

Contributions to the Phenomenology of Heightened Reality

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How could this be so real, and at the same time have its reality so in question, so laughable, when it so departs from the consensus of what is real and what is not back at baseline?

Diana Reed Slattery. *Xenolinguistics*

Fortunately, we make contact with reality at times.

Charles Tart. *States of Consciousness*

Abstract. This article analyzes the experience of heightened reality, whereby subjects feel or think that what they are facing is reality itself, or somehow a ‘more real reality’, a hyperreality. My main examples for this specific kind of metacognitive supervision are from reports about the near-death experience, the psychedelic experience and the mystical experience. I will interpret accounts of such experiences using first of all philosophical phenomenology and theories of sense of reality. I criticize and try to complement Martin Fortier’s model of the plural taxonomy of sense of reality. In addition, I propose a triadic model of the experience of reality and, based on the analysis of the testimonies of heightened reality, I have developed a triadic model, according to which one dimension of reality experience is merely heightened reality, the other two being self-evident immersion in reality and the irruptive suspension of ordinary experience.

Keywords: sense of reality, heightened reality, hyperreality, phenomenology, altered states of consciousness

Apie aukštesnės realybės fenomenologiją

Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojama aukštesnės realybės patyrimas, kuomet subjektai jaučia ar galvoja, kad kaip tik tai, su kuo jie susiduria, ir yra pati realybė, kad šioji yra „tikresnė tikrovė“, hiperrealybė. Pagrindiniai nagrinėjami šios savotiškos metakognityvinės supervizijos pavyzdžiai yra priešmirtinio, psichodelinio ir mistinio patyrimo liudijimai. Juos interpretuoju remdamasis visų pirma filosofine fenomenologija ir realybės pojūčio teorijomis. Aš kritiškai analizuoju ir siekiu papildyti Martino Fortier modelį bei jo realybės pojūčio taksonomiją. Siūlau triadinį realybės patyrimo modelį ir, remdamasis aukštesnės realybės patyrimo liudijimais, teigiu, kad viena realybės patyrimo dimensijų yra tiesiog aukštesnioji realybė, o kitos dvi – tai arba akivaizdus panirimas į realybę, arba veržlus kasdienio patyrimo suspendavimas.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: realybės pojūtis, aukštesnė realybė, hiperrealybė, fenomenologija, perkeistos sąmonės būsenos

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Introduction

This paper seeks to draw attention to one aspect of encountering with reality, namely, the experience of heightened reality. These are experiences in which the subjects do not meet with ordinary reality, but feel or think that what they are facing is reality itself, or is more genuinely real, somehow a *more real reality*, a hyperreality. Heightened reality goes beyond mere individual phenomena by its parainformal noetic quality, or, to put it another way, it is a result of metacognitive supervision which gives a special dimensionality to what appears. While these experiences are by no means always verbalized, our primary sources for them can be the subsequently formulated autophenomenological reports or answers to well-articulated microphenomenological questions. Our primary sources for them can be the subsequently formulated reports or answers to well-articulated microphenomenological questions. Their interpretation is no small challenge, since although a number of useful insights into sense of reality (SR) have emerged over the past decades (e.g. Aggernaes 1972, Johnson&Raye 1981, Bentall 1990, Ratcliffe 2008, Laughlin 2013, Farkas 2013, Hobson et al. 2014, Dokic&Martin 2017), a truly comprehensive theory is still lacking.

There is something what disposes people to critically process reality information and judge something real. SR is not uniform or homogeneous, and it requires a highly complex phenomenology. Reality orientation is always in flux, and it is an extremely multiplex and dynamic spectrum. At times it can be explicitly in crisis, as in the obvious case of the psychopathology of derealization, and at other times it can be relatively free and productive, as in the case of the creation of virtual realities. Hopefully, a better understanding of one aspect of SR, in this case HR, may help us to understand the other aspects, that is, in a feedback loop, a better understanding of HR can also shed new light on what is considered to be the default consensual, ordinary experience of reality, its limits and boundaries, its contingent character and its further potentials. We may be better able to deal with crises of reality experience and be more resourceful and effective in restoring ordinary SR, and, on the other hand, also discovering alternative or new phenomenal realities and to eventually cross ontological boundaries (Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner, with more pathos, would have said: “to escape the soundless deserts of mapped out reality” [1963: 173]). This can undoubtedly have important implications for contemporary philosophy, which in its varieties has made a particular effort to contribute to the reconceptualization of reality. Let me cite an example from Jocelyn Benoist’s *Elements of a Realist Philosophy*: “The evidence of reality seems so strong that one has to wonder how we can ever come to question it philosophically” (2011: 45). In contrast, I argue that if we really appreciate the astonishing diversity of SR, the exact opposite question actually arises: how was the myth of the ‘evidence of reality’ possible in the first place and how could we grasp its genesis?

Testimonies about the experience of HR

To make it clearer what exactly is at stake and what calls for a deep phenomenological analysis, I will illustrate HR with examples. I urge the reader to look carefully at these

quotations, and also to accept that I will make only minimal comments in these paragraphs, and only then move on to the analysis. These types of experience all share the common feature that those who experience them often report that they have encountered a non-ordinary reality, a parallel or a hyperreality. The scope of the article restrains my possibilities to dwell upon their differences. For the aims of this paper, it is enough to emphasize what they share: apart from the fact that they involve an extraordinary change in the sense of reality, they are usually described as outstanding examples of an altered state of consciousness.¹

My first example will be the near-death experience (NDE). While it could happen that during this critical situation SR simply fades away, many reports suggest something different. According to a study, “most of the experiencers report a clear sensorium and an intense sense of reality.” What is more, NDEs are often accompanied with the disappearance of the self, and “this detachment would offer experiencers a more intelligible and less distressing reality” (Martial et al. 2020). The conclusions of another study are consistent with this:

[A]kind of heightened alertness is often reported, and subjects of NDEs do not experience the anxiety, confusion, and distorted sense of reality that typically accompany limbic lobe-syndrome and sensory deprivation. [...] Besides, the clarity and lucidity of the NDE are exactly the opposite of what we would expect under conditions of severe energy loss to the brain (Dell’Olio 2010: 119).

Another study suggests even more:

Near-death experiencers often describe their mental processes during the NDE as remarkably clear and lucid and their sensory experiences as unusually vivid, surpassing those of their normal waking state. An analysis of 520 cases in our collection showed that 80 percent of experiencers described their thinking during the NDE as ‘clearer than usual’ or ‘as clear as usual’. Furthermore [...], people reported enhanced mental functioning (Greyson et al. 2009: 229).

Bruce Greyson claims that NDEs are characterised by the extraordinary clarity of perceived events, that is, hyperlucidity (Greyson 2012: 516–517). Or, as Lee Irwin says, these experiencers have “psychooetic consciousness, with heightened qualities of perception” (Irwin 2015: 154). A woman experienced intense light and commented on it in this way: “Heavier things we can see are of a lower reality and are real, but not like we think they are. There are invisible things to us now from higher levels that are far, far, far more real. I thought, ‘I’ve GOT to remember this!’” (Ring 1998: 74). Another woman reported that her experience had been “more than real: absolute reality” (Greyson&Bush 1992: 102). In the *Near Death Experience Documentary* (Lembo 2016) we hear reports such as: “[Cardiologist:] people tell me that this was more real than ever” and further:

¹ I want to thank the anonymous reviewer who draw my attention to the question of differences between those types of reality experience. Currently, I am writing my book with the working title *Reality Realed. The Phenomenology of Non-Ordinary Realities* and will necessarily touch upon the issue of their typological differences. I am going to elaborate a detailed phenomenology of many other kinds of experience in that context.

[NDE survivor 1:] it was more real than my sitting here 39 years later and telling the story; this is like a dream, but that was real”, “[NDE survivor 2:] it was real ... I would say it was just real, this is real but that was just very real” [NDE survivor 3:] so I [...] knew that this is the real world, that this is everything that I ever needed. This is truth, this is reality. It’s absolute love. And everything down there that I have left behind was completely unreal, illusion and empty. (*ibid*)

However, these experiences are not necessarily joyful and liberating, on the contrary, sometimes “these NDEs are traumatic in their realness, their rupturing the sense of worldly reality, and the power of the questions they raise” (Greyson&Bush 2014: 373).

Let me conclude with a quote from Imants Barušs that is particularly relevant: “some experiencers [claim] that their NDEs were as real as or more real than ordinary reality. What we have in such cases are comparisons being made regarding the degree of reality of subjective states” (2003: 223).

The next type is the psychedelic experience. It is worth taking a look at how classical psychedelic authors have expressed themselves in this regard. For example, in *Doors of Perception*, Huxley wrote not only about “the sacramental vision of reality,” but also about a chair “incomparably more real than the chair of ordinary perception” (1953). It is worth mentioning the famous case of Wasson who wrote:

[T]he visions [...] were sharply focused, the lines and colours being so sharp that they seemed more real to me than anything I had ever seen with my own eyes. I felt that I was now seeing plain, whereas ordinary vision gives us an imperfect view (Wasson 1957: 109).

According to R. Griffiths, one of the foremost researchers on effects of caffeine on the brain, participants in psilocybin studies have claimed that they had “a sense that the drug trip is more real than everyday life” (see Scharper 2017). Masters and Houston write about a psychonaut who felt that “this was the only reality [she] had ever known” (1966: 163), and Pahnke refers to an experiencer in the following way: he “was living in the most beautiful reality he had every known, and it was eternal” (1963: 144). Ward writes in *A Drug-Taker’s Notes*: “And this was reality. [...] The feelings and the thoughts we usually have are not real by comparison with this new condition of being into which I had moved” (1957: 200). Accordingly, Huston Smith claims that the “basic message of the entheogens [is] that there is another Reality that puts this one in the shade” (2000: 133). McKenna stated about the psychedelic experience:

[Y]ou are conveyed into worlds that are appallingly different from ordinary reality. Their vividness cannot be stressed enough. They are more real than real. And that’s something that you sense intuitively. They establish an ontological priority (1991: 78).

Schultes, Hofmann and Rättsch write that during the psychedelic experience, “without loss of consciousness, the subject enters a dream world that often appears more real than the normal worlds” (2001: 14). Strassman writes about people who have experienced DMT that “there is no doubt in their minds that it really is happening. Thus, they describe their experience as ‘more real than real’” (2001: 217). A recent DMT study produced similar

results: “the encounters felt more ‘real’ than reality.” This was true for 81 percent of respondents during the encounter, and 65 percent after the encounter. One respondent wrote:

There was an indescribably powerful notion that this dimension in which the entity and I convened was infinitely more ‘real’ than the consensus reality I usually inhabit. It felt truer than anything else I’d ever experienced (Davis et al. 2020: 1015).

“More (real than) real” has become a kind of established trope in psychedelic literature, and many more examples could be cited.

As for the mystical experience, it is worth starting again with the insights of classical authors. According to Evelyn Underhill, mystical experiences “reveal to us a world of higher truth and greater reality than the world of concrete happenings in which we seem to be immersed” (1914: 4). Marghanita Laski wrote about those who “encountered or felt [...] had encountered [...] reality or God,” and noticed that believers (including Christian mystics) and non-believers alike are fond of talking about their encounter with an abstract totality, which they call reality (1990: 116, 128–132). W. T. Stace suggested that mystical experiences have universal characteristics, and included among these a “sense of objectivity or reality” (1961: 110). A more recent theorist, Richard H. Jones, writes that “advocates of mystical experiences as cognitive believe that mystical experiences ‘feel so vividly real’ and cognitive after mystics return to their baseline state of consciousness indeed, they feel even more in touch with what is fundamentally real than experiences in ordinary consciousness that they must be rooted in a direct contact with a reality” (2016: 3, 7, 166). Regarding the reports, Ronald Shor recounts his own experience in the following way:

[I]n an instant, as if in a flash, full awareness of myself and reality expanded around me. [...] In rediscovering myself and the world, something vital had happened; suddenly all of the specifications of reality had become apparent to me (1959: 586).

Of particular relevance to us is Margaret Prescott Montague’s *Twenty Minutes of Reality*:

I have looked into the heart of reality [...] When once we wake to Reality [...] we shall never be bored, for in Reality there is no such thing. [...] ‘Yes, O Beauty, o Reality, O Mad Joy! I, too, have seen you face to face! (1917: 4, 11–12, 31–34).

Timothy Beardsworth’s *Sense of Presence* is also an important source: “more ‘real’ than the Light itself was the unbearable ecstasy that accompanied it. All sense of time or self disappeared,” “I suddenly became aware of a different dimension *everything became intensely vivid* in colouring,” “the plants and shrubs and the three pine trees in a copse on the opposite side of the valley became unreal. And yet they were more real than I had ever seen them in the 3½ years I had lived there” (1977: 20, 82–85). Finally, let me quote Virginia Woolf’s diary:

That is one of the experiences I have had here [in the sanctuary] in some Augusts; and got then to a consciousness of what I call ‘reality’: a thing I see before me: something abstract; but

residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. [...] And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek (1953: 132).

Needless to say, the forms of experience I have chosen are not the only ways of experiencing HR. For instance, Stanislav Grof writes in the context of the re-enactment of the birth event that it can be “typically accompanied by a sense of certainty that this knowledge is ultimately more relevant and ‘real’ than the perceptions and beliefs we share in everyday life” (1990: 38). Or for example Charles Morley writes that “a lucid dream can feel even realer than real life, and this hyperreality comes from the fact that our senses are not limited to the constraints of the physical sense organs” (2015: 20). A large number of other examples could be cited. However, I believe that there is now sufficient material to begin a phenomenology of this experience.

Phenomenological interpretation of testimonies of HR

Let me stress that I am concerned with the ‘how’ of the experience itself, the way it is given to the experiencer. Despite the fact that those who have lived through such experiences often make extremely sophisticated or general metaphysical claims (typically with a non-naturalistic content [e.g. Timmermann et al. 2021]), I will not dwell on the metaphysical reality or state of affairs that is supposed to appear within the experience, instead I will focus on the phenomenology of experience. Of course, there is a temptation to betray the givenness of experience, despite the explicitly formulated phenomenological claim, if we cannot register what appears without a retrospective rationalizing, arbitrarily interpreting, projecting cultural biases, judging the metaphysical status of what appears detached from experience, or superficially metaphorizing approach. Although the accounts of these experiences are often suboptimal themselves, that is, they are not characterised by phenomenological rigour, we must make every effort in this regard.

As for the linguistic surface of the accounts, let me point out that most of them are ex post formulated sentences, in the past tense, which, although obviously striving to be faithful to experience, often mix the inherently distorting memory about the immediacy of SR with the mediatedness and sedimentedness of the retrospective judgment of reality. If the experiencers during the experience feel that they are encountering a HR, if this is not reflectively endorsed or believed, then we can speak of metaphysical *alief* (Gendler 2008), while, in contrast, ex post opinion formation or offline monitoring may involve inferential logic, information based comparison, unnoticed transfer of previous beliefs, etc. Moreover, I have focused primarily on quotations in which the theme of altered reality appears explicitly, in the ontological sense. However, beyond the explicit comparison or contrasting, there can be several other signs. These include, for example, the evocation of an up-feeling or, conversely, down-words (Laski 1961: 67–76) (“so I drifted way way up,” “downs or sky,” etc.). It may be also symptomatic if the person claims that something has radically altered in the structure of experience, for example, the perception of space, time, or causality, the previously existing modal space, the experience of

self or body ownership. In some cases, the experiencers explicitly state that what they experienced was more real than ordinary reality, but in some cases they simply state that what they experienced was reality. In the former case, the experience of HR is evidential due to the obvious comparison, but in the latter case, our interpretation infers: for if what is experienced is described as reality pure and simple, then it implicitly suggests that the phenomenal qualities experienced before or outside of this experience do not attain the status of genuine reality, or at least underestimated compared to a higher reality. So sometimes the reference to reality is simply a reference to HR. This can be confirmed by ordinary language use. Sometimes a statement about a ‘real F’ is only an intensifying use of ‘real’, i.e. it is in fact a ‘very much’.

There is an inherent tension between the seemingly abstract terms used by experiencers and the concreteness of the experience described. At this point, a critical analysis of the terms ‘real’ and ‘reality’ can be helpful. Several theoreticians have already stated that ‘real’ is a muddled and inaccurate term, in the sense of being an undefined primitive, or more accurately because there are many sets of criteria for a ‘real F’ that can proliferate even in the case of a single F. In some cases, ‘real’ may seem redundant in its entirety, or, as Austin put it, it may function as a trouser-word: sometimes the truth-conditions of ‘real F’ would be the same if ‘real’ is dropped from it (1962: 70). A related difficulty is that ‘real’ is ‘substantive hungry’, i.e., as Steven L. Reynolds writes: “the use of ‘it’s been real’ as parting phrase strikes some of us as odd because it doesn’t seem to say anything, although it sounds as if it ought to. It has a merely surface grammatical completeness” (2006: 476). But why then does anyone say, that what they experienced “was just real”, or “far more real,” when they are describing an extraordinary, particularly intense experience? These expressions do not seem to be empty to their formulators, but rather to express the most loaded phenomenal state. But what are “real” and “reality” exactly referring to? When he wanted to sketch the semantic space of reality, David Chalmers distinguished five basic meanings: reality as existence, as causal power, as mind-independence, as non-illusoriness, and as genuineness (2022: 116–123). The problem with this list is that it tends to focus on metaphysical and epistemological aspects, that is, Chalmers wanted to make the case that virtual reality is a reality in its own right, not to explore the characteristics of the experience, whereas my analysis favours a phenomenological approach. Let me briefly predict that I think the point is that “real” can function as a dimension-word, that is, in some cases it can be used to approvingly express that some essential aspect of experience (vividness, emotional attunement, etc.) was increased. In this case ‘real’ is not a mere indexical expression or an adjuster word, which slightly modifies the meaning of a discourse or of another word, and nor is it an empty term, but refers to something experiential having a more or less easily identifiable property of real-ness. And when the word ‘reality’ is used, the description is no longer of one or a few phenomena, but holistically of the whole phenomenal field of experience.

We may also benefit from Ninian Smart’s insight (1965: 79) that we can distinguish between lowly ramified concepts (such as reality or oneness) and highly ramified concepts (such as God or Brahman). Namely, the former are not derived from a specific meta-

physics or theology, and as descriptions might be closer to the immediacy of givenness. However, Jones suggests (2016: 45) that classical mystics, who all belonged to a specific tradition before modernity, typically describe their experience in terms of highly ramified concepts, rather than abstract words. Similarly, what is happening to them is experienced as directed towards a highly specified reality, not a generic ultimate reality. This may not necessarily be true, as Laski, as we saw, for example, suggests from her textual analyses that Christian mystics also sometimes describe what they experience as reality or ‘more real reality’. It may be otherwise true that in a socio-cultural atmosphere in which more and more people define themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” a less binding abstract and neutral term may be more attractive than a semantically overloaded one.

Triadic model of the reality experience

It will be useful to distinguish between three elementary modes of experiencing reality. In one mode we take reality for granted, that is, we are immersed in it like fish in water, as in a self-evident environment. To experience the phenomena around us as real is a primitive experiential feature, a pre-given orientation, a default setting. It is unnecessary to add to any phenomenon that it is real. As Husserl suggests, “with the natural attitude there is at the outset (before reflection) no predicate ‘real’ and no category ‘reality’” (quoted by Schütz 1962: 238). What is called “common sense direct realism” is nothing other than this organic connection with reality, this complete embeddedness in it. As Alfred Schütz puts it, in this natural attitude

we have no reason to cast any doubt upon our warranted experiences which, so we believe, give us things as they really are. It needs a special motivation, such as the irruption of a ‘strange’ experience not subsumable under the stock of knowledge at hand or inconsistent with it, to make us revise our former beliefs (1962: 228).

Schütz’s sentences open up an analysis of another mode of experiencing reality. The phenomena that do not fit into our model of reality disrupt the general style of experience, and we have basically three options: either we relegate the phenomenon to the margins of our experience so that we can ignore it, or we actively seek to integrate it into our existing schemas at all costs, or it remains hauntingly present followed by a weird sense of unreality. However, it happens, the phenomenal event has already created at least a minimal gap in our fairly unproblematic dwelling in reality. If this is even more pronounced, our whole view of reality can be called into question. Jaspers suggested that SR is taken for granted until “it is disturbed pathologically and so we appreciate that it exists” (1963: 93–94). This crisis may give space to elementary forms of judgement. It is somewhat similar to Heidegger’s analysis of the broken hammer in *Being and Time*: breaking out of the habitual patterns, we can take the position of ‘mere seeing’ instead of the pragmatics of self-evident interpretation, that is, the naturalness of ‘as’ is no longer given (1962: 188–192). *Mutatis mutandis*, it becomes a separate issue whether something appears to us as real when the immediate givenness of reality is in crisis.

This analysis can be further nuanced by another phenomenologist, László Tengelyi. According to him, we can speak of a full-fledged experience only when a new cognition is created, that is, when something appears as something else. In other words, as that and not as this. In fact, in a certain sense, it is the categorial fixation of sense that refers back to the more originary experience of the creation of sense, and not the other way round. Tengelyi claims that reality is independent of consciousness, which can defy all expectations;

in experience, reality appears to us in the form of an event which we could not have seen in the light of the possibilities that were unfolding before our eyes, and which, therefore, we could not have controlled on the basis of those possibilities. It is precisely this unforeseeability and uncontrollability that gives us the experiential meaning of reality (2007: 24).

His two examples of this are the Lacanian suggestion that reality is the impossible, and the Lévinasian insight that the present is the real, which precedes and surprises the possible. It is precisely the source of the creative experience of reality that the unquestioned style of ‘as’ is broken and something new emerges. We may even say “now, this is something truly real.”

In concrete experience we are very often dealing with “impure mixtures” (Bergson) of these three modes. Even if it may happen that our interpretative models as a whole are thrown into crisis, this extraordinary experience is also given meaning and weight in collision with our previous reality orientation. The same applies to the experience of HR, which in fact presupposes all three layers. First, it assumes that there is a prior ordinary experience of reality from which the novel experience may differ. This may now be classified as ‘less real’ or outright ‘unreal’, but as a member of the comparison, it is very significant. Second, there is an essential role for the irruptive suspension of the ordinary style, which brings the unified style of ‘as’ into crisis and challenges it to a reordering, and brings a more explicit mode. Patterns of consciousness and what is given coincide less and less, the divergence becomes more and more confusing. Otherwise, the unquestioningly immersed experience of reality is so self-evident that the background effort to make it possible at all is not apparent. They can only be revealed through a rupture, in moments of crisis. In these cases, as Matthew Ratcliffe writes, it can manifest itself that “the everyday sense of reality is a phenomenological accomplishment that requires explanation” (2008: 183). It also reveals itself to be more contingent, more fragile, overridable. Finally, when the event-like experience has successfully transcended previous schemas, the newly given may appear as what it genuinely or more real – this is the fulfillment of the experience of HR.

It is possible to have an experience of HR that consists simply in seeing an already existing phenomenal entity or the entire preexisting phenomenal field as ‘more real’ or as “reality itself”. For example, an entity (such as a chair in Huxley’s case) or phenomenal qualities in general (such as colours) may seem more real. The other type of experience is about the givenness of a new, categorially different phenomenal content or entire new phenomenal fields, and is often described as a parallel reality or planes of reality that transcend the ordinary one. An excellent example is what Benny Shannon writes:

real though the Ayahuasca visions may be deemed to be, they are not usually confused with the normal perceptions of the ordinary world. Rather, the feeling is that what is seen in the visions pertains to other, separate realms. [...] Thus, then, Ayahuasca drinkers may experience themselves as perceiving states of affairs that they regard as real, but at the same time they can appreciate that these states of affairs are separate and distinct from those pertaining to ordinary reality. [...] the ability to differentiate between what are taken to be different realities does not imply that the person under the intoxication is constantly in touch with this world (2002: 265-266).

This duality of hyporeality and hyperreality may remind us of what is known in schizophrenia research as double book-keeping (Bleuler 1950: 127–130, 378; Sass 2014), but similar phenomena can also be observed in other areas, such as hypnosis (Sheehan and McConkey 1996: 169-172).

Sharpening the taxonomy of sense of reality. What this suggests to us is that the experience of reality is not necessarily homogeneous and one-dimensional. In this regard, we can greatly benefit from the research of Martin Fortier (2018a, 2018b), who tried to develop a pluralistic taxonomy of SR, focusing on the psychedelic experience but also using a broader comparative perspective. The division he proposed is as follows: 1) the affective SR which implies that objects in the world are characterized by variable affective valences; 2) the integrative SR which is based on integration of intra- and inter-modal sensory information; 3) the sensory-motor SR, which is characterized by the subject's ability to interact with and navigate through objects in the world; 4) the predictive SR that refers to the gating effect, whereby the brain makes a distinction between known stimuli and unknown stimuli and separates them into redundant and relevant ones; 5) the sensory SR, which refers to the intensity and richness of perceptual contents; 6) the apodictic SR, which refers to whether the experiencer perceives the phenomena that appear to them as fictitious, which allows them to keep a critical distance. It is worth mentioning Fortier's suggestion that SR is culturally embedded (for instance, he argues that whether a type of SR is indeed relevant may vary from culture to culture).

The experience of HR is also multidimensional. A good example of heightened affective SR is the exuberant love that is so often characteristic of mystical experience, as Montague, for example, writes: "for those glorified moments I was in love with every living thing before me" (1917: 11). If we look for an example of heightened integrative SR, we have Merleau-Ponty's description of the mescaline experience, who calls on Gestalt psychology to help him grasp *synaesthesia*: "now just as, within each sense, we must find the natural unity which it offers, we shall reveal a 'primary level' of sense experience which precedes its division among the separate senses" (quoted by Merleau-Ponty 2005: 264). The eminent sensory-motor SR can be illustrated by lucid dreams in which there is no longer a constrained physical body, but we are free to fly, penetrate walls, etc. (I believe that Fortier misjudges lucid dreams when he is content to say that they involve a less evidential experience of reality than, for example, non-lucid dreams.) The next type of SR is predictive, but, in this case, I think significantly differently from Fortier. His main example is prodromal psychosis, in which patients are gripped by a sense of alienation

and irreality, with the feeling that everything is constantly and suspiciously making new sense. Furthermore, while Fortier mentions schizophrenia and psychedelic experience for low-predictive SR and ‘normality’ for medium-predictive, examples of high-predictive SR are delirious experiences and degenerative disorders. The reason for this approach is perhaps that we are caught up in a strong predictive SR when the phenomenal field gives the impression of complete plausibility, and we are filled with a sense of overall credibility, because of the systematic juxtaposition of things, the repetition of patterns, the constant conjuncture of specifiable items and the reliability of affordances. Indeed, for example, the mechanical closure and predictability of a paranoid worldview can give the subject the impression of high, significant SR everything fits well into a consistent whole, never questioned, sometimes not even in its minutest details. However, Fortier’s model can only be generally accepted if we interpret the experience of reality in a static way, isolating the individual phases from each other. As I have suggested, the disruption of the interpretative style of ‘as’ can very well contribute to SR. For example, the fact that many psychonauts are filled with a strong sense of novelty does not diminish the intensity of the SR, on the contrary. Let me illustrate this with a comment from Huxley: “I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence” (1953). Hardly anyone would claim that Huxley, who, in his own words, was a witness to a “sacramental vision of reality”, would suggest that he was filled with a sense of unreality because of the feeling of novelty. Overall, I think that the predictive SR is essentially ambivalent. In some cases, SR may be reinforced by the fact that the phenomena we are facing fit seamlessly and organically into an already given stream of experience; however, in other cases, we may be thrown off by a new, different experience that is somehow out of control, and this may even result in an experience of HR. Predictive SR must be understood holistically, keeping in mind its complex dynamics. And finally, let me briefly mention the two remaining SRs. I have actually already given examples of increased sensory SR (e.g. “everything became intensely vivid in colouring”). A good example of increased apodictic SR is when something threatening happens in a non-lucid dream or a psychedelic experience sometimes described as a ‘bad trip’, such as a snake swallowing us and we are indeed, because we cannot keep a critical distance from the experience, scared to death.

According to Fortier (2018a: 14), there are other potential candidates for SR: sense of mineness, objectual reification, and metaphysical and mystical insights. Even with this addition, I have the impression that Fortier would have categorised differently if he had, in a phenomenological spirit, focused first and foremost on experience itself, and had not sought to identify the neural correlates of experience at all costs. I could take the experience of alterity as an example. During a DMT experience, sometimes beings may appear that we perceive as belonging to ‘other dimensions’, and at the same time their intelligence may seem to be significantly beyond ours. This otherness is felt to be more real the more it is experienced to be independent of our individual consciousness and patterns of ordinary baseline consciousness, and the more these beings appear to have their own agency, causality, intentionality, evolved personality, etc. This mechanism cannot

be traced back to predictive SR, since it is not merely a matter of the brain temporarily rearranging its relation to stimuli, but of some content as content inherent to experience, in this case that of alterity, that gives rise to a strong SR. I am by no means arguing that the neural correlates of these experiences cannot be meaningfully discussed (e.g. Winkelman 2018), only that a proper phenomenology can conclude from the knowledge of such an experiential content that it is a HR, and that this phenomenological dimension is not reducible to other SR types. Another simple aspect that may contribute to the sense of HR is that if, for individual or cultural reasons, the subject already associates the experienced content with a higher ‘realm’, for example an angel.

Another such aspect might be existential meaningfulness, the precise neural correlates of which are also hard to identify. What I mean is that if, for example, the experiencer comes to psychic insights about their own life, i.e., receives suggestions and advice that fit well into their self-constructed narratives (or perhaps correcting existing narratives in a meaningful, integrable way), this may contribute to the experience of HR. If during a deep hypnosis, an intense meditation or a psychedelic experience, memories emerge that were previously excluded from the baseline consciousness but the experiencer now recognizes them as their own, or if the experience prompts shadow-work in the Jungian sense, the message and implications of which they can also identify with, even if it takes effort, it may contribute to the fact that the experience is genuinely real or ‘more real’, the more revelatory it is in terms of the hermeneutics of the self. (This is not at all identical with the way Billon [published in 2023], mentioned by Fortier, describes the sense of mineness, which is simply the general first-person dimension of awareness, and does not refer to psychic insights about personality). The alteration of meaningfulness can also affect individual phenomena. It is a well-known feature of psychedelic experience that phenomena that would otherwise have ephemeral significance suddenly become highly relevant, or they even become the direct embodiment of an archetype (Charles Tart described the experience of a cannabis user who suggested that it is “no longer being the case of John Smith and Mary Williams walking together in New York City on June 30, 1962, but Man and Woman Dancing Their Pattern Together, as it always has been and always will be” [Tart 1975: 73]).

Finally, it might be wrong to assume that the growth of SR starts first of all with the emergence of some tangible positive. In some cases, the habitual dimensions and contents of mediation are being removed from the relationship between reality and us so that experience is considered to mirror the flow of what is real. As Jones writes in his book on mystical experience, “the analytical mind alienates us [...], conceptualizations embedded in language stand between us and what is real, interfering with our view of what is actually real” (2016: 14). Or, to quote Underhill: “What is it that smears the windows of the senses? Thought, convention, self-interest. We throw a mist of thought between ourselves and the external world” (1915: 25). In certain cases, the mind might be unconstrained by the usual structuring, the obstacles might be removed. The suspension of the conceptual and emotional apparatus of the ego, the peeling away of superfluous phenomenal layers, the dismantling of the established relations of worldliness, might in principle lead to

something that is experienced phenomenally as frontal, unmediated and direct contact with reality, and can be described as, for example, “seeing things as they really are” (in Buddhism, this is referred to as *yathābhūtam*). Taking this aspect into account can help to capture predictive SR and SR in general in a more nuanced way.

When the natural, unproblematic dwelling in reality is in some special way informed of the possibility of experiencing HR, the altered SR is often seen as an anomalous option that cannot or should not interfere with the unquestioned immersion in ordinary reality in a serious, meaningful way. The experience of HR, on the other hand, can sometimes radically redefine the relationship to reality: it can even become a yardstick against which everyday experience of reality is measured. Retrospectively, the seemingly ‘primordial’ experience can be exposed as an arbitrary construction, as a contingent model. In this spirit, for example, Tart writes: “ordinary s-SoC [discreet state of consciousness] is not natural and given, but *constructed* according to semi-arbitrary cultural constraint” (1975: 158). That is why we must be careful when William James and Alfred Schütz suggest that despite the multiplicity of realities (or sub-universes), there is one paramount reality, the reality of shared everyday life. It can easily turn out that what appears to the philosopher to be a natural, always given, starting-point-like attitude is in fact only that of his own contingent and particular culture or individual preference. For me, the phenomenology of ‘ordinary experience’ was only of operational significance in the context of the specific dynamics of the experience of heightened reality, but if it is reified and conceived in a static way, it may falsely ontologize what has only a relative status. We must always bear in mind the contingency, fragility, and relativizability of SR.

I would like to argue, in a minimalist spirit, that this type of experience itself does have value, regardless of its implications. These experiences cannot be explained away, and they undeniably manifest certain new and different layers of experience that can be considered phenomenologically ultimate, which are at least, as Henry Corbin would put it, ‘phenomenologically true’ (1971: 57). If these phenomenal realities exist, which, given the plethora of accounts and testimonies, we can hardly question, and, generally speaking, HR experiences are self-validating as states of consciousness, then experiencing them has at least the advantage of radically transforming the way one looks at the modal space of experience – one no longer sees ‘default reality’ (or rather the ideology created around it) as a necessity, but as a prison, a stepping stone or perhaps merely one of many phenomenal realities, as the case may be. It seems that we cannot claim with certainty that those who have experienced HR have grasped some metaphysically separate reality. Nor could we make such a claim about ‘reality itself’ in a metaphysical sense, if only because it turns out that the experience of HR can only be conceptualized by a layered, differentiated phenomenology, which precludes any experience of HR from being taken as the sole and only path to the sole and only Ultimate Reality. I partly agree with Chris Letheby on this point: “the message of entheogens is not that there is another *metaphysical* Reality that puts this one in the shade. There are other *phenomenological* Realities which put our ordinary, default mode in the shade” (2021: 219). However, unlike him, I think, that metaphysical inquiries should be left open, and that perhaps there is a meaning-

ful road from phenomenology to metaphysics. Ultimately, the experience of HR might retrospectively reveal what we are otherwise rarely aware of, that the vibration of reality is constantly taking place, that we are stretched between the pulsations of derealization and becoming more real, that reality is an often covert but still dynamic and malleable pulsation, that there are always already micro-ecstasies going on in the subtle layers of experience, moving from one state to another. Reality is sometimes shrinking into its own self-evidence, sometimes close to exploding. What is extraordinary is that sometimes we have the opportunity to face it, in a flight towards reality or in a passive self-surrender, not to lose sight of it anymore.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the experience of HR primarily through the prism of philosophical phenomenology, theories of SR and to a minimal extent -- through linguistic analysis and religious studies. I have sought to analyze the experience of HR not in isolation, but integrated into a broader field of experience, taking into account that HR can only be truly heightened in relation to something. Accordingly, I have developed a triadic model, according to which one mode of reality experience is merely HR, the other two being self-evident immersion in reality and the irruptive suspension of ordinary experience. I am convinced that this is the only way to understand HR holistically. Although I have tried to partly criticize and partly complement the model of SR provided by Fortier, I think that the typology could be even more differentiated if the analysis were to be complemented by further aspects in future research, such as the way in which transpersonal psychology, and, above all, Abraham Maslow, has provided an analysis of peak experience and plateau experience (which explicitly refers to HR), and the insights of the increasingly deep and broad research on altered states of consciousness. However, while a more effective communication between these disciplines is highly desirable, one must be cautious about seeking synthesis at all costs, since, as we have seen in the example of Fortier, SR clearly requires a plural taxonomy, and this will only be made more complex by further heterogeneous models of altered states of consciousness. Future metaphysical questioning, which I hope will dare to be sufficiently speculative, will necessarily have to take into account the insights of the phenomenology of HR.

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