

## Trends in Contemporary Research on Shamanism

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### Abstract

Recent research on the topic of shamanism is reviewed and discussed. Included are works appearing since the early 1990s in the fields of anthropology, religious studies, archaeology, cognitive sciences, ethnomusicology, medical anthropology, art history, and ethnobotany. The survey demonstrates a continued strong interest in specific ethnographic case studies focusing on communities which make use of shamanic practices. Shamanic traditions are increasingly studied within their historical and political contexts, with strong attention to issues of research ideology. New trends in the study of cultural revitalization, neoshamanism, archaeology, gender, the history of anthropology, and the cognitive study of religion are highlighted.

### Keywords

shamanism, history of anthropology, revitalization, neoshamanism

Nearly two decades ago, Jane Atkinson (1992) could express surprise and a certain satisfaction at the reinvigorated research on shamanism that she noted in her review of the field. Scholars like Atkinson herself had breathed new life into a term that many scholars had considered to be only a relic of the history of their disciplines, finding new communities and contexts in which to explore the intricacies and nuances of localized shamanic traditions. Today, in the year 2010, one can see that the trends Atkinson noted have only continued to grow in importance, with valuable research ongoing within a number of different theoretical frameworks and a marked increase in scholarly and popular publication venues, including new presses and journals and a burgeoning internet presence for shamanic topics. The field has witnessed an unabated

ethnographic exploration of “shamanisms” (a term intended to reflect the particularizing ethnographic trends Atkinson noted), with new and fascinating research on various aspects of shamanic healing, music, material culture, gender, revitalization, and relations with the state, and increasing research that attempts to reconstruct past shamanisms through historical, ethnographic and/or archaeological evidence. New trends which were only nascent at the time of Atkinson’s review have now blossomed into full-fledged scholarly enterprises, such as the vein of research I shall term below the “rhetorical approach,” i.e., the scholarly examination of the development of “shamanism” itself as a scholarly term and academic construct, particularly as a reflection of broader trends within the academic study of religion and anthropology. The scholarly study of the cognitive science of religion, novel and appealing when Atkinson wrote in the early 1990s, has steadily grown in influence and acceptance in the academic examination of shamanism. Finally, an area which Atkinson covered literally as a postscript to her review — the study of neoshamanism as a religious movement and as a reflection of the role of ethnographic literature in the Western romantic engagement with the “primitive” — has become a major area of scholarly inquiry, with insightful studies by scholars both critical of neoshamanic phenomena and, increasingly, by scholars sympathetic to its goals or motivations. In the last decade particularly, scholars of religion have begun to explore neoshamanism’s use of ethnographic data, its underlying philosophical premises, and the practices and communities constituted or drawn together by neoshamanic activities. The present paper surveys various trends in shamanic research since the publication of Atkinson’s review and highlights some of the productive directions scholars are moving in their investigation of past or present shamanisms, neoshamanisms, and the relation of such phenomena to state and intellectual institutions.

It should be noted that part of what I shall discuss below is drawn from my recent overview of past and present studies of shamanism, *An Introduction to Shamanism* (DuBois 2009). Whereas that volume, however, presents the field as it developed from the medieval period to the present, with a strong focus on the evolution of scholarly understandings of shamanic traditions over time, the current review focuses only on the most recent developments, some of which were too new or

provisional for inclusion in a volume designed to serve as an introduction to the field.

### **Particularized Ethnographic Approaches**

By adopting Holmberg's (1983) use of the term "shamanisms" in her review, Atkinson sought to underscore a key component of the renewed anthropological interest in shamanic traditions in the 1990s: a turning away from broader examinations of shamanism as an overarching, superorganic phenomenon (Eliade's "archaic technique" or various other atemporal and culture-transcendent approaches) in favor of close ethnographic examinations of the experiences and perceptions of particular shamans in particular cultural settings. By pluralizing the term, Atkinson reminded readers of this more delimited ethnographic focus and the theoretical and disciplinary dispositions it reflected. Such research was to be regarded as a "corrective" to earlier synthetic theories.

An impressive number of culture-specific ethnographies have thus emerged in the last two decades, aimed at describing shamanism within particular cultural settings. Many of these have focused on Asian communities (Her 2005, Lardinois 2007, Nicoletti 2004, Omar 2006, Ortner 1995, Peters 2004, Purev and Purvee 2004, Riboli 2000, Smyers 1999); Chilson and Knecht's anthology, *Shamans in Asia* (2003), is a particularly fine presentation of specific, historically-inflected ethnographic case studies in this area (see especially Naoko 2003 in that volume). Laura Kendall's (1995) case study of a single Korean woman's initiation into a shamanic role provides a fascinating glimpse of the individual experiences and social dynamics too often obscured in broader studies. The work *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge and Power among the Daur Mongols* (1996), written by Caroline Humphrey with her Daur Mongol collaborator Urgunge Onon, represents a model for engaged, complex examination of shamanic traditions within a given cultural milieu. It also serves as a useful illustration of the ways in which scholars from outside a shamanic tradition can work with native authorities from within to produce works rich in ethnographic detail and historical nuance. Together, these various works depict traditional shamanisms gripped in processes of change, as Asian societies

negotiate a balance between traditional modes of spirituality and healing and the allures or pressures of an increasingly globalized, technologically advanced world.

Specific or comparative ethnographies of shamanism in North and South America have also continued to appear in the last two decades as well, although these are often more focused on a single research question (e.g., Cayon 2008, Crepeau 2007, Furst 2006, Lenaerts 2006). Ana Mariella Bacigalupo's various works (1998, 2001, 2004) explore Mapuche *machi* shamans in Chile, attending to similar questions of cultural change and its effects on shamanic traditions. Her 2004 study of gender transgression represents a useful and evocative contribution to the discussion of shamanic gender discussed below. Schaefer and Furst's (1996) volume on Huichol culture provides a fine-grained overview of Huichol peyote rituals and the role of the *mar'ákáme* in past and present Mexico. Neil Whitehead's (2002) ethnography of *kanaimà* and Whitehead and Wright's (2004) anthology of works on Amazonian assault sorcery explore shamanic aggression in specific cultural traditions, tying such ritual assault to the complexities of Amazonia's colonial and postcolonial history. A number of other excellent ethnographies of North and South American shamanisms are discussed below.

Given the plethora of specific examinations, a number of scholars have sought to create overarching works that help readers access the burgeoning scholarship in the field. Graham Harvey's *Indigenous Religions: A Companion* (2000), Harvey's *Shamanism: A Reader* (2002), Norman Bancroft Hunt's *Shamanism in North America* (2002), and Walter and Fridman's (2004) *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices, and Culture* all seek to help the reader negotiate the bewildering array of studies that have appeared in recent years. Naturally, such overarching texts can seldom convey the full richness of the particularist research described above; nonetheless, they can serve as valuable works of first resort to researchers and generalists interested in exploring a new topic.

## Particularist Subfields

In connection with the ethnographic shift toward situated specific case studies has come a focus on particular topics within shamanism, such

as healing, narrative, music, material culture, gender, and ethnobotany. While such studies may be published in journals of religion or anthropology, they may also appear in the journals of other disciplines, and reflect the widened scholarly discussion of shamanism today.

Some of the most exciting research in the particularist vein in the last two decades has occurred in the ethnography of healing. Although scholars of shamanism have long recognized the importance of healing as a context and purpose of shamanic rituals, earlier research was often tinged by scholarly skepticism regarding the efficacy of shamanic rituals and sometimes an open hostility toward practitioners as charlatans or self-deluded neurotics. A shift toward the exploration of shamanic healing as a socially-negotiated process within a shaman's wider community was well underway at the time of Atkinson's 1992 review, finding expression in studies of shamanic rituals as therapeutic acts or, in the cognitive science vein, exploring the possible psychological or physiological mechanisms of such events as instances of symbolic healing, social bonding, endorphin release, or catharsis (for summary, see DuBois 2009, 133–150). In the last two decades, the exploration of shamanic healing as therapy has continued to attract researchers, with many new studies appearing in the field of medical anthropology and related disciplines (e.g., Sasamori 1997, Scherberger 2005, Sidky 2009). Particularly enlightening are Laderman and Roseman's anthology *The Performance of Healing* (1995) and Connor and Samuel's (2001) *Healing Powers and Modernity*, both of which can serve as excellent introductions into the ethnographic complexities of (shamanic) healing events.

The area of narrative has attracted a number of excellent studies in recent years, including Gregory Maskarinec's (1995) study of Nepalese shamanic oratory, Malotki and Gary's (2001) anthology of Hopi narratives, and Cesarino's (2006) study of poetic parallelism in South American shamanic utterances. Kira Van Deusen's (1999, 2004) collections of contemporary shamanic narratives within post-Soviet Siberia are also noteworthy and tie in with wider discussions of shamanic revitalizations and neoshamanism discussed below, particularly with reference to the post-socialist world.

Methodologically distinct from these studies of narrative are ethnomusicological examinations of shamanic music and musical equipment

(e.g., Aubert 2006, During 2006, Lecomte 2006, Lee 2004, Potapov 1999, Walraven 1994, Williams 1995). Particularly noteworthy as examinations of shamanic music in a context of massive cultural change are Marina Roseman's various studies of Malaysian Temiar music-making (1995, 2001), extensions and refinements of her earlier *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest* (1991). While all of these studies focus on particular shamanic traditions and their associated musical performances, various scholars have examined the psychological or neurophysiological effects of music more generally (e.g., Becker 2001, Jourdain 2006, Levitin 2006). The study of music's emotional and physical effects parallels the wider cognitive scientific examinations of shamanism described below.

Likewise, material culture has attracted a number of recent particularist studies, including Barbara Iliff's excellent examinations of Tlingit shamanic kits (1994, 1997) and Peter Furst's (2007) examination of Huichol shamanic yarn paintings. A team of scholars led by Juha Pentikäinen assembled a fascinating and diverse array of Siberian shamanic items for museum display; the catalogue from the exhibition is a good source for the study of shamanic art (Pentikäinen et al. 1998). Barre Toelken (2003) offers insights on the ethics of displaying Native American shamanic art. Robin Ridington and Dennis Hastings (In'aska) (1997) explore the issues of repatriation in connection with particular sacred objects belonging to the Omaha people of Nebraska.

While material culture has received greater attention in recent years than ever before, the scholarly examination of entheogens — psychoactive or hallucinogenic substances consumed for sacred purposes — remains of perennial interest, both among scholars and among popular readers. Overview works abound, both in print and on the Internet (e.g., Erowid 2007, Ott 1993, Pinchback 2002, Rätsch 2005, Schultes et al. 2001). While attention to long familiar entheogens such as opium and tobacco continues (e.g., Booth 1998, Von Gernet 2000, Westmeyer 2004), *ayahuasca* has attracted considerable interest as an element of traditional Amazonian shamanisms (e.g., Bennett 1992), and as a cross-over entheogen for neoshamanic movements (Grob 1999, Luna and White 2000, Metzner 1999, Shanon 2002). The contrasts between traditional shamanic uses of entheogens is illustrated nicely in Stacey Schaefer's (1996) examination of Huichol peyote rituals, while the

edited volume, *Dangerous Harvest: Drug Plants and the Transformation of Indigenous Landscapes* (Steinberg et al. 2004), explores the sometimes devastating economic effects that can accompany the shift of an entheogen from ritual object to lucrative cash crop. More so than virtually any other aspect of contemporary shamanism, the study of entheogens ties shamanic traditions closely to wider discussions of community-state relations, globalization, and economic networks.

A final long-standing element of earlier scholarship on shamanism — the examination of gender and sexuality in relation to shamanic callings — has received much needed re-evaluation in the last two decades. Especially noteworthy is the longstanding collaborative work of Françoise Morin and Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, who have compared two disparate shamanic cultures over time, combining the particularist tendency of modern ethnographic research with the comparative and generalizing aims of earlier scholarship. Their comparisons of Peruvian Shipibo shamans and counterparts among Canadian Inuit explore a range of topics related to spiritual marriage, gender change, and sexualized relations with spirit helpers (Morin and Saladin d'Anglure 1998, 2003; Morin 2007). Examination of gender performance among Native American peoples has also received valuable reappraisals (e.g., Hollimon 2001, Jacobs et al. 1997, Lang 1998, Roscoe 1998). In a related but slightly different vein, Barbara Tedlock (2004) has examined the gender biases of past ethnographers to suggest that scholarly descriptions of past shamanisms have tended to trivialize or marginalize female practitioners, obscuring the roles of women as shamans in various traditions around the world.

While particularizing scholars have succeeded in adding tremendous nuance and refinement to the universalizing pronouncements of earlier scholarship, they have not succeeded in rendering inductive approaches obsolete, at either the scholarly or the popular level. In fact, given that many of the specific ethnographic case studies generated in the last two decades confirm in one way or another some details of earlier universalizing models, new ethnographies can sometimes buttress rather than undermine superorganic characterizations. Further, a focus on specific elements of a culture's shamanic tradition (e.g., its healing methods, music, material culture, or gender performances) can reinforce the assumption that there exist specific therapeutic, musical, material, or

gender aspects of shamanism that operate cross-culturally, perhaps deriving from a single past tradition or from a neurologically constituted primal source. In practice, then, the particularist enterprise within ethnographic studies of shamanism has not put an end to the concept of shamanism as an element of both scholarly and popular discourse.

### **Historicized and Politicized Approaches**

The particularist approach has also spawned a wealth of research on past shamanisms, case studies reconstructed on the basis of ethnographic, historical, or even archaeological evidence. Particularly in the field of archaeology, as we shall note, these reconstructions have sometimes spurred heated debate. From the perspective of the historical examination of colonialism, many accounts of past shamanic traditions provide important insights into the ways in which indigenous cultures were altered and refigured by invading regimes. Studies of the fate of shamans within particular historical settings have been examined particularly in connection with Native America, past and present Siberia, and post-war Korea. These histories have also sometimes served as backdrops for examinations of indigenous efforts to revitalize discontinued shamanic traditions. And in a series of studies which I label the “rhetorical approach,” scholars have turned their historical scrutiny upon themselves, examining the development, spread, and intellectual implications of the very study of shamanism as a topic of research.

### **Historical Reconstructions**

The last two decades have seen a tremendous increase in the number of examinations of past shamanic traditions. Previously, such studies were relatively rare, as ethnographic research focused primarily on the synchronic description of fast-disappearing indigenous cultures, and scholars of other fields — e.g., Classics, history, and philology — were often unaware of, or uninterested in, the notion of shamanism as a widespread cultural practice. Thus, for example, where scholars prior to the 1960s produced only a handful of studies examining possible shamanic traditions among Viking Age Scandinavians, the last two decades have



seen numerous lengthy and detailed examinations of the topic (e.g., DuBois 1999; Jolly, Raudvere and Peters 2002; Price 2002; Solli 2002; Tolley 2009). Part of this increase stems from the rise in prominence and accessibility of ethnographic research on shamanism, leading to its application to historical contexts studied by scholars who formerly had no familiarity with the theories or findings of ethnographers. Part of the increase also lies, however, in the particularist ethnographic interest in uncovering and documenting as many unique past religions as possible, even ones buried in the remote past and reflected by cryptic or misleading ancient texts. Thus, examinations of ancient Greek (Athanasakis 2001), Sámi (Mebius 2003, Rydving 1995), Finnish (Siikala 2002), and various other past European traditions have appeared, sometimes spurring ethno-neoshamanic revivals (see below). Harvey and Wallis's *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (2007) serves as a reference work for the study of such scholarly reconstructions.

### **Archaeological Reconstructions**

Closely linked to the interest in reconstructing past shamanisms is a movement within archaeology to examine possible traces of past shamanisms in the archaeological record, particularly in rock art depictions that might be interpreted as representing shamanic practitioners, spirit helpers, or even trance state perceptions. Although suggestions of this kind were made occasionally by earlier scholars (e.g. Lommel 1967) the enterprise received new impetus with the work of David Lewis-Williams (2001, 2002), who used present ethnographic details of San shamanic rituals and conceptualizations as a basis for reading and interpreting past San rock art. The wider implications of this theory for archaeology were explored in a further study co-authored with Jean Clottes (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 2001), pushing the time-frame deep into the past. Although a number of other scholars both within and outside of the field of archaeology have embraced these ideas enthusiastically (e.g., Aldhouse-Green 2005, Brady 1994, Coe et al. 1996, Freidel et al. 1995, Pearson 2002), others have voiced strong criticisms of the methodology or validity of such investigations (Francfort and Hamayon 2001, see especially Bahn 2001, Francfort 2001, Klein et al. 2002). A careful weighing of the potential and perils of such research is

presented in an anthology edited by Neil Price (2001), particularly the articles by Devlet (2001), Fedorova (2001), and Rozwadowski (2001) in that volume. See also the various printed responses to Klein et al. (2002) that accompany the article in publication. The vigorous debate (and occasional invective) surrounding this topic in archaeological literature over the past two decades stems in part from the strongly materialist approach of earlier archaeologists and their skepticism concerning attribution of religious significance to recovered artifacts or art. As archaeologists of recent decades have begun to interpret various, often cryptic, objects or depictions as evidence of possible past cultic activities, it is natural that other scholars would respond with caution or even alarm. The coming decade is likely to see a good deal more discussion of archaeological shamanisms and perhaps the development of a scholarly consensus regarding meaningful and accurate ways of recognizing past shamanic activities in archaeological evidence. As with the historical reconstructions described above, these archaeological forays have proven of great interest to generalist readers and have sometimes found enthusiastic response in various neoshamanic movements.

### **State Relations**

The historical predilection in much recent research on shamanism has led to a valuable and far-ranging exploration of the relations of past shamans with larger institutions, particularly states. Shamans often became symbols of indigenous resistance to colonial powers and world-views, and their authority was often directly challenged and undermined by incoming religious authorities as well as the social disintegration and occasional epidemic disease that often accompanied colonization. Rebecca Kugel's (1994) fine study of an Ojibwe community, for instance, employs a missionary's diary and other historical documents from the nineteenth century to explore the reasons behind initial Ojibwe resistance to missionization, and the cultural factors that combined to stigmatize a particular Anglo-American missionary. Similar topics are explored variously in an edited volume by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (1994), with examinations that range from antiquity to the near-present. Humphrey's (1994) model of the relations of shamanism to broader state-supported cults in Northern

Asia is of particular interest and value. Other recent examinations explore further shaman-state relations in Asian contexts (e.g., Buyandelgeriyn 2007, Ortner 1995), and particularly in Korea, where the attitudes of state regimes to shamanic traditions have varied widely over the course of the last century (Kendall 2001, Tangherlini 1998, Yun 2008). Particular scholarly attention has been paid to the case of Siberia, from the era of the pre-revolutionary Russian empire (Glavatskaya 2001) through the development and eventual breakdown of the Soviet state (Balzer 1997, 1999; Basilov 1997), to the revitalizations and neo-shamanic experiments of the present (Grusman 2006, Hoppál 1992, Hutton 2001, Miller 1999, Reid 2002, Vitebsky 2005). In the American context, studies of state cooption and control of indigenous sacred spaces (Burton 2002) as well as various examinations of shamanic traditions vis-à-vis the law (e.g., O'Brien 2004) examine the difficulties of maintaining indigenous traditions in a postcolonial situation. All such research contributes integrally to the particularist approach to shamanic traditions described above, and reveals the complex relations between shamanic (or broader religious) traditions and state or societal politics as described by Fitzgerald (2000).

### **Revitalizations**

Given the rapid and sometimes violent suppression of shamanisms in past colonial encounters, it is not surprising that indigenous communities today have occasionally sought to revive lapsed or moribund shamanic traditions. Scholars have examined these revitalization movements variously in the past two decades, with many fine insights into the role of shamanism as a symbol or device of cultural identity. Particularly valuable in the North American context has been the work of Robin Ridington (Ridington 1997, Ridington and Hastings 1997) on attempts to repatriate and revitalize shamanic cult objects among Omaha people as well as Robert Sullivan's (2002) journalistic account of the revival of Makaw whaling. Post-Soviet Siberian revitalizations are explored in a number of the works described above, while Mongush Kenin-Lopsan (1997) presents the materials and justification for Tuvan revitalization as a leader of the movement in his country. A fascinating ethnography

by Virlana Tkacz et al. (2002) presents Buryat shamanic revitalization through the lens of a close ethnography of a single ritual event, examining the complexities of training, ritual performance, and interpretation in a revived tradition.

### **Rhetorical Approach**

As Atkinson made clear in her 1992 review, the particularist interest in close examination of specific shamanic traditions went hand-in-hand with an anthropological critique of the very notion of “shamanism” as an overly generalized, empirically flawed relic of earlier anthropological theorizing. Atkinson was able to cite Gloria Flaherty’s (1992) then newly published examination of the intellectual development of the concept of shamanism in eighteenth-century letters and science as a useful history of the construct. Flaherty’s seminal work paved the way for a great many subsequent examinations of shamanism as a product of Western theorizing, often framed in terms of a Foucauldian notion of discourse and referring to shamanism as a “construct,” “idea,” “notion,” or “metaphor” — terms that assert the existence of shamanism primarily or even solely in the imagination of Western scholars (e.g., Hamayon 1993, 2001; Hultkrantz 1998, 2001; Hutton 2001; Jones 2006; Leete 1999; Narby and Huxley 2001; von Schnurbein 2003; Schröder 2007; Svanberg 2003; Znamenski 2004). At its most strident (e.g., Kehoe 2000, Noel 1997), this critique of the term “shamanism” and the scholarly enterprise that has long employed it represents the construct as an unconscious expression of Western racism, a willful denial of the complexity of “primitive” religions, and the reduction of their diversity to a simplistic unity that can be effectively contrasted with more favored constructs like “Christianity.” As such, critiques of this sort can be viewed as part of a larger critical deconstruction of the study of anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988) as well as religion (Fitzgerald 2000, Gold 2003, Jensen and Rothstein 2000, Kippenberg 2002, McCutcheon 1997) in Western academe. Within the rhetorical approach to shamanism, however, other scholars (e.g., von Stuckrad 2002, 2003; Znamenski 2007) have adopted a more benign interpretation of scholars’ imaginings, one

which they apply as well to the phenomenon of neoshamanism (see below), regarding it as a direct outgrowth of Western scholarly imaginings of primitive religion, nature, and spirituality.

The critique of scholarly generalizations regarding shamans and shamanism has given rise to interesting examinations aimed at teasing out some of the underlying cultural or political assumptions at work in past or recent scholarship (e.g., von Schnurbein 1992, 2003). The viewpoints and blinders of Mircea Eliade have been meticulously examined (e.g., Allen 1998, Berger 1994, Tedlock 2004, Znamenski 2007). Lyle Dick (1995) deconstructs the popular academic construct of “arctic hysteria” in connection with Inuit people, while Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin (1994) reveal the ways in which scholars’ unfamiliarity with concepts of incarnation led them to underreport it as an element of many Native American indigenous religions. Both Tedlock (2001) and Winkelman and Peek (2004) have sought to raise scholarly respect for divination, an element of shamanic traditions again often marginalized in theoretical syntheses after Eliade. The combined weight of such studies reveals the degree to which seemingly objective past scholarship was actually often laced with political, cultural, and social agendas, ones which scholars were reticent about acknowledging in their work or in the writings of their colleagues.

### **Transcendent and Cognitive Approaches**

While the particularist investigation of specific shamanisms continued at an unprecedented rate over the past two decades, a certain number of scholars working within the history of religions paradigm continued to examine shamanism as a transcendent phenomenon (e.g., Hoppál and Pentikäinen 1992; Pentikäinen et al. 1998, 2001; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993; Siikala and Hoppál 1992; Vitebsky 1995). I label this vein of research “transcendent” not because the authors in any way portray shamanism as atemporal; in fact, many of the scholars lay stress on the fact that shamanism as characterized in their works resulted from specific historical processes occurring in particular locales over the centuries. Rather, by “transcendent” I mean to suggest that scholars focus on aspects of shamanism recoverable at a level of abstraction beyond

the close ethnographic details of particularist research. By comparing different shamanisms as they are found in various, sometimes quite disparate, locales, it becomes possible to arrive at inductive syntheses that can be regarded as indicative of a source shamanic tradition that has diffused or migrated over time to different populations and environments. Scholars have sought to test and refine the models of earlier researchers, examining commonalities that occur with frequency cross-culturally. Although many particularist scholars criticize such research as conjectural or abstract, it remains a fact that many particularist studies rely in their basic conceptualizations and terminology on past transcendent syntheses. Scholars who employ the terms “shaman” or “shamanism” at all in their research bear witness to the utility of such formulations as convenient and useful means of describing the stable as well as the variable elements of various indigenous religions.

Whereas such transcendent approaches to shamanism have been greatly overshadowed within anthropology and other ethnographic sciences by particularist scholarship, scholars working in the burgeoning field of the cognitive science of religion (e.g., Austin 2006, Hubbard 2002, McKinney 1994, Newberg et al. 2001, Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, Rossano 2007, Tremlin 2006, Walsh 1997, Whitehouse 2004, Whitehouse and McCauley 2005, Winkelman 1992, 2000) are often quite comfortable with approaching shamanism through an inductively derived cross-cultural model. Regarding shamanic altered state experiences and other elements of shamanic traditions identified within past inductive scholarship as products of brain function and neural architecture, such scholars can posit techniques or experiences that could recur in various cultures or locales over time without needing to assume historical diffusion or transfer. Because shamanism as theoretically defined centers on particular altered states of consciousness, it offers a seemingly ideal test case for the examination of the relation of spiritual experiences and brain function. Further, because of its apparent antiquity as inductively reconstructed, shamanism has been examined as a stage in the overall evolution of human religious consciousness (e.g., Hayden 2003, McClenon 2002). Whereas many of the researchers listed above write about religious experiences in general, Michael Winkelman (e.g., 1992, 2000; Winkelman and Baker 2008) focuses on shamanism in particular and is regarded as the leading

authority in this area. The insights of cognitive research have been met with interest in many scholarly circles, although, as Bulkeley (2008) notes, the “explanatory gap” between the processes under focus in cognitive scientific investigation of the “brain-mind” and the nuanced complexities of lived spiritual experience remains formidable.

### Neoshamanism

Transcendent views of shamanism are also fundamental to most or many of the practices and writings produced in the neoshamanic movement. The term “neoshamanism” (or alternatives like “modern Western shamanism” — von Stuckrad 2002) has arisen in scholarly literature to describe various attempts to revive or recreate shamanic traditions in the lives of contemporary Westerners. The term implies a distinction between traditional shamanisms that have been passed down from generation to generation within specific cultural traditions (as described in the works of particularist ethnographers) and more improvised, provisional shamanic rituals and experiences often born within workshop settings and informed by past (or recent) ethnographic literature. Although many of the leading exponents of neoshamanism, such as Michael Harner (1990), received advanced degrees in anthropology, scholarly views of neoshamanic adaptations were initially quite dismissive (e.g., Johansen 2001 and various of the other contributions to Francfort and Hamayon 2001). As the above discussion of post-Soviet shamanic revitalizations shows, of course, the line between “traditional shamanism” and “neoshamanism” is not always clear, either in the experience of neoshamanist practitioners or in the analysis of observers. More recent scholarly literature concerning neoshamanism has tended to adopt a more neutral tone when describing the topic, or even displayed marked sympathy for the movement or its practitioners.

A good portion of the scholarly production concerning neoshamanism grows out of the rhetorical approach described above (e.g., Hamayon 1993, 2001; Hoppál 1992; Hulkrantz 2001; Hutton 2001; Jakobsen 1999; Jenkins 2005; Johansen 2001; Jones 2006; Leete 1999; Noel 1997; Schröder 2007; Svanberg 2003; von Schnurbein 1992, 2003). Particularly illuminating is Andrei A. Znamenski’s *The Beauty of the*

*Primitive* (2007), which carefully traces the ideas that become important in neoshamanic ideology and examines their further development or transformation within neoshamanic writing and activities. Also of great value are Kocku von Stuckrad's (2002, 2003) as well as Robert Wallis's (1991, 2001, 2003) investigations of neoshamanic ideologies from a perspective that includes both American and European examples. In general, scholars trace neoshamanism's philosophical roots to the romanticizing or nostalgic sensibilities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographers concerning spiritual belief, imagistic or mystical religious experience, idealism, materialism, nature, hunter-gatherer societies, and the appeal of improvised, personalized rituals as powerful enabling documents for the eventual development of neoshamanic practices. In neoshamanism, these scholars suggest, the musings of disaffected Western theorists are transformed into concrete actions for incorporating shamanic practices and understandings into personal ritual repertoires as alternatives to Western cultural categories and values deemed insufficient or misguided.

Certainly in the works of figures like Michael Harner (1980, reprinted 1990) — an anthropologist who began to teach neoshamanic workshops and eventually created the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (Harner 2008) — such intellectual continuity is amply evident and explicitly stated. Other writers vary in the degree to which they follow a purely “technique”-based interpretation of neoshamanism or incorporate more elements of belief or worldview into their adaptations. Shamanism as part of a wider self-help or personal realization framework is increasingly common in North America as well as Europe, as illustrated by the range of recent works by neoshamanic authors (e.g., Cowan 1996; Ingerman 1991, 1993; Scott 2002; Weatherup 2006). Hillary S. Webb's (2004) collection of interviews with neoshamanic writers provides a useful starting place for researchers wanting to chronicle the varying and evolving ideas of leading neoshamanic practitioners today, and Petitmengin and Bitbol's (2009) discussion of introspective experience and processes of validation or appraisal within movements can serve as a valuable theoretical basis for approaching such issues ethnographically.

Rich ethnographic potential resides in investigating shamanic tourism and the development of various *ayahuasca*-related tourist packages



(see, for example Salak 2006, Souther, and the advertising of the World Shamanic Institute). Much ethnographic work is needed as well on the ever-expanding internet presence of neoshamanic resources and communication, evidenced by sites such as the *World Shamanic Institute*, Amazon.com's *The Shamanic Community*, the wide-ranging *Shaman Portal*, and *Shamanic Circles* and the various self-realization products and programs offered by neoshamanic writer Marti Spiegelman through the site, *Shaman's Light* (Spiegelman). The insights of Paolo Apolito's important *The Internet and the Madonna* (2002; English translation 2005) or various works by Robert G. Howard (e.g., Howard 2009a, 2009b) offer useful models that can be adapted to the study of neoshamanic uses of Internet media.

While many scholars have thus examined the intellectual moorings of neoshamanic leaders, the conscious motivations of ordinary neoshamanic practitioners have also begun to attract research attention. Scholars such as Stjepan Meštrović (1997), Robert J. Wallis (2001, 2003), and Joan Townsend (2005) have offered a variety of theories regarding the motivations of participants in various New Age activities, but close ethnographic examinations of particular neoshamanic communities are still relatively rare (e.g., Lindquist 1997, Blain 2001).

Andrei A. Znamenski (2007: 273ff.) explores perceptively the occasional conflicts between neoshamanic practitioners and Native Americans, particularly when neoshamanic writers adopt or highlight personal Native American heritage as a justification or enhancement of their viewpoints. Andy Smith's (1993) wry response to Anglo-American cooption of indigenous religious traditions is a good encapsulation of the Native critique that eventually developed into the label "plastic shamans" for various neoshamanic practitioners. Perhaps in response to such critiques, but also as an expression of practitioners' desire to relate on a personal level with the shamanic techniques and traditions they embrace, various "ethno-neoshamanisms" have developed. Such movements focus on recovering a past shamanism on the basis of specific historical evidence, sometimes closely related to the reconstruction of past shamanisms discussed above. Examples include revivals of Celtic shamanism (Cowan 1993, Trevarthen 2007), Sámi shamanism (Gaup 2005), Jewish shamanism (Winkler 2003, 2008; see also his Walking Stick Foundation website), and Germanic shamanism (Blain 2000;

Wallis 2001, 2003; von Schnurbein 1992, 2003). Von Schnurbein in particular explores not only the development of such movements but also their cultural and social underpinnings. Such movements illustrate the importance of expanded ethnographic examinations of neoshamanisms, studies which will create a particularist perspective on neoshamanic activities to match the last two decades' admirable production of particularist studies of traditional shamanisms.

In the last two decades, then, scholars have sought to describe with accuracy and insight the specific spiritual experiences of individuals within communities in relation to prior traditions, state institutions, and complex processes of economic and cultural exchange. The role of scholars as observers, purveyors, and shapers of culture has been perceptively examined, while the boundary between purportedly objective observers and subjective participants has been productively problematized and blurred. In this respect, scholarly trends in the study of shamanism(s) can be seen as symptomatic of broader shifts in the study of religion as a whole.

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