Anthropology of Science in Trance. Practices of Self-Induced Cognitive Trance.

Yannick Primel is an ethnographer working in the private sector. This paper is written on the author's own behalf. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3038-1959

No funding, no affiliation, no conflict of interest.

This is a **preprint version**, submitted to *American anthropologist*: june 2025.

Abstract

Reflexivity and auto-ethnography are essential to explore the Self-Induced Cognitive Trance (SICT) with an anthropological perspective. The social, cultural and therapeutic implications of SICT are discussed, putting on the forefront its radical novelty. The author shares his own experience of a cognitive trance initiation, describing the physiological and psychological effects, as well as reflecting on the necessity to deploy a scientific institutionalization, to reinforce the legitimation and acceptability of trance in a rationalist, western, society. The question of social change is also evoked, through the possibility of a normalization of cognitive trance in our culture, which would gain a practice of its own to embrace the vastitude of human consciousness.

Keywords

Trance, Self-induced cognitive trance (SICT), France, Rationalism, Health, Agency, Consciousness, Social change.

Contents

Introduction: the subject matters

Like any other event of social interaction, a 'field' in anthropology is ultimately nothing more than a moment of convergence of biographies.

Thus, I found myself one morning in June 2024, north of Paris, for a training course in self-induced cognitive trance (SICT). The idea was not even to investigate, I was there on an individual basis, to pursue a personal approach. But the power of what I experienced, and the individual and collective potential, convinced me that an article like this deserved to be written.

This is the first of its kind on the theme of self-induced cognitive trance (SICT). We will therefore speak of exploratory anthropology. The objective is less to reach conclusions than to provide preliminary elements for future studies.

It is also confirmation that, sometimes, it is not the researcher who chooses his subject but the reverse.

Also, it may be of interest to note that the SICT training, and this subsequent article, were done in France, in French language, by a French person. However, the implications, as we'll explain, vastly overflow this initial context.

1. On cultural distance, at-home ethnography, and auto-ethnography

The anthropological work consists, in a seemingly innocuous way, of relating the lives of others, in order to describe how they understand their own existence, and function as a specific social group. It is thus possible to speak of the culture of a group of individuals who collectively produce their own repertoire of behaviors [Laland et al., 2003].

From this point of view, it is not strange for an anthropologist to conduct an investigation at home, within her, or his, own culture, just because she is 'too close' to it. [Peirano, 1998. Ouattara, 2004. Moore et al., 2014]

Indeed, if cultural distance was a guarantee of anthropological reliability, the ethnocentric and racist studies of the 19th and 20th centuries would still be considered scientifically valid.

And since the researcher is supposed to blend in the group he is studying, her own experience is therefore important. A completely external positioning is probably not even desirable, as it then omits the researcher's experience, which constitutes the junction between the life of the group and the research work [Flamme, 2021. Poulos, 2021]. The researcher's experience, related by her, adds useful information, and the anthropological literature abounds in descriptions of tribulations, difficulties, failures, logistical problems, torments of indecision, moral dilemmas, which must be faced. [Malinowski, 1957, Goffman, 2020, Geertz, 1973]

The account of her own experience certainly does not have more value because it is the researcher who expresses it. But as a professional of description, his account carries an evocative value, which gives a possibility to illuminate elements impossible to grasp otherwise.

2. Inner experiences and social categorization

The corollary to the notion of auto-ethnography is that, just as the researcher cannot pretend that he is not embodied in his field of investigation, one cannot ignore the fact that she is also not impervious to sensory perceptions, and to the inner dimension of the experience. The relationship unfolds within the framework of an experience lived together, where researchers and their interlocutors *'find themselves encompassed in the same experience, which involves a common experimentation, where participant observation becomes observing participation; where 'being with' momentarily transforms into 'feeling with*'.' [Mazzocchetti & Piccoli, 2016: 4]

The ability to take into account affects and to relate this 'feeling with' is particularly relevant for situations where members of a group share an experience that each can only experience individually. An ethnography of the intimate is then possible [Petitmengin, 2007], and feelings have intrinsic value without it being necessary to neutralize them through rationalization, since, precisely, the account of 'how it feels' is an integral part of the research. Sometimes, it is even a culmination in intensity, due to the subject addressed [Perrin, 2023]. The researcher may then find himself in a situation of collecting a speech that highlights how much self-understanding, and the relationship with others, are the result of internalized states that can only be found in a narrative that is made in a confidential tone.

Some investigations are only possible because the researcher will know how to dive into his own inner dimension, which is the foundation of the shared experience. Speaking of diving, literally, we will mention the example of Sally Montgomery, who succeeds very well in isolating the purely individual elements of the experience of freediving, in an underwater environment where practitioners, as a social group, can only exchange about the experience after it is over [Montgomery, 2024]. Thus, if the anthropologist wants to access certain realities felt on an individual scale, he must feel it himself, as far as possible.

When Michelle Beeler and then Jessica Jennings address the practice of reiki in Great Britain, a Japanese energetic technique, in which they themselves have been trained, they both mention that neither practitioners nor clients know how to say *what it does*, which does not prevent each from describing the physical sensations that delimit *how it does it* [Beeler, 2015. Jennings, 2019]. It is on this basis of feelings, and on a shared vocabulary to describe them, that the common experience takes shape and can be deepened.

Sometimes, the modalities that make it possible to access the inner dimension may suggest that the researcher has not chosen anything at all: *'Sometimes it is beings from the side of the invisible, or ancestors, who come to tell the researcher the place to be given to him, or who enjoin him to take a place he did not wish or did not imagine occupying*.' [Mazzocchetti & Piccoli, 2016: 1]

In his account of initiation into the xangô cult to overcome a trauma, Arnaud Halloy describes in a striking way how the framework of understanding is set by his mentor, so that he, a foreigner, understands what is happening to him according to the cultural codes and vocabulary of xangô. [Halloy, 2006]

The common point of these accounts is the articulation of two distinct elements that cannot function without each other: there is the *direct access to the feeling*, on the one hand, and the *knowledge of the words* to express it, on the other hand. The framework of understanding of individual feeling is set, delimited, by the vocabulary. And it is through this common denomination of a shared experience that the group identifies its singularity vis-à-vis others.

In France, the foundational work of Jeanne Favret-Saada [Favret-Saada, 1977] describes in a masterful way how her acceptance into a rural community in Mayenne is linked to her learning of the practice of witchcraft. A learning that we could say was moderately voluntary. The way she talks about her experience is not only informative to show 'how it feels', but it is also eloquent to understand that, without the words to say it, which she learns from the people she meets, she would have had no intellectual framework to understand what was happening to her.

She also highlights the difficulty of studying a social subject on which everyone thinks they can give an opinion that is, in reality, only a summary of preconceptions or class prejudices. Because, in this case, if witchcraft is widely denigrated, it is because it is implemented in an inferiorized popular culture. Conversely, the so-called official culture can deploy its own beliefs, which do not suffer from the same pejorative connotation, since they emanate from groups that have the means to assert their legitimacy. The modalities of beliefs turn out to be social markers in their own right, which situates us in categories that value or devalue.

This is the fundamental aspect of Favret-Saada's work: beyond the differences in culture and social strata, there is the highlighting of a universal practice. Cognitively and symbolically, human beings deploy identical ways of doing things, from an anthropological point of view. All cultures impose a symbolism and beliefs on their relationship with the world, because none can do without it. And all cultures teach their members to read the world and to blend into it by using this symbolism.

3. States of consciousness and SICT

States of consciousness are always mentioned in the plural, as their variety is part of the complexity of the subject [Lapassade, 1987].

The observation that there are several of them is therefore not new, and contrary to a common belief, there is not one state of consciousness that could be described as normal, which would need to be disturbed, or even altered or degraded, in order to reach other so-called non-ordinary states.

The multiplicity of states of consciousness brings out the idea that the only truly 'ordinary' dimension of consciousness is modulation itself, the fluid and constant transition from one state to another, for example from daydreaming to concentration, or from wakefulness to sleep.

However, some of these states of consciousness possess an intensity whose importance has been recognized by human societies by ritualizing them. The most powerful symbols in any culture most often derive from these rituals, and from the experiences that are sheltered within their limits. The knowledge of the phenomenon is everywhere intertwined with the fact of being human, at least since the Neolithic [Samorini, 2019. Robinson et al., 2020. Tanasi et al., 2024. Socha et al., 2022].

Our contemporary era is no exception, and the works of Mircea Eliade [1951], followed by those of Erika Bourguignon, have highlighted that the vast majority of cultures integrate this ability to access somewhat brighter states of consciousness into social life through institutions that play an important role in legitimizing these transitions to greater intensity [Bourguignon, 1968, 1973, 1977. Escoffery, 1999. Ember, Carolus, 2017].

The 'important' non-ordinary state of consciousness we are talking about here, accessed through the technique of Self-Induced Cognitive Trance (SICT), as its name suggests, is induced by the sole will of the person who will experience it, and allows them to reach a state whose neurophysiological characteristics are the subject of various studies, aimed at identifying its specificities and empirically attesting that there are measurable therapeutic benefits.

This is the peculiarity of this form of trance: SICT is structured by an institutional framework of scientific research that addresses the subject in terms of its clinically observable effects.

We shall insist on the novelty of the subject, its corpus, and its institutions, by stating that the TranceScience Research Institute, was created in 2019 to coordinate the scientific studies; while the TranceLab Institute was created in 2021 to provide the trainings in France and Belgium.

3.1 The ethnographer goes off in trance

On this morning of June 2024, we are twenty participants in this workshop, wishing to learn how to reach the state of cognitive trance.

The socio-professional profiles are varied: from company executives to farmers, or public sector employees, or retired people. And, as far as I could observe, the female population is overrepresented by more than 70%, and 100% for the supervisory team.

Over the first few hours of a twenty-eight-hour workshop (four full days), everyone gets to know each other, and the supervisory team provides descriptions of what self-induced cognitive trance is, using presentations of ongoing or past scientific research on observed or potential therapeutic effects. The main themes of these biomedical studies are the perceptions, phenomenology, stress, well-being, artistic creativity, strength and pain, vocal manifestations, as well as behavior and cognition. For example, among others, and without exhaustivity: Flor-Henry *et al*., 2017, Grégoire *et al*, 2021. Timmermann *et al.* 2022. Bioy, 2023. Oswald *et al*, 2023. Kumar *et al*, 2024.

Participants learn that the state of cognitive trance causes a slight dissociation from the surrounding world. We are not completely absent, but rather far inside ourselves.

The atmosphere is warm and caring, and the subject is intellectually fascinating.

But of course, we are talking about trance, and it is not just an intellectual subject... we realize this when someone from the supervisory team stands up, claps their hands, and says the fateful words: '*Well! Let's get started!*'

The excitement and joy are palpable among the trainers (all women), while we, the novices, try to put on a brave face, despite the enormous capital U of the Unknown into which we are about to plunge.

True to its caring attitude, the team reassures us, or tries to. The experience is above all joyful. *'Think of it as a game!*'

The first session takes place lying down on our backs, and with music. A very specific music, called the sound loop, which has the particularity of bringing nearly 99% of those who take the workshop to be able to 'go off' after a few minutes of listening.

This sound loop is an inducer that activates neurological circuits that, through education and cultural habit, we have never activated before. And induction by music is only the first step: the goal of the whole workshop is to teach us to reach a trance state without any inducer except ourselves. Hence the name: self-induced trance.

This first session lasts about thirty minutes, for a subjective duration that I would have estimated at ten.

When the music decreases and then stops, everyone 'comes back' slowly, moves from a lying position to a sitting position, and stretches. I still have my eyes closed, and I realize that my abdominal muscles are relaxing. They had been contracted without interruption for half an hour.

Before any other thing, before any possibility of understanding, there is the bodily, carnal manifestation. We enter SICT through interoception, a word that I didn't even knew beforehand.

What I, and we, have just experienced is so rich that it leaves us stunned. We had learned about it theoretically, during the preliminary presentations. But it is one thing to read 'slight dissociation' on a PowerPoint slide, and another to experience it in one's body. And to talk about it afterwards, the words to describe it do not come easily.

This is yet another argument to affirm that individual feeling and the need for an appropriate vocabulary to describe it are two inseparable elements.

For my part, in addition to the abdominal muscle work, I saw a vast nocturnal landscape, heard violent barking, and what sounded like Amerindian incantations, even though there were obviously no angry canids or medicine men in the room, and the sun was still high in the sky.

Everyone had a unique experience. However, all now share the conviction of having experienced a moment that was both overwhelming and foundational.

Personally, I retain the certainty that my body, my mind, and the rest of the world, are not as distinct as I had learned.

3.2 From well-being to agency

In the pluralistic landscape of solutions for living better, or less badly, the search for well-being is not synonymous with rejecting scientific medicine. However, scientific medicine is put in competition for what it can offer compared to other proposals. There is therefore a continuity of the idea of self-care, when health is understood as '*a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*', as stated since 1948 in the preamble of the Constitution of the World Health Organization.

The difficulty is not then to find solutions, but to select those that seem closest to personal strategies where each person constructs an understanding of what it means for them to live better (or less badly).

And in exercising this individual free choice towards well-being, a certain orientation is socially suggested, so that the solution chosen is one that allows for greater capacity to

adopt the expected behaviors, depending on the role that is imposed: parent, spouse, employee, neighbor, member of a collective, etc.

'*The State thus encourages individuals to develop forms of sociability based on self-control and the distancing of emotion. At the same time, it imposes, for each context, for each role, a set of possible (or obligatory) emotions*.' [Garcia et al., 2023: 2]

From this point of view, joining a workshop to learn trance implies a departure from somewhat official recommendations. One must have already shown confidence in one's decision. Many have experienced more or less subtle attempts at dissuasion from people more or less close to them, who themselves carry preconceived ideas about this type of inner experience.

This brings everyone to the firmness with which they can hold their decision, even to the point of defiance. As one informant expressed it: *'If I had wanted to look more normal, I would have done yoga in my living room!*'

The initiation to SICT therefore involves a certain assertion of oneself, and a clear awareness of engaging in an uncommon approach.

However, a salient point among the volunteers to learn SICT is the motivation to '*find myself, and not just find how to adapt*.'

The underlying search is not conformity, but agency: a means to assert oneself as an autonomous actor who does things in the world, rather than an element that controls itself to be more adaptable.

The social injunction to adapt is perceived bluntly for what it is, that is to say '*the imposition of a constraining psychic norm that values an individual who knows how to take a step back from their emotions and existential difficulties, an individual [...] encouraged to adjust to external constraints or even to re-enchant their daily life to 'feel good,' rather than to question (and fight against) the social constraints and social relationships that lead to fatigue or malaise*.' (Garcia et al., 2023, p. 3)

Finding ‘enchantment’ in one's life, or asserting that one has 'found oneself' on the grounds that one receives validation from the outside, is perceived as largely insufficient. Agency, here, is first sought for itself and for oneself, which involves distancing from society’s power plays, and submissions. It then becomes necessary to go deeper into oneself, to better know and recognize what constitutes our identity. This goes far beyond the idea of better conforming to external injunctions. It is not foreign to it, nor opposed to it, but surpasses it.

And it is a promise that SICT seems able to fulfill, which gives birth to a motivation to learn the technique.

3.3 What's in a name

It is the trust in Corine Sombrun that makes many participants commit to enrolling in a SICT training course.

The prior reading of her books [among others: Sombrun, 2005. 2009] and her personal story, as remarkable as it is eventful, generate empathy and attachment that seem to be a constant in the decision to consider these courses as 'safe', ethically reliable, and in line with strategies for navigating the plethora of offers for better living.

The existence of the institutional framework, and SICT itself, are directly linked to Corine Sombrun, who is, by name (or, more exactly, by pseudonym), the person who invented this practice.

She has acquired the status of a tutelary figure, as incisive as she is benevolent.

It is important to remember that her ability to trance (for those in the know, the noun becomes a verb) was accidentally discovered during a work session in Mongolia, with a shaman. This was followed by several years of training, until she herself achieved the official status of a shaman.

The use of the term *šamán* refers to the linguistic family of the languages of northeastern Eurasia. It spread through Russia to Europe from the 17th century, that is, during the colonization process.

The anthropological works of that time are not known for their nuance, and the word shaman was used to designate '*in an ethnocentric and disdainful manner'* [Walsh, 2007: 4] the spiritual practices of so-called traditional societies of the present or past, wherever European colonizers found them.

Under the influence of the Western counterculture of the 1960s [Huxley, 1954. Harner, 1968], and then the spiritual syncretism of the New Age movement [Ferguson, 1980], the two words shaman and shamanism acquired a quasi-universal meaning, encompassing cultural realities that have absolutely nothing to do anymore with the original Siberian region.

Hence the term neo-shamanism.
With this phrase, the European colonization has permanently erased the vast and various richness used until then to speak about these practices. As if the word waltz had successfully won the battle to describe any type of dance, in the whole world, which would have been called afterwards "neo-waltz".

In the 1980s, French anthropology even developed an observation protocol to socially situate each so-called shamanic practice, as it was now studied in heterogeneous cultures [Hamayon et al. 1981].

This is why we can now find shamans and shamanism everywhere and at any time, in Asia, Australia, Oceania, America, Europe, or Africa:

'*Such an Egyptologist commonly uses the term 'shaman' to designate officiants of ancient Egypt, such a prehistorian considers that the rock art of the Sahara illustrates shamanic sessions, and many authors defend the hypothesis of an authentic shamanism that has been transmitted, almost unchanged, in southern Africa for several thousand years. However, the question of 'African shamanism' is at least open to discussion, and the use of a concept from the Siberian world may prove inadequate*.' [Le Quellec, Jean-Loïc, 2005: 28]

However, regarding the trance ability acquired in Mongolia by Corine Sombrun, it was indeed shamanism in the cultural sense. But the state of trance itself does not mean that the individual is a shaman, nor that the state of trance cannot be achieved if one is not a shaman. Participants in SICT trainings are not called shamans afterwards, just like gospel church-goers who reach the state of trance never claim this title either.

Corine Sombrun puts it best: '*trance does not make the shaman*.'

And it took her personal commitment to submit to scientific analysis the state of trance she could now achieve on command without any external inducer.

She was thus the sole subject of the first research conducted by Pierre Flor-Henry's team, which allowed them to assert that trance is a non-pathological cerebral capacity (medicine), present in all individuals (physical anthropology), regardless of their culture of origin (social anthropology).

Few people in the world will have known the relief of learning from a scientific article, entirely dedicated to them, that they are officially considered mentally sane...

This first scientific publication dates from 2017, in the seminal article by Pierre Flor-Henry, Yakov Shapiro, and Corine Sombrun: *Brain changes during a shamanic trance: Altered modes of consciousness, hemispheric laterality, and systemic psychobiology*.

The title alone indicates how the scientific understanding of the phenomenon quickly evolved: indeed, this 2017 publication mentions 'shamanic trance'. And, in just three years, the vocabulary changed to describe this specific type of trance under a term that no longer evokes any belief system, under the name 'self-induced cognitive trance', abbreviated as SICT, or *TCAI* in French: *Transe Cognitive Auto-Induite*.

It is important to emphasize at this stage the inextricable intertwining of culture and brain activity.

The infinite variety of cultures should not make us forget that our abilities to acquire knowledge of the world, and interact with it, are based on the fact that we are all Homo sapiens, and that we share a common neurological and biophysical foundation.

Our species has been roaming the planet for about three hundred thousand years [Greene et al., 2015. Callaway, 2017], and our biophysical and genetic heritage has been stabilized for about fifty thousand years [Tournebize et al., 2024].

The neurological circuits that allow us to move from one state of consciousness to another, of which the state of trance is just one modality, are an integral part of the innate capacities of a human brain (physical anthropology).

The great unknown is therefore how a particular culture (social anthropology) will teach its members to use it.

And, in the roughly fifty thousand years of Homo sapiens history, it seems that contemporary Western culture may be the only one not only to *not* have developped legitimate ways of doing so, but even to actively *discourage* its members of accessing other states of consciousness than the one considered normal:

'Since the Enlightenment, we have learned to distrust it like the plague. Indeed, by establishing reason as the foundation of legitimate behavior in Western societies, it has relegated any modification of consciousness to outdated practices of the Ancien Régime*, tinged with esotericism, superstition, or even devilry.*

Our modern, liberal, and democratic societies are based on the use of reason in full consciousness. Modifying the parameters of the exercise of reason thus threatens society as a whole. The moral revolution of the 19th century will further reinforce this aspect, associating all cognitive modifications with a moral defect, a vice that must be curbed.' [Savary, 2014]

3.4 The words to say it

The shift from the term ‘shamanic trance’ to ‘self-induced cognitive trance’ (SICT) is a good indicator of the vocabulary now used to describe it.

First and foremost, each training session includes two lead instructors: a doctor and a psychologist, which can be referred to at any time and in full confidentiality. Symbolically, science and its professionals are in charge.

Some participants, initially drawn by spiritual exoticism or by reading Corine Sombrun’s books recounting her (mis)adventures as a shaman in Mongolia, realize they are ten years behind the semantic shift from shamanic trance to self-induced trance.

As a matter of fact, the appropriate language register in SICT is now one of empirically verifiable and measurable facts. Explanations beyond factual elements are discouraged, as they risk falling into a discourse that is not scientifically acceptable, and thus considered out of place in the intellectual framework of SICT.

Each trance exercise is followed by a group debriefing, where everyone is invited to speak freely. Personal experiences are never questioned; on the contrary, they are considered valuable and valid information. However, additional insights are provided by the instructors to help participants develop the most relevant understanding. This is part of the pedagogical process to better articulate the experience.

In my own case, I saw a nocturnal landscape, clear as a photograph. I also heard barking and fragments of ritual chants. It would have been easy to describe these as visual and auditory hallucinations. Similarly, trance can induce spontaneous movements of varying intensity, known since the 5th century as chorea, or later as St. Vitus's dance. There may also be unintentional and ungrammatical speech, historically known as glossolalia, or '*speaking in tongues'* —it's the language of angels mentioned in the Epistle to the Corinthians of the Bible. Figures like Alexander of Abonoteichus in the 2nd century and Hildegard of Bingen in the 12th century were reputed to speak this way.

However, St. Vitus's dance is caused by bacterial infection or ergot poisoning. A hallucination is seen as a sensory error, a precursor to delusional madness. Glossolalia is interpreted, depending on the speaker, as prophecy, hysteria, or a speech disorder.

None of these terms avoid connotations of mental illness, substance use, or religious interpretation. Yet, it's worth repeating again that SICT is triggered solely by willpower, in a 'natural' neurological configuration [Hollanders et al., 2021]. Thus, such connotations are irrelevant, and instructors emphasize the importance of a neutral vocabulary: not hallucinations, but modified sensory perceptions; not St. Vitus's dance, but spontaneous movement; not glossolalia, but protolanguage —the language before language.

By removing connotations, the institution provides an opportunity for each person, in their individuality and in their own personal history, to experience their inner journey fully and uniquely. This aligns with the idea of individual exploration as a means for agency, where external validation is set aside (ch. 3). The modalities of 'how it feels' are always valid, and self-explaining, including when the lasting impression leaves us sometimes very moved, or shaked.

Indeed, '*Trance is an altered state of consciousness that includes an element of abruptness. In other words, an event that disrupts the subject's usual reference points, shaking their senses and perception of reality, plunging them into an unusual, atypical, and transitory experience'* [Bioy, 2023: 7].

Ultimately, integrating trance as a personal practice opens the way to revealing an individual identity that is more self-aware and more connected to the world and to life itself —something consistently described positively by participants. Words like deep joy, alignment and grounding are often mentioned.

3.5 The meaning of it

As with the previously mentioned examples of inner experiences, it is possible to speak extensively about 'how it feels'. But there are restrictions regarding the expression of 'what it does'.

What practitioners *believe* they can deduct from their perceptions while in trance is, at best, a hypothesis. Any expression that touches on 'what it does' —in the sense of identifying a causality, a reason, or a meaning of why such and such things happened— is met with benevolent but unwavering skepticism. Ultimately, benevolent doubt *is* the appropriate way to answer the question 'why'.

As the training team puts it: '*we don't go into the why*.' That is not the purpose of SICT trainings, and the practitioners must approach their own interpretive certainties with caution, just as they should not expect an external source to explain, for example, why they heard violent barking when no dogs were present.

Everyone is encouraged to consider the broadest meanings: not only the first intuition but also its opposite. This keeps the entire field of explanation open. No interpretation of the phenomenology is suggested, and admitting that we don't know is part of the process. For everyone —novice participants, experienced trance practitioners, instructors, and researchers— it is an exercise in humility.

Knowledge can be shared when, and if, valid studies provide more than just subjective opinions. Ongoing studies are mentioned [e.g., Desmond-Lequéméner, 2023], and the valid arguments will strengthen over time [e.g., Vanhaudenhuyse *et al.*, 2024], allowing new studies to build on this expanding corpus of knowledge. Such goes the experimental method.

In the absence of conclusive evidence, there is a boundary the institution does not cross, out of ethical responsibility.

What messages, and meanings, are conveyed by SICT, as a dialogue with oneself, need to be *felt*, because the language is feelings and perceptions. This *felt meaning*, whatever 'it' is, does not diminishes the clarity but highlights it. The most important perceptions will be put forward, in the broad sense of 'What do I need to learn now, about me ?'. Self-induced cognitive trance is then a phenomenon to be experienced more than analyzed. Hence the idea that even in the absence of conclusive certainty, '*trance knows —let it happen*.'

Overcoming this apparent lack of certainty would probably lead us, in part, into fields beyond biomedical research. We suggest, as a hypothesis, a connection with Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology. Jung was familiar with non-ordinary states of consciousness and describes the techniques of introversion as '*A path to free oneself by one's own means and find the courage to access one's true self.*' [Jung, 2021: 178]. See also the introduction to his *Red Book* by Ulrich Hoerni and Sonu Shamdasani. [Jung, 2012].

In particular, the explanatory depth of the concept of individuation seems especially relevant —though we leave that to the specialists.

4. Institutionalization through organization

A training course in self-induced cognitive trance is an initiation, where novices are integrated into a group with specific demands and capabilities.
It involves learning a practice, a framework for understanding, and a way of expressing (and also *not* expressing) oneself on the subject.
In doing so, at both the organizational and institutional levels, a process is also being deployed to ensure symbolic compatibility with the society in which this learning takes place.

TranceLab and TranceScience Research are institutions but also mechanisms that facilitate connections and linkages with other institutions that hold the power to legitimize SICT.
In search of a better culture fit, this approach allows the rationalist culture to appropriate an element from the vast field of non-ordinary states of consciousness, through the notion of therapeutic benefit and the credibility of biomedical research.
For TranceScience in particular, it is a patient process of institution-to-institution dialogue, aimed at overcoming preconceived notions of trance as synonymous with charlatanism, pseudoscience, or, worse, cultism.

Still, outside the community of informed individuals, trance remains a marker of a frightening, stigmatized, even controversial inner experience.
In total, since the first workshops that produced the first trance practitioners, only about twenty thousand people have been involved.
This is not enough to normalize the subject in the eyes of the general public. For example, after a workshop, when participants take public transport together in Paris to return home, conversations continue, and very quickly, one learns to publicly refer to 'SICT' rather than 'trance', so that no one can judge the discussion through a lens of devaluing connotations that would place us among those with illegitimate inner experiences.

Other mechanisms are needed to broaden the dissemination.
As such, in addition to public training workshops like the one described earlier, there are also numerous medical studies with their growing corpus, as well as workshops focused on creative skills on one hand, and on the medical professions on the other.
Indeed, within the SICT community and institutions, there is unanimous support with the idea of having more training opportunities for healthcare and emergency professionals. This allows these people to gain a new therapeutic resource for themselves.
Furthermore, to enable the emergence of healthcare providers authorized to use SICT as a specific therapeutic tool, the University of Seine-Saint-Denis Paris VIII offers two professional university diplomas (DU, equivalent to 3 years of higher education, and DESU, equivalent to 4 years).

These various organizational structures, as we have seen, contribute to solidifying the institutionalization and legitimization of SICT.

5. Conclusion: towards a normalization?

The radical novelty of Self-Induced Cognitive Trance lies in the individual's ability to access a non-ordinary state of consciousness on command, without any external inducer, and without needing any prior belief —except the belief that one does not have a particular belief.
There is a dual reciprocity: SICT is freed from cultural aspects that would require an alien, exotic, or metaphysical belief; and at the same time, science can appropriate SICT because it requires no prior belief —except the belief in scientific method itself.

By using scientific vocabulary, biomedical analysis, and peer-reviewed publications, SICT equips itself with the elements of legitimacy needed to integrate into a specific culture —our own.
It is one of the rare instances where an element considered irrational (trance) is deliberately embedded within the framework of the experimental method (science), to provide it with collectively acceptable symbolic elements (SICT).
Anthropologically, this is a case of transculturation: two phenomena connecting to form a third, distinct, new, and autonomous one.

SICT thus appears as both an auxiliary and a complement to medical care, as well as a personal tool for better self-access, and maybe even access to the self —reinforcing the idea that health *really* goes far beyond the mere absence of disease.

Future research could not only refine knowledge related to the synchronic dimension: the experience and analysis of one trance; but also the diachronic dimension: the effect of trance in general, i.e., the consequences on an individual's life of using the skill of cognitive trance.

A third line of study could focus on the institutional and social aspect of SICT: how this practice manages to establish a credibility that could lead to its normalization.

Invented in France, by the western scientific community, for the western public, Self-Induced Cognitive Trance could open our culture to its own legitimate form of inner experience, whose potential for collective transformation is still poorly understood.

Anthropologically, we hypothesize that Self-Induced Cognitive Trance could represent the emergence of a *social fact* —that is, it has the potential to become a full-fledged western cultural trait, precisely through the pursuit of cultural fit and institutional legitimization. Consequently, the impacts of such a weaving of SICT within society are also poorly understood.

For practitioners who have made cognitive trance a routine of their lives, all indicators point to an increased ability to overcome the closure of the self, which characterizes the Western rational individual's self-definition. This is, in essence, a shift in the collective relationship to the world [Tornatore, 2023].

This idea leads us toward speculative ethno-fiction, or anthro-fiction, to imagine what a Western (or, at least, French) society might look like if SICT was so common that its use was no longer questioned.

Bibliography

(References are presented here in the language they were accessed: french or english)

Baud, Sébastien : Anthropologies du corps en transes. Ed. Connaissances et Savoirs, 2016.

Beeler Dori, Michele : An ethnographic account of Reiki in Britain. Ed. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.
Bioy, Antoine : Le Grand Livre des transes et des états non ordinaires de conscience. Ed. Dunod, 2023.
Bourguignon, Erika : A Cross-cultural Study of Dissociational States. Ed. Ohio State University Research foundation, 1968.
Bourguignon, Erika : Religion, altered states of consciousness and social change. Ed. Ohio State University Press, 1973.
Bourguignon, Erika ; Thomas Evascu : Altered States of Consciousness within a General Evolutionary Perspective: A Holocultural Analysis. In Cross-cultural Research, Volume 12, 1977.

Callaway, Ewen : Oldest Homo sapiens fossil claim rewrites our species' history. In Nature, 2017.

Desmond-Le Quéméner, Elie ; Meunier, Hélène ; Michel, Nathalie ; Ollagnier-Beldame, Magali ; Patri, Jean-François : Informations perçues en TCAI: données effectives ou projections ? Apports méthodologiques. Communication au Congrès de recherche sur la Transe Cognitive Auto-Induite (TCAI), TranceScience Institute. 2023.

Eliade, Mircea : Le chamanisme, et les techniques archaïques de l'extase. Ed. Payot, 1951.
Ember, Carol ; Carolus, Christina : Altered states of consciousness. In Explaining Human Cultures, 2017. [Online : https://hraf.yale.edu/ehc/summaries/altered-states-of-consciousness accessed june 2025]
Escoffery, Janet : An historical review of the contributions of Erika Bourguignon to cross-cultural psychology. PhD thesis. Miami Institute of Psychology of the Caribbean Center for Advanced Studies, 1999.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne : Les mots, la mort, les sorts. La sorcellerie dans le bocage. Ed. Gallimard, 1977.
Ferguson, Marylin : The Aquarian conspiracy : personal and social transformation in our time. Ed. Tarcher, 1980.
Flamme, Kévin : Approche méthodologique de l'enquête auto-ethnographique dans l'étude des organisations. In ? Interrogations ? Revue pluridisciplinaire de sciences humaines et sociales, 2021.
Flor-Henry, Pierre ; Shapiro, Yakov ; Sombrun, Corine : Brain changes during a shamanic trance : Altered modes of consciousness, hemispheric laterality, and systemic psychobiology. In Cogent psychology, 2017. [Online : https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311908.2017.1313522#d1e214 accessed june 2025]
Garcia, Marie-Carmen ; Fraysse, Mélie ; Bataille, Pierre ; Lefèvre, Brice : En quête de contrôle de soi. Ressorts de l'engagement dans la pratique du yoga d'individus diplômés du " supérieur long ". In Regards Sociologiques, 2023.
Geertz, Clifford : Bali. Interprétation d'une culture. Ed. Gallimard, 1984 [1973].

Green, Eric ; Watson, James ; Collins, Francis : Human Genome project : twenty five years of big biology. In Nature, 2015.
Grégoire, Charlotte ; Sombrun, Corine ; Gosseries, Olivia ; Vanhaudenhuyse, Audrey : La transe cognitive auto-induite : caractéristiques et applications thérapeutiques potentielles. In Hegel, 2021.
Goffman, Alice : L'art de fuir. Enquête sur une jeunesse dans le ghetto. Ed. Seuil, 2020 [2014].

Halloy, Arnaud : Un anthropologue en transe. Du corps comme outil d'investigation ethnographique. In Corps, performance, religion. Etudes anthropologiques offertes à Philippe Jesters. Ed. Publibook, 2006. [Online : https://hal.science/hal-01797226v1/file/Un%20anthropologue%20en%20transe.pdf accessed june 2025]
Hamayon, Roberte ; Mitrani, Philippe ; Bidou, P. ; Chaumeil, J. P. ; Perrin, M. : Le chamanisme dans la recherche anthropologique. In Journal des anthropologues. 1981.
Harner, Mickael : The sound of rushing water. In Natural history, 1968.
Hollanders P ; Panda R ; Sombrun C ; Laureys S ; Vanhaudenhuyse A : Phenomenological experience and neurophysiological correlates of trance in healthy individuals. Ed. BIAL Foundation, 2021.
Huxley, Aldous : Les portes de la perception. Ed. du Rocher, 1999 [1954].

Jennings, Jessica Laura : The vibrant individual : Reiki in London. PhD thesis. University College London. 2019.
Jung, Carl Gustav : L'âme et le soi. Renaissance et individuation. Ed. Albin Michel, 2021 [1967]
Jung, Carl Gustav : Le Livre rouge - Liber Novus. Ed. L'iconoclaste, 2012.

Kumar, Pradeep; Panda, Rajanikant; Sharma, Kanishka; Adarsh, A.; Annen, Jitka; Martial, Charlotte; Faymonville, Marie-Elisabeth; Laureys, Steven; Sombrun, Corine; Angarai Ganesan, Ramakrishnan; Vanhaudenhuyse, Audrey; Gosseries , Olivia : Changes in high-order interaction measures of synergy and redundancy during non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by meditation, hypnosis, and auto-induced cognitive trance. Ed. Neuroimage, 2024.

Laland, Kevin; Will Hoppitt; Blackburn, Laura : Response facilitation in the domestic fowl. In Animal behaviour, 2007.
Lapassade, Georges : Les états modifiés de conscience. Ed. PUF, 1987.
Le Quellec, Jean-Loïc : Existe-t'il un chamanisme africain ? in Religions et Histoire. 2005.

Malinowski, Bronislaw : Journal d'ethnographe. Notes de travail. Ed. Seuil,1985 [1967]
Mazzocchetti, Jacinthe ; Piccoli, Emmanuelle : Défis méthodologiques, éthiques et émotionnels d'une ethnographie de l'intime, des silences et des situations de violences. In Parcours anthropologiques, 2016.
Montlibert (de), Christian : Le soin de soi et le développement personnel. In Regards sociologiques, 2023.

Montgomery, Sally : A freediver finds belonging without breath. Ed. Sapiens.org, 2024. [Online : https://www.sapiens.org/culture/freediving-belonging-kinship accessed june 2025]
Moore, Henrietta ; Sanders, Todd : Anthropology in theory. Issues in epistemology. Ed. Wiley. 2014.

Ouattara, Fatoumata : Une étrange familiarité. Les exigences de l'anthropologie « chez soi ». In Cahiers d'études africaines, 2004.
Oswald, Victor ; Audrey Vanhaudenhuyse, Jitka Annen, Charlotte Martial, Aminata Bicego, Florien Rousseaux, Corine Sombrun, Yann Harel, Marie-Elisabeth Faymonville, Steven Laureys, Karim Jerbi, Olivia Gosseries : Autonomic nervous system modulation during non-odinary states of consciousness. In Nature, 2023.

Peirano, Mariza : When anthropology is at home : the different contexts of a single discipline. In Annual review of anthropology, 1998.
Perrin, Raphaël : L'ethnographie comme travail émotionnel : une enquête de terrain sur l'avortement. In Genèses, 2023.
Petitmengin, Claire : Découvrir la dynamique de l'expérience vécue. In Bulletin de psychologie, 2007
Poulos, Christopher, N. : Essentials of Autoethnography. In Essentials of qualitative Methods Series. American Psychological Association, 2021.

Robinson, David ; Brown Kelly ; McNemeny, Moira ; Haviland, David : Datura quids at Pinwheel Cave, California, provide unambiguous confirmation of the ingestion of hallucinogens at a rock art site. In Proceedings of the national academy of sciences of the USA, 2020.

Samorini, Giorgio : The oldest archeological data evidencing the relationship of Homo sapiens with psychoactive plants: A worldwide overview. In Journal of psychedelic studies, 2019.
Savary, Jean-Félix : éditorial sur « Les états 'modifiés' de conscience ». In Dépendances, 2014.
Socha, Dagmara ; Sykutera, Marzena ; Orefici, Giuseppe : Use of psychoactive and stimulant plants on the south coast of Peru from the Early Intermediate to Late Intermediate Period. In Journal of archeological science, 2022.
Sombrun, Corine : Mon initiation chez les chamanes. Une Parisienne en Mongolie. Ed. Pocket, 2006.
Sombrun, Corine : Les tribulations d'une chamane à Paris. Ed. Pocket, 2009.

Tanasi, David ; van Oppen de Ruiter, Branko ; Florian, Fiorella ; Pavlovic, Radmila ; Chiesa, Luca Maria ; Fochi, Igor ; Stani, Chiaramaria ; Vaccari, Lisa ; Chaput, Dale ; Samorini, Giorgio ; Pallavicini, Alberto ; Semeraro, Sabrina ; Serena Gaetano, Anastasia ; Lican, Sabina ; Barbieri, Pierluigi ; Greco, Enrico : Multianalytical investigation reveals psychotropic substances in a ptolemaic Egyptian vase. In Nature, 2024.

Tornatore, Jean-Louis : Pas de transition sans transe. Essai d'écologie politique des savoirs. Ed. Dehors, 2023.
Tournebize, Rémi ; Chikhi, Lounés : Ignoring population structure in hominin evolutionary models can lead to the inference of spurious admixture events. In Nature, 2024.
Timmermann, Christopher ; Bauer, Prisca ; Gosseries, Olivia ; Vanhaudenhuyse, Audrey ; Vellenweider, Franz ; Laureus, Steven ; Singer, Tania ; Mind and Life Europe Research group ; Antonova, Elena ; Lutz Antoine : A neurophenomenological approach to non-ordinary states of consciousness: hypnosis, meditation, and psychedelics. In Trends in cognitive sciences, 2022.

Vanhaudenhuyse, Audrey ; Castillo, Marie-Carmen ; Martial, Charlotte ; Annen, Jitka ; Bicego, Aminata ; Rousseaux, Floriane ; Sanz, Leandro ; Sombrun, Corine ; Bioy, Antoine ; Gosseries, Olivia : Phenomenology of auto-induced cognitive trance using text mining: a prospective and exploratory group study. In Neuroscience of Consciousness. 2024.

Walsh, Roger : The world of shamanism : new views of an ancient tradition. Ed. Abe Books, 2007.