Canada) before I could be supervised by him with the financial assistance that I needed to support my studies as his (last) doctoral student at UC Davis. Previously I had written letting him know of my interest and, not knowing better, boasted that I had read most of his works. In reality, I had read his two main books on ASC plus a few papers, which is what I thought was the typical academic output, instead of the more than a hundred papers he had published by that time. He kindly responded with a letter recommending that, for pragmatic reasons, one should become an expert in an accepted topic before researching unorthodox areas such as psi, an advice that I now pass to those who write to me wanting to be my students.

Besides his epoch-making anthology, Tart's contributions have ranged widely across the whole spectrum of altered states. To mention but a few of them (doing justice to all would require a whole book): a still widely relevant and not sufficiently-mined systems theory on ASC (Tart, 1975); a phenomenological study of marijuana experience (Tart, 1971); a radical methodological proposal to create state-specific sciences, published in *Science* (Tart, 1972); papers on various aspects of hypnosis (e. g., Tart, 1970; which inspired my own doctoral work and later studies, e. g., Cardeña, 2005; Cardeña et al., 2013); pioneering studies of out-of-body-experiences (e. g., Tart, 1998); and works on dreaming, lucid dreaming, mindfulness, meditation, and how to test the ontological validity of aura perception (see <https://blog.paradigm-sys.com> for a list and description

of many of his works). It is such a vast and rich oeuvre that just trying to take the measure of it is overwhelming. His important work on transpersonal psychology is discussed in this issue of *JAEX* by Paul F. Cunningham and that on parapsychology (psi or anomalous cognition) by Dean Radin.

As to the title of this editorial... People who know Tart (or Charley, as he likes to be called) might be surprised that I describe him as a “hummingbird,” but let me explain my metaphor. Charley has had a heterodox career in the many types of scholarly activities he has brilliantly engaged in, from researcher and theoretician –particularly in the first decades– to pragmatic thinker –in the last few. Most academics would be happy to excel in one area or activity, whereas he has been a trailblazer in many of them. He might have stayed an eminent researcher and theoretician, say, in hypnosis (he held a postdoctoral position at Stanford with one of the giants of the field, Ernest Hilgard), but he also researched many other induction techniques and alterations of consciousness, authoring books and papers with well-thought proposals about the general nature of states of consciousness and how to define and study them. He would then focus for a while on a specific alteration before shifting to study another, while also bringing psychological insights into the study of the psi hypothesis. For me, it is as if he has been a noetic hummingbird, not resting too long on any specific flower (or state of consciousness), but extracting noetic nectar from many different species before proceeding to pollinate a wide field that had mostly lain barren since the turn of the century contributions by William James and a few others.

It is with personal and professional pride that *JAEX* dedicates this editorial and the following two articles to the 85th birthday of Charley last year (and to the memory of his beloved Judy). Gracias, Carlitos, for being my supervisor and then friend all these years.



Carlitos donning a Haitian hat that the author shared with him circa 1988

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Eine Festschrift für einen Bewusstseins-Kolibri: Charles T. Tart
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Zusammenfassung: Charles Tart war wohl der wichtigste Theoretiker und Untersucher von veränderten Bewusstseinszuständen (ASC) in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts.. Sein umfangreiches Werk umfasst Bücher und Artikel, die die Grenzen der Erforschung von Bewusstseinszuständen im Allgemeinen, des hypnagogischen Zustands, des Träumens, der Meditation, der Hypnose, kleinerer und größerer psychedelischer Drogen usw. erweitern. Er war kein spezialisierter Wissenschaftler, sondern ein schneller und wendiger Kolibri, der sich nicht mit ein oder zwei Blüten begnügte, sondern den noetischen Nektar aussaugte, um dann ein weites Forschungsgebiet zu bestäuben, das seit den Beiträgen von William James und einigen anderen um die Jahrhundertwende größtenteils brach gelegen hatte. In diesem Editorial gebe ich eine allgemeine Einführung in sein Werk zusammen mit seinem Einfluss auf meines.

German translation: Eberhard Bauer

Festschrift Celebrando um Beija-flor da Consciência: Charles T. Tart
Etzel Cardeña

Resumo: Charles Tart foi, seguramente, o mais importante teórico e pesquisador dos estados alterados de consciência (EAC) na segunda metade do século XX. Sua vasta produção incluiu livros e artigos ampliando as fronteiras dos estudos sobre estados de consciência em geral, estados hipnagógicos, de sonhos, da meditação, da hipnose, das drogas psicodélicas de menores e maiores efeitos, entre outros. Mais do que um cientista especializado, ele foi como um rápido e ágil beija-flor que, ao invés de se contentar com uma ou duas flores, extraiu o néctar noético e, então, passou a polinizar um amplo campo de estudos que, em sua maior parte, estava estéril desde as contribuições de William James, e alguns outros, na virada do século. Neste editorial, apresento uma introdução geral ao seu trabalho e sua influência sobre o meu.

Portuguese translation: Antônio Lima

Un Festschrift Para un Colibrí de la Consciencia: Charles T. Tart
Etzel Cardeña

Resumen: Charles Tart fue posiblemente el más importante teórico e investigador de los estados alterados de consciencia (ASC) en la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Su vasta producción incluyó libros y artículos que ampliaron las fronteras de estudio de los estados de consciencia en general y de los estados hipnagógico, de sueño, de meditación, de hipnosis, y de drogas psicodélicas menores y mayores, entre otros. Más que un científico especializado, fue un rápido y ágil colibrí que no solamente visitó una o dos flores sino que extrajo el néctar noético de muchas para luego proceder a polinizar un amplio campo de estudio que, en su mayor parte, había permanecido estéril desde las contribuciones de William James y algunos otros. En esta editorial ofrezco una introducción general a su obra y su influencia en la mía.

Spanish translation: Etzel Cardeña