

In the Realm of Shamanism and Cosmovision

How to research similarities in Transcendental Experiences and Cosmological
Beliefs

Valerie Dierckxsens

S0980773

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Abstract

Asking grand questions has long been found problematic in anthropology. The focus is usually put on the smaller issues. This thesis will research how we can unpack these trends. I investigate a macro-approach by using literature on shamanism and cosmovision.

Grand questions are a compelling topic. Various disciplines, from history to archaeology and anthropology, have developed great talents in focusing on grassroots problems and micro-issues. Small-scale and area-fixed studies are the norm. Not only is the focus put on the smaller issues, it is also considered too risky to present grand statements and promises, for it almost seems to beg for criticism. My criticism is that although these processes are essential, in that they provide the data for larger research questions, these studies often do not themselves get back to the broader perspectives. The hybridity, as well as the larger implications, thus easily remain obscured.

In this thesis I take on the challenge to combine and reconnect the richness of different types of data with the theory-based literature. Through a critical assessment of the literature, I will research how we can look at small-scale issues from a broader perspective. Simultaneously, I will analyse how research with a focus on large-scale issues can be analysed. This brings me to the connections that exist among the various approaches and perspectives used in anthropological and interdisciplinary research. It is precisely the combining of divergent approaches that challenges us, anthropologist, in our research and that is the topic of my research.

The idea of interconnectedness will be put on the agenda by discussing how the topic can or cannot be studied. This means that I will look at approaches used in the literature and make an attempt in reconnecting the concepts that have been disconnected by researchers in the past. In conclusion, the main question of this thesis will focus on how we can research large topics by bringing research outcomes of projects that focus on small-case issues together. One could say that in these small-scale projects there is a trend to work within a fixed set of boundaries. This raises the question whether we, as anthropologists, are able to cross the boundaries of such delimited thinking.

Introduction:

A literature research on transcendental experiences & cosmological beliefs

An interconnecting approach to the literature

Anthropology usually focuses on the presentation of smaller case studies that are closely connected to a culture's everyday life, in order to grasp some larger phenomenon at hand. Russell Bernard (2006) recognises this and points out that "*many theories are developed to explain a purely local phenomenon and then turn out to have wider applicability* (65)". However, a critical point in anthropology that he also mentions is that this goal is not always attained when conducting practical research.

This raises epistemological questions as it touches upon the types of data and "truths" we are looking for. Bernard summarises this as follows:

"One is whether you subscribe to the philosophical principles of rationalism or empiricism. Another is whether you buy the assumptions of the scientific method, often called positivism or favour the competing method, often called humanism or interpretivism." (Bernard 2006: 2-3)

Taking this citation as a starting point, this thesis will not focus on case studies or critical questions about wider phenomena. Instead, I will direct my focus to possibilities of researching phenomena themselves and the possibilities of this approach in scholarly research.

When I assess literature on cosmovision and shamanism, I have noticed many different approaches to these topics. Some researchers have focussed on myths, where others have looked at the symbolic expression of art or the chanting and drumming in rituals (Hultkranz 1997: Ossio 1997: Eliade 1987: Price 2001: Kehoe 2006: Winkelman 2004: Braun 2011). I have noticed that authors have focussed on one certain aspect of the phenomena of shamanism and cosmovision. Therefore, I have studied the approaches of several authors on the topics of consciousness, shamanism and cosmological belief. This study has presented a disconnection of the concepts and the theories presented. This disconnection, from my point of view, makes it difficult to maintain the overview and understand the interconnectedness of these topics.

Theory-oriented research in the field of cosmovision is widely available but is mainly focussed on small-scale issues. Zigon (2007) recognizes this and describes it as follows: "*For when something becomes present-to-hand, that is, when something breaks down, it becomes disconnected from its usual relations in the world* (137-138)." The issue is how we are going to reconnect these concepts. Hence I will address the literature so I can observe how we can reconnect these disconnected concepts and theories. I will

undertake this assess by using literature from several disciplines, for example philosophy and phenomenology. This enables me to investigate the phenomena of shamanism and cosmovision as total phenomena.

The theory-focused approach used in this paper is part of a larger debate. The specific central focus considered in this thesis is well expressed by Michael Winkelman:

"... [To] bring together diverse perspectives on the nature of shamanism and altered states of consciousness, spanning contemporary and historical manifestations. A central theme is a recognition of the commonality and importance of shamanic experiences across time and cultures." (1989: 14)

This citation suggests that interdisciplinary perspectives can work together in researching shamanism and cosmovision. Similarly, Hagens (2009), Braun (2011) and Bourguignon (1968), who among others are contributors to this area, write frequently about the interdisciplinary character of cosmovision and shamanism. When we look at the presentation of anthropological research by scholars today, this approach is rather unusual. The approach I use in this thesis is thus not all too common in how research is carried out in anthropology today. As a result, I feel obliged to present a comprehensive explanation to my approach. In order to understand how I bring together this mosaic-like area of studies, the next section will aim to how I intend to approach these concepts.

Discussing shamanism and cosmovision

In the first chapter, I will discuss some approaches to and representations of cosmovisions that are presented in the literature. I will show that it is explained in the literature how worldviews are constructed through the practice of rituals, oral traditions and symbolic expressions. In the combination of these three fields of study I will try to perceive the topic of cosmovision as a total phenomenon. After a presentation of several cosmovisions, I will show, through my focus on the literature, that these presentations have been considered universal models.

Secondly, I will address the research on consciousness with a specific focus on 'altered states of consciousness' and 'collective consciousness'. In this chapter I will present the selection of ideas of consciousness that are emphasised in the literature and address how researchers connect these theories to shamanism and cosmovision. I will focus on literature that explains the idea of altered states of consciousness as a shamanic phenomenon and the phenomenon of collective consciousness. These are the aspects to which, according to the authors, shamanism is usually connected.

The specific focus on consciousness integrated in this thesis is well expressed by

Foucault's view on 'the order of things'. When researching literature on consciousness, the topic is sometimes approached as if everything is connected to a certain 'matrix'. Michel Foucault sees this matrix as the entanglement of three fields of study: language, biology and history. He continues his theory by stating how linking these fields would establish a matrix in which knowledge is embedded.

"The nature of things, their coexistence, the way in which they are linked together and communicate is nothing other than their resemblance. And that resemblance is visible only in the network of signs that crossed the world from one end to the other." (Foucault 1995: 29)

He describes this matrix by looking at science and its inherent need to order and categorise reality. Scholars are usually engaged in the process of discovering simple elements and the progressive combinations that come with it. In the presentation of their discoveries, *they form a table on which they display their knowledge through a system that is contemporary with itself* (Foucault 1995: 74). In other words, scholars shape a certain grid to which they connect their continuous growing discoveries. Similarly, it is a platform on which the progressive combining of several theories and discussions occurs. Precisely this platform makes up the crystallization of the phenomenon of consciousness. Moreover, when I connect this idea to the topics of shamanism and cosmovision, I notice how these are also concerned with connecting their creations and ideas to a consciousness-grid.

As such, I will shortly discuss the literature that is concerned with the connection between shamanism and consciousness. In relation to altered states of consciousness in shamanism, Michael Winkelman is one of the researchers to which others have referred most frequently. However, when I look at the research on collective consciousness it is mainly in the theories of Durkheim that we find our knowledge. Both researchers have considered the topic of consciousness in science from different points of view. On one hand, Winkelman (1994: 1997: 2002: 2004) has looked at the neurotheological and phenomenological aspect of consciousness in shamanism. On the other hand, Durkheim (1893: 1897: 1912) has presented a sociological perspective on consciousness and collectiveness. Both researchers have delivered interesting and renewed approaches to the topic. Thus I am interested in combining and connecting these approaches to get a better understanding of shamanism and belief systems.

Thirdly, I will assess the literature that examines the topic of shamanism. In this chapter, I will focus on universal aspects, practices and related cross-disciplinary discussions of the phenomenon of shamanism. This will lead us to consider the way in which researchers have considered shamanism to be an ancient but still existing cross-cultural phenomenon. Besides this, I will also focus on the literature that shows how

shamanism has made its transformation to neoshamanism and its potential importance in contemporary society, as presented in the literature.

Eventually, I will ground these theories by presenting a case study. In this fourth chapter I will give a description and presentation of the creation of cosmological ideas of individuals in contemporary society. These ideas will be accessed through a focus on ritual practices, the oral traditions and the use of symbolism. In this example I will refer to the cross-cultural existence of the phenomenon of shamanism. The conclusion will present the potential importance of these perspectives of consciousness, cosmovision and shamanism in combination with ancient knowledge for individuals in contemporary society nowadays.

Finally, we conclude the thesis with some reflexions, critical points and a collection of our derived statements. In this chapter I will present the implications of the unusual approach of this thesis. This means that I will inspect to which extent I have been able to reconnect concepts and rethink theories. The conclusion will show to which degree we have acquired more insight in the research regarding the reconnection of the concepts and the interconnection of our topics.

These insights will also address how researchers have dealt with ‘Out-of-the-Way’¹ topics like transcendental experiences and cosmological beliefs. Herewith I mean topics that are hard to reach with conventional concepts and modern scientific thought. It is through anthropology that we find the platform to take this different approach, just like Anna Tsing once did. In the Realm of the Diamond Queen, she positioned the “local” within processes of regional, national and global interconnectedness (Tsing 1993: 33). Likewise, I am curious to see what happens when we put the classical approach to analysing literature and theory aside and make an attempt to experiment. In the concluding chapter we will realize to which extent this experiment was a success.

Magic and consciousness in contemporary society

Before we move to our first chapter concerning the topic of cosmovision, I will first give a short introduction to magic and consciousness in contemporary society. I will look at the way the literature has considered these topics in the contemporary era of science, technology and modernity. Consequently, we find the platform from which we can make our leap into the world of “(dis)enchanted” thinking.

¹ Anna Tsing (1993) In The realm of the Diamond Queen Marginality in an Out-Of-The-Way Place

Modernity, according to Weber (1946), disenchanting the world. He explains this “disenchantment” as follows:

“...there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather... one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service.” (139)

The citation suggests that this differentiation of matter and spirit represents the hallmark of the modern era. Braun (2011) points out how “... modernity is said to offer a dissatisfactory, disenchanted cosmology ... because of its emphasis on the external, material, and measurable (1)”. Furthermore, science as the explanatory tool of choice in the modern world, does not answer questions like ‘What should we do?’, ‘How should we live our lives?’ or ‘Who am I?’. In this way, science does not address meaning or the deep issues of being (Berman 1981; Howe 2006; Weber 1946; Wilber 1998). Weber (1930) states that such a world results in deep spiritual isolation and profound inner loneliness.

Many sociologists, philosophers and other scholars also write about the human need of ontology. Ontology is the study of the nature of being, existence or reality as such, as well as getting a hand on categories of being. The research on disenchantment in modernity thus asks for a sense of metaphysical thought. It is through these thoughts, this idea of a dichotomous view of pre-modern and modern life, that according to Braun (2011) forms a foundation for the counter-reaction to modernity that neoshamanism stems from.

In the assessment of the literature on cosmovision, consciousness and shamanism, some challenges will arise. Firstly, we will be confronted with abstract thoughts on which theories presented in the literature are based. Bernard (2006) considers these abstract thoughts as follows; *Science does not reject metaphysical knowledge but it does reject metaphysics to explain natural phenomena (6)*. He continues with how *the great insights about the nature of existence... may one day be understood as biophysical phenomena, so far they remain tantalizingly metaphysical (Bernard 2006: 4)*. Hence I am challenged to create a framework or a matrix that is accessible for further theoretical and practical understanding.

Secondly, time and space present an obstacle in current discussions. Thus I would like to diminish these categories to one dot on a surface without the vertical or horizontal movement of the matter presented. Greenwood (2009) suggests that we can *metaphorically bring seemingly disparate branches of knowledge as science (logos) and magic (mythos) together into a new pattern that includes both (145)*. He offers us a way

of envisioning how a different type of science can be connected to the whole *just as each thread of a spider's web makes a connection to the whole* (146).

Summarizing the above, this thesis addresses the following:

- Anthropologists focus on specific concepts in order to understand a certain aspect of a phenomenon. They carry out research on small cases and micro-issues because a large focus has shown to be problematic and complicated. This thesis will therefore put the idea of understanding certain phenomena as a totality by reconnecting the concepts that have been delimited by researchers in the past, on the agenda.
- This thesis will try to give an understanding how several phenomena can be interconnected. Researchers in the past have never really looked at the possible interconnection of phenomena. It is therefore important to perceive phenomena as totalities before we can address their interconnectedness.
- The importance of these interconnecting phenomena for contemporary society. This is appointed to the growing importance ancient knowledge seems to have among individuals nowadays.

These arguments are explored through an assessment of interdisciplinary literature that addresses both in depth theories and the small case studies.

1.

Cosmovision as a representation of belief systems

Introduction to the construction of cosmovisions

In this chapter, I will firstly approach the literature that highlights the meaning of cosmovision and where it stems from. The presentation of this holistic topic will help us comprehend the nature of consciousness in shamanic cultures. Throughout the literature I have observed how researchers have focussed on particular aspects of a phenomenon on which they draw their conclusions. These researchers have looked for the deeper, underlying meaning of rituals; they analysed myths and narratives or they tried to understand the meaning of everyday symbolism in a given culture (Ossio 1997: Greaves 2002: Eliade 1987: Jewson 1976: Middleton 1967). It would be interesting to see what happens when we put our focus on the total phenomenon in combining these specific perspectives of the researchers. As such, I will approach the literature in a way that I can study the underlying aspects of structure and order of a culture. These can be found in a culture's vision of the cosmos, in which these structures are hidden. Throughout this chapter these invisible factors will be brought to the surface. The main contributor to this process is Durkheim, who among others had important theories of society, religious representations and collectiveness.

Abram and Primack (2001) discuss how every traditional culture has had a cosmology. Every traditional culture studied by anthropology has shown to have *stories of how the world began and continues to be, how humans came into existence and what the gods expect of them* (1769). They point out how through cosmology people try to make sense of the world *by defining a larger context and grounding people's sense of reality, identity, and their codes of behaviour in that grand scheme*. Just like in modern science, this 'making sense of the world' *embeds everydayness in an invisible reality* (Abram & Primack 2001: 1769).

The word 'Cosmovision' can be divided into 'cosmos' and 'vision'. The etymology of 'cosmos' can be traced back to its Greek roots: stemming from the Greek word "Kosmos", it refers to an ordered world or universe including all of existence. Ossio (1997) explains how a society denotes its knowledge through their perception of the universe's composition. A cosmovision presents how human beings position themselves within a certain society. Nowadays it is exactly this notion of knowledge that has become the topic and the name of a field of science, cosmology that is conceptually and thus not mainly based on modern science. In modern science, the cosmos or the

universe is a representation of the total of all physical things. This refers not only to matter in its firm state of being but also to *matter in concepts like time and space* (Ossio 1997: 548), meaning that:

“As such cosmology can be considered a holistic discipline; its subject is the universe as a systematic totality and, correspondingly, its aim is to construct a comprehensive image of its structure and evolution.” (Ossio 1997: 549)

Throughout time and along many anthropological discussions, the term ‘cosmovision’ somehow seems to have arrived at two different meanings. Firstly and mainly, it refers to cultural and religious matters. The second meaning, as we mentioned before, has a deeper focus on a scientific aspect to the exclusion of a wider context. It has been claimed by Greaves (2002) that only the history of religions continues to look at cosmologies in the older sense of the word. This means that the idea of science will be incorporated in looking at religion and culture. In the words of Eliade:

“The history of religions is the only discipline seeking to relate two branches of learning that have been kept apart for a considerable time; that is, the humanities (including history) and the natural sciences.” (Eliade 1987:100)

Following this citation, it is important that we embrace the original understanding of a cosmovision. Because in understanding a universal shamanic cosmology through the literature, it is essential that we are able to go beyond the scientific matters available. This means that, as Eliade suggested, I will combine cultural aspects with the biophysical aspects.

Cosmological studies seem to be associated with the secular domain, as it can be perceived in the literature. This field of study is usually based on a holistic approach and shows profound interest in structure and order. It is easily associated with the study of religious worldviews. Every religious worldview could be seen as a cosmovision, but not the other way around. Unfortunately, as Jewson (1979) suggested, the religious approach to a cosmovision seems to have dominated most of our views on the world and nature throughout the 16th century. He states that this plays such an extensive role in cosmological research that the place of cosmovision in everyday life seems to be taken out of consideration. Not even historical or anthropological texts, nor those of sociology or religion, have shown enough attention for the way in which a cosmovision has its place in a culture’s everyday life activities. When a topic gets in touch with a cosmovision, it is easily related to and categorized within a chapter entitled ‘Religion’.

The actual understanding of cosmologies seems well described in the following passage:

“... cosmologies are basically metaphysical attempts to circumscribe and define systematically the essential nature of the universe ... as a whole. They are

conceptual structures which constitute the frame of reference within which all questions are posed and all answers are offered.” (Jewson 1976: 10)

According to the above, anthropologists have approached the study of cosmologies as ‘cultural phenomena’. This is what Durkheim calls ‘collective representations’. Durkheim and his followers extensively turned the comparative study of cosmologies into a specific area of research. In my research on the literature it seems that these worldviews are now slowly being treated as a whole instead of a separate phenomenon within a certain society. Durkheim constructed this idea in the following way:

“... [T]here are no religions, which are false... [because] all answers, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence. ... A human institution cannot rest upon an error and a lie ... [because] if it were not founded in the nature of things, it would have encountered in the facts a resistance over which it could never have triumphed. ... [Unless one studies primitive religions] with the assurance that they hold to reality and express it.” (1964: 2-3; 1960: 3)

For Durkheim, religion plays such a fundamental role in everyday reality that for him even other disciplines like science and philosophy have their roots in religion. He continues how this can be traced back to the very first systems of self-representation in which humans have pictured themselves and the world. These representations were of religious origin and in this way *there is no religion that is not a cosmology* (1964:9; 1960: 12). Durkheim states that philosophers, ever since Aristotle, have introduced us to certain categories of understanding. These categories are the sum of essential ideas that seem to have influenced and dominated all of our intellectual life (1964). Categories such as ideas of time and space, numbers, class, substance, personality, cause, consciousness and so on. They are the projection of our framework of intelligence and correspond to the most universal properties of things. So when anthropologists start analysing primitive religious beliefs systematically, they automatically and naturally run into these principal categories. As such, these categories or concepts of thoughts are *a product of religious thought, like they are born of and in religion* (Durkheim 1964:9-10; 1960: 12-13).

Having come to this stage of Durkheim’s analysis on religion, we are at the junction where ‘consciousness’ and ‘cosmological thought’ meet. Through Durkheim we now learn that religion is an eminently social domain. *Religious representations are collective representations, which express collective realities* (Durkheim 1964: 10). A culture’s rites and rituals can thus be seen as an act through which religious representations are expressed in the midst of group gatherings. At the same time they create or maintain certain mental states, possibly altered states, in these groups. So if

the categories described in the previous paragraph are indeed of religious origin, then *they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts. They too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought* (Durkheim 1960: 13).

Inspired by Durkheim, Steven Lukes suggests how *concepts are collective representations*. They can thus be seen as operating *within forms of social life, according to rules* (Lukes 1973: 436-37). This argument contributes to the perspective of society as a system of social relationships. From this, Mary Douglas derives the *prototype for the logical relations between things* (1973: 11). Hereby, she laid the foundations for further analysis of comparative studies in language, symbols and myths. Myths could now be seen as true narratives from which the real meaning was to be found in the symbolic layers of society, beyond any appearance. An identical account can be given on the perception of 'rites', which could now be seen as actual expressions of the narratives. These have come forth from the oral traditions that contain the main values and norms of the society in question. It can therefore be stated that concepts like myths, symbols and narratives amongst others are collective representations that operate within forms of social life.

Concluding this section, Barth (1987) demonstrates how *a better understanding of cosmology comes not by construing more order in it, but by better accounting for its production* (84). In the following sections I will present the way in which the literature approaches this 'account for the production'. First I will give a short presentation of cosmovisions of several cultures. Secondly, I will look further at the basis of the production of cosmovisions.

Presentation of Cosmovation

Before we continue analysing the concepts that shape a culture's cosmovation, we will focus on examples of how cosmovisions have been presented to us by researchers. The examples of cosmovisions presented below illustrate the complex multidimensionality they can have.

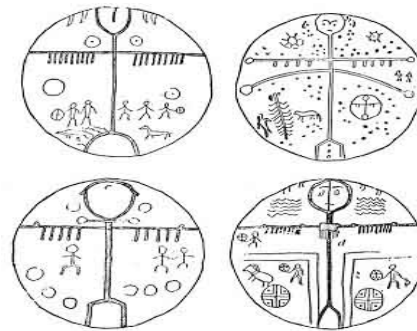
The exploration of time and space is an eminently human drive, as can be perceived in the multiple examples from different cultures and movements all over the world, presented below. Visually mapping space gives rise to highly geometrized mandalic systems. This representation of a cosmovation incorporates the multidimensional ecology of beings living in our world. Charting time is more difficult for it involves observing and recording the changing position of stars. This construction

of a cosmology is, according to researchers, also influenced and facilitated by shamans who used powerful vision plants to induce altered states of mind (Eliade 1963: Ossio 1997: Winkelman 2000, 2002).

In the case study I will give a more contemporary perspective on cosmovisions. The following examples will visualize the structure of cosmovisions in more traditional societies, cultures or religions. After this presentation, we will further analyse and give an account for the production of a cosmovision.



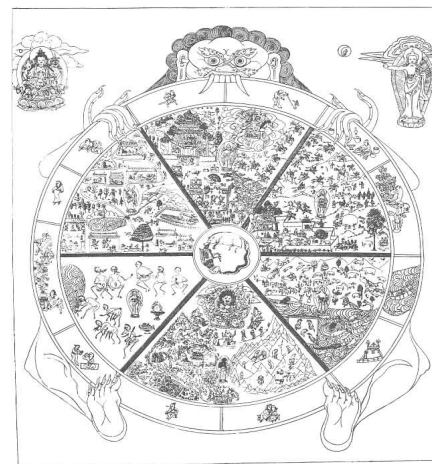
2
Figure 1.1: Mayan Cosmivision



3
Figure 1.2: South Asian & South American Cosmivision



4
Figure 1.3: Cosmivision Neoshamanism



5
Figure 1.4: Buddhist Wheel of Life

² <http://www.yucatanadventure.com.mx/mayanacalendar.htm>

³ <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Tengriism>

⁴ <http://www.myspace.com/schawa/photos/70533895#%7B%22ImageId%22%3A70533895%7D>

⁵ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/earth/boe/boe18.htm>

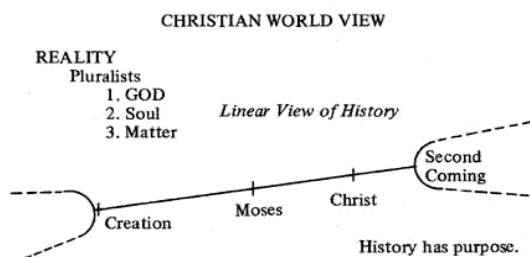


Figure 1.5: Christian worldview

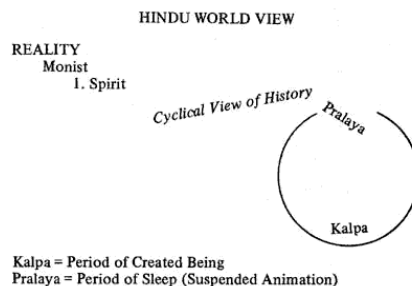


Figure 1.6: Hindu worldview

Analysing Cosmivision

In my research on the literature concerning cosmivisions, I put my focus on three specific fields of information that will give an account on the production of these cosmological thoughts. Researchers and many authors have only focussed on one of the following fields: myths, rituals and symbols (Ossio 1997: Malinowski 1962: Eliade 1963: Weiner 2010: Damatta 1991: Lewis-Williams 2002). I would like to combine their approaches in order to analyse a culture's cosmivision. The combination of these small-scale focuses might help us better understand the order and structure of shamanic cultures and perhaps even shamanism as a total phenomenon. The first focus will be on the oral traditions or written narratives that are considered to be myths. Secondly, I will focus on rituals as the physical expression of these oral or written traditions. A third field of information is the symbolic representation of one's culture. This can be any visual expression from rock art or iconography to architecture.

- **Myths and Oral Traditions**

“Oral literature’ is used by anthropologists and others to refer to unwritten forms which can be regarded as in some way possessing literary qualities. It thus broadly covers such oral forms as myths, narratives, epics, lyrics, praise poetry, laments, and the verbal texts of songs; also sometimes riddles, proverbs and perhaps oratory and drama.” (Finnegan in Barnard 2010: 516)

Mythology has been seen as the reservoir where cosmological formulas and explanations of origin find a place (Weiner 2010: 492). From Durkheim's theories two approaches emerge on the study of myths. On one hand we find Malinowski (1962) and

⁶ <http://bible.ovu.edu/missions/guidelines/chap3.htm>

in his footsteps, expanding the approach, Eliade (1963). She emphasises that myths are social characters and thus act as models for the actions of individuals. However, she also suggests that myths are above all true and sacred stories. Other researchers have a deeper focus on the more intellectual processes that take place in the background of these myths. In his functionalist approach, Malinowski states that a *myth or sacred story has to be defined by its functions* (1962: 286) and they are stories that are being told in order to create a belief. He suggests that myths are a pattern of religious and moral conduct and serve as an action that precedes some ceremony or ritual. Mythology is in other words the sacred tradition of a society. It is therefore *a body of narratives woven into their culture, dictating their belief, defining their ritual, acting as the chart of their social order and the pattern of their moral behaviour* (Malinowski 1962: 286).

Eliade elaborates further on this perspective. She reaffirms the important place myths take in the presentation of a worldview. She continues on how a 'myth' means a 'true story' because it is a sacred and significant concept. Furthermore *it supplies models for human behaviour and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life* (Eliade 1963: 1-2). She focuses on the sacred nature of the myths' characteristics by elaborating on the 'Natural' versus the 'Supernatural'. The contrast of two opposite forces usually forms the basis of presenting one's cosmovision. Additionally, Eliade points out *how a reality comes into existence through the deeds of Supernatural Beings*. This can be the *whole of reality, the Cosmos, or any fragment of reality*. Such reality can be *an island, a species of plant* as it can be any *particular kind of human behaviour, an institution* (Eliade 1963: 5-6). In this case, a myth is always a story of a 'creation' and thus gives an account of the various *breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'Supernatural') into the World* (Eliade 1963: 5-6).

- **Ritual Practices**

Regarding rituals, these have been referred to a set of actions that are linked to the mythology at hand. Ossio (1997) states how ritual practices are enactments of the myths being told. He continues with the idea that the concept of a ritual is like a range of patterns that knows its unchanged repetition for an unmemorable amount of time. Moreover, they express a variety of topics along a wide range of domains varying from order, purification, health matters, fertility, status, social disputes and causes of harm etc. Precisely its unchanging, fixed and traditional nature makes that rites play important roles in complementing the thoughts and ideas that are being provided by a culture's mythology in order to penetrate into the true nature of one's cosmovision.

Furthermore, R. Damatta (1991) points out that we can distinguish two ways of studying rituals. On one hand, a ritual is like a response to concrete factors and having a direct relationship to them, which means looking at it in terms of its point of departure. On the other hand a ritual can also be taken in terms of completing a trajectory. In this way, a ritual not only focuses on the point of arrival in reaching one's goal but also on the steps in between. At the end of a ritual or ceremony all participants return back home where the daily routine and reality continues. Since a ritual denotes the transition from the old to something new, the group thus separates with renewed hopes or fears that 'the mundane realities of life' bring with them. From Damatta's perspective, a ritual is a special moment with a beginning, middle and an ending. It is a full story or a chapter in an endless book, which is society. It is this thought that offers participants a way of getting rid, although only briefly, *of the continuous line that springs from societal routines without beginning or end* (Damatta 1991: 23).

In my focus on the literature on rituals, I find a distinction between two categories. On one hand we have public rituals that are related to the social level of the society, like families in the domestic area. These rituals usually take place in villages or smaller communities. Secondly, there are private rituals that are connected to the individual or on a family level at large. These rituals can be related to the purification of a house or an individual, the solving of a social dispute and so on.

According to A. van Gennep (1909), and later on also V. Turner (1969), it is essential to include several phases in studying rituals. These phases vary between structured and liminal moments. This liminality points to a moment of transition between two positions. It usually coincides with the moment in which an individual passes from one status to another, for example during the rites of passage. This means that besides the ritual's symbolic expressions, one should also take their sequence into account. Ossio (1997) points out how important it is to take notion of the social relationships among the people who are present. Also the spatial meaning of the particular space in which the ritual takes place should be taken into account. In studying rituals from these multiple perspectives, we can obtain deeply rooted information on the different social patterns and the existing time and space perceptions.

- **Use of Symbols expressed in Art**

“The fact that those divinities and symbols [that come forth in artistic expressions] occupy a fixed position within this interrelated closed system enhances their meaning and enables the reconstruction of wider structured complexes, finally disclosing the basic premises of the cosmological system.” (Ossio 1997: 560)

This aspect of shaping a culture’s cosmovision finds a focus within the field of archaeology and more specific ethno-archaeology. In these ethno-archaeological studies I find the explanations of the material culture concerning the artistic expressions and use of symbols. G. McCall (2006) argues that a lot of cosmological beliefs have remained very persistent and durable ever since they came into existence. He suggests that the use of symbols expressed in art is related to *the overarching cosmological dispositions of the cultures that are responsible for its production* (McCall 2006: 224).

Besides this, Ossio (1997) points out the nature of symbolic representations of complex structures. He elaborates on how these convey *the sense of totality by which many traditional cultures conceive society and its integration into the cosmos* (Ossio 1997: 559). Looking deeper into these symbolic representations, we find the master keys that can help us in further explaining and interpreting more of the structured complexities society offers. This will, according to Ossio (1997), eventually lead to the essence of the cosmological model of the culture that is being studied.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overall understanding of cosmological thinking. Through a survey of the literature we have noticed how people create complex models that reflect their own culture’s structure. Anthropological literature research usually focuses critically at some issues or statements presented in the research questions. I have, on the contrary, looked at and combined several interdisciplinary studies that discuss cosmovision and its universal aspects, both socially and culturally. I have done this in order to put the construction of a new way of theoretical thinking on the agenda, in which we can perceive a cosmovision as a total phenomenon. Eventually we can analyse how it is possible to interconnect several topics along multiple disciplines.

In my assessment of the literature I have noticed how close the idea of having a cosmovision is positioned to our own presentation of our environment. Important to know is that our western framework of analysing and thinking usually does not allow us to make the distinction between an ‘upper world’ from an ‘underworld’. The western

understanding of the cosmos, as the literature has presented, rather focuses on scientific facts and everything that falls beyond it is left to spiritual gurus and religious experts and practitioners. In the case study I will analyse the three fields on which a culture's or an individual's cosmovision can be visualized: oral traditions or myths, ritual practices and the visual expression of symbols. In order to appoint the topics of shamanism and cosmovision to a grid of collectiveness I will now look deeper into the domain of consciousness.

2.

The nature of consciousness in theoretical thinking

Introduction to consciousness in science

Consciousness is generally seen as the wide connection between the external or operational world and the internal or cognized world. Winkelman (1994) describes consciousness as the overarching of wide ranged mental capabilities and awareness. He continues with explaining how these vary from self-awareness and awareness of ones environment to capabilities concerned with social and cultural references. Researchers have claimed that our human consciousness is rooted in the evolution of discovering, understanding and using the nature and capabilities of human characteristics within phenomenological studies (Winkelman 1994, 2002, 2004: Durkheim 1893).

I will look at consciousness from multiple perspectives. These include neurotheological, cognitive, biological, phenomenological, metaphysical, philosophical and cultural perspectives. In my assessment of the literature I will present a better understanding of the connection between consciousness, shamanism and cosmovision.

In the first section I will address the research on collective consciousness. Furthermore, I will discuss the literature that focuses on altered states of consciousness. In this assessment I will present how the literature provides an understanding of consciousness in direct relationship to shamans and the important role altered states of consciousness play herein. Further on, I will discuss the particular focus of researchers on cross-cultural approaches to shamanism (Bourguignon 1968: Wilber 1977: Winkelman 1994, 2002, 2004: Braun 2010). Some of them have focussed on how altered states of consciousness are induced by vision plants and rhythms in shamanic cultures. Simultaneously, this section will present how research on this topic suggests universals of shamanism. Finally, an important aspect of this chapter will focus on how the literature is concerned with the integration of consciousness in shamanic cultures.

A grid of collective consciousness

When we address the research on collective consciousness there is one researcher in particular that has been referred to frequently, Emile Durkheim. Collective consciousness is described in Durkheim's (1893) words as 'conscience collective', pointing at the common consciousness that individuals belonging to the same society or social group are sharing. Shamans belong to one social group and it is therefore stated in the literature that they are connected to a mutual collective web of knowledge and information. This conscience collective Durkheim presents is moral just like it is cognitive at the same time.

The literature in the disciplines of phenomenology, neurotheology and cognitive psychology points to a universality of shamanism. In my consideration of multidisciplinary literature, I focus on how consciousness is not only approached in terms of cognition but also as a cultural, philosophical and metaphysical phenomenon. The connection of this multidisciplinary focus on collective consciousness will be addressed to the topic of shamanism in order to explain its universal aspects that have come forth in the literature.

Durkheim (1893) further explains how a society is seen as an exclusive human phenomenon. Furthermore, it consists of supra-biological and supra-individual realities with a nature that is both symbolic and moral. This concept of society translates as a coherent wholeness and is established through its own purposes, namely a web of collective consciousness. This web seems to come into existence through the cohesion of the internal and the external consciousness. Simultaneously, Durkheim discusses how a traditional collectiveness is opposed by a modern collectiveness:

"Societies based on mechanical solidarity have no great internal complexity and little division of labour, but a relatively strong collective consciousness: they are held together by their uniformity. Modern societies, in contrast, are characterized by organic solidarity, and are held together by their interdependence." (Durkheim in Barnard 2010: 774)

Moreover, Durkheim (1893) states how a human individual can be seen as a 'homo duplex'. He refers to a human individual as a biological organism, but on the other hand also as a social organism with moralities, intellect and spiritual needs. These two parts of human existence are in constant collision within the individual. Durkheim also discusses how the individual body can transcend its material senses and connect with a collective consciousness in which the (sacred) traditions of society occur. As such, if people became conscious again of their individual selves this self-awareness too would serve a collectively conscious social function. Finally, Durkheim concludes how

complexities in European society enhanced individualism, such as the collective division of labour and the Enlightenment. Thus individualism is a fundamental aspect of western society (Durkheim 1893).

Eventually, Durkheim points out how a collective consciousness is present in any society. In this society all the components that shape the society are attached to the grid of this collective consciousness. As such, all shamanic cultures are connected to this grid as well. Concluding this study of the literature on collective consciousness, I have found a connection of the consciousness grid with shamanic cultures across time and space. Consequently, I would be interested in further analysing this connection with a view to universals of shamanism.

Additionally, the literature points out that shamans shift between altered states of consciousness for the greater good of their people. The way in which they do this will be further explained in the chapter on shamanism. The next section will focus on the literature that has looked at the way (collective) consciousness is integrated in shamanic cultures.

Altered States of Consciousness in Transcendental Experiences

The central theme throughout this section will focus on researchers that have dealt with the importance and commonality of the shamanic experience of altered states of consciousness. As such, I believe it is important that we understand and appreciate the complex historical achievement of altered states of consciousness. Moreover, the literature points out that it is important to realize how these states improve health and engender religious thought. Winkelman (2002) discusses how this includes the recognition of the relationship between these alterations and the realm of transpersonal experience. He continues with stating how this intellectual heritage of shamanism should be recast to serve humankind. Additionally, Winkelman points to the considerable importance of the integration of ancient knowledge in contemporary society.

The literature suggests that non-Western and cross-cultural examinations of consciousness give us an expansion on the phenomenal domain of consciousness. This, however, challenges the existing conceptual framework of modern science. The data extracted from cross-cultural research presents us a variety of different phenomena that do not seem to be addressed by Western societies directly. Eastern societies on the contrary put a primary focus on the research on consciousness. In doing so, they create

new conceptualizations and theories in shaping frameworks expanding those of Western scientific thought.

On top of the phenomenal approach of the literature to the domain of consciousness, researchers have also focussed on neurological processes in relation to shamanism (Wright 1991: Winkelman 2002, 2002: Hayward 2004: Kaplan 2006). It is suggested by these researchers that cross-cultural studies point out how a universality of shamanic practices in forager societies across time and across cultures is established. The universal principles of shamanistic practices are being reflected through the underlying neurological processes. Winkelman (2004) discusses in his cross-cultural approach how shamanic practices reflect *fundamental brain operations and structures of consciousness* (193).

Additionally, Bourguignon (1968) presents a cross-cultural study of ASC. Her research has suggested how 'trance states' reach a universal representation, how the nature of ASC experiences is culturally variable, how they relate to the social context and how they have variable interpretations. She also reports how the use of ASC among those that are in contact with the spirit world and the use of it in therapies shows cross-cultural similarities.

The central role of religious ceremonies in participation with shamans is frequently discussed among anthropologists (Bourguignon 1968: Winkelman 1994: Braun 2010 et. al.). As such, they have focussed their research on the integration of consciousness in the community bonding rituals in shamanic traditions. However, not all religions are rooted in the practice of shamanism through altered states of consciousness. Nevertheless, Winkelman (1997) states how all societies contain religious practices that have their roots in shamanistic healing. Hence, they may use ASC to get in contact with the spirit world for healing purposes. Furthermore, Winkelman (1997) suggests further research on cognitive theories concerning the paradigm of shamanism to better understand these religious experiences. He means to say that we have to link symbolic aspects of shamanistic practices with concepts and aspects of the discipline of psychology (Winkelman 1997).

On one hand, researchers refer to internal visions that induce altered state of consciousness (de Rios and Winkelman 1989: Chippindale and Smith 2000: Lewis Williams 2004). These visions supposedly represent insights that are adapted and integrated by the shaman's cultural group. Precisely this experience of shamans gives them the access to the other, internal, cognized world. Although the issue of conceptualization arises, the previous does form a clear representation of the existence of several types of consciousness that are different from everyday awareness.

On the other hand, Brown (2000) suggests how altered states of consciousness are also induced by the subjects' capacity of chanting, drumming or dancing. As such, these expressive actions are based in rhythm and precede the communicative field of language. He discusses how they are used for internal states of communication in order to influence cohesion, cooperation and synchronization (Brown 2000). The vocal expressions of chanting, calling, hooting are the result of the ancient ways of communication. Simultaneously, this provides us information on the visceral states in which members of the group are connected. Additionally, Bjorn Merker (2000) explains how synchronous singing stimulates cognitive and social integration. Thus, rituals with dancing and plays induce an altered state of consciousness. Furthermore, Donald (1997) considers that rhythmical dances and animal imitations performed in rituals stem from early human mimetic performances. As such, they represent a symbolic form of communication. Precisely this sum of practices like dancing, drumming and chanting performed by shamans reflect, according to Winkelman (1997), the mechanisms used for social learning, the expression of interpersonal dynamics, manual skills and nonverbal communication of a (shamanic) culture.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have explored Durkheim's theories of how people of a certain society or culture are connected to a collective grid. This grid seems constructed by everyone who is involved in a group, community or society. The literature on shamanism and consciousness, in which shamans across time and space belong to the same group and use common practices, also points to this certain grid by focussing on altered states of consciousness. Research on shamanic beliefs and experiences discussed how this grid is accessible to any initiated individual. The individual can connect to this grid by entering an altered state of consciousness induced by vision plants or rhythmic sounds. In this "world in between" one can, according to shamanic belief systems, find collective knowledge and solutions. Moreover, altered states of consciousness are besides cultural, also neurotheological phenomena. Finally, in the next chapter I will address the literature that discusses how shamanism is a total phenomenon and presents the topic's universal aspects.

3.

Shamanism as a total phenomenon

A short introduction to shamanism

The meaning of 'shamanism' has been debated for almost three centuries. Price (2001) describes shamanism as the activities of those who attain altered states of consciousness to mediate between human beings and the supernatural world. Shamanism is a total social phenomenon and Price also mentions how this is expressed in the articulation of three levels. These levels are psychological, social and religious. The specific and underlying meaning of shamanism will be further discussed in the first section of this chapter.

First I will address the literature that focuses on the universals of shamanism as a total phenomenon. The second section will present a discussion of modern shamanism. This transformation of traditional shamanism is called neoshamanism. I will approach the literature on this topic in such manner that I will study the roots of neoshamanism and certain aspects of neoshamanic practices nowadays.

The theories presented in the literature have usually focussed on a certain micro-aspect of shamanism. Several researchers have tried to obtain a deeper understanding of aspects such as shamanic rituals, the use of the term 'shaman', characteristics of shamans and biological aspects of shamanism among other topics (Eliade 1964: d'Aquili 1990: Price 2001: Taylor 2002: Winkelman 1990, 1992, 2000, 2004: von Stuckrad 2002: Sutler-Cohen 2005: Kehoe 2006: Braun 2010). Similar to our approach to the research on cosmovision, I will bring together different theories and approaches to the topic of shamanism addressed in the literature. Additionally, I will connect these approaches in my attempt to focus on shamanism as a total phenomenon. After all, this thesis is concerned with an approach that focuses on the reconnection of delimited concepts.

Collecting universals of shamanism

Firstly, I focus on the literature that is concerned with how a shaman specialist would be a cross-cultural and total phenomenon. In my assessment of the literature, several questions come to the fore. Researchers have wondered whether shamanism could be appointed to a universal spirituality. They have questioned whether all societies have

magic beliefs and if all shamans perform similar individual rituals (Winkelman 1992, 2000; Kehoe 2006; Greenwood 2009; Braun 2010). This has led Hultkranz to investigate how all societies have magical beliefs (Hultkranz in Kehoe 2006). However, the word “magical” confronts scholars with several assumptions and connotations. The term “magic” in western society is polluted. Moreover, Greenwood (2009) explains how in a society where science dominates thought, it is difficult to perceive the “magic” at hand. An example is the experience of “coincidence” in everyday life. Some people do not look further than the mere occasional event while others swear by destiny that intervenes.

Michael Winkelman (1990, 1992, 2000, 2004) addressed several research projects on shamanic healers in cross-cultural studies. His research helps us understand the differences and similarities of practitioners engaged in healing. The results of his research suggest that there are distinct types of healers that carry the label of ‘shaman’. Moreover, he illustrates that although shamanism is seen as a universal phenomenon, the form of it differs systematically among cultures that have different orientations in their society. Winkelman (2002) characterizes and compares these shamanic practitioners and healers through which he clarifies his use of the specific terminology and definitions. He examines the functions and characteristics of shamans in consideration of their cultural context. These aspects of shamanism will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The nature of shamanism is a frequent discussed topic in contemporary and multidisciplinary debates. Some researchers claim that the term ‘shaman’ only refers to its practices (Petrovich 2001; Morris 2006), while others prefer to address shamanism as a total phenomenon (von Stuckrad 2002; Winkelman 2002, 2004; Kehoe 2006; Greenwood 2009; Braun 2010). Researchers of the latter have provided empirical evidence of phenomena from all across the world. Systematic cross-cultural research of these data allows for a quantitative basis. Such evidence, presented in the literature, has proved the existence of universals of shamanism (von Stuckrad 2002; Winkelman 2002, 2004; Kehoe 2006; Greenwood 2009; Braun 2010).

Winkelman (2004) noticed how shamanism does not seem to be a culture specific concept but is rather a complex system of characteristics found in hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies. He continues on how this concept of shamanism is performed by magico-religious practitioners around the world. Moreover, Winkelman (1986) also explains how these magico-religious healers are not only found in Siberia and Asia, as commonly assumed, nor is their worldwide distribution a consequence of the diffusion of traditions. Winkelman (2004) hereby points out the universal aspect of shamanism in connection to a collective consciousness.

Besides the universal compound, the literature on shamanism also addresses the systematic differences among magico-religious practitioners in other, sometimes even more complex, societies. In these societies practitioners are labelled as shamans, witchdoctors, healers, mediums and so on. Winkelman (1990, 1992) lists characteristics of shamans on an empirical basis and presents them as follows:

- Chanting, drumming and dancing
- Divination, diagnosis and prophecy
- Vision quests and death/rebirth experiences through induced ASC
- Soul flight in ASC experience named "Ecstasy"
- Capacity to relate with spirits
- Healer of diseases caused by 'magic'
- Therapeutic capabilities on soul recovery
- Relating with animal spirits and transformation into animals
- Charismatic leadership
- Sorcery
- Magic used in hunting

This description is also integrated in Eliade's (1964) contribution to defining shamans. She writes about the way the practice of shamanism is typically involved with healing and divination matters during ceremonies involving the entire community. During these ceremonies they give an expression of the culture's myths, their journeys in the spirit world and the struggles with entities and spirits through dancing, chanting and drumming. Hence, altered states of consciousness are produced which is usually referred to as an experience of "ecstasy". Precisely these activities of practitioners in altered states of consciousness obtain experience in the spiritual world and the interaction with spirits. Eliade (1964) further explains how this happens through certain actions such as soul journey, flights to lower and upper worlds, death/rebirth experiences and transformations into animals. She continues on how, during a soul flight, the shaman experiences an out-of-body moment where the spiritual part leaves the body and travels to other places in order to make a connection to certain webs of consciousness. These are kind of matrices to which other shamans throughout time and space also connect or have connected (Eliade 1964).

The basis of shamanic universals is, according to the literature, derived from its biological aspects. The reason for the spreading of shamanism around the world does not seem to be an effect of diffusion. Winkelman (2004) appoints this to the idea of collective consciousness, human psychobiology and neurophysiology. Furthermore, d'Aquili (1990) explains how universal aspects of the mind and the fundamentals of knowledge and perception are based in neural networks found in the biological foundation that reflect the uniform aspects of shamanism. He states that the structures of neurological networks are also connecting to our creation of thoughts and thereby

also religious and spiritual thought. Moreover, these neural networks consist of information that is relevant to the social others, the animal world and the self. They lie rooted in shamanic universals of animistic thought, the spirit world and totemism (Winkelman 2000, 2002, 2004). Winkelman discusses the basis of shamanic universals in the following terms:

- “*Ecstasy*, an integrative mode of consciousness manifested in soul flight and visionary experiences and reflecting presentational symbolism and basic structures of consciousness.”
- “*Spirit relations*, including guardian spirits and animal powers, which represent aspects of the self.”
- “*Community rituals and totemism*, providing mechanisms for social coordination and eliciting the immune systems, modifying self and other identity dynamics, and providing social identification.” (2004: 198)

After focussing on concepts that state universals of shamanism, as presented in the literature, we discuss the modern form of shamanism. This section will focus on authors and researchers that explain how traditional shamanism has found its way to contemporary society.

To a modern form of shamanism: neoshamanism

In my focus on the literature I have noticed how shamanism contains one of the oldest healing techniques known to mankind. Researchers have discussed how, through altered states of consciousness, the shaman engages with spirits and the upper world for the greater good of the community and the people that construct it (Eliade 1964; Winkelman 1990). In contemporary society we see how this traditional form of shamanism has grown and transformed into a new and modern shamanism. Braun (2010) suggests that neoshamanism is thus a modern form of the practice of shamanism attached to an ‘*enchanted cosmology*’ in contemporary Western society (19).

One of the fundamental aspects of shamanism, applicable to both its modern and traditional form, is the ‘journey’. Braun (2010) explains how the *(neo)shaman travels into an extra-material (spiritual) realm in an altered state of consciousness in order to get information from spirit teachers and animals to help and heal self, others, and the environment* (20). Vision plants or rhythmic sounds induce altered states of consciousness, as it has been discussed before. The same is applicable to neoshamanism, as the individual is also inspired by the traditional practices and ancient knowledge for inducing the mind. For example, research on contemporary shamanism in Lowland South America and the Caribbean among the indigenous cultures has points to a

transformation from a universal hunter-gatherer shamanism to a touristic form of shamanism. Nowadays tourists pay high prices to experience a trance state of being under the influence of the traditional hallucinogen Ayahuasca. Von Stuckrad (2002) claims that neoshamanism is thus at the same time a modern phenomenon as it contains the counter reaction to the disenchantment of the modern world.

Braun (2010) discusses how neoshamanism is a contemporary cultural phenomenon within several different contexts. She states that it varies in form but not in function. Neoshamanism is thus the practice where one, when induced to an altered state of mind, travels to extra-material reality in order to find the information needed to help oneself and others. A common situation in the field of neoshamanism is the contact with entities or beings and energies that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Furthermore, Braun (2010) explains how through this contact, according to the modern practice of shamanism, one can effectively heal self and others. A central statement of Braun in her view of transcendental experiences and beliefs *is the premise that we live in an enchanted world, rich with an unseen, energetic reality, alongside and in addition to the material world* (5). The study of neoshamanism, according to Braun, points out how the modern individual is potentially able to reconnect with nature and thereby also the spirit world. The modern individual gets in touch with this after being *'enculturated' into the premises of a disenchanted cosmos* and after dealing with the tools offered by *scientific consciousness to navigate the cosmos* (Braun 2010: 5-6).

The roots of the phenomenon of neoshamanism seem a neglected field of study in anthropological research. I have noticed how this neglect and unfortunate silence in anthropological study might stem from the fact that studying neoshamanism as an anthropologist is actually introspectively gazing at oneself. Braun (2010) discusses how the roots of this phenomenon are found within us instead of staring at 'the other'. Consequently, a research on this phenomenon will not be concerned with travelling to exotic places or lingering in a realm far from our own material reality. The stimulation for almost every anthropologist stays out: the rite of passage for the anthropologist to go into the field, to participate in an unknown culture and to live among native peoples in order to take home the stories of *how different they are, the kind of exotic materials they create and food they eat, and with that a disease or two* (Braun 2010: 39). Wallis (2000) describes how this new area of study is a domestic one. Moreover, it seems so utterly unattractive that *the silence is, at least in part, rooted in the reluctance to take something so close to home seriously* (Wallis in Braun 2010: 39).

Sutler-Cohen's (2005) discusses how a void and desire induced by modernity eliminates uncertainty due to modernity's exclusion of the sacred. He explains how

modernity entails a distinction between the sacred and the material. The rational materiality usually overrules the mystic experiences. Nevertheless, the search for mystic experiences seems grounded in the very nature of modernity. Von Stuckrad (2002) explains this as follows:

"...[T]he shaman became an indication of a new understanding of humanity's relation to nature, of man's ability to access spiritual levels of reality, and of leading a respectful life toward the 'sacred web of creation.' Henceforth, shamanism was no longer regarded as a spiritual path limited only to 'classical shamanic cultures.' Instead, by substituting the western positivistic and mechanistic attitude toward reality and nature with a holistic or vitalist one, shamanism was considered available to everyone – even to those in urban contexts that are estranged from nature." (774)

This citation suggests that neoshamanism stimulates a re-enchantment of the experience of nature in our contemporary society. However, this focus is not solely presented by neoshamanism. Taylor (2002) refers to the actual importance of the natural and alternative resources like for example homeopathy and upcoming eastern traditions in contemporary society. Speaking of eastern traditions, they have actually been able to integrate the experience of nature into the practitioners' everyday lives. The experience of nature is their everyday life and modernity comes second. For example, Chinese people in doing their daily exercises in order to keep their 'chi' in balance or the Buddhist and Hindu's that use meditation in order to connect with nature and the experiences it offers. These are only a few examples among many and exactly these traditions along with shamanism are to be maintained according to neoshamanic cosmological views that are presented in the literature.

Researchers have discussed how neoshamanism is like making the ancient traditions of shamanism rework (von Stuckrad 2002: Braun 2010). Neoshamanism is a cross-cultural phenomenon in a modern context for modern individuals. Furthermore, it serves as a counter-reaction to the disenchanting nature of modernity in contemporary society. It would therefore be interesting to see to what extent people nowadays attach value to the integration of ancient knowledge in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

The literature on shamanism presented the concepts through which we can explain the phenomenon of shamanism with its universal components as a totality. I have combined the diverse perspectives on the nature, the experiences and the belief systems of shamanism. The literature has shown how the combination of these perspectives to

(altered states of) consciousness and the way a shamanic culture perceives the cosmos, points at the interconnectedness of these topics. The literature has also pointed to a modern form of shamanism called neoshamanism. This modern form of shamanism contains and engenders the universals we have seen in research on the practices of shamanism. Finally, I have noticed how neoshamanism is a relatively neglected topic in the discipline of anthropology, possibly due to its inwards-looking character.

The combination of the literature concerning cosmovision and shamanism discusses how these holistic topics present the universe as a systematic totality. Moreover, cosmological research aims to construct a comprehensive image of the structure and evolution as a whole. This cosmological image of a certain shamanic culture provides the framework of reference or the matrix of consciousness from which all questions are posed and all answers are offered.

The following chapter presents a case study in which I will look deeper into how ancient knowledge together with the phenomenon of neoshamanism is integrated in contemporary society. Moreover, it will present how shamanism is re-enchanted through neoshamanism in a contemporary society where scientific materialism is highly valued. In this case study I will try to perceive how people are looking for re-enchancement in a so-called disenchanted world, as emphasised in the literature. This disenchanted world refers to a world where one supposedly has no longer recourse to magical means now that technical means perform most services.

4.

Case Study: Interconnecting knowledge in today's reality

A focus on today's reality and the integration of the past, the present and the future in the daily life of modern humans in a material world: <http://www.realitysandwich.com/>

In the previous chapters I have discussed three phenomena: shamanism, cosmovision and consciousness. In the attempt to present a better understanding of these phenomena, I have brought together the concepts that have once been delimited by researchers. In doing this, I have tried to perceive every topic as a total phenomenon. Moreover, I have tried to understand the way these topics are interconnected with each other. This has, theoretically seen, been a difficult challenge to tackle. In this chapter I will thus practically assess these phenomena by focussing on one case study that will bring these topics together in today's reality.

Reality Sandwich – Evolving Consciousness, Bite by Bite, is a platform on which different topics are presented and discussed. These topics range from sustainability to shamanism, alternate realities to alternative energy and remixing media to re-imagining community. The topics also concern holistic healing techniques and the perils of new technologies. The goal of this website is to “*inspire psychic evolution and a kind of earth alchemy*”. The website considers spicing up the debates in, according to them, a time of intense transformations. Furthermore, they try to engage people from all disciplines and interests to sound their voices and connect with each other. Through this network, people from everywhere have the opportunity to post articles concerning their topic of interest or post comments on what other people have stated or suggested.

A front-page article on the moment of writing entitles “Awaken the Visionary Shaman”. This article is an example of how people are interested in the integration of shamanism and consciousness in contemporary society. L. Wolf presents a contemporary perspective on (neo)shamanism:

What does it mean to "Awaken the Visionary Shaman," to live from the shamanic psychospiritual perspective, and to embrace the spiral cycles of change? The shamanic psychospiritual path is a path of direct experience to our own lives, the mystical and the mundane. It is not a religious path; however, it can be brought into any spiritual or religious tradition that you may already be involved with. It is the merging of the ancient wisdom teachings inherent in all traditions -- everything that has already been -- with the new, cutting-edge, consciousness

paradigm and downloads from the future, the quantum leap of being that is calling to us from our imaginal cells.”⁷

This article underpins the relevance of considering how people find it important to integrate ancient knowledge in their everyday lives. The topics in which they find this ancient knowledge are usually related to shamanism, cosmovision and/or consciousness. These phenomena have been discussed in my assessment of the literature in the previous chapters. This literature research has shown that they can be found in different widespread traditional and contemporary cultures, from the past to the present moment, where it is suggested to be integrated in our future.

The tag-cloud below in figure 4.1 is a copy from the one visible on the Reality Sandwich homepage and shows the interests and topics on which authors have been writing their articles. Among others, the topics of shamanism, healing, evolution and consciousness find themselves in a quite prominent place. This website forms one of the many platforms on which ancient knowledge is reconstructed and combined with modern ideas. The website highlights examples on how topics on ancient knowledge try to find their way into the contemporary/modern way of life.

Figure 4.1: Tag-cloud Reality Sandwich⁸



Among the people who frequently post new articles are many scholars from various disciplines. Also anthropologists have found the means in writing about their own experiences and research interests. Chris Kaplan has been exploring the comparative study of iconography through altered states of consciousness within the *depths of collective consciousness in which we are all subject*⁹, as he states. Hank Wesselman is paleoanthropologist and

another anthropologist writing for Reality Sandwich is Jeremy Narby, who is mostly known for his book entitled ‘The Cosmic Serpent and Intelligence in Nature’. A final contributor in the list presented on the website of Reality Sandwich is a medical

⁷ Article on Reality Sandwich: http://www.realitysandwich.com/awaken_visionary_shaman

⁸ Tag-cloud on homepage: <http://www.realitysandwich.com/>

⁹ Contributors list on Reality Sandwich: <http://www.realitysandwich.com/contributors>

anthropologist called Alberto Villoldo. Besides his research on spirituality and shamanism in the Amazon and the Andes, he also practices shamanic techniques himself and eventually teaches them to others.

In the chapter on cosmivision, I have discussed the research from multiple scholars along many disciplines. The literature has shown how we can perceive a cosmivision as a total phenomenon by combining several concepts that have been researched. The research has focussed on three fields of expression: narratives, rituals and symbols. These three aspects also appear when we apply these to the website of Reality Sandwich. This gives us the opportunity to address the growing importance of ancient knowledge and the transformation of the old, materialistic worldview in contemporary society.

Firstly, I put my focus on the aspect of narratives. The entire website can be seen as a database where modern narratives are stocked and made available for the public. Although these narratives mostly take shape in texts and articles, more modern media formats are also available. Participants can log in to live videoconferences where several topics are being discussed or YouTube channels, in which relevant videos are gathered together. Additionally, not only people of shamanic cultures now have access to this certain knowledge, but also anyone interested can join and interact.



Figure 4.2 (left) & Figure 4.3 (right): Examples of neoshamanic rituals

Furthermore the aspect of rituals constructing the total phenomenon of cosmivision is integrated in the website's model. The website monthly presents workshops, ceremonies or rituals to which one can apply for participation. These rituals approach many different angles, from (neo)shamanic initiation rituals to healing practices or large conferences with inspiring people. Among these people are authors, filmmakers and speakers in general who are well known in these circles. These people

¹⁰ Pachamama organizes sacred Music ritual: <http://www.pachamama.com/waterfall-of-music.asp>

¹¹ An audio course on experiencing mystical state of consciousness: <http://lp.higherbalance.com/ibtwn24>

could be seen as the shamans of this online community. They are often considered to be spiritual leaders and their talks are highly valued among practitioners. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 (above) are some examples of how rituals and ceremonies are presented on the website.

A final field in which we can construct a cosmovision are the symbolic expressions. The website Reality Sandwich is overloaded with symbolic messages and reproductions. More specifically, every article is supported with a certain drawing, picture or logo. We often find a drawing or a painting from Alex Grey. He is specialized in spiritual and psychedelic art from a visionary perspective. His drawings, sketches and paintings symbolize many aspects of human consciousness with a blending of mind, body and spirit. Alex Grey thereby uses a multidimensional perspective in creating and symbolizing the *universal human experiences* as he calls it himself.

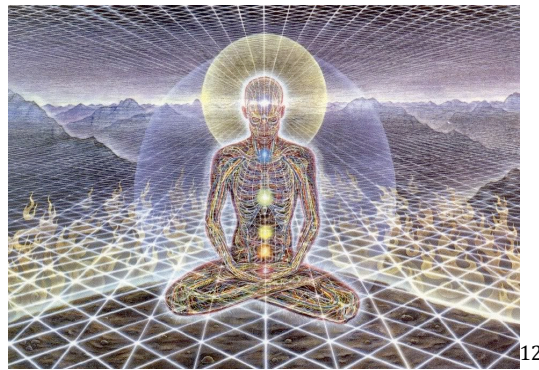


Figure 4.4: Symbolic expression of neoshamanic cosmovision¹²

After this presentation of the aspects that compose a cosmovision, we can perceive how the website is a forum on which a cosmovision is created and recreated. Everyone is free in his or her own interpretation in visualizing the cosmovision of contemporary society, for this is a universal one that is similar in function, but thereby not necessarily in form.

In this case study I have tried to show how the theories presented throughout the chapters in this thesis can be grounded and interconnected in this one example that contains all. Many people seem to be occupied with these thoughts and stimuli relevant to the topics I have discussed. Moreover, they are integrating these aspects into today's realities. The website presents the way in which the integration of the past, the present and the future in the daily life of modern humans in a material world can add up to the daily human experience. In merging ancient knowledge into the contemporary existing paradigms, it is suggested through this case study that one can experience other perspectives of life.

¹² Alex Grey – Knowledge and Chakras: <http://webpages.shepherd.edu/fmahooti/208-Spring2007/Philo-Spring2007.htm>

Conclusion:

The implications of a focus on phenomena

“One of the biggest awakenings you can have along the way is that everything you do, smell, taste, no matter how much you hate it or love it is your culture. You cannot escape it. If you want to try to escape it the first step is to simply see it, how huge it is. It’s hard for anybody to see their own culture. It’s big, and most people have some degree of comfort in their own culture, so they have no real reason to see it for what it is.”¹³

(Braun 2010: 119)

This statement of a neo-shamanic practitioner can be connected to William Dressler’s theory of cultural consonance. *“Cultural consonance is the degree to which people’s lives mirror a widely shared set of beliefs about what lives should look like* (Dressler in Bernard 2006: 65-66).” More specifically, cultural consonance refers to the extent to which individuals are able to connect with their own beliefs encoded in shared cultural models. This theory contains an important aspect to which I will appoint my conclusions.

This thesis has shown how seemingly disparate branches of knowledge, namely science and magic, can be brought together into a whole new spectrum that integrates both. On one hand I have combined literature from multiple disciplines: philosophy, psychology and anthropology with its sub disciplines like the anthropology of consciousness and transpersonal anthropology. The research within these disciplines has presented me the data and in depth theoretical elaborations through which I have shaped a platform of intensive discussions. On the other hand I have struggled with the many concepts that are presented by others. In my research on the concepts concerning shamanism, cosmovision and consciousness, I have tried to understand the interconnected nature of these topics.

The introduction of this thesis discussed how anthropology and science for that matter breaks matter or topics down into smaller parts and bits in pursuit of understanding the larger phenomenon. This approach in anthropological research has been shown to work, at least to some extent. However, putting these delimited concepts back together to understand their interconnectedness and to present the overview is difficult. My attempt to understand how the smaller cases and micro-issues connect with each other, to then connect to the bigger picture is a difficult challenge and appears to come later in the development of the phenomenon, the science or even the scholars themselves.

In my approach to the literature I have noticed different threads. Metaphorically,

¹³ The words of a neo-shamanic practitioner

these are like the threads of a spider's web. In my construction of this web, I have tried to reach the centre where the threads of our topics join together. More specifically, this means that I have tried to understand an interconnected view of our topics.

On one of these threads I focussed on research concerning the topic of cosmovision. In this chapter, Michael Winkelmann (et. al.) has shown how oral traditions or written narratives, ritual performances and symbolic expressions through art are the means in which we can reconstruct one's cosmological belief. Where cosmological beliefs are usually referred to as an aspect of traditional cultures, it has been shown that these kinds of projections are not so far from our own perspective of our contemporary environment. An important notion the literature has presented is the western paradigm that arguably prevents us from approaching mystical aspects of life in which may lay the answers to uncertainties.

Another thread is that of consciousness in which I have put my focus on the cultural aspect of this topic. In my focus on the literature concerning thoughts, I have pointed out that these are connected and projected into the external world. Collective consciousness is thus like a grid that includes all of our thoughts and ideas. Durkheim suggested how any society or other groups with mutual interests, like shamans, are connected by and have constructed this collective grid, which is like a matrix of the world as Foucault once described. In a practical mode this means that shamans are able to travel through this realm of nothingness, this void where all collective and cultural knowledge is collected. In my focus on the literature, I have noticed how the shaman reaches this collective grid by entering altered states of consciousness induced by vision plants and rhythmic sounds.

A final thread I followed in this thesis concerns the research of shamanism. In the research on this topic I have observed how the phenomenon of shamanism and its (universal) practices are transformed into a modern form of shamanism. More specifically, I have perceived how shamanistic practices in traditional cultures are still very much alive these days. These practises have found their revival in touristic shamanism, like for example the Ayahuasca rituals. In other words, we find ourselves in contemporary western society where shamanism is transformed in neoshamanism. The forms in which this is expressed vary, but its function is still as universal as the research on the phenomenon of shamanism suggests.

Finally, the case study shows how the combination of theories and data, presented in the literature, can be grounded in today's reality. Reality Sandwich has shown to be a website where people meet across space, across disciplines, across religions and across cosmological belief. It has shown to be a platform where thoughts

and theories can collide in the aim of constructing and building new ones. Reality Sandwich embodies the considerable importance people have attached to the integration of ancient knowledge in contemporary society.

The implications of this 'magical' movement appeared in the literature to be challenging for the materialistic realm in which western paradigm survives. In my focus on the studies and literature concerning neoshamanism, I noticed the lack of introspection amongst anthropologists. This lack of introspection points to the idea that anthropologists seem to be afraid to look for the truths in themselves, for it seems too biased and too subjective. Russell Bernard explains this phenomenon of cognitive dissonance as follows:

"When people have inconsistent beliefs, or when they perceive things in the real world to be out of whack with their ideas of how things should be, they feel discomfort. This discomfort leads people to strive naturally toward cognitive consonance (Bernard 2006: 65)".

More precisely this means that the cultural aspects and the western framework most scholars are bound to make it difficult to see whatever lies beyond these borders.

Anna Tsing among others inspired me to proceed to a more holistic understanding of the topics. She collected her data by approaching her respondents as cultural critics or "ethnographers" (1993: 225). As I am inspired by her approach to try something new, I tried to approach the topics in a manner that I can understand their interconnection and present the overview of the phenomena discussed. From my point of view, this perfectly operates within the discipline of anthropology. Although my specific approach still holds many holes and more questions than answers, it contains a new potency, which has been rarely considered before. It puts many academic conditions and demands to the test. Besides this, it challenges most of the foundations that the field of anthropology thrives on today, but this does not make it less valuable. This approach can be seen as a possibility in progress; it could therefore contain some meaningful values for future anthropological, theoretical research.

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to point out the importance of focusing on interconnectedness and the overall perspective on phenomena. At the same time I have criticized the way in which anthropologist often narrow down their focus to the smaller structures or micro-aspects of certain phenomena, looking far from home and never enough into themselves or the events that occur right in front of them. I am aware of the fact that even my perspective is not giving the total understanding of the topics. Although this has been my intention, it occurred to be too great of a challenge to tackle by myself. I am also aware of the seemingly outdated aspect of this approach in the field of anthropology, which appears as a post-functionalist approach in which I have tried to

revert to a focus on the wider phenomena. The tendency of focussing on grand theories has been exceeded by anthropology long time ago and there has been reason to do so. Nevertheless, the construction of theories is a phenomenon that has been in existence just as long as abstract thought has. Theories are being constructed and reconstructed throughout time. Although theories cannot fully represent truths, they are useful and necessary tools anthropologists need to use and constantly work with.

In my attempt to reconnect and understand the interconnectedness of the concepts, topics and theories some implications have come to the surface. The conclusions that we have been able to draw based on literature research suggest that we have only created another way of looking at the content instead of creating the overview. Another complication arises when we look at the selection of the literature. This selection was made in an unexplainable, biased way, which gives the approach a subjective and very self-projecting head start. The presentation of the theories throughout this thesis seems to be just another belief. It seems that I have created my own theoretical belief system or cosmovision, instead of finding a way around the systematic structural approach, which has been the original intention.

However, is this not what anthropology has been doing ever since the beginning of its existence as a discipline? In this way I feel limited by the discipline and approach of anthropology itself nowadays. Anthropological research has always presented the researcher's perspective on the matter, with the aspect of self-reflection kept in mind. Inevitably, when writing on a topic that is fluent and flexible, like research on transcendental experiences, one faces this criticism. This criticism arises when I try to make these topics understandable by delimiting the concepts and present a structuralist perspective on the topics. Thus, in this structuralist approach one would try to understand a fluent topic by delimiting its concepts and putting them in boxes. The question arises; how can we (metaphorically seen) possibly understand "circle-shaped" topics like transcendental experiences and cosmological beliefs when we try fitting them in "square-shaped" boxes that stem from a structuralist approach?

Integrating ancient knowledge, as proclaimed by neoshamanism int. al, in contemporary society between the everyday life and the existing Western paradigm is not an easy topic to understand. Once a technology or theory is entrenched, people would more easily conform their ideas and beliefs accordingly, than live in the discomfort of cognitive dissonance (Bernard & Peltó 1987). Nevertheless, throughout this thesis we have seen how people are inspired to escape some disenchanting, modern life that has been presented by contemporary societies. We have also seen how a modern shamanism could be the framework from which people can experience a re-

enchanted life. Unfortunately this is not a reality since these people, 'touched-by-
enchantment', still live in a world of dualism, where the enchanted is opposed by the
disenchanted. This search for enchantment therefore enhances the creation of a re-
enchanted imaginary community.

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