

Shamanism in the postmodern world: A review essay

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Introduction

When Jane Atkinson undertook her review of the state of shamanism studies for the *Annual Review of Anthropology* just over a decade ago, she reported on a “renaissance” of shamanism scholarship fuelled by a “multi-disciplinary interest in states of consciousness and mechanisms of therapy, and by popular interest in alternative forms of spirituality” (1992: 307). In fact much of this revitalization, Atkinson notes, has taken place outside the discipline of anthropology particularly in the fields of psychology and religious studies along with popular writings on self-actualization and New Age spiritualism. For anthropologists, there has been a general distrust of categories such as “shamanism” partly because, as Humphrey suggests, it gives the impression of a single unified system (1996: 51). Even so, recent scholarship in anthropology attests to its broadening appeal in such areas as archaeology (Price 2001) and more particularly rock art (Chippindale and Taçon 1998), performance (Laderman and Roseman 1996; Rodgers and Ziegler 1999), identity (Saladin d’Anglure 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Conklin 2002; Greene 1998; Jackson 1995) and neo-shamanism (Blain 2002a; Kehoe 2000; Wallis 2003a).

In the 10 years since Atkinson’s review a number of important developments have helped to shape the emerging course of shamanism studies. Perhaps most notable among these has been the appearance of the journal

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Shaman (an international journal for shamanistic research) in 1993. Adding to this has been a number of meetings organized by the International Society for Shamanistic Research (created in 1988), and in particular, publication of conference proceedings on such themes as: *Studies on Shamanism* (Siikala and Hoppal 1992), *Northern Religions and Shamanisms* (Hoppal and Pentikainen 1992), *Shamans and Cultures* (Hoppal and Howard 1993), *Shamanism in Performing Arts* (Kim and Hoppal 1995), and *The Concept of Shamanism: Uses and Abuses* (Francfort, Hamayon and Bahn 2000). As well, conferences held by other organizations have also resulted in major contributions as in the proceedings from: *Shamanism, History and the State* (Thomas and Humphrey 1994), *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology: an Anthropology of the North* (Irimoto and Yamada 1994), *Shamanism and Northern Ecology* (Pentikainen 1996), *Circumpolar Animism and Shamanism* (Yamada and Irimoto 1997), and *Shamanism and Culture* (Pentikainen 1998). Further, there have appeared a number of special journal issues devoted to areas of shamanism studies or on cognate topics inclusive of shamanism. These include: Cantwell et al. (1995), Overmyer et al. (1995), Chernela and Ehrenreich (1996), Pinto et al. (1997). As well, a number of important collections of articles in edited volumes have appeared in the intervening years dealing with various aspects of shamanism, some from a particular geographical or regional perspective (Bean 1992; Langdon and Baer 1992), while others have been more thematic in their focus (Sandness and Wong 1997; Price 2001; Harvey 2002).

Throughout this growing literature there continues to develop a number of prominent themes. In preparing this review essay we were drawn to the emerging course of scholarship in four of these areas. In archaeology, the field of rock art research has produced significant results in the application of shamanic approaches to our understanding of this imagery. Indeed David Lewis-Williams' work (2001) continues to demonstrate the potential for these approaches in exploring notions of human intervention and agency to specific images and features of images.

A second area of scholarship which attracted our attention was that associated with shamanism and performance. Here we are reminded, through the expression "words are not enough," that all the elements of performance—music, props, movement and audience are necessary to the conveyance of meaning (Laderman 1996). While this may seem obvious, it is essential to understanding the transformative effect created by shamanic performance. A third area of scholarship which caught our eye was with respect to shamanism and identity. Here we were struck not only by the qualities engendered by shamans (Saladin D'Anglure 1992, 1994a, 1994b) but also by their mobilization in the redefinition of knowledge as the centre of indigenous identity (Conklin 2002). Finally, we were drawn to developments in the area of neo-shamanism. While it was clear there was no agreement on the meaning of this term or even what it embraced, it seemed none the less to raise important questions. Could neo-shamanism, for instance, be applied

to contemporary versions of shamanism in traditional societies? Alternatively, was neo-shamanism simply an attempt by societies lacking a tradition of shamanism to produce practices modelled on those found in traditional societies? In this regard, could New Age and neo-pagan activities be deemed shamanistic in a larger (and also duly contested) sense of the term (Blain 2002a; Wallis 2001, 2003a)?

As became clear throughout our review, these areas of scholarship continue to challenge our notions of what we think shamanism is and its role within contemporary society. At the same time it offers an opportunity for an engagement with shamanism in a postmodern world. We conclude this essay with some ideas of future directions of research, drawing upon our work and work others have done relative to potentially transformative effect on shamanism in a world now linked through a wide array of media such as video technology and news media.

Shamanism and Rock Art Research

According to Price, shamanism has resurfaced in archaeological interpretations since the 1980s largely in the “context of the post-processual concern for ancient symbolism and the meaning-content of material culture” (2001: 7). Indeed it is here that the field of rock art research has received special attention. Over this period a number of works have reported on the emerging course of scholarship.

One such work is a collection of papers presented at the 1993 Alta Conference on Rock Art (ACRA) and subsequently published as *Perceiving Rock Art: Social and Political Perspectives* (Helskog and Olsen 1995). The collection begins with an overview of particular traditions in rock art research from different regions of the world before turning to three interconnected themes. These are: rock art considered within its social context; the use of ethnographic analogies in the interpretation of rock art; and finally, present political and ethnic perspectives relating to rock art. Here the theme of ethnographic analogies in the interpretation of rock art focusses on the insights passed on directly or indirectly from those who made and used the rock art. One such assessment along these lines is offered by Robert Layton in his essay “Rereading rock art: Text and discourse” which considers the correspondence between “readings” of rock art by Aboriginals today and that of a century ago. For Layton, such a “reading” means that rock art must be seen as part of a living, negotiated culture within which “iconography, style and context authorize certain readings of newly-encountered texts within established patterns of discourse” (1995: 224). Thus as Layton contends, “members of a culture within which rock art is current can identify the discourse to which particular figures relate... whether secular or sacred” (1995: 225). The essay by Patricia Vinnicombe and David Mowaljarlai “That rock is a cloud: concepts associated with rock images in the Kimberley region of Aus-

tralia,” which follows Layton’s essay, offers one such illustration. Here David Mowaljarlai, an Australian Aborigine, partly in response to questioning by Vinnicombe, discusses the connection between images on rock surfaces and the interplay of creative power or potency within the Aboriginal world. One of these images is that of *Wungud*—a snake found in association with permanent springs and pools and which serves as a source of power for *Banman* or *Maban*—healers or spiritual specialists. It is also clear, though, that *Wungud* in at least certain places serves as the source and origin of human life. For Vinnicombe “the quest for access to, and control of, unseen forces through concepts of power or potency, is a primary factor underlying the production of rock art” (1995: 243). As such, Vinnicombe’s contends, “it should be feasible to abstract the basic elements of a common ‘grammar’ or universal pattern of creative thought...” (1995: 243).

Finding a “common grammar” or undertaking a “reading” of rock art, though, is a good deal more difficult than it would seem at first glance. Part of the problem as Lewis-Williams discovered in his work in the Drakensberg mountains of southern Africa is that “...a rock art panel is not like meaningful words on an otherwise meaningless page...” (1995:75). In fact as Lewis-Williams found images that relate as much to the rock face as they do to each other. Metaphorically, the rock face serves as a “veil” between two worlds. By placing images on this “veil,” artists are essentially opening a portal between themselves and a spiritual realm which lies behind the rock face. The piling up of images one on top of another—what Lewis-Williams refers to as a “syntax at right angles to the rock face”—relates to the “...penetration of the rock face in shamanic journeys and experiences...” (1995: 75) and is an important component of composition as well as juxtaposition to infer meaning.

Equally important in this process has been the role of ethnography to gain insights into the possible meaning of images as part of a complex system of symbols to do with religious concepts and social values. Here researchers such as Lewis-Williams have sought to outline various areas of thought where equivalences can be drawn between beliefs and practices as these relate to notions of supernatural potency, initiation and trance performance (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1994: 207). With this established, ethnographic work is then used to elucidate features of the rock art. Central to this process for researchers like Lewis-Williams has been the identification of trance “metaphors.” Here therianthropes and other figures departing from naturalistic forms are viewed as hallucinatory forms or metaphors for trance experience. On the one hand, certain of these forms or metaphors are characteristic of the hallucinatory experience of all humans while, on the other hand, hallucinations of the deepest experiences derive from an individual’s memory and cultural circumstances (Lewis-Williams 1995:80). It is in this latter instance that access to certain types of this imagery and its interpretation may have been reserved to a powerful elite—suggesting rock art as a site of

struggle—with shaman-artists “intervening rather than passively responding to structures, initiating and pursuing social conflict, not just social harmony” (Lewis-Williams 1995: 81; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1993b).

Elaborating on this point, Dowson shows how the depictions of rain-creatures and associated beliefs were used by shamans “as a political resource to exercise their power and to control the behaviour of other people” (1998c: 85). Depictions became, recursively, a resource that could be used to bring about certain actions that reproduced ritual dominance. Additionally, according to Dowson, shaman-artists in placing their depictions at a number of different sites may have been making a territorial statement. “When people journeyed to him to ask him to make rain for them, they had to leave their own territories and enter his. In so doing, they acknowledged his control of land as well as his control of rain” (Dowson 1998c: 87).

Dowson’s essay appears in the volume *The Archaeology of Rock-Art* (Chipindale and Taçon 1998). The volume is a collection of 18 essays which explore the nature of rock art through three methodological approaches—the *informed method* using ethnography, ethnohistory or historical records; the *formal method* which approaches rock images, simply in terms of themselves, in the absence of other information; and finally, *analogy* which considers what can be inferred from an investigation of similar material. Dowson’s essay along with those of three other contributors (Whitley, Ouzman and Klassen) serve as examples of the informed approach. Like Dowson, all make the connection between rock art and shamanism, but each explores different dimensions of this connection. For Whitley, it is the symbolism of rock art sites as ritual locations within a landscape, and more particularly, the gendered quality of this symbolism throughout sites in California and the Great Basin of far western North America. In the case of Ouzman, there is a sense in which forager cognitive systems, their perceptions of landscape and shamanism intersect at rock art sites as both physical and conceptual places which find the suspension and re-ordering of ordinary reality. And for Klassen, there is a continuity from iconic to narrative modes of imagery in which the former evokes an eternal presence of the spiritual world associated with visions and medicine powers while the latter relates specific events, biographical or historical in origin, corresponding to the “ethnographically documented Plains Tradition of ‘war record’ imagery found on painted bison robes and shirts” (1998: 45).

Neil S. Price’s (ed.) *The Archaeology of Shamanism* (2001) centres on the place of shamanism in material culture studies. Focussing principally on the northern hemisphere, this collection of essays, grouped by region, provides a survey of archaeological approaches to specific shamanistic themes from studies of prehistoric “art,” constructions of gender, identity and body, to landscape, architecture, mortuary behaviour and human-animal relationships. Prominent here as an opening chapter is Lewis-Williams’ essay “Southern African shamanistic rock art in its social and cognitive contexts.” Adding

to the points already noted above, Lewis-Williams discusses four stages in the production and consumption of rock art images: the acquisition of imagery, the manufacture of paint, the making of rock paintings and finally, the use of rock paintings. Space only allows us to discuss the first and last of these stages.

The acquisition of imagery takes place in at least four contexts involving San shaman insights into the spiritual world: the trance dance, special curing rituals which do not entail full dance, viewing rock art and dreams (Lewis-Williams 2001: 26). The trance, or healing, dance brings San of all ages together into a carefully choreographed event which focusses attention on the shamans and their visions. As captured in rock paintings, there appear to be a number of ways in which participants could arrange themselves but one trend shows a dance form that placed a number of shamans on an equal footing to one with a single prominent shaman surrounded by smaller figures (Lewis-Williams 2001: 27). Added to this are dancers shown with lines emanating from their noses. The ethnographic record shows this to be blood, which in the case of shamans, is rubbed on those they wish to heal.

With regard to “special curing,” one or two shamans enter trance without the women’s supportive clapping and singing. This occurs when a person is particularly ill. In this circumstance a shaman first determines the cause of illness and then proceeds to draw it into himself before expelling it through a “hole” in the back of his neck. This supernatural event is visible only to shamans and appears in some rock paintings (Lewis-Williams 2001: 27).

In the case of viewing rock art, rock images serve both as a record of accumulated visions and experiences of shamans as well as a reservoir which can be tapped for power and insight. In Lewis-Williams’s view, “there was, therefore, probably a recursivity between rock art images and shamans’ visions. This two-way interaction sustained the parameters, though not all the idiosyncratic details, of San spiritual experience” (2001: 28).

Likewise, in the case of dreams, there was a relationship between personal revelation and socially sanctioned visions. Thus the painter of crabs, as an “underwater” motif representative of the trance experience associated with weightlessness, difficulty in breathing and impaired, blurred vision, did not become accepted by other painters who chose instead to express this sensation through the depiction of fish.

Turning to the final stage outlined by Lewis-Williams—that of the possible uses of rock paintings—the ethnographic record suggests that the images continued to be important well after their placement in rock shelters. An informant simply referred to as M explained to Lewis-Williams and Peter Jolly how when San people danced in the rock shelters

... they raised their arms and turned to the paintings when they wished to intensify their potency [*amandla*]. As they danced and looked at the paintings, power flowed from the images and entered into them. This was, I believe, her way of saying that the sight of the paintings deepened the dancers’ trance experience. The images were reservoirs of *n/om*. (Lewis-Williams 2001: 33-34)

Continuing, M explained how if a “good” person placed their hand on a depiction of an eland, the potency would flow into that person, imparting in this fashion special powers. Should a “bad” person place their hand on such depictions, M noted that their hand would adhere to the rock surface with the consequence that they would waste away and die. For Lewis-Williams, such action recalled the “laying on of hands” during a San curing dance:

... shamans place their hands on people and draw sickness out of them and into their own bodies; they then expel the sickness through a “hole” in the back of the neck, and it flies back to the spirit world from whence it came. A comparable process of transference of supernatural essence, it seems, could take place between a person and a painted image imbued with power. In the case of paintings, the images were thus mediators between the material and spiritual realms and entities. (Lewis-Williams 2001: 34)

For the San as perhaps with other peoples who created such rock images, these sites served as “nodes on the landscape” which became “sources of potency and active components in a complex ritual of dancing, singing and clapping that controlled the spiritual, or hallucinatory, experiences of shamans and, possibly other people’s as well” (Lewis-Williams 2001: 34). As time went on, many of these sites showed a building up of multiple layers of images. Some of these images would have been carefully overpainted, possibly in an effort to renew them visually and spiritually. This process of selection no doubt had social significance, with the sites most densely renewed probably regarded as places of exceptional personal and group power.

Shamanism and Performance

In an article on Malay shamanism Carol Laderman notes that all elements of the performance—music, props, movement, words and audience—are important to the conveyance of meaning (1997: 115). The entire performance is necessary to reveal the truths that allow for healing, and words alone are not the “sole messengers of meaning.” While this may seem obvious, it is revealed in various ways and with varying emphases in recent works on shamanic studies. Thus, in Laderman’s article she demonstrates how performance draws upon indigenous ideas about illness and personality to provide the basis of ritual drama.

Rodgers’ and Zeigler’s article, “Elisabeth of Spalbeek’s trance dance of faith” (1999) stands out for its bold approach to the application of anthropological theory to performance. First and foremost is the inclusion of medieval European mysticism within the global tradition of trance (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 100). Thus, Elisabeth is described as a “sacred, inspired dancer [who] embodied certain crucial tension-filled power dynamics of her culture and her moment in history. Many of these dimensions had to do with gender and social hierarchy” (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 302). The authors note that Elisabeth’s dance had shamanistic elements, but do not claim that she was a type of shaman. The value of their work lies in the dialogic alliance of

anthropology, art history and performance studies for the analysis of shamanistic performance. In this work the authors are primarily concerned with the performance of Elisabeth's religious ecstasy through the medium of female dance (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 315). The analysis concentrates on "Elisabeth's status as a female trance dancer operating within a conventionalized, male-dominated, hierarchical, official church ... via the work of I.M. Lewis and Mary Douglas" (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 316). Following Lewis, the authors assert that Elisabeth was, through her passionate dance performances, offering an external critique of conventional religious institutions. Yet, while her enactment of Christ's passion and interpretation of the divine usurped male roles, she was also supported by the local hierarchy, as it strengthened them against "more centrally positioned ecclesiastical authorities" (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 319). This performance is understood as transformative and repetitive, thus taking on the quality of routines that could be reflected on and altered. But at the same time the performance transformed Elisabeth so that she "became a site where Christ was made manifest" (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 324).

The authors also turn to Lévi-Strauss to demonstrate the importance of inversions and revisions of standard Christian worship. The expectations of experience held by the audience were manipulated by Elisabeth to lend authority to her performance (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 327). By associating her performance with the Holy Hours and substituting her body for that of Christ, Elisabeth was able to use the power of her trance/dance performance in association with standard ritual performance. In addition, the authors convincingly demonstrate the process whereby Elisabeth would have been able to bring herself into a trance state. Finally, Grotowski's theories of ritual drama are used to account for the way in which Elisabeth's physical performance is able to have such an intense impact upon her audience (of male clerics). The authors understand Elisabeth's performances as an "exteriorization" of her spirituality for the benefit of the audience. Thus, the various elements, while simplistic in terms of costumes, props, scenography and other effects, are rich in details of intimacy and confidence. There is a kind of discipline to the performance that is strikingly similar to the discipline and control exhibited by a master of spirits (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 335). The authors place Elisabeth within the context of other "brilliant ritual performers in other places and times" (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999: 339)—specifically shamans—and have uncovered her ideational and emotional world by drawing on performance theory.

Prattis, by contrast, is concerned particularly with the question of the meaning of symbolic communication between shamanic informant and anthropologist, and particularly the way in which a phenomenological engagement with the object of study can reveal different levels of meaning (2001: 38). Prattis further argues that "the deep mind in the unconscious projects symbols into mythology which then become the basis of liturgical reinforcement" (2001: 39). In other words, the universal human uncon-

scious is made manifest in myths that are enacted through mythology. Thus, Prattis' approach is centred on the subconscious and experiential comprehension of symbolic communication (via Campbell, Turner and Jung). Prattis suggests that the performance of myth allows a physical experience of the symbolic meaning attached to the myth that can then be consciously appreciated by performer and audience. For Prattis the importance of performance is in its function as a transformative process, rather similar in fact to the argument made by Rodgers and Zeigler that performance exteriorizes personal spirituality.

Placing her analysis within the context of a Sakha shamanic revival, Balzer notes at the outset of her article that she is "interested in the aesthetic power of shamanic chants as poetry" (1997: 93). The author lists the different types of oral genres, both traditional and post-Soviet that have emerged, and gives a brief account of the overlaps between shamanic arts and contemporary urban performance (including film, drama, written poetry, music and "shamanic rock"). Balzer makes the important point that all of this represents not simply a dilution of tradition but a re-emergence along contemporary lines (1997: 96). At the core of the shamanic revival is the shamanic séance, with its potentially powerful, consciousness-affecting performance. Performance, titillating and terrifying, astonishing and entertaining, and characterised by verbal dexterity, wit, improvisation, memory, humour and bawdiness, nevertheless must be marked by "spiritual depth" (Balzer 1997: 102–103). Balzer provides many examples of shamanic poetry, demonstrating the variety and complexity of the poetic tropes, which when combined with visual artistry creates an art form of remarkable intensity. While Balzer may be accused of being too close to her subject for objective analysis, there can be no doubting the depth of her appreciation of "form and content, purpose and symbol" (1997: 116).

Balzer notes that trance can be accomplished without performance (1997: 119). Howard asks the rhetorical question: "Can you imagine a shaman ritual without music?" (2001: 56). Howard offers a useful overview of music in Korean shamanism and its relationship to secular music, but he is somewhat prone to generalizations and assumptions about global shamanism that undermine his analysis. Lee (1993) demonstrates similar linkages within Korean culture in an article on shamanistic elements of Korean folk theatre. Kister's (1993) article in the same volume inverts the formula by examining the presence of comedic elements in Korean shamanic ritual. He argues that comic performance both draws the audience towards paradise and moves them away from it through ironic references to a paradise lost, thus imbuing Korean shamanic rites with a sophistication that has not been understood by classic students of shamanism such as Eliade (Kister 1993: 44). Kendall considers Korean shamanism as a "slow and by no means certain process" (1996b: 49), meaning that there is a learned and performed aspect of shamanic ritual that is as central to its efficacy as possession by or of spirits. Kendall makes the essential point that "performance—the ability to per-

form—is necessary to allow the inspiration and spiritual/psychological transformation” of both the shaman and (eventually) the audience. This insight applies not only to Korean shamanism but ritual performance globally, and as the author suggests, has been somewhat neglected (Kendall 1996b: 19). The ability to perform under varied circumstances, and its consequences for the social relevance of Korean shamans, is also discussed with regards to state hegemony in an article by Choi (1997).

The most comprehensive and challenging work on shamanic performance to emerge in recent years is Kim and Hoppal's edited volume *Shamanism in Performing Arts* (1995), a collection of papers on that topic presented at a conference organised by the International Society for Shamanistic Research. Some contributions to this work are rather controversial, such as, Kim's introductory essay on the “Ur-meaning” of shamanism and its relation to the performing arts. This essay takes as its starting point the assumption that there has been demonstrated to exist universal “arche-pattern based thinking” (Kim 1995: 3–4). Insofar as the author presents this as a statement of fact without evidence to demonstrate its factuality or references that might in turn provide such evidence, it is difficult to get beyond this basic problem. In fact, Kim's non-sceptical presentation of the idea of “arche-patterns” is an indicator of the essentially unilineal evolutionary approach found in this work. Kim is looking for survivals of the Ur-form of religious thought. Thus there is not simply a flaw in logic, for this flaw stems from an unsustainable approach. Despite this initial problem, there is much valuable information here. This work is based on research done with Korean shamans, and contains an excellent breakdown of the elements of a Korean shamanic ritual. Kim convincingly illustrates the similarities between ritual arts and performing arts, although this is an argument that has been made before, and does not necessitate arguing for “arche-patterns” to explain similarities that more likely arise out of solving similar problems with a similar set of tools in a similar way.

Similarly generalizing, but without unfounded assumptions, is Musi's (1995) essay in the same volume. Musi writes of shamanism in general, and while she draws on limited examples from a few traditions, this work is not specifically focussed on one particularly shamanic tradition. However, the value in her work lies not in the evidence that she adduces, but in the questions that are raised. In particular, the near and far nature of the (“Euroasiatic”) shamanic performance, and the activities of the shaman as actor, spectator and director creates a fictional representation of the mythological that has the “appearance of true reality,” while reality seems to be appearance (Musi 1995: 41). Through the abilities gained in trance, the shaman is able to create this interchange that—importantly—differentiates shamanic performance from theatre.

Horwitz's article from this same collection is an attempt to take the reader beyond performance and consider the content of the shamanic ritual, rather than simply the appearance (1995: 233). While a laudable desire,

especially insofar as the author makes some useful suggestions about methodology, it is unfortunate that he ignores the social scientific interest in the meaning of behaviour, regardless of whether the shamanic experience is “valid” or not. On the other hand, Horwitz’s argument that there is no barrier between actor and audience in shamanic ritual, and therefore no performance, is intriguing and should be explored further by other researchers *as a social phenomenon*. In fact, Samuel (1995) does this very thing in his article in the same volume. Other works within this same edited volume deal with the similarities between shamans and actors with a greater focus on theatre and performance theory (Dooley 1995), ritual as dramatic or dance performance (Berti 1995; Yamada 1995), and elements of performance in north Chinese minority shamanism (Guo 1995; Liu 1995; Du 1995). In fact, a number of articles on the shamanism of one north Chinese minority, the Manzu, have been published in recent years. In addition to the three latter articles just mentioned, performance related articles have recently been published about the Manzu by Shi (1996), Li (1993) and Stary (1993b).

Other authors whose recent works include considerations of the performative aspects of shamanistic rites include Ripinsky-Naxon (1993: chap. 7), Townsend (1997: 453–454), and Vitebsky (1995b: 120–127). Roseman’s (1991: chap. 4) monograph concerning Temiar music and healing, while not strictly concerned with shamanism, contains extensive descriptions of all the elements of shamanistic performance. Similarly, Averbuch (1998a), writing of shamanic elements in Japanese kagura dances, is not concerned with actual shamanism, but describes the preservation of shamanic elements in a performance that no longer encompasses actual trance. Laderman’s (1997) article on the unconventional performance of a Malay shamaness is of particular interest due to its effective illustration of anomalies and heterodox practice in the supposedly universal practice of shamanism. Schieffelin takes an approach similar to Kendall’s (1996b) in his consideration of a *failed* shamanic performance among the Kaluli of New Guinea, attempting to get at the “inner construction of the particular ‘ritual’ or ‘theatrical’ experience involved, and thus, on a broader level, to provide insight into the particular ways (at least performatively) a people constructs its own particular social reality” (1996: 62).

Shamanism and Identities

Shamans are well known for their mediating positions between the worlds of humans and animals, the living and the dead, the visible and invisible, left and right—to name just a few. As mediators, shamans often display qualities drawn from such “worlds” and in a combination unique to them alone. Saladin D’Anglure gives some sense of these qualities found in many cultures:

The shaman is the individual who, in addition to living in the visible world like everyone else, is also able to function in the reality of myth. He is the one who can readjust the pillars holding up the worlds, who can find babies pushed up from the

ground and give them to sterile women, who can bring back game animals to areas where none are to be found. He is the one who through levitation frees himself from the pull of gravity, who through metamorphosis, crosses the gender boundary, who through glossolalia speaks through the language of others, and who through clairvoyance sees through the obscurity and across all obstacles into the past or into the future. Like the great spirits, he also benefits from telescopic vision together with a tenfold increase in strength and speed. Like them, he is insensitive to pain.... He seeks aid from helping spirits of the opposite sex to transcend the sexual boundary more easily. (1994a: 208)

For Saladin D'Anglure, though, exploring these qualities among the Inuit of the central Arctic has led to the development of a model centred around the category of a "third gender." This he describes through three spheres of overlap beginning with the foetus and culminating in the shaman (1992: 236). The Inuit foetus is regarded as a miniature human endowed with consciousness and will "...psychologically fragile, unstable, susceptible and versatile..." yet hypersensitive "...it hears, understands, smells and sees..." what most of us cannot (Saladin D'Anglure 1994b: 83). In this context the foetus may decide to change gender at birth [*Sipiniq*] due either to human negligence, the risks associated with delivery or to the will of a deceased person (Saladin D'Anglure 1994b: 86). In this last instance, this is either made known by the deceased person before his/her death, through shamanic seances or divinations at the time of delivery or afterwards as an intra-uterine memory recalled by the infant. Closely associated with this process is the complex naming system of Inuit—it being reported that

The shamans say that sometime, on their spirit flights, they can see, behind each human being, as it were a mighty procession of spirits aiding and guiding, as long as the rules of life are duly observed; but when this is not done, or if a man is tempted to some act unwelcome to the dead, then all the invisible guardians turn against him as enemies, and he is lost beyond hope. (Rasmussen 1929: 58-59 cited in Saladin D'Anglure 1994b: 90)

From among this "procession of spirits," then, are ancestors or deceased near kin some of whom were shamans. As to other requirements from among the cases cited by Saladin D'Anglure there are: at least one spirit-helper of the opposite gender, the presence of spirits belonging to the supernatural mythic world, the presence of animal helpers such as polar bear, walrus, shark, wolverine, raven, and even caribou, metamorphosed as humans, and finally, the employment of eponymous spirits either from the list of ancestors, mythic figures or animal species (1994b: 104). Together with life's ordeals, then, we have the necessary conditions for the making of an Inuit shaman.

Saladin D'Anglure's discussion of the various factors at play in creating the Inuit shaman also helps us to more fully appreciate the complexity of the shaman's mediating position. It finds not just the Inuit shaman but shaman-

ship more generally mediating different levels of meaning: the personal, the social and the cosmological-political.

Writing with reference to the Siberian context, Balzer suggests that, “spirit name adoptions, ‘cover names,’ and some beliefs about possible reincarnation into different genders give us clues to the creative and flexible use of cross-gender referencing in some Siberian cultures” (1996c: 254). More broadly still, Humphrey finds herself drawn to the cultural creativity of shamans, “their use of previous images to build new ones, and their use of moral-emotional categories to establish the identity of spirits and explain their vengeful activities” (1996: 359). For Humphrey, linking this creativity to the constitutive actions of shamans in the political arena is of central importance.

One illustration of such linkage is offered by Conklin (2002). Here Conklin explores the rise of shamans as political representatives in Brazil. Of particular note is what Conklin sees as “a redefinition of knowledge as the core of indigenous identity, with a corollary recognition of shamans as the bearers of privileged forms of valuable knowledge” (2002: 1050). Over the past decade, shamans and healers have become prominent figures in the indigenous rights movements with the consequence that “indigenous activists increasingly identify themselves as shamans, and Native rights supporters and the media increasingly treat shamans as representatives of their people and icons of indigenous identity in general” (2002: 1050). A further development over this period has been a shift from a view of Native peoples’ claims to land and resources based on arguments about the morality of their cause to one about the value of their knowledge in the service of biodiversity. What this has meant, according to Conklin, is a move

away from claims about the superiority of specific indigenous resource management practices and toward claims about the value of indigenous knowledge that transcends the limitations of Western scientific knowledge. Instead of focusing on what Native communities actually *do*, this discourse highlights the potential value of what indigenous individuals may *know*. Whereas Native peoples formerly were positioned as guardians of the forest itself, now they are positioned as guardians of *knowledge* of the forest. (2002: 1056)

In this context shamans are considered to be experts on esoteric environmental knowledge. In the process this has solved a number of problems. One of these has involved indigenous leadership and a gap between the rhetoric of environmental stewardship and action—which has found leaders entering into contracts with logging and mining companies in return for a percentage of the proceeds. Whereas the image of such leaders has raised questions as to whether such individuals have or deserve their people’s support, the figure of the shaman is not necessarily linked to that of being a chief or tribal leader (Conklin 2002: 1056). Again, a shaman’s authority is tied to privileged esoteric knowledge and spiritual power. Thus while “chiefs” may

face media scrutiny and waning political authority, "...individual claims to traditional knowledge and spiritual agency are claims that outsiders are seldom in a position to judge" (Conklin 2002: 1056). At the same time, shamanic knowledge is outside the purview of Western scientific knowledge and therefore only partially open to evaluation by Westerners. Finally, "knowledge-based authority" is easily exportable from local Native communities to the wider world where it is difficult to determine how such individuals might be viewed back home (Conklin 2002: 1056).

In the Brazilian context, according to Conklin, a generic version of shamanism is developing which diverges from actual Native practices in two major ways: it is divorced from images of conflict, killing and death; and secondly, medicinal plant use is represented as the core of shamanic practice and expertise (2002: 1056). Thus, in the first instance, one finds illness, curing and shamanic initiation "permeated with metaphors of killing, hunting, and warfare"; while in the second, "discourses about shamanism's contemporary relevance focus almost exclusively on the plants and medicines, ignoring other practices, with nonempirically testable effects, that constitute much of shamanic activity in indigenous community contexts" (Conklin 2002: 1056-57). It seems that while in some lowland South American Native communities shamans may have privileged knowledge of medicinal properties of plants, this is not universally the rule. Further, in many Native Brazilian societies, medicinal plant knowledge is not necessarily the special province of shamans—it being widely shared among adults in particular women (Conklin 2002: 1057). As Conklin concludes:

The politicization of indigenous shamans and the "shamanization" of indigenous politics is a case study in how indigenous identities are being creatively reformulated in response to the need to negotiate among tensions and contradictions between multiple political discourses and constituencies. (2002: 1058)

Neo-Shamanism

The term neo-shamanism, as with most things shamanic, is subject to contested meanings. There seems to be no consensus as to what neo-shamanism means, nor what phenomena are described by it. Specifically, it is questioned whether the term applies to contemporary versions of shamanism in traditional societies, attempts in non-shamanic societies to produce a practice modelled on those found in traditional societies, or New Age and neo-pagan activities that are shamanistic in a larger (and also duly contested) sense of the term.

Johansen (2000) discusses neo-shamanism as an updated version of the traditional practices of indigenous peoples, specifically the Tuvas. In referring to contemporary shamanism as neo-shamanism Johansen is following the lead of Hoppal (1996: 101). While her terminology may cause some confusion, her argument, that there are substantial differences between classic

shamanism and contemporary manifestations, is compelling. She notes that the cognitive systems of temporally separated shamans must differ, since recent shamans are exposed to education, the influence of other religions and television; that neo-shamanism is international in nature, and thus modern shamans are influenced by international expectations; that the audience extends beyond the in-group, and includes sceptics and non-believers, altering the nature of the performance; and that there is a "strong element of ethnicity" in neo-shamanic performance (Johansen 2000: 301). The question as to the nature of shamanism is rendered much more nuanced and complex in Johansen's sophisticated approach to the subject. This consideration of traditional shamanism responding to the forces of globalization is also found in Hogarth's (2001) paper on the Korean shamanistic heritage and Vitebsky's (1995a) discussion of Sora and Sakha shamanism. The mirror image of this is Chernela and Leed's (1996) discussion of anthropologists as a type of shaman in their role as cross-cultural and international travellers (also considered by Ehrenreich 1996).

In the same volume with Johansen, Vazeilles (2000) presents a fairly comprehensive overview of the intersection between the New Age and shamanism. While this article is essentially a summary of the activities of prominent promoters of neo-shamanism (in the second and third senses described above) it ends with a strongly worded condemnation of the neo-colonialist aspects of the movement (Vazeilles 2000: 380). And what precisely is this movement? Various attempts to address this question have been forthcoming in the past decade. Wallis (1999: 42) addresses it in an article that describes neo-shamanism as "a spiritual path for personal empowerment" largely derived from popularisers like Michael Harner. Wallis suggests that there is value in the neo-shamanistic movement, and that better communication between academics and neo-shamans will place neo-shamanism in a cultural context that will make its meaning clearer.

Daniel Noel, a psychologist of religion, has produced a sceptical, scholarly work (1997), written in an engaging style, which manages to take neo-shamanism seriously without promoting it. Much of Noel's work revolves around the importance of the re-emergent Arthurian figure, Merlin, as a shaman. Merlin is described as "a role model for Western shamanism who seems to be resurfacing in popular culture today" (Noel 1997: 16). While asserting Merlin's status as a shaman without exploring in depth what that term means is problematic, the value of this book lies in Noel's conception of neo-shamanism as Jungian imaginal healing. That is, Noel is attempting to understand the making of modern Western "shamanism" through Jungian psychology, rather than with reference to other traditions (1997: 21). The imagining is recognized as wholly Western, and therefore its meaning is found in the Western imagination. At the same time, Noel draws attention to the overlapping worlds of anthropology and literary fiction, and ties in our understanding of neo-shamanism to the new anthropology (1997: 88–93).

This is useful for drawing attention to the ways in which anthropological writing forms a part of the “centrality of imagining” that gives neo-shamanism its meaning.

Another work that contributes to our understanding in a way that is essentially relativistic is Brown (1997), in which the author differentiates between shamanising and channelling based on context. This stands in opposition to works by authors such as Willis (1994) or Harvey (1997), which conflate channelling, past-life regression and shamanising, treating them all as one phenomenon. Comparing Brown (1997) to these latter two works represents the difference between an attempt by the ethnographer to create an analytically satisfactory understanding on the one hand, and the presentation of an experiential standpoint on the other.

Kürti's survey of the cultic milieu in Hungary includes a section on neo-shamanism (2001: 40). However, what he seems to be discussing in this excellent article would be better characterized as a New Age phenomenon or perhaps part of the men's movement. Many articles purporting to relate to shamanism are essentially reporting on various manifestations of the New Age syncretisms (Albanese 1993; Carroll 1992; Fenkl 1999). Albanese's work is particularly useful as a survey of different contributions to the development of New Age “shamanic spirituality,” predicated on the assumption that the defining element (à la Eliade) of shamanism is ecstatic trance. While this is arguable, the strength of the article lies in the historic context that is provided for understanding the various streams that have fed into the New Age. A particularly interesting aspect of Albanese's exploration is that she demonstrates how a “scientific” stream is mingled with the other elements, lending this phenomenon a distinctly Western consciousness.

Works dealing with contemporary paganism, while not explicitly about neo-shamanism, do posit a strong phenomenological connection between paganism and shamanism (Hannagraaff 2002; Harvey 2002; Jones 2002; Samuel 1996). Jones (1998) goes so far as to argue that Europeans retain a native tradition that is at the root of modern paganism, without owing any particular debt to colonized peoples. Especially prominent in this regard are works in the volume *Paganism Today* (Hardman and Harvey 1996). In the introduction, Charlotte Hardman suggests that paganism is “a religion based on Nature worship and ancient indigenous traditions” (1996: ix). Significantly, Hardman argues that contemporary paganism is detectable in numerous “spiritual paths,” including shamanism. In essence, paganism is understood as a highly diverse phenomenon with many manifestations (Hardman 1996: xi). Since one of its core beliefs is that there is no single correct belief system, it is a natural extension of paganism to include a variety of traditions. From a critical perspective this may seem like another manifestation of cultural hegemonism. Hardman writes of a singular shamanic worldview that she seems to consider universal and as fitting the “anthropomorphic view” of paganism. This viewpoint and the other papers in this volume

provide insight into the ways in which peoples of European descent justify their construction of a new spirituality that draws heavily and unapologetically upon the traditions of indigenous peoples. Gordon MacLellan's (1996) chapter in the same volume makes the most explicit claim to a shamanic practice in the West that owes no apologies or explanations to a cultural other, but is justified in its existence by the service that it offers to the community.

Harvey (1997) does lay explicit claim to shamanism as an aspect of neopaganism in *Contemporary Paganism*. For Harvey, shamanism is simply a name derived from anthropology that is used to describe things that some European peoples were already doing (1997: 110). Furthermore, it is "petulant to insist" that Westerners cannot refer to themselves as shamans. For Harvey, the claim to being a shaman depends on moving beyond self-discovery and self-empowerment, and in fact the changes experienced by Westerners who utilise shamanic techniques must be "dissimilar to changes induced by Western psycho-therapies (Harvey 1997: 112). For Harvey, then, paganism has a more legitimate claim on shamanism because it represents a conversion for its practitioners from the usual contemporary Western religious belief systems. Shamanism revitalizes and expands paganism by encouraging experimentation (1997: 124). In turn, shamanism is expanded by its association with paganism because it takes on an explicit role in environmentalism and changing the world view of Westerners. From this perspective what is important about neo-shamanism as an element of neo-paganism is how well it works, and not its derivation.

Along the same lines, but far more scholarly in nature, is Lindquist's monograph on Swedish neo-shamanism (1997). While it is true that here again we find a conflation of paganism and shamanism, nevertheless her work is generally respectful of the people that she studies while at the same time dedicated to the exploration of the phenomenon as a social construct. Lindquist provides an analysis based largely on her understanding of the ritual aspects of neo-shamanism. As such, what is important about this work is what it reveals about the nature of ritual—specifically, how it is created—and what a particular cultural context contributes to its creation. Thus, while Swedish neo-shamanism is indebted to non-Western traditions, the nature of postmodern Swedish society, especially in a milieu dominated by actors, writers and artists, leads to the creation of rituals that are distinct (Lindquist 1997: 181). This is an important analytical insight if we are to get past the question of whether neo-shamanism enjoys "legitimacy." A related work is Hutson's (2000) article on rave culture, which brings to scholarly attention the frequently ecstatic nature of the experience and allows us to identify the so-called techno-shaman as another variant in an evolving Western system of spiritualities.

However, the derivative nature of neo-shamanism leads us to an important counterpoint to the explorations and exploitations of shamanism: the

critique arising from an indigenous perspective on neo-shamanism, also referred to as white shamanism, modern shamanism or urban shamanism (Buckskin 1992; Churchill 1992; Kehoe 1996, 2000; Johnson 1995; Smith 1993; Rios 1994; Vazeilles 2001). Kehoe (2000) provides an excellent summary of the issues surrounding shamanistic ritual and neo-shamanism. She writes that some “believe they really are assisting clients to ‘cross the shamanic bridge.’... Some sellers appear merely earning a living. A few can be dangerous, callous of clients safety, or even sadistic” (2000: 81). But it is in approaching neo-shamanism as “ ‘idealized and metaphorical images of shamanism’ ” (2000: 85 quoting Townsend in press) that Kehoe’s critique is most informative. There is a tinge of dismay in Kehoe’s writing as she details the grab-bag nature of New Age spirituality and its inward-looking, self-referential and individualistic appropriation of shamanic techniques. Perhaps most striking is the description of the spiritual dangers encountered by traditional shamans, as opposed to the marvellously benign spirit-world of “shamanic journeying” (2000: 86). Finally, Kehoe suggests that the focus on “native spirituality” in various guises distracts attention from the real issues that indigenous peoples face, causes them distress when they encounter “unqualified persons violating religious practices” and misrepresents the reality of varied shamanic traditions (2000: 88–89).

One of the most significant works to appear in the past ten years is Wallis’ *Shamans/neo-Shamans* (2003). The author has produced a broadly inclusive survey of the antecedents, sources and varied practitioners of shamanistic systems. Wallis also provides an overview of the critiques of neo-shamanism and places the whole debate within the context of the varied agendas of academics, indigenous peoples and neo-shamanic practitioners. His approach is critical, including the use of archaeology to determine as far as possible the reality of traditional European shamanising. His analysis in this regard is inconclusive (Wallis 2003: 137), but he draws attention to the biases of archaeologists as much as neo-shamans. Most valuably, Wallis draws our attention to the re-sacralisation of historic and archaeological sites, and the potential for damage and conflict that results from neo-shamanic (or perhaps neo-pagan?) attempts to reclaim those sites for their own purposes (Wallis 2003: chap. 5 *passim*).

Shamanism in a postmodern world

The areas of scholarship we have reviewed continue to challenge our notions of what we think shamanism is and its role within contemporary society. We conclude this essay with some ideas of future directions of research, drawing upon our work and work others have done. Recent work has been informed by the recognition of the resiliency of shamanism in the modern context, while also considering the potentially transformative effect on shamanism by a wide array of media such as video technology and news media as well as the

spread of literacy and the New Age interest in shamanic praxis. An emerging area of research seeks to understand how shamanism has been responding creatively to these new possibilities.

Related to explorations of the impact of new media are other research questions. One implicates the classic definition of shamanism, with its emphasis on ecstatic trance, and asks whether this definition is likely to hold, particularly at a time when shamanism seems to be as much about communication on the Internet as with the ineffable. The social and political dimensions of shamanic practices, opportunities for communication—as well as opportunistic communications—and control of competing representations, such as those described in Holyoak's study of Manzu video productions (2005), all figure into current expressions of shamanism. New technologies contribute to the reappraisal of traditional ideas about shamanism, particularly when shamans, shamanic practitioners and consumers of shamanism can exchange information and understandings of what constitutes "real shamanism" in virtual worlds. As Holyoak found in his work with the Manzu, videotaping of the performances of clan shamans was widespread as was the viewing of these tapes by shamans and others. This led to comparisons among performances and more generally to an assessment of shamanistic technique, movement and the power of their singing. Another direction for shamanism studies deals with the new importance being enjoyed by shamans and whether this would result in a radically different role for shamans, or perhaps with time, new consistencies of form, given current possibilities of readily-accessible information.

Another question is the effect of global capitalism on shamanic practices, as seen in work by Hope MacLean (2003) who wonders what happens when an ancient shamanic culture such as the Huichol enters the global marketplace. Here yarn paintings are transformed from religious offerings to a major art-form, sold throughout the world.

Considerations of consumerism, the effects of late capitalism, commodification, the impact of new technologies and the changing profiles of cultures in circulation perhaps signal future research in shamanism studies. The past 10 years of research and the directions this field of study has taken are documented in the accompanying bibliography.

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