

A spectrum of magical consciousness

Conspiracy theories and the stories we tell ourselves

Susan Greenwood

Susan Greenwood is a former lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London, and the University of Sussex, UK. Her email is sejgreenwood80@hotmail.com. For more information, please see susangreenwood.org.

1. I came to this conclusion from fieldwork among pagans over the years, and also a small Facebook survey on a pagan page asking for individual opinions on the subject after the storming of the Capitol. More details on the Police Pagan Association's work against far-right terrorism using pagan iconography can be found in Ball (2021).

2. I am grateful to Geoffrey Samuel and Santi Rozario for helpful discussions and their hospitality in Australia.

Ball, T. 2021. Pagan police join fight against far-right extremists. *The Times*, 31 December.

Barthes, R. (1957) 1973. *Mythologies*. London: Vintage.

Bateson, G. 1988. *Mind and nature: A necessary unity*. New York: Bantam Press.

Cornish, H. 2005. Cunning histories: Privileging narratives in the present. *History and Anthropology* 16(3): 363-376.

— 2009. Spelling out history, transforming witchcraft past and present. *Pomegranate, The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 11(1): 14-28.

Crockford, S. 2021. Q Shaman's New Age-radical right blend hints at the blurring of seemingly disparate categories. *Religion Dispatches*, 11 January.

Douglas, K.M. et al. 2019. Understanding conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology* 40 S1: 3-35.

Evans-Pritchard, E. (1937) 1976. *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

— (1965) 1990. *Theories of primitive religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fassin, D. 2021. 'Of plots and men': The heuristics of conspiracy theories. *Current Anthropology* 62(2): 128-137.

Gazzaniga, M.S. 1998. The split brain revisited. *Scientific American* 279(1): 50-55.

As the US Capitol's January 2021 insurrection shows, magical thinking is alive and well in conspiracy theories. Donald Trump's supporters, including alt-right White supremacists waving Confederate flags and QAnon conspiracy theorist supporters, stormed Congress to sabotage the certification of President-elect Joe Biden. Some erected a noose to hang the vice president for failing to support the rebellion. Standing out in the crowd was so-called Q Shaman Jake Angeli, a 'digital soldier' fighting a spirit war on President Trump's behalf with an arsenal of magical meanings (Crockford 2021). The Capitol insurrection left five people dead, proof of the power of conspiracy theories to engage with emotions of fear and hate. Trump's refusal to concede the 'stolen' election and the promulgation of conspiracy theories centring on a Democrat paedophile ring at the heart of government fuelled these events, which flashed live worldwide. Watching the effects of these stories live at the Capitol was shocking, for this was Western democracy – for better or worse – under attack, seemingly by the forces of unreason.

As the chaos unfolded, I realized how central a magical mode of thought was to the whole situation, and it was one with which I felt uncomfortable personally and professionally. This article forms the basis of my reflection on the insurrection relating to what we know about magic.

For most of my professional life, I have researched 'magical consciousness', a pan-human and cross-cultural mode of thought in the form of other-worldly or non-material reality (Greenwood 2000, 2005, 2009). Magical thinking forms a spectrum of beliefs and informs ritual practices based on participatory, analogical – rather than analytical or logical – thought (Greenwood & Goodwyn 2016). It underpins most areas of human life, from randomized synchronicities to healing (Goodwyn 2012).

My recent work suggests that understanding the dynamics of magical consciousness might help build a communication bridge between Western cultures and the animistic world views of small-scale or First Nations peoples through storytelling (Greenwood 2020). Stories and storytelling in one form or another are the modus operandi of magical thinking. As I watched the US Capitol become infiltrated by far-right conspirators, such as Jake Angeli, rallied by Trump, the effects of the conspiracy theories that

played out before my eyes shocked me. Uncomfortable but determined, I decided to investigate the political underbelly of the role of magical consciousness through a broad spectrum of storytelling.

'Q SENT ME'

Jake Angeli (aka Jacob Chansley, Loan or Yellowstone Wolf [sic]) is a decorated, ex-naval storekeeper seaman apprentice, a QAnon and Trump supporter and counter-protestor against the Antifa (anti-fascist) and Black Lives Matter movements. Angeli entered the Capitol building on 6 January and called on the other insurrectionists to join him in prayer, thanking Christ for America's rebirth in a struggle for power to understand 'the real truth' (Wong 2018, 2020). One of the conspiracy theories that fired conspirators such as Angeli to storm the Capitol was of a Democrat-infiltrated paedophile ring that abducted, trafficked, cannibalized, sexually abused and tortured children. Operated by past presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, out of a Washington DC pizza parlour, this ring supposedly reached the heart of the US government.

While trying to politically annihilate his opponent Clinton during his first presidential campaign in 2018, Trump had encouraged his supporters to chant 'lock her up' at massive rallies. He had also retweeted QAnon and 'Pizzagate' conspiracy theories, thus normalizing these stories in the minds of many (Rupar 2020). It is widely believed amongst QAnon conspiracy followers that Trump became president to save the country and the world and that 'Q' has high-level intelligence about the supposed paedophile ring. Q's following significantly increased and became mainstream during the Trump rallies. Many Q followers wore shirts emblazoned with pizza slices, with 'Q' (Fig. 1) and 'Who is Q?'. Angeli, one such supporter, is pictured holding a placard mounted on a spear reading 'Q SENT ME!' for a Trump re-election rally (Fig. 2). These images and messages about Q sent waves of postings on conspiracy sites across social media speculating on Q's identity. Such conspiracy theories strike into the hearts and minds of their believers as a manipulated metalanguage (Barthes [1957] 1973) ramped up by the technology of social media.

On 6 January 2021, while rallying his supporters at the Ellipse near the White House, it was not in Trump's interest to openly deny conspiracy theories surrounding his opponents immediately before his supporters marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to 'fight like hell' or lose their country. Angeli allegedly believed that he affected the quantum realm by walking the ley lines in the Washington landscape on the way to the Capitol, thereby accentuating the earth's magnetic field (Kunkle & Tate 2021). Once inside the Senate, he prayed for America's rebirth.

Angeli's image became iconic for the 2021 insurrection. According to *The Washington Post*, Angeli's spiritual path led from Catholicism to pagan and New Age-like religious beliefs, as reflected in his clothing and body tattoos (Kunkle & Tate 2021). It is worth looking at the symbolism of his appearance in more detail as it carries a particular political message. The Native American trickster coyote headdress, horns and facial war paint instantly signify something New Age, 'shamanic' and 'spiritual'. His body tattoos derive from the Nordic mythological tradition. Mjölnir, the hammer of the thunder god Thor is a symbol of blessing and a weapon of protection against the forces of evil; Angeli's waist is tattooed on the left side (see Fig. 2). Thor guards



Fig. 1. A Trump re-election rally, 'Keep America Great'.



Fig. 2. Jake Angeli, Donald Trump and QAnon supporter, Arizona, October 2020.

- Goodwyn, E.D. 2012. *The neurobiology of the gods: How brain physiology shapes the recurrent imagery of myth and dreams*. New York: Routledge.
- Greenwood, S. 2000. *Magic, witchcraft and the otherworld*. Oxford: Berg.
- 2005. *The nature of magic*. Oxford: Berg.
- 2009. *The anthropology of magic*. Oxford: Berg.
- 2020. *Developing magical consciousness: A theoretical and practical guide for the expansion of perception*. London: Routledge.
- & E.D. Goodwyn 2016. *Magical consciousness: An anthropological and neurobiological approach*. London: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Donna Haraway: Story telling for earthy survival*. [film] Fabrizio Terranova <https://earthissurvival.org>.
- Hristić, L. 2007. Defining urban legends. *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 2(2): 25–34.
- Kunkle, F. & J. Tate 2021. Trump supporter in horns and fur is charged with Capitol riot. *The Washington Post*, 10 January.

Asgard, the land of the gods, against the giants. See Fig. 4 for an archaeological image of Mjöltnir in The Swedish History Museum. Thor is depicted in diverse guises, especially in video games, cartoons and films (Fig. 3).

The three-triangle Valknut emblazoned on Angeli's left chest is another, more modern, Norse symbol representing the 'knot of those fallen in battle', the most valiant of which were said to be taken to Valhalla, the god Odin's hall, by 'battle maiden' Valkyries (Fig. 5).

The third Nordic symbol covering Angeli's heart is the stylized image of Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree containing nine worlds of intercommunication between gods and humans through the medium of myth. Fig. 6 shows a 19th-century version, but the meaning is like an all-encompassing world view of connection.

This symbolism contributes to what I would describe as Angeli's magical spirit identity in line with the storytelling of the QAnon conspiracy theories, an issue that I will return to below.

Conspiracy theories

The spread of conspiracy theories on social media tells us much about contemporary societies and how stories spread in seconds, such that protestors believing them could storm the government of a modern democratic superpower. Looking at a broader complex, including cognitive and contextual approaches, we can see that storytelling is at the heart of conspiracy theories and classical and urban myths and is a staple of magical thought. Think of the mythopoetic genres of ancient Greek, Roman or Norse formats or small-scale or First Nations cultures embedded through thousands of years. The Aborigine Rainbow Snake mythic corpus is one example I will refer to later. In general, these

myths are cultural languages that can explain the sacred, spiritual and non-material dimensions embodied in the cosmos and relationships between humans and animals.

There are beliefs in conspiracy theories across times, cultures and social settings, and they are emotion-based and psychologically motivated (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Conspiracy theories often include a secret plot to usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe established agreements, withhold vital secrets or alter the bedrock of institutions (Douglas et al. 2019). All of these would undoubtedly fit the storming of the US Capitol, but that is not the whole story. As in the case of Angeli, these stories have a spiritual element that has made the social sciences so suspicious of them. The Enlightenment legacy that myths are stories that are the antithesis of 'truth' and 'reason' is a lingering problem addressed by notions of historicity (Cornish 2005, 2009; Greenwood & Goodwyn 2016).

In this regard, it is too simplistic to dismiss conspiracy theories as false stories or fake news or bad science when believers bring in spurious 'scientific' ideas for justification. It is also unhelpful to reduce mythical understandings of experience to a rationalized history as this downplays the veracity of the emotional dimensions of participatory thought (Cornish 2009; Hristić 2007; Parmigiani 2021). Notwithstanding, much anthropological research has gone into witchcraft, sorcery and evil forces and occult cosmology (Rabo 2020). In her examination of 'conspiracy', the relation between New Age and conspiracy theories during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Parmigiani employs the term 'conspiracy-believing', as opposed to a belief in conspiracies, to focus on the aesthetic aspects of magical thinking among contemporary pagans in Salento, southeast Italy. Here she argues that the adoption of conspiracy theories among her informants, an eclectic group of witches and New Agers with beliefs ranging from Catholicism, Umbanda and theosophy to neo-shamanism and energy healing, is an expression of dissent towards the status quo. Parmigiani's interlocutors all share a neo-animist experience of the world. While they do not openly engage with political activism, they are 'committed to social justice and environmentalism: they are inclusive and cherish relationships with humans, non-humans and more-than-human 'coplesences' (Parmigiani 2021: 507–508). This wide-ranging spirit community wants to be recognized and legitimated in their magical way of inhabiting the world. They do this through their sensory and artistic practices of participation in a magical mode of being. It is time to look more closely at the notion of participation.

Participation

Angeli operates through what German psychologist Klaus Conrad referred to as 'apophenia', a concept he coined in the 1950s to describe the perception of meaningful patterns between unrelated or random things and bringing these back to an unseen authority who must be pulling the strings (Mishra 2010). Angeli views himself as a shaman on a crusade to protect vulnerable children from satanists. Apophenic communication is often associated with dysfunctional behaviour such as schizophrenia, involving delusional revelations and abnormal, random patterns of thinking. There is a tendency to pathologize this thinking. However, we cannot so easily dismiss apophenia as pathological – the connection of a meaningful pattern is formed not through unrelated or random things but emotionally connected things. This vital point takes the understanding of magical consciousness away from being labelled as somehow 'abnormal' or 'delusional'.

This makes sense if we look at Lévy-Bruhl's notion of participation, which he defined as a universal human process of making supposedly random, unrelated connections between things that fall outside a rationalism para-

Fig. 3. Thor, depicted as a superhero with Mjölir.
Fig. 4. Mjölir, Thor's hammer, iron, found in Björkö, Adelsö, Uppland.
Fig. 5. Valknut, symbol of interconnection and 'mark of the valiant warrior'.
Fig. 6. Yggdrasil, the Norse cosmic tree of life and death by Friedrich Wilhelm Heine, 1886.

Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1923. *Primitive mentality* (trans.) L.A. Clare. London: George Allen & Unwin.

— 1926. *How natives think* (trans.) L.A. Clare. London: George Allen & Unwin.

McGilchrist, I. 2010. *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the Western world*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mishra, A.L. 2010. Klaus Conrad (1905-1961): Delusional mood, psychosis and beginning schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* (36)1: 9-13.

Parmigiani, G. 2021. Magic and politics: Conspiratoriality and Covid-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89(2): 506-529.

Polanyi, M. 1946a. The foundations of freedom in science. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 2 (11-2): 6-7.

— 1946b. *Science, faith, and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— 1958. *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

— 1970. Transcendence and self-transcendence. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 53(1): 88-94.

Rabo, A. 2020. Conspiracy theory as occult cosmology in anthropology. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds) *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories*. London: Routledge.

Rupar, A. 2020. Trump spent his holidays retweeting QAnon and Pizzagate accounts. *Vox.Com*, 2 January.

Samuel, G. 1990. *Mind, body and culture: Anthropology and the biological interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shore, B. 1998. *Culture in mind: Cognition, culture and the problem of meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

van Prooijen, J-W. & K.M. Douglas 2018. Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48(7): 897-908.

Wong, J.C. 2018. What is QAnon? Explaining the bizarre right-wing conspiracy theory. *The Guardian*, 30 July.

— 2020. The growing influence of the QAnon conspiracy theory. Podcast with Anushka Asthana. *The Guardian*, 21 Sep.



digm (Lévy-Bruhl 1923, 1926). Lévy-Bruhl has shown that participation is what indigenous peoples have always done. Of course, this is understood and valued in small-scale societies as a shaman's unique spiritual insight into a community's problems. It is up to the shaman to interpret symbols, such as marks on a bone or patterns of shells, and Western thought has often dismissed this as irrational. However, such magical thinking is rational within its social context, though often viewed as inferior to scientific knowledge (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976, [1965] 1990).

In his search for 'native' thought, Lévy-Bruhl distinguished between ancient Greek mythopoetic and critical thinking. The former is participatory, while the latter is analytical and rational. For Lévy-Bruhl, 'mystical mentality' arises from the social dominance of mythopoetic thought; therefore, small-scale peoples were indifferent to reason, not because they could not reason. Lévy-Bruhl made small-scale peoples too mystical as he was trying to make a point, but in correspondence with Evans-Pritchard, they agreed that all humans cross-culturally think in both mystical and reasoned ways (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976, [1965] 1990; Greenwood 2009; Lévy-Bruhl 1923, 1926).

A spectrum of storytelling

Thinking about the recent events at the Capitol, I wonder if an understanding of magical consciousness as a participatory rather than an analytical mode of thought based on analogic rather than logic could add anything to this debate. Using the notion of magical consciousness as a lens to develop the earlier work of Lévy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard, it is possible to see a similar pattern of thinking behind the storytelling of myths of all types and conspiracy theories. We can construct a spectrum of magical consciousness with examples that have very different motives, objectives and outcomes. As Lévy-Bruhl pointed out so long ago, the context is all. Looking at this spectrum, on the one end are alt-right QAnon-type conspiracy theories like those of Angeli's that utilize a fascistic, neo-Nazi, Christianized 'blood and soil' battle between good and evil, intent on fostering racial and social separatism masquerading as a 'fight to save the world'.

However, at the other end of the spectrum, many contemporary Western pagan practitioners of magic, with whom I conducted fieldwork in Britain, might use the same or similar Nordic mythology, as indicated above in the Mjölir, Valknut and Yggdrasil symbolism, but with very different and broadly inclusive meanings. The majority of pagans I know are passionately anti-racist. A small contingent embraces the same racist agenda as in the US, but I sense that they are the minority, although the Police Pagan Association, a support organization for pagans in the UK police force, is collaborating with the Home Office to tackle far-right terrorist groups that use pagan symbolism.¹ For most pagans in the UK, myths and stories are the mainstay for communication with the spirits of the natural world – the gods and goddesses that evoke the forces of nature, as in the case of one of my interlocutors, Gordon MacLellan (Greenwood 2005).

Stories for everyone

Pagan shaman Gordon MacLellan was one of my first informants when I conducted fieldwork amongst British practitioners of magic in the early 2000s. Working with children and adults, using an eclectic mix of drama and art to engage them with their natural surroundings under the aegis of Creeping Toad environmental education, Gordon's approach is to help people find their own stories in communication with nature (Fig. 7).

Gordon became a key source of information for my research on practitioners' relationships with nature. He is 'inspired by the dream of the land' (Greenwood 2005: 73) rather than any specific mythology. The dream of the land has many denizens (Fig. 9), some of whom Gordon says he communicates with regularly or occasionally. Many such beings are represented in dance performances using masks (Fig. 8).

These spirit beings will speak to everyone if they listen, so the relationship with nature is vital, and the story or myth is the spirit 'vehicle' by which that connection is made. Many pagans broadly symbolize this connection as



LAURENCE CROSSMAN-EMMS



JAMUS WOOD



ADAM RHODE



SUSAN GREENWOOD

Fig. 7. Gordon MacLellan, aka Creeping Toad, environmental educator, Plas Power Woods, 2014, UK.
Fig. 8. The mask of the spirit of Crow, as danced by Gordon MacLellan.
Fig. 9. 'Old Man of the Woods', a 3 meter giant puppet created by members of the public during one of Gordon's workshops.
Fig. 10. Gordon with my two grandchildren at one of his storytelling sessions at Langley Vale Wood. Here they are creating their own story books about what they have 'seen, smelt, touched or imagined' in the 'Langley Vale Library' after listening to his stories.

Yggdrasil, the Norse cosmic tree, through which all processes of life and death spiral (Fig. 6).

This magical attitude helps people connect with the spirits of nature, as in Fig. 10, where Gordon holds a storytelling session at Langley Vale Library in a wood near Epsom in Surrey, UK. Gordon invited children, including my two grandchildren, to make their own books and write their own stories after listening to his stories.

More recently, Gordon has worked with Celebration-Earth! – 'creating a community of faith, art and environmental groups where wonder is at the heart of action' – to bring various groups together to facilitate change in the natural world. Fig. 11 shows Gordon addressing the totem Latermat in its final resting place from a journey from Mexico to COP26 as part of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Scotland in 2021.

A broader complex

Participation is a quasi-universal mystical or magical mode of human explanation in myths and storytelling, both among small-scale peoples in the past and contemporary Western mythologies – from Jake Angeli's spiritualized QAnon conspiracy theories to the environmental work of Gordon MacLellan. How can we understand this? The motives behind stories, be they creation myths or conspiracy theories, might be different – hugely different as we have seen here. Still, they employ a similar type of participatory thinking that I have summed up as magical consciousness. It is time to look at their historical, cross-cultural and cognitive aspects to get some idea of their quasi-universal features.

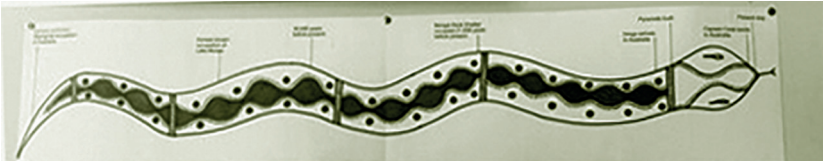
At its most basic level, this mode of thinking is a language that forms relationships between things created through the stories people tell themselves, and it transmits through analogic rather than logic. Polanyi (1946a, 1946b, 1958, 1970) wrote that all knowledge is personal, and as knowers, we participate within our universe, and knowledge is individual and relational. As part of that participation in the world, the stories we are shaped by and the stories we tell create meanings and context in the world. It might not be a step too far to say that, in essence, our anthropological theories are no different in principle; they are 'stories' in the form of frameworks guided by participant observation, scientific analysis and prediction, with their own history, which help us categorize and understand knowledge.

We are changing our stories as we learn more and understand science. The historical, scientific story supported the view that human beings were at the apex of the Great Chain of Being originating in medieval Christianity. Ordained by God, this story saw creation descending through angels, humans – specifically white males – to animals, plants and minerals. Stories from science now have more to do with ecological interconnectedness and the growth of fungi metaphorically and otherwise. We must change our attitudes to look after the planet during climate change. In this respect, Gregory Bateson was a pioneer by thinking through connections, relationships and patterns, replacing machine metaphors with a network of mind in nature (Bateson 1988). One such story is Haraway's (2016) symposium, which breaks down old boundaries in academic thought, mirroring the plasticity of how we think. Haraway's relational ontology shifts from autopoiesis' 'self-making' to the 'making with' of likenesses of recursive evolutionary systems with no defined boundaries. Engaging with each other in multiple multi-species exchanges as 'storytelling for earthly survival' is not so different from Gordon MacLellan's stories that he invites children, young and old, to participate in at his environmental workshops.

Some would like the categories between 'science and rationality' and 'magic and irrationality' to remain intact



MIKE BOLAM / THE CRICHTON TRUST



SUSAN GREENWOOD



SUSAN GREENWOOD



SUSAN GREENWOOD

Fig. 11. Return to the Earth ceremony for the totem Latamat on its journey from Mexico to Dumfries, Scotland for United Nations COP26 Climate Change Conference in 2021.

Fig. 12. The ubiquitous symbol of the Rainbow Snake features in much Aboriginal storytelling, as here at a training station at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve near Canberra, Australia.

Fig. 13. Sand painting showing the Rainbow Snake's cycle of life, drawn here by Darug Aborigine Evan Yanna Muru, Blue Mountains, Australia.

Fig. 14. The natural environment comes alive during the telling of stories. The ancient, sacred Aboriginal Rainbow Snake storytelling site in the Blue Mountains is complete with rock carvings and a female Rainbow Snake rock pool.

when including spirits or magic. This position belies the fact that the scientific method originated alongside the Enlightenment, which had its own form of 'storytelling'. The Enlightenment narrative elaborated one form of reason while negating another in magic, branding all aspects it did not want to incorporate as superstition. However, the principle of magic is reasonable when considered as a participatory mode of being; it engages with a different type of story. Reason has many faces that must be viewed through a historical and cross-cultural lens (Greenwood & Goodwyn 2016). Analysis of the context in which participatory modes of experience occur is all. Therefore, I believe we need to see the spectrum of the many ways in which magical consciousness plays out.

Theoretical storytelling patterning led me to research the idea that understanding the dynamics of magical consciousness might help build a bridge of communication between Western cultures and the world views of First Nations peoples. Testing this idea on a research trip to Australia in 2016, I investigated participatory relationships with the land by walking part of the songlines in the Blue Mountains with Aboriginal guide Evan Yanna Muru.² By comparing William Blake's philosophical myths that emphasize connection rather than the individual with the Aboriginal Dreaming stories, especially the Rainbow Snake (Figs 12-14), I explored what I hoped might be a magical participatory connection. In this sense, mythology was a point of communication, a broadly common language. As we walked the songlines, we connected with the natural environment of the mountains, which came alive during the storytelling. I could later relate this to Blake's perspective of psychic reintegration into a broader world view (Greenwood 2020).

As human beings, we share similar physiology, but physiology is subject to vast cultural differences through time and space (Shore 1998). The workings of the hemispheres of the human brain are not discrete in function as earlier lateralization theories would suggest (Gazzaniga 2002). The brain has remarkable plasticity, with the left brain hemisphere more orientated toward convergent, logical, 'scientific' analysis. The right brain hemisphere has a more divergent holistic, non-reductive, 'magical' or 'spirit' orientation, which is the primary orientation for storytelling (McGilchrist 2010). It must be emphasized that both need each other and must work together, as Lévy-Brul and Evans-Pritchard pointed out so long ago, and both orientations are essential. This is a critical point in post-truth cultures that devalue facts over emotion and beliefs. In this sense, the Enlightenment emphasis on analytical reason is reversed – the pendulum has swung from one extreme to another. What is needed more than ever is a balance between these different modes of thinking and being (Greenwood & Goodwyn 2016).

Last thoughts

Relational patterning so typical of magical participatory thinking brings with it a shift to a more ecological mind frame, which is less Great Chain of Being, or even Tree of Life with one root system and single trunk, to the metaphor of a rhizome or fungal mycelium (Samuel 1990). And mycelia are amoral; it is how we understand them and work with them, creating our own stories that are of the essence. Here the generalities of storytelling meet specific contexts. The context is all, but only if we assume that we are all creatures that tell stories to make meanings of the world. Anthropologists tend to prefer cultural specificities – and long may that be the case – to avoid stereotypes and understand the difference. But only if we recognize that we humans are more alike than non-alike can we overcome the type of hatred perpetrated during the storming of the US Capitol. ●