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There has been much interest of late, reflected in several panels at the recent American Anthropological Association meetings in San Jose, in the interdisciplinary and “trans-disciplinary” work of medical anthropology: What is our role? Our contribution? What do we lose by the collaborative, and often times compromising, process required? And of what value are such studies to the holistic aims of the field? Do they push the field further or limit our theoretical influence? These questions, while not explicitly addressed in the volumes reviewed here, seem to lie in the background as each grapples with questions of inter-and cross-disciplinarity (Spiritual Transformation and Healing), theoretical innovation through the bridging of old concepts with new understandings (Multiple Medical Realities), and differing methodological approaches to the study of medical systems, bodily experiences, and illness representations.

In Multiple Medical Realities, editors Helle Johannessen and Imre Lazar have compiled an intriguing collection of articles exploring medical pluralism and bodily experiences from a largely European perspective. The volume includes a preface (Thomas Csordas), an introduction, and two sections somewhat arbitrarily divided as they continuously explore choices, positionality, and medical practices within specific globalized social and cultural contexts. The strong ethnographic content of many of the contributions illustrates the importance of situational context in the ways medical pluralism works on a structural level and how it is experienced bodily by health seekers. In doing so, the authors succeed in showing that plural medical use on behalf of health seekers is not random but, rather, is embedded in intricate and ever-changing meaning systems. In addition, the selection of plural use does not always reflect a plural philosophy: At times it reflects curiosity and opportunity without a change in basic worldview.

Johannessen opens the collection with a theoretical framework based in the combination of medical pluralism (as a structural concept) and concepts of “the body” (from Nancy Schepet-Hughes’s and Margaret Lock’s elaborations of the individual body, the social body, and the body politic) with the concept of “elective affinity.” This framework conceptualizes medical pluralism not as the coexistence of separate and independent sociocultural systems of medicine but as fluid and flexible networks based on affinal organizing principles. In addition, Johannessen provides a valuable history of medical pluralism within the field of medical anthropology, as well as a review of how Schepet-Hughes’s and Lock’s arguments have changed over time, all of which is useful for any student of the field.

Part 1 begins with a quantitative analysis of alternative medicine use in postsocialist Hungary (László Buda et al.) followed by a meandering exploration of the “reemergence” and reconfiguration of shamanic tradition, also in postsocialist Hungary, as a form of socialist nostalgia and cultural revitalization (Imre Lázár). As with all reinventions of tradition, what emerges is a hybridized, modern version, in this case one in which healers dabble in multiple healing modalities while never experiencing the trance states of their shamanic predecessors.

The use of multiple healing modalities on behalf of providers is further explored in Kristine Krause’s contribution in which staff of a psychiatric hospital in Ghana combine biomedical treatment with Christian healing (prescribing biomedical drugs and “anointing prayers” at the same time). Krause incorporates patient experience by showing how one patient negotiates different spiritual beliefs and practices to ally herself with the psychiatrists treating her and maintain connection with her family support system. In so doing, she selectively accepts and rejects aspects of the clinic’s diagnosis, biomedical perspective, and Christian ideology in favor of maintaining connection with a family spirit. These processes of choice within changing political, social, and cultural medical contexts are richly reflected in Witold Jacorzynki’s and Michael Knipper’s contributions as well.
From these complex explorations, we move into two complementary chapters exploring physician (Robert Frank and Gunnar Stollberg) and patient (Christine Barry) preferences and practices of alternative medicine usage, followed by Efrossyni Delmouzou’s ethnographic exploration of the “medicalization” process through a couple’s troubles with conception and disclosure of IVF use in a Greek village. The theme of reproduction continues in Geoffrey Samuel’s study of the relationship between traditional birthing practices and biomedical options in rural Bangladesh. Questions of identity and meaning as embodied in pluralistic medical practice are explicitly addressed in Anne Gronseth’s work with Tamil refugees interfacing with Norwegian medical clinics. The volume closes with a reflective review by Lazar and Johannsen, in which they again emphasize the centrality of social context to understanding medical pluralism in practice and experience. As they state, different needs and expectations—which are constantly shifting as situations and priorities shift—sustain different patterns of use.

In *Spiritual Transformation and Healing*, Joan Koss-Chioino and Philip Hefner have brought together anthropologists, philosophers of religion, neuroscientists, behavioral scientists, and clinicians to explore healing processes in diverse cultural, religious, and biological contexts. The book is structured with an introduction followed by five topical sections, representing different disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological approaches (ethnographic, theological, philosophical, personal, biological, and clinical). The definitional groundwork is laid in part 1, in which concepts of “spirit” and “spiritual transformation” are defined (Hefner and Koss-Chioino, Kenneth Pargament, and David Hufford and Mary Ann Bucklin). Empathy, introduced in part 2 (Koss-Chioino), is a continual theme explored throughout, as are questions of measurement (Pargament, Fraser Watts, and Andrew Newberg) and the appropriate scientific approach to the study of spiritual transformation and healing.

Part 2, which seems to be of the most interest to anthropologists, focuses on cross-cultural and indigenous healing systems, opening with Koss-Chioino’s concept of “radical empathy,” deemed essential for shamans and other healers to accomplish their work. The supposition that core elements are present in the spirit healing process cross-culturally, on which the analysis is based, is further elaborated on and convincingly argued in Edith Turner’s contribution. Bonnie Glass-Coffin and Marjorie Balzer ethnographically demonstrate “radical empathy” in practice in their respective analyses of shamanic practices in Peru and Siberia.

Part 3 opens with Hefner’s analysis of New Testament terminology, followed by Karl Peters’s focus on the very personal experience of his wife’s death from cancer, embedded in a discussion of evolutionary theology. Watts examines the gospels in considering the role of personal narrative in personal transformation from both psychological and Christian perspectives. A weakness of this section is that all contributions are based in Christian traditions with references to other major faiths only in passing. A preferable approach would have been to follow the ethnographic section with a more widely ranging discussion from different religious philosophical perspectives and texts.

The value of having at least a Buddhist scholar in part 3 becomes particularly apparent as part 4 opens with Andrew Newberg’s examination of neurological studies of brain and mind transformation in response to meditative states found in various Buddhist practices. Newberg presents a very interesting model of the ways in which the brain responds to meditative states, and he sets the stage for exploration of related states and methods of observation. Also of value to Newberg’s contribution is the introduction of the concept of “neural plasticity,” the brain’s ability to learn from experience (mapping new synapses through repetitive practices such as meditation). This concept is further elaborated in David Allen Hogue’s contribution as key to understanding spiritual transformations.

The *Spiritual Transformation and Healing* volume closes with two clinical studies (Gail Ironson et al., and Jean Kisteller and Leonard Hummel) that ground concepts raised in earlier contributions (definitional distinctions between religion and spirituality, and value of narrative as a spiritual resource in healing, respectively) in “clinically relevant” terms meaningful to those involved in HIV and cancer research. The strength of interdisciplinary approaches to questions posed in this collection is clearly outlined, as is the value of ethnography to elucidating the multiple levels of social context in the *Multiple Medical Realities* volume. Together, the two offer valuable contributions to the field of medical anthropology.