

The Figure of the Shaman as a Modern Myth

Some reflections on the attractiveness of shamanism in modern societies

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Abstract

With an increasing interest in shamanism in Western societies during the last decades the character of the shaman was—with an act of identifying—implanted into the cultural perspective of many subcultures. Due to the widespread psychologization of shamanism an overgeneralized and oversimplified view of traditional shamanism gives a matrix which creates the different popular conceptualizations of the figure of the shaman. In this paper, four areas explicitly referring to the figure of the shaman are described, demonstrating the fascination it holds and the manifold possibilities of interpretation. The four areas are: neoshamanism, the ‘urban shaman’ as cultural critic and rebel, technoshamanism/cybershamanism, and the field of performing and visual arts. Looking at these areas one can find ten elements of the shaman myth which form the popular image of shamanism in Western societies and which constitute the attractiveness and the fascination of the figure of the shaman. Referring to some philosophical concepts of the German philosopher Karl Jaspers the figure of the shaman can be understood as a powerful cipher of transcendence.

Introduction

In the last decades Western industrialized societies have shown an increasing interest in the figure of the shaman. For many people, the books of Carlos Castaneda presented a fascinating introduction to the subject, defining the role of the shaman in distant countries for many years. In doing so they refer to a fine European tradition: as early as the travel tales of the thirteenth century we find the first descriptions of shamans; during the Age of Enlightenment and romanticism the figure of the shaman became an important intellectual and literary issue.¹ Above all it served as a means of discrimination, giving a contrasting background to European culture in two ways: Either the shaman was demonized or medicalized, finally to be classified under the psychiatric perspective of the early twentieth century as “*arctic hysteria*”² whose behavior strongly

¹ Kocku von Stuckrad, "Reenchanting Nature: Modern Western Shamanism and Nineteenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, no. 4 (2002): 771-799.

² Andrej A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive. Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press), 81-101; Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism. Archaic techniques of ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Michael Winkelman, *Shamanism : The Neural Ecology of Consciousness and Healing*. Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 2000; Andrei A. Znamenski, "General Introduction. Adventures of the Metaphor: Shamanism and Shamanism Studies," in *Shamanism.*, ed. Andrei A. Znamenski, Critical Concepts in Sociology (London / New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), xix-lxxxvi; Roger N. Walsh, *The spirit of shamanism* (New York, NY: Tarcher, 1990); C. Jason Throop and Jennifer L. Dornan, "Psychopathology and Shamanism," in *Shamanism. An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, ed. Mariko N. Walter and Eva J. N. Friedman. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2004), 211-217; and Georges Devereux, "Shamans As Neurotics," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961): 1088-1090.

manifests a cultural and geographic predisposition of hysteria: a symbol of the irrationality, wilderness and inhospitality of a rough, natural environment, which was contrasted to civilization and culture. Or, in a positive sense, he was seen as the “*noble savage*” who stands in primal contact with nature and who speaks—like Orpheus—her language and knows how to enchant her, who enters into hidden dimensions of reality, not yielding to the degenerative influences of civilization.³

Such images have lost nothing of their formative power, but despite that, the situation has fundamentally changed. With an *act of identifying, appropriation* has taken the place of the former demarcation and thus the character of the shaman was implanted into the cultural perspective of many subcultures. The image of the shaman as a gifted healer, which is of fundamental importance for so-called neoshamanism, forms only a part of this semantic field. This paper wants to demonstrate several facets of the reception of the shaman into modern Western societies, as well as going further into the question of the fascination he holds, making the figure of the shaman a modern myth and a powerful cipher of transcendence.

Shamans in traditional societies

The above-quoted perspectives of the shaman as *arctic hysterics*, *Orpheus*, and *healer* contain some of the elements which characterize shamans in traditional cultures when looked at from a Western perspective. The character of the traditional shaman has also to be seen as a Western construction.⁴ It is the result of a widespread psychologization of shamanism which took place as a result of increasing interest in studies on altered states of consciousness.⁵ Although many anthropologists rightly criticize this emphasis on psychological states of shamans with its aim of stressing the universalizing theories of shamanism, the latter had an immense impact on the popular reception of the figure of the traditional shaman in Western societies which cannot be overstated. This imbalanced and oversimplified view of shamanism, which downplays its social and cultural dimension, provides the matrix for most conceptualizations of the figure of the shaman. Books by scholars such as Eliade, Harner, Goodman, Kalweit, Drury, among many others, are a key source for a vast amount of popular literature on shamanism with their own aims of introducing alternative forms of therapy and spirituality.⁶

³ See Znamenski, *General Introduction*; Ronald Hutton, *Shamans. Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London and New York: Hambleton and London, 2001); Roberte N. Hamayon, "Are 'Trance', 'Ecstasy' and Similar Concepts Appropriate in the Study of Shamanism?", in *Shamanism in Performing Arts*, ed. Tae-gon Kim and Mihály Hoppál. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995), 18f. A detailed and brilliant historical survey on this topic is given by Kocku von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik. Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 35-137. A compilation of early texts on shamanism is provided by Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley, *Shamans Through Time. 500 Years on the Path of Knowledge*. (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2004).

⁴ Andrej A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*. Cp. also Graham Harvey, "General Introduction," in *Shamanism. A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-23.

⁵ Mircea Eliade's equation of shamanic practice and the technique of ecstasy, addressed in his influential book *Shamanism* (first published 1951 in French), has been a main impulse for this development, although there are more influences which can be found. See Jane Monnig Atkinson, "Shamanisms today," in *Shamanism*, ed. Andrei A. Znamenski., Critical Concepts in Sociology (London / New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 117-145, for a concise historical reconstruction of this development.

⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*; Michael Harner, *The way of the shaman. A guide to power and healing* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990); Felicitas D. Goodman, *Where the spirits ride the wind. Trance journeys and other ecstatic experiences* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990); Holger Kalweit, *Dreamtime and Inner Space. The World of the Shaman* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1988); Nevill Drury, *The shaman and the magician. Journeys between the worlds* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). All of these authors have (or had) specific approaches and occupations: Eliade was engaged in the history of religion, and his scholarly

In order to reconstruct a wide range of the popular concepts of shamanism in modern Western cultures it may be helpful first of all to outline the character of the *traditional* shaman as emphasized in many general theories of shamanism, as well as some of the main points of the shamanic cosmology.⁷ American psychologist Roger Walsh mentions some fundamental elements of shamanism:

Shamanism can be defined as a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves or their spirit(s), traveling to other realms at will, and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community.⁸

The crucial points are: the deliberate entering into altered states of consciousness with the intention of gaining information, service for the community, the assumption of one or more realms of “other realms” (Non-Ordinary Reality–NOR) to which one can, in principle, have access, and the communication with entities (power animals, spirit helpers, etc.) in this NOR.⁹ The two latter points are fundamental elements of shamanic cosmology, which is shaped by the assumption of mutually pervading realms of reality. The model of the shamanic world is divided in three parts: the Lower World, the Middle World, and the Upper World, which are connected through a ‘World Axis’ (also a ‘World Tree’). During the state of trance the NOR can be traveled using imagined points of connection such as trees, caves, ponds, etc. The otherworldly realms are populated with *spirits* and *spiritual entities*, with which the traveler can communicate. During his training the shaman encounters his personal *spirit helpers* and *power animals*, which act as guides, informants, and protectors during those travels.

Two other elements are of great importance in understanding shamanism. On the one hand the shamanic world view is *animistic*. The whole natural environment is experienced as being alive, and during altered state of consciousness the shaman can communicate with animals, plants, stones, etc. Another important element is the assumption of an *all-embracing connectedness*. In the shamanic view all things are connected, and this applies both to animate as well as inanimate objects. It is impossible to see things in an isolated way, the cosmos being understood as a large organism. Under this assumption the transmission of information becomes plausible, a fact which appears impossible under a scientific worldview. Thinking in analogies and the ‘synchronistic’ interpretation of events are important when adopting this approach.

The shaman is an essential part of many traditional communities. Though he is not necessarily popular and sometimes even dreaded, he takes on vital functions within the social community: He gives the feeling of control over events within a cosmic perspective, and is responsible for the maintenance of balance in the social community, as problems in individual lives, as well as in the collective generally, are understood as disturbances of a necessary balance. Intervention may be required in the field of health (healing rituals and treatments), food (magical rituals for successful

work on shamanism became a main reference of the neoshamanic conceptualization of shamanism (von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik*, 123-135). The anthropologists, Harner and Goodman who turned to neoshamanic teachers and practitioners. Kalweit researched ethnopsychology and became a psychotherapist, whilst Drury carried out his research as an independent scholar of religion.

⁷ This outline will, of course, be oversimplified, but so is the popular matrix which creates the different popular conceptualizations of the figure of the shaman. It therefore serves the purpose of this paper well. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, "Shamanism and Cosmology," in *Shamanism. An Expanded View of Reality*, ed. Shirley Nicholson. (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1987), 17-46; Piers Vitebsky, *Shamanism* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); and Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth. Contemporary Paganism*. (London: Hurst & Company, 1997).

⁸ Walsh, *The spirit of shamanism*, 11.

⁹ Ruth-Inge Heinze similarly stresses these three points to characterize the profiles of contemporary shamans (Ruth-Inge Heinze, *Shamans of the 20th Century*, 24).

hunting and for good weather), and success in waging war. Furthermore, the shaman enhances community cohesion by making and cultivating myths and looking after the preservation of traditions; he helps as a diviner and clairvoyant by gaining information by non-ordinary means; and he accompanies the dying so there is an unproblematic passage into the realm of the ancestors without major problems for the remaining community (his function as a *psychopomp*). Shamanic intervention is usually *culturally conservative*. However, if the culture has become strongly unbalanced, they can become *innovative*. Using a specific state of altered consciousness, the shaman is able to loosen the texture of experiences which are obscured by concepts and ideas during normal or everyday states of consciousness. He can thereby find new ways, perspectives, and solutions. Such experiences encountered during deliberately induced altered states of consciousness can radically change the perception of reality and gains local authority on the basis of the shaman's authority. As Baker points out: "Altered states of consciousness can thus serve problem-solving functions, and can also result in the development of new ways of looking at the world".¹⁰ In this respect the shaman is both acting within his tradition, yet can react in an adaptable way to changed situations when conventional cultural concepts are no longer effective.¹¹

Facets of the figure of the shaman in modern cultures

In the following, four areas explicitly referring to the figure of the shaman are described, demonstrating the fascination it holds and the manifold possibilities of interpretation.

***Neoshamanism*¹²**

The Western neoshamanism has the primary orientation towards the aspects of the *healer* and the *spiritual teacher* in common. This means that shamanic techniques are seen as part of the fields of complementary medicine, personal growth, self empowerment, and counseling in the broadest sense, attempting to integrate 'ancient' shamanic knowledge into the established Western health care system, thus becoming part of complementary medicine and therapeutics. Depending on uses and social locations, shamanism is either understood as a *technique* or a *world view*. In the former case it is easier to integrate it into non-shamanic cultures. An example for this approach is the method of *core shamanism*, developed by American anthropologist Michael Harner. He tried to

¹⁰ John R. Baker, "Keepers of Tradition, Agents of Change: Shamanism, Altered States of Consciousness, and Cultural Adaption," *Curare* 22 (1999), 119.

¹¹ References to further literature on the shaman's role of disrupting, creating, and sustaining order can be found in Atkinson, *Shamanisms today*, 129.

¹² There has never been any conceptual accuracy in the use of the term 'neoshamanism'. In English-speaking countries it is mostly used as a collective name for a heterogenic field of new shamanic movements. It is also sometimes called 'modern shamanism', 'Western shamanism', or white shamanism. I do not strictly follow the definition of neoshamanism suggested by Joan B. Townsend, "Individualist Religious Movements: Core and Neo-Shamanism," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 14, no. 1 (2004), 1-9, but use it in a broader sense as a superior category containing a lot of different modern shamanic approaches—some more eclectic, others more specific, but all stressing a (Western) concept of shamanism, all relying "on a context of radical modernity" (Paul C. Johnson, "Shamanism from Ecuador to Chicago. A Case study in New Age ritual apropiation," in *Shamanism. A Reader.*, ed. Graham Harvey. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003, 334-354) and all with direct or hidden references to the Western esoteric tradition. Although there are differences between Core shamanism and other modern shamanic approaches it makes to my opinion little sense to put all the other—partly very specific—approaches into a kind of residual category termed Neoshamanism. Townsend's differentiation inherently contains pejorative elements towards 'all the others'. For criticism on Townsend's position see Loren Cruden, *Coyote's Council Fire. Contemporary Shamans on Race, Gender, & Community* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1995), 23-25, and Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans.*, 57f.

free indigenous shamanic techniques of their cultural context and to get a universal form reduced to its core elements. Basic shamanic techniques (the controlled use of altered states of consciousness in particular) are taught in workshops given by the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*—an organization founded by Harner in 1985. These introductory courses brought fast success for most participants, that is, they sometimes had very intensive experiences which are seen as sense-making and meaningful.¹³ For many neoshamans, these courses represented a gateway to their practice.¹⁴

Whilst *Core shamanism* seems to reduce shamanism to a set of culturally independent techniques, *ethno-shamanic* approaches emphasize the exchange with authentic experts. Native shamans are invited to transmit their personal experience to interested people in the west. Alternatively, initiated Westerners who have undergone a long period of training with indigenous people communicate the knowledge they have acquired. The aim of these efforts is, on the one hand, a broadening of the spectrum of common medical and psychological therapies, and on the other, the strengthening and maintaining these treatments in their primary cultures where they are strongly threatened by the influence of modern Western medicine.¹⁵

Other neoshamanic approaches can also be found, although this would be beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁶ The various forms of neoshamanism extend from a rather technical approach to a spiritual-religious view: courses on the use of shamanic techniques in management and business, sweatlodge rituals, healing sessions, shamanic drumming groups, shamanic counseling, introductory courses to basic shamanic techniques, vision quests, shamanic dream work, travels to authentic shamans in Tuva or the Amazonian rain forest, and ethnomedical workshops, among many others.

The (urban) shaman as cultural critic, rebel, and anarchist

Shamanism and the figure of the shaman are not only limited to the areas of healing and self-actualization in esoteric and New Age movements. *Cultural critique* in a broad sense builds another

¹³ For detailed information on these basic workshops and on the performance of shamanic traveling using the method of Core shamanism see Harner, *The way of the shaman*; Galina Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene. Neo-Shamanism in Contemporary Sweden*, Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 39 (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 1997), and Merete Demant Jakobsen, *Shamanism. Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999).

¹⁴ Although characterized as a pure technique by Harner and other Core shamanic authors, we can find that the practice of core shamanism aggregates techniques of altering consciousness with specific religious beliefs (see Lindquist, 1997). Townsend numbers Core shamanism among the group of individualist religious movements which have become increasingly prominent over the last few decades (Townsend, *Individualist Religious Movements*)—a classification which does not fit in with the way Core shamanism has defined itself as simply a technique for gaining knowledge, but mirrors the approach of most Core shamanic practitioners.

¹⁵ This statement can only, of course, be directed to respectable organisations and providers. Many things offered within an ethno-shamanic context is not approved by either many native shamans or by the *Foundation of Shamanic Studies*. Principally concerns center around cultural and spiritual exploitation by Western providers of workshops and the disclosure of secret knowledge by natives "who have taken up the practice of marketing their heritage to the highest bidder" [Ward Churchill, "Spiritual Hucksterism. The Rise of plastic Medicine Men," in *Shamanism. A Reader.*, ed. Graham Harvey. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 326]. See i.e. Dagmar Wernitznig, *Going Native or Going Naïve? White Shamanism and the Neo-Noble Savage* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003). For the controversies on plastic shamanism and spiritual exploitation see also Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 33-48.

¹⁶ I.e. Huna Shamanism, Tensegrity, Celtic Shamanism, Trance Postures, and others. See i.e. Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans*. A particular issue would be the integration of shamanic and neoshamanic elements into psychotherapeutic approaches, particularly transpersonal psychotherapy.

approach.¹⁷ In esoteric groups, particularly belonging to the field of contemporary paganism, and even in parts of academic psychology, moments of a cultural critique are hinted at e.g. as a criticism of modern high technology medicine or of environmental damage.¹⁸ Psychologist Renaud van Querkelberghe, for instance, regards the realisation of a “shamanic healing attitude” [“schamanisches Heilungsbewusstsein”] characterized by nonlinear, egalitarian, holistic, and harmonic features as an important challenge of modern societies. He wishes “to concentrate all efforts on the dawning of a new era in which a definitive farewell to modern mentality, and thus to the ‘Babylon project’ will be prepared”.¹⁹

There are, however, outsiders and members of cultural minorities for whom a shaman represents someone who has a ‘real’ deeper knowledge and who confronts society with uncomfortable truths. We find this, for example, in a book by Gerd-Lothar Reschke under the title of “Der moderne Schamane” [*The Modern Shaman*]. The author criticizes the illusions of occultists who loose contact to a down-to-earth reality, and explains the “real nature” of a shaman:

The shaman is a specific character which has been found in every epoch and every culture, which still exists and will always do so. A shaman is somebody who is called upon to ‘look behind’ everyday reality. Shamans exist—to dismiss the stereotype once and for all—in computer companies, and advertising agencies, in sports clubs, film productions, in high-rise buildings, and the internet—of course there and everywhere else too.²⁰

In such approaches belonging to the field of alternative culture and the counterculture, the ‘other reality’ is understood as a kind of underlying layer which contains the ‘true reality’. In a similar way to the above quotation, Terence McKenna points out:

A shaman is someone who has been to the end, it's someone who knows how the world really works, and knowing how the world really works means to have risen outside, above, beyond the dimensions of ordinary space, time, and casuistry, and actually seen the wiring under the board, stepped outside the confines of learned culture and learned and embedded language, into the domain of what Wittgenstein called ‘the unspeakable’, the transcendental presence of the other, which can be absanctioned, in various ways, to yield systems of knowledge which can be brought back into ordinary social space for the good of the community, so in the context of ninety percent of human culture, the shaman has been the agent of evolution (...)²¹

¹⁷ Stephen O. Murray, “Die ethnoromantische Versuchung,” in *Der Wissenschaftler und das Irrationale. Erster Band: Beiträge aus Ethnologie und Anthropologie I*, ed. Hans Peter Duerr. (Frankfurt/ Main: Syndikat, 1985), 104-112.

¹⁸ For the engagement of neoshamanism in issues and projects concerning environmental protection see e.g. Gordon MacLellan, "Dancing on the Edges. Shamanism in modern Britain," in *Shamanism. A Reader.*, ed. Graham Harvey. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 365-374; Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*; and Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*.

¹⁹ Renaud van Querkelberghe, "Wiederbelebung archaischer Vernunft und schamanischen Heilungsbewusstseins durch transformatives Lernen," in *Ethnotherapien – Therapeutische Konzepte Im Kulturvergleich*, ed. Christine E. Gottschalk-Batschkus and Christian Rätsch. (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1998), 252. Translation by G.M.

²⁰ Gerd-Lothar Reschke, *Schamane in Deutschland. I: Wirk-Gilde* (Leipzig: Engelsdorfer Verlag, 2004), 11.

²¹ Terence McKenna, "Re: Evolution," 2005,

http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/mckenna_terence/mckenna_terence_re_evolution.shtml

(accessed May 14, 2008). A further example of a similar opinion can be found in John Jay Harper, *Transformers: shamans of the 21st century* (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2006), lxxi-lxxxix. For Harper, shamans can see “through the illusions of good and evil, life and death, space and time. They refuse to play the game the majority of us play, preferring to create new ones in their place” (lxxvi).

The surface of things is thus characterized as concealing what is beneath. The emphasis lies on a rebellious ‘scratching away at the-finish’; and in this regard the figure of the shaman can be considered a *surface anarchist*. The rules which he will accept, and to which he has to play by, lie under the surface. They lie beyond appearance, namely in a ‘true reality’, to which the urban shaman²² believes he has access. This perspective is often linked to an animistic world view as well as to magic beliefs. The types range from the privileged ‘fool at the king’s court’ who is strongly dependent on the social system (and who supposedly supports the system), to different kinds of so-called *Urban Primitives* trying to eke out a living in the ‘urban jungle’ by magical means or wanting to bring civilization back to the ‘right path’. Some excerpts from the *City Witch Song*, composed by one of the authors of the book *Urban Primitive*, express many of the facets mentioned:

In the long ago and the far away/ We tilled the soil and worked the clay (...) Many long years have passed since then/ And the circle song now rises again/ And we must choose as we crouch in the ruins of men .../ (...) At the cost of pity to follow the dream/ Or to lend the help of our hands/ (...) And a new power grows in this cold stone womb;/ To heal the wounds of the masses lost,/ We’re the generation that carries the cost/ Of averting humanity’s doom./ But the mother’s land is split and sold/ And the Green Man’s peace must be bought with gold/ And million banished to the cities cold .../ (...) And we drag each other up out of the mire,/ And we weave our web/ Until we close humanity in;/ (...) Where there’s fear there’s power;/ Where there’s change there’s fear;/ To the cries of the city we raise our voice,/ A living example that there is a choice,/ To the lost a candle/ To the hopeless a star,/ To the walking dead a mirror.²³

These romanticising and poignant words forward the opinion that individual survival and the salvation of mankind can only be successful by returning to the world views, moral concepts, and the wisdom of primitive cultures.²⁴ Less dramatic, but pointing in the same direction with a slightly different scope is the approach suggested by MacLellan, who sees the tasks of modern shamans as being similar to that in traditional shamanism, even though

the shapes modern shamans take may be apparently different from their traditional one (...). The role of guide or pathfinder or communicator has specialised a bit now, perhaps because of the nature of the individuals involved or simply because we now live in such large groups of people that the shamanic function has had to subdivide for shamans to remain collective at all. Modern shamans may be

²² The label “urban shaman” is not to be mistaken for the urban shamanism in Siberia, Nepal, Korea, and elsewhere, which concerns traditional shamans practicing in urban areas with a living shamanic tradition. The latter terminology is etic (see Townsend, *Individualist Religious Movements*, 2), the former emic. It has been popularized by the book *Urban Shaman* by the psychologist Serge Kahili King [Serge Kahili King, *Urban Shaman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990)], and spread, with more or less different denotation, to other realms [i.e. Gabrielle Roth, *Maps to Ecstasy. Teachings of an Urban Shaman* (Novata, California: New World Library, 1989)].

²³ Raven Kaldera and Tannin Schwartzstein, *Urban Primitive. Paganism in the Concrete Jungle* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2002), xiii-xv.

²⁴ As the authors write elsewhere: “Those of us who practice real urban magic are trying to see beyond the rote, brutal tediousness of twenty-first century urban life to something deeper, and those of us who are on a lower income may live a life that is startlingly close, in many ways, to that of our more ‘primitive’ hunter-gatherer ancestors” (*ibid.*, x).

personal healers: shamans who help people listen to themselves
community healers: shamans who help people listen to each other
patterners: shamans who help the community listen to/ relate to the world around them²⁵

He defines his own duty as a modern shaman as follows:

My 'job' is to help people find their own relationship with nature and to understand and appreciate that connection. Working in environmental education and interpretation as I do, my daily work is part of the fulfilling of my shamanic function: I help people explore the world around them. I rarely do this with traditional shamanic tools²⁶

Contrary to former movements in the early seventies which were critical of modern civilization, no migration from the cities to a rural idyll is proposed; instead the new power shall rise out of the 'cold concrete womb'. The reasons for this are ideological as well as pragmatic: neopagan movements emanate from urban environments where it is easier to find like-minded people than in rural regions. Although urban shamans and urban primitives are not hostile to modern technology, their metaphors and visions are strongly related to the pagan world view of primitive peoples and former civilizations. The efforts to integrate the figure of the shaman into such a context are somewhat easier to handle.²⁷

Technoshamanism and cybershamanism

In so-called *technoshamanism* and *cybershamanism* we find a more striking shift of meaning. The use of the terms is unclear and heterogeneous, and although the two terms are sometimes used synonymously, the main focus is slightly different. They nevertheless have a strongly presence-orientated view in common. Inspiration is not drawn primarily from social structures of primitive or former cultures, but also from utopian concepts of an alternative counter-culture and vanguard cyberculture. The author and ethnopharmacologist Terence McKenna is one of the spearheads of this movement.²⁸ He studied hallucinogenic plants in the Amazon at the beginning of the seventies, and addressed questions of globalization and ecology with a 'bio-futuristic scenario' at an early stage.²⁹ For McKenna, who is also known for his work with musicians and producers of the techno-music scene, *Raves* i.e. big techno music parties, represent ritual events in which the participants can have impressive spiritual experiences of mystical participation and connectedness under the influence of fast monotone rhythms and entheogenic substances (i.e. drugs). The place of the event, the techno-shamanic dance-floor, becomes a sacred space which facilitates a group-mind, where contact with 'other realities' can be found, and where the

²⁵ MacLellan, *Dancing on the Edges*, 368f.

²⁶ Ibid., 369. See also Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans*; MacLellan, *Dancing on the Edges*; Beverley Butler, "The Tree, the Tower and the Shaman. The material Culture of Resistance of the No M11 Link Roads Protest of Wanstead and Leytonstone, London," in *Shamanism. A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 375-401, and Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth. Contemporary Paganism*. (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 122.

²⁷ Films such as *Crocodile Dundee* (Faiman, USA 1986) which present a sharp-witted 'natural' man in the context of a decadent big-city lifestyle provide a stimulating, though not completely adequate, model.

²⁸ See http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/mckenna_terence/mckenna_terence.shtml (accessed May 14, 2008)

²⁹ "Our present global crisis more profound than any previous historical crises; hence our solutions must be equally drastic. I propose that we should adopt the plant as the organizational model for life in the twenty-first century, just as the computer seems to be the dominant mental/social model of the late twentieth century, and the steam engine was the guiding image of the nineteenth century" [Terence McKenna, "Plan, Plant, Planet," 2006, http://deoxy.org/t_ppp.htm (accessed May 14, 2008)].

participants “can become part of this Gaian supermind”.³⁰ Thereby the boundaries between performers and audience dissolve: “(...) large groups of people getting together in the presence of this kind of music are creating a telepathic community of bonding that hopefully will be strong enough that it can carry the vision out into the mainstream of society”.³¹

Whereas McKenna emphasizes the *spiritual collective experience* and the *political utopia*³² the ethnopharmacologist Christian Rätsch strongly stresses the interpretation of the shaman as a *master of trance* and *ecstasy*. The charismatic *disc jockey* (DJ) is regarded as a successor to the shaman as his role is the controlled induction of altered states of consciousness by means of sounds and rhythms.³³ Rätsch says: “The DJ as a ‘technoshaman’ has to make a contact between tribesmen and the numinous. He works above all with rhythms ...”.³⁴ Elsewhere Rätsch terms techno “the consequent transmutation of archaic shaman music in technological information age”.³⁵ Rätsch looks at shamanism from a universalistic perspective as an *archaic form of biotechnology*: Shamans, as “programming masters of the human biocomputer”³⁶, are able to handle and manipulate human states of consciousness. He makes the case that shamanism, techno, and cyberspace are three cultural phenomenons which “have to be attributed to the same matrix of our consciousness, or culturally manifest in our consciousness through the ‘archetypal’ (or ‘typal’) matrix—that is the basis of our imagination generating prototypical patterns”.³⁷

Rätsch points out—like many others—that shamanism is not a religion, but a set of techniques. Indeed, he reverses the popular argument by not seeing shamanic practice as a tool of religion or healing, but by declaring the shamanic state of consciousness and the experience drawn from this to be the goal. This therefore stresses the hedonistic aspect: the aim of gaining new experience and finding ecstasy. This perspective differs from seeing shamanism as a spiritual conception of life, the latter of which not only has hedonistic and joyful sides in traditional shamanic cultures (as well as for serious shamanic practitioners in modern societies), but also requires years of discipline to reach adepthood. Indeed we cannot accuse Rätsch of lacking experience with traditional shamanism which he got to know well during his travels. His uncritical analogies between the techno scene and shamanism may reflect his fascination by this youth culture and their relationship to drugs and ecstasy, expressing the desire to bring the two still very different worlds of traditional shamanism and the techno scene together.³⁸

³⁰ McKenna, "Re: Evolution".

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Dave Green, "Technoshamanism: Cyber-sorcery and schizophrenia," 2001, <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/london2001/green.htm> (accessed May 14, 2008)

³³ Christian Rätsch, "Techno-Schamanen," *Connection special*, no. III/00 (2000): 44-47; Christian Rätsch, *Schamanismus, Techno und Cyberspace. Von "natürlichen" und "künstlichen" Paradiesen* (Solothurn: Nachtschatten, 2001).

³⁴ Rätsch, "Techno-Schamanen", 45 (*Translation by G.M.*).

³⁵ Rätsch, *Schamanismus, Techno und Cyberspace*, 18 (*Translation by G.M.*).

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

³⁸ Typically enough, an ethnomedical workshop with a Columbian shaman, organized and conducted by Rätsch amongst others in November 2001, took place in the rooms of Natraj Temples, a rave and goa disco in Munich.

We can find something similar by authors such as Dave Green who—picking up the concepts of Deleuze and Félix Guattari³⁹—relate the ciphers of the *Rhizome* and the *Nomad* to techno-shamanic practices:

Clearly nomadic, rhizomatic thinking underpins the bricolage that comprises technoshamanism. The rhizome however also links the specific elements that compromise the heterotopic space of the dance floor, bringing together retraditionalized ritual forms with contemporary technology. The endless drum loops and samples are themselves rhizomatic. Rhythms and sacred sounds culled from archaic sources fold back themselves in endless variation but are still part of the same continuous movement of sound, reverberating from their times and places of origin into the now of the dance floor. (...) The rhizome also psychically links individuals with transformative shamanic hidden realities and artistic inspiration bringing them, in the terminology of McKenna, in direct contact with Gaia.⁴⁰

The nomadically emerging musical fragments stemming from shamanic traditions should carry the participants through rhizomes of time, space and memory. With this model of a shallow, subterrestrial and thereby not directly visible root system, the author wants to make plausible a ‘substantive’ (quasi ‘material’) relationship between the events on the dance-floors of rave parties and shamanic practices in traditional cultures. At the same time the rhizomatic thinking should serve as a model for experiences of mystical participation as a result of the dissolution of the boundaries between rave participants.

The rhizomatic thinking raises another aspect of shamanism in an unexpected place: referring to Green, the postmodern changing of identities in cyberspace reflects the aspect of the trickster in the figure of shaman. Like a shaman who temporarily changes his shape and identity during a ritual and connects himself with, for example, the figure of a so-called power animal, a person moving like a nomad through the chat-rooms of cyberspace can change his identity incognito: “Cyberspace, like ritual space, is an important site for spiritual transformation where one is able to perform, play with, deconstruct and reconstruct identity”.⁴¹

Although such notions may be perceived as stimulating, they leave a feeling of theoretical overload at the expense of analytical depth. Using Green’s analogy, as the rhizomatic network hardly leaves the surface, so the mentioned analogies stay superficial. The emphasis on non-hierarchical structural elements disregards the hierarchically formed structure of the shamanic cosmology and its deep roots in the cultural tradition. The flat-rooted, horizontally spreading shamanic world tree has yet to prove its practicality.

Let us return to the characterization of the figure of the shaman as a *surface anarchist*. In an anarchistic manner, elements of different cultural areas and ideological models have been

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1988).

⁴⁰ Dave Green, *Technoshamanism*.

⁴¹ Ibid. See also the cultural critic Erik Davis who writes in his book *TechGnosis*, an exploration of “the mystical impulses that lie behind our obsession with information technology” (*cover text of the book*), on the fascination of the figure of the shaman: “Many MUDders (MUD is an abbreviation for: Multi-User Dungeon – G.M.) and other online changelings would accord with the wizard Tuan Mac Cairill’s cheer in the Irish tale *The Voyage of Bran*: ‘A hawk to-day, a boar yesterday,/ Wonderful instability! This is the song of the shaman, whose archetypal popularity in contemporary spiritual culture cannot be simply put down to colonizing New Age romanticism. The shaman changes shape, interbreeds with animals and inhuman cosmic forces, and even scrambles gender roles through cross-dressing and other tricks. Moreover, the shaman leaves his or her body to enter an immense and incorporeal soul-space teaming with images, information and entities, many of them quite hostile and deceptive. Of course, the shaman also returns from the bowels of the earth with medicine to heal the tribe, whereas we return from a night of MUDding or netlust with aching eyes, sore wrists, and often a vaguely hollow feeling of spent life force.’ [Erik Davis, *Tech Gnosis. Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2004), 265].

agglomerated, but the connecting elements do not leave the realm of the surface. One can see this most prominently in less elaborated texts on techno-shamanism and cyber-shamanism respectively, which are targeted towards a general audience and where one can often find an unreflective sequencing of current catch phrases from the field of 'pop sciences' (particularly favored are quantum physics and Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields). One should, however, not draw the conclusion that the needs and yearnings concealed behind this are superficial. The problem is building an adequate connection between interests in modern technology and in spirituality. A review of the computer software *Cybershaman* shows such a conglomeration of interests:

Spinning Buddhist prayer wheels or whirling about like a god intoxicated Sufi may help some open up to higher realms. But for those of us who tend to spend more time at our computer stations than on Zafu cushions and yoga mats, there's something even better to assist us into a benignly altered state of being: an intriguing software application fittingly named: *Cybershaman*.⁴²

The fact that hardly anything reminds us of shamanic practices in this software except for the name and the reference to altered states of consciousness, that the content is mainly made up of elements from different religions and schools of higher wisdom such as yoga, Buddhism, and also astrology, and that the procedure itself refers to magical beliefs and practices⁴³ (the main module of the software is named *Wish Machine*), – all this illustrates the eclecticism of combining spiritual contents with other esoteric elements, and with the fascination for modern technology (and in this case, in addition to a particular fondness for simple solutions):

Cybershaman's basic principle of operation involves the use of psionics: focusing our intent, whether it be to send prayers to someone in need of healing, warding off negativity or manifesting a soul mate and then clicking the 'send' button. It is as simple as that!⁴⁴

Finally, the aim of those people who are seriously engaged in techno-shamanism seems to be to connect to ancient spiritual traditions without abandoning the orientation towards the technological avant-garde (cyberspace, virtual reality), or maybe, more accurately, to inoculate the 'cold' realm of technology with a spiritual germ. Thereby the individualistic shamanic form of spirituality seems to be more suitable than the form molded by Western churches.

Actors and artists as shamans

The three areas described above are characterized by an explicit reference to shamanism through self attribution and self characterization. In contrast to this, such affinities and analogies are postulated in the field of performing and visual arts also from an external viewpoint e.g. from art criticism. For the emerging of myths, the question of whether such attributions are adequate has a secondary importance. The larger textual distance which often correlates with a minor knowledge of the matter can enhance the degrees of freedom regarding the possibilities of projection. And the fact that the use of the term is not only dependent upon the members of some limited subcultures, but is also formed by cultural mediators (e.g. journalists, art critics), similarly contributes to the wider spectrum of meaning and to the generation of a myth of the shamanic figure. By characterizing rock singer and poet Patti Smith in a record review as a

⁴² Jaye Beldo, "Healing Technology: Cybershaman Software," http://beta.associatedcontent.com/article/2374/healing_technology.html (accessed May 14, 2008).

⁴³ The terms "shaman", "magician", and "sorcerer" are often used synonymously in those contexts. They characterize a person who is familiar with the means and practices referring to a realm beyond the materialistic, subjected to scientifically well-known natural laws.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

praying shaman who is able to combine classical techniques of ecstasy in her chant with a totally new sound which transcends boundaries,⁴⁵ by subtitling a comic biography of the German artist Joseph Beuys "Der lächelnde Schamane" [The Smiling Shaman],⁴⁶ and by naming an actor a modern shaman⁴⁷ different aspects of the shaman are touched upon: the ecstatic, the ritualist, the performer, the quick-change artist/trickster, and the visionary who brings virtually inaccessible layers of reality to light, and who can generate utopian ideas. It is important not to also forget the shaman as a public person who stands out from the crowd because of his character and social role.

For some art critics and theorists, artists are seen as heirs of indigenous shamans. Udo Kultermann primarily stresses the power of art to change society. As the traditional shaman has an important function in maintaining the balance in his community, as well as giving it a center and direction, the modern artist of the twentieth century should rectify social imbalance, and help realize utopian social visions. The author notes:

The shaman doesn't produce objects, even though the shaman is normally also an artist in primitive communities, but rather acts like an artist through self-abandonment, through making sacrifices for the community. By means of self commitment he stimulates healing behavior in others. In such a perspective, the consequence of modern shamanism is the 'happening'.⁴⁸

Artists have also taken such references into account.⁴⁹ Thus Joseph Beuys cultivated such an image by means of his habit, of his biographical mise-on-scene, and of his performances and/or activities (e.g. "Coyote; I like America and America likes me", May 1974). The charismatic singer of the rock group *The Doors*, Jim Morrison, who dealt with shamanism and the role of shaman in some of his lyrics, called on the audience to "Break on through to the other side".⁵⁰

The relationship between art and shamanism reaches back to ancient times. Some scholars suggest that the origins of visual and performing arts can be found in the shamanism of prehistoric times.⁵¹ In the myth of Orpheus, the skills of an exceptionally gifted and enchanting

⁴⁵ Jürgen Frey, "Das Recht auf Sünde. Patti Smith: Hits und Raritäten auf einer Doppel-CD," *Badische Zeitung*, May 18, 2002. This characterization is a popular one: See e.g. Sandy Carter, "The Second Coming Of Patti Smith," *Z Magazine*, 2000, and Jeff Apter, "Patti Smith: Return of the Thin White Duchess," 2006, http://www.nyrock.com/features/1997/patti_smith.asp (accessed May 14, 2008). An early reference can be found in a record review in *Rolling Stone* magazine: John Rockwell, "Patti Smith: Shaman in the Land of Thousand Dances," *Rolling Stone*, 1976). The reviewer writes: "Patti Smith is a rock & roll shaman and she needs music as shamans have always needed the cadence of their chanting." (no page numbers given). This interpretation of ecstatic performances is not that far removed from cultural anthropologist Romano Mastromattei's characterization of shamanic texts by their ecstatic quality: "a text is or becomes shamanic, primarily *qua* recited in an ecstatic context" [Romano Mastromattei, "Oral Tradition and Shamanic Recitals," in *Oralità: Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso*, ed. B. Gentili and G. Paioni. (Urbino: Ateneo, 1981), 467].

⁴⁶ Bernd Jünger and Willi Blöß, *Joseph Beuys – Der lächelnde Schamane*, Comic-Biografie (Aachen: Willi Blöß Verlag, 2004). Beuys, however, is an example of an artist who identified himself as a shaman.

⁴⁷ Brian Bates, *The Way of the Actor: a Path to Knowledge and Power* (Boston: Shambala, 1987).

⁴⁸ Udo Kultermann, *Leben und Kunst. Zur Funktion der Intermedia* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1970), 13. (Translation by G.M.).

⁴⁹ See Robert J. Wallis, "Art and Shamanism," in *Shamanism. An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, ed. Mariko N. Walter and Eva J. N. Friedman. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2004), 21-28.

⁵⁰ See Adriana Rubio, *Jim Morrison Ceremony: Exploring the Shaman Possession* (Evansdale, Iowa: Arts Publications, 2005).

⁵¹ See Andreas Lommel, *The World of the Early Hunters. Medicine-men, Shamans, and Artists* (London: Evelyn, Adams & Mackay, 1967); Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998); and Harald Braem, *Die magische*

artist are combined with a wanderer between the worlds who is able to speak nature's tongue. For a modern artist, two aspects are in particularly attractive: the access to other realms of reality, to the unconsciousness, and to subconscious matters which promise the discovery of new worlds of images and the insight into new interrelations.⁵² The other is the biographic matrix of *illness–crisis–breakthrough* as an expression of a calling and of being elected—something which a lot of artists can identify with regarding the artist's self stylization and the structure of creative processes.

The fields of visual arts and performing arts are converging in the *Happening* art form. By subordination to the specifications of artistic composition, the *Happening* becomes kind of ritual.⁵³ For the performing art itself, and principally for the actors, the ability of a shaman to *incorporate 'other beings'* and to *change his figure* is of great interest. As scholars ascribe the first human illustrated artifacts to prehistoric shamans, one can see the shaman as a prototype actor who can create illusions through his ability to metamorphosize and/or change his figure, but can also be an authentic 'vessel' for emanations of spirits and deities.⁵⁴ The boundaries between staging, conjuring tricks, suggestion, and real incorporation into altered states of consciousness are fluid. The German ethnologist Klaus E. Müller elaborates:

Shamanic seances have always possessed a large element of dramatic and effective theatricality, something very consciously striven for. They were performances practiced by true masters of the art. But less for the sake of entertainment than for success after the effort involved, which the ritual, the mimic expression, i.e. the magical invocation of what is intended, had as a

Welt der Schamanen und Höhlenmaler (Köln: Dumont, 1994); for a critical approach see Henri Paul Francfort and Roberte N. Hamayon (Eds), *The Concept of Shamanism: Uses and Abuses*. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001).

⁵² The title *Dreaming with Open Eyes* of a book which deals with "the shamanic spirit in twentieth century art and culture" (subtitle), is a good illustration of this aspect [Michael Tucker, *Dreaming with Open Eyes. The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture* (San Francisco: Aquarian/Harper, 1992)]. In 1920 the Swiss painter Paul Klee formulated his famous definition of the function of art: "Art is to not to reproduce the visible but to make visible." [German original: „Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar." Translation by G.M.] The artist Carolyn Marks puts it this way: "I see the artist/shaman as a deep sea diver who dives down into the unconsciousness, bringing back, like Jacques Cousteau, the knowledge about the survival of our species, the knowhow about what is missing or is about to be missed. In so doing, artists/shamans are preserving our precious human gift of creativity" (Carolyn Marks, "The Artist as Shaman," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Study of Shamanism*, ed. Ruth-Inge Heinze (Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia, 1985), 34-35.

⁵³ Etzel Cardeña, "The magical Flight: Shamanism and Theater," in *Proceedings of the third International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing*, ed. Ruth-Inge Heinze (Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars of Asia, 1987), 291-304.

⁵⁴ See John A. Dooley, "Shamans, Actors and Images," in *Shamanism in Performing Arts*, ed. Tae gon Kim and Mihály Hoppál. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995), 42-56 on parallels between shamanistic rituals and the work of actors. Hamayon also addresses this point: "He (the shaman – G.M.) takes up his role as a shaman, a role that consists of portraying his contact with the spirits. The fact that his function is performed in a staged, ritual framework reinforces the point that the shaman acts out a role and brings his behaviour still closer to a dramatic performance. The shaman 'in trance' is like the actor on the stage" (26). But she also stresses the differences between actor and shaman, between ritual and play-acting: "The shaman's actions address supernatural entities and not an audience, and aim at producing symbolic effects in other realms and not at merely entertaining or being an end in itself." (Hamayon, *Are 'Trance', 'Ecstasy' and Similar Concepts Appropriate in the Study of Shamanism?*, 26-27.)

precondition for such success. And the more perfectly this was done, the more certain one was of obtaining the desired effect.⁵⁵

Staging and show are seen as essential components of successful shamanic practice—as during the viewing of a play or a film, the consciousness of the fact that one is in a special situation detached from daily life never totally fades. The authenticity of the performance and the total absorption in the storyline notwithstanding, one can come back to reality at any time.⁵⁶

Despite the distance between the social role of a contemporary artist and a traditional shaman, and the fragmentary nature of his reception, after careful consideration we see how a variety of connections clearly demonstrate the myth-generating power inherent in the shamanic figure from the Western point of view.

Toward the fascination of shamanism

In an overall view of the described fields we can find ten elements of the shaman myth which have formed the popular image of shamanism in Western societies since the growth in interest among spiritual seekers, artists, and academics in the 1960s, and which constitute the attractiveness and the fascination of the figure of the shaman.⁵⁷ These elements are *attributions*, based on handed down knowledge on traditional shamans.⁵⁸ They demonstrate, however, a Western, inevitably fragmented, perspective.

- *The shaman as healer:* increasing discontent with the dominance of orthodox therapies has intensified the search for alternative or complementary courses of treatment which are based on a more holistic view of the human being. In shamanism the social context, the ancestors, the natural environment as well as the cosmos are kept in mind. The diagnosis 'healthy or ill' is not as important as the question about the conditions of recreating the balance in the systemic connections concerned. With reference to transpersonal and spiritual components—concerning the level on which the 'real healing' is happening—needs are fulfilled which are not included in therapeutic approaches of modern high-technology medicine.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Müller, *Schamanismus*, 90. Highlighted in original (*Translation by G.M.*). See also Ronald Hutton, *Shamans. Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2001), 85-98; and Mark Münzel, "Lügen die Schamanen? Schauspieler im Amazonasgebiet," in *Schamanen zwischen Mythos und Moderne*, ed. Alexandra Rosenbohm (Leipzig: Militzke, 1999), 90-103.

⁵⁶ See Uri Rapp, *Handeln und Zuschauen* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1973). An important influence on studying the relationship between shamanic rituals and theatre performances has been made by Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Eds.), *By means of performance. Intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Richard Schechner, *Between theater and anthropology* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). See also Harvey, *General Introduction*, 13-15; and Atkinson, *Shamanisms today*, 129-31.

⁵⁷ Needless to say, this list is not exhaustive. During the history of the reception of shamanism in Western societies a lot of other elements became important for characterizing shamanism and the figure of the shaman e.g. the shaman as a psychotic, a trickster, and a fraud. For the purpose of this paper these elements with strongly negative connotations are not considered relevant.

⁵⁸ See Atkinson, *Shamanisms today*, 132-34 on the impact of anthropologists on these developments.

⁵⁹ See e.g. Larry Dossey, "The Inner Life of the Healer: The Importance of Shamanism for Modern Medicine," in *Shaman's Path. Healing, Personal Growth, and Empowerment*, ed. Gary Doore. (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1988), 89-99; Walsh, *The spirit of shamanism*; and Mayer, *Schamanismus in Deutschland*. Beyman and Kremer also list "cultural healing" as a task of the shaman as healer. That, in the opinion of the authors, particularly means the integration of polar opposites and the adjustment of imbalances: "Integrative states of consciousness or shamanic trance states (...) evoke the presence of the spirit or archetype or image of the androgyn or hermaphrodite in dimensions ranging from experiences of cellular

- *The shaman as master of ecstasy*: a figure who promises intensive experiences on a physical, an emotional, and a cognitive level. In doing so he remains the ‘master’ of events, not becoming a victim of the ‘invoked spirits’ and/or the induced processes, in contrast to the sorcerer’s apprentice. The shaman personifies the seemingly paradoxical combination of will power and control with abandonment and letting go.⁶⁰
- *The shaman as psychonaut and ‘wanderer between the worlds’*: shamanic techniques allow access to extra-ordinary realms of reality. The shaman is a master in dealing with altered states of consciousness. By means of trance techniques and/or entheogenic substances (i.e. drugs), the shaman reaches an advanced state of consciousness, allowing him insights which are normally hard to gain.⁶¹ The theme of traveling or wandering refers to a flexibility which counteracts the imminent (mental) torpor of daily life. Here, too, he is a person acting with intent and not a victim of mental states. In a literal sense the traditional shaman can in fact be seen as a ‘wanderer between the worlds’: flying with airplanes between east and west, between past and present time, between the traditional and modern industrialized world, teaching traditional knowledge to interested people in modern societies, and bringing back knowledge from these cultures into the indigenous context. He therefore crosses borders in many respects, thus simultaneously belonging to several cultures and realms of reality.
- *The shaman as a magician*: a large fascination for shamans is due to accounts of exceptional skills they have shown in traditional contexts.⁶² The spectrum reaches from weathermaking to divination, psychokinesis, telepathy, and miraculous healing. His status as an outsider associated with an extreme life i.e. a self-sacrificial readiness-to-suffer and highly determined attitude illustrate his exceptional skills, and distinguish him from a charlatan. Thus the figure of the shaman is well suited as a projection surface for omnipotence fantasies.
- *The shaman as a master of metamorphosis*: it is often reported that in a shamanic ritual which has, as noted above, aspects of a theatrical performance, the figure of the shaman changes i.e. he can slip into different roles and embody different entities. He is a master of the game of identities—a requirement the individual has to fulfill more and more in postmodern culture.
- *The shaman as a interpreter of the world*: by means of his ability to interpret omens, to communicate with different entities, and to speak nature’s language, he has a deeper insight into the connectedness of all things, and thus he is able to discover structures of meaning in the world of experience seeming to be chaotic and made up only of incoherent single parts—for him nothing is accidental and without meaning.⁶³

memory to sacred marriage and mystical union. The integrative function of trance states, as evidenced by brain research, is the reflection of the androgyn of origins, the androgyn of the self, and the possibility of an integration of polar opposites. The presence of the androgyn signals the presence of creative, regenerative, or healing energies, whether for artistic creativity, personal healing, psychological integration, or cultural healing. Trance work has the potential to help overcome rigid binary gender constructions and to heal cultural splits” [Rebecca Beyman and Jürgen W. Kremer, “The Spirit of Integration,” *ReVision* 26, no. 1 (2003): 48].

⁶⁰ This widespread interpretation mainly became popular through the influential work of Mircea Eliade.

⁶¹ E.g. Jeremy Narby, *The Cosmic Serpent. DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), and Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head. A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* (New York: Broadway, 2002).

⁶² E.g. D. Scott Rogo, “Shamanism, ESP, and the Paranormal,” in *Shamanism. An Expanded View of Reality* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1987), 133-144.

⁶³ E.g. Baker, “Keepers of Tradition, Agents of Change,” and Heinze, *Shamans Of The 20th Century*, 195.

- *The shaman as a respected outsider*: his social role in shamanic cultures makes him both an important and well respected person, but also an outsider. He is a full member of the group and at the same time an individual exception. He therefore stands out clearly from the crowd. With his ability to travel to ‘other realms of reality’, the shaman is the one who recognizes the structures of reality behind the physical surface. For the shaman the world is not the way it seems to be at first sight; thus he abides by a ‘deeper-rooted’ order (‘surface anarchist’), not accepting the laws and rules deduced only from appearance. By seeing through the surface and orientating himself towards the ‘reality lying behind’, the shaman also stands for authenticity in a world which is experienced as increasingly artificial.⁶⁴
- *The shaman as an ecologist*: an access to ancient, traditional knowledge is attributed to him, and his connection to nature is that of archaic power. The roots of his tradition reach back to former times when man allegedly lived in harmony with nature, maintaining her balance.⁶⁵
- *The shaman as an exponent of a non-materialistic cosmology*: the shamanic cosmology is based on a world view that takes other forms of causality into account. It is therefore a voice critical of a purely scientific world view, and more generally critical of modernity, acting as an antidote against disenchantment of the world which started its triumphal march in the Age of Enlightenment.
- *The shaman as an exponent of an alternative, individualistic spirituality*: the spiritual embedding of the shaman is anti-hierarchical and individualistic. There are no gurus and there is no ecclesiastical hierarchy. The connection to the divine is individual inasmuch as every shaman searches for his own, very personal spiritual helpers and/or spiritual guides, and—from a Western point of view—quasi ‘owns’ them. They are not prescribed, but found during shamanic travels in altered states of consciousness. The shaman himself is only subordinated to a divine principle which remains abstract. This approach may serve as an attractive substitute after turning away from traditional religious doctrine.⁶⁶

The figure of the shaman as a modern myth – concluding considerations

Seeing the different facets of the figure of the shaman which make up its attractiveness as a whole, an iridescent image of a *Renaissance Man* emerges who cannot be absolutely monopolized by an individual as a projection surface for own wishes and needs, but can, at least to some degree, be used by almost everybody. In his exoticism he remains strange, fascinating, and mysterious. With the onset of globalization, however, what is foreign has lost a lot of its

⁶⁴ See Wernitznig, *Going Native or Going Naïve?*, 61-66. Taussig stresses the anarchistic and socially critical function of indigene shamans in southern Colombia where he did his fieldwork (Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man. A Study in Terror and Healing* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]. See also Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 229-231).

⁶⁵ The Swiss psychotherapist Carlo Zumstein writes on this subject: “Shamanism (has) maintained the power of the wild, and today many people are searching for precisely this pristine, wild power—as a healing power, but also as a power which connects us with the roots of our existence. Shamanism is wild, but not primitive. It is a highly developed form of life in accordance with nature ...” [Carlo Zumstein, *Schamanismus* (München: Hugendubel, 2001), 10. *Translation by G.M.*] Dagmar Wernitznig outlines the „neo-noble savage“ created by neoshamanic fantasies and provided in books and films of the 1990s. She points out: “At times when urban life is perceived as too overbearing by the majority of its inhabitants, this wilderness, then, connotes freedom. The clear-cut distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ world becomes a convenient model for dystopian and utopian visions alike. This dichotomy of dystopia and utopia, bound to a definite opposition between savagism and civilization, is another crucial source for the reproduction of stereotypes” (Wernitznig, *Going Native or Going Naïve?*, xv).

⁶⁶ See e.g. Znamenski, *General Introduction*; and Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*.

strangeness—the fringes of our world are no longer inhabited by monstrous creatures and demons. With increasing mobility, more and more individuals are able to experience foreign cultures and world views directly, without major consequences for their everyday life. What was possible for only a few people a hundred years ago—a journey to foreign cultures with a totally different world view—is today easily possible for a large part of Western people without long-term planning (for example Ayahuasca workshops in the Amazon, staying in an Indian ashram, shaman tourism to Tuva). Moreover, one can afford to invite traditional shamans as teachers and mediators of the wisdom of primitive people to the west. Thus it is possible to complement theoretical knowledge with personal experience in the field and/or that brought by traveling natives. This allows physical contact with the shaman, and he becomes one who ‘really’ exists. This does not, however, prevent myths evolving—as one may suppose at first. The shaman himself as well as the Western admirer remains in an exceptional situation during their contact (comparable perhaps with the state of passionate obsession which often results in an idealized perception of the partner). What for the traditional shaman and his community is a natural, commonly understood, and culturally embedded act, becomes a magical-mystical act for the stranger attending the ritual, a spectacle, whose distance to Western everyday experience could hardly be bigger. For the ‘Westerner’ it is impossible to *not* perceive the magical action against the background of scientific-enlightened thinking. For him magical thinking remains one option among others.⁶⁷ When the traditional shaman goes along with the wishes and needs of the ‘seekers’ in modern societies by accepting invitations to give workshops, or by being available for shamanism tourism in his indigenous context, he contributes to his own mythologizing in modern societies—no matter whether he wants to or not. This is not to say he will not follow his own interests and satisfy his own needs as well. That fact, however, does not significantly affect the process of mystifying (e.g. a shaman who is financially greedy or who has a power obsession may be interpreted as being corrupted by the contact with modern societies, as a victim infected by a materialistic virus). The participant of a workshop or the traveler to far away countries is spared de-idealizing the shaman with his own cultural conditions and limitations.

After the pluralization of socially accepted “world view” (*Weltanschauung*) models during the last decades one is free to orientate oneself in his practices and activities towards models stemming from foreign cultures. This has become possible without significant problems and without having to become involved in occult groups. One can freely *decide* to choose the ‘way of the shaman’ in a European country (or perhaps become monk in a Buddhist monastery) as religion and personal philosophy of life have become a private concern. This development is part of a deep and extensive process of modernization⁶⁸ pushing forward the individualization of one’s own life concepts (due to general disentanglement from fixed social expectations and the necessity of daily ‘identity work’⁶⁹). For many practitioners, shamanism is seen as a spiritual path characterized by a particular relationship to nature. In opposition to many far-eastern paths which seek transcendental experiences mainly by a decrease of arousal (meditation, contemplation, reclusion), shamanism chooses the method of increase of arousal and of stimulus satiation. As a clearly individualistically orientated approach it conforms to structural conditions of the social process of modernization. Furthermore shamanism, in its flexibility and ambivalent nature, allows it to be interpreted as a set of techniques or a form of natural religion spirituality, is particularly

⁶⁷ See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁸ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1992), and Anthony Giddens, *The consequences of modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

⁶⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self. Making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); and Heiner Keupp and Renate Höfer (Eds.), *Identitätsarbeit heute. Klassische und aktuelle Perspektiven der Identitätsforschung*. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

well suited for syncretistic solutions. Beliefs and credos are not required, as the approach is strongly experience-based.

The figure of the shaman, of the *wanderer between the worlds*, of the *border crosser* who is able to be in different places at the same time, and who is domiciled in various worlds, can also be interpreted as a symbol of ‘sitting on the fence’, of non-commitment. As a socially integrated member of a community with an individual, exceptional, position, he fits into a world which places complex identity demands on the individual. The neoshaman (or the techno-shaman/cyber-shaman) grows up in a modern culture and wanders around between a modern scientifically-formed conception of the world, and a post-modern liberal ideological eclecticism, i.e. he stays in both spheres at the same time and switches—according to current demands—consciously from one to the other. The magical-animistic world view intimately connected with shamanic cosmology helps in giving meaning because, contrary to statements from modern science camps (e.g. emphasis on the relevance of chance, negation of a free will of the human being etc.) which can cause huge uncertainties, the shamanic approach emphasizes the meaning of all events. Everything has meaning—one must only learn to understand ‘nature’s language’. The disenchantment engendered by enlightenment, which by no means provided man with a life with filled with less discomfort and fear⁷⁰ is opposed by a “re-enchantment of the world”⁷¹. Such a re-animated concept of the world can—in addition to its cultural critique—provide a suitable framework for interpreting and dealing with existential issues without necessarily having to refuse the model of scientific world interpretations.⁷²

The potency of giving meaning the magical-animistic world view is linked to the *aspect of power*. The figure of the shaman possesses access to ‘supernatural’ forces. With such attributions one can feed *imaginaries of omnipotence* which become attractive in difficult situations or in the face of failure: whether for the long-term unemployed who gives up hope with conventional means after the umpteenth letter of refusal, whether for the subordinate who believes that he can only resist the bullying superior by magical means, whether for the sick person who is abandoned by the conventional medical system and places his last hope in the shaman (or the mental healer). The last-mentioned explicitly shows that occasionally these hopes are absolutely legitimated, without offering an explanation of the underlying mechanisms.

Is the mystification of the figure of the shaman a temporary fashion to be understood as a typical reflection of *zeitgeist*? Or is it an expression of an ancient everlasting knowledge (*philosophia perennis*) adapted to a contemporary context?⁷³ Both statements may be right. The scholar of religious studies, Kocku von Stuckrad⁷⁴ has shown that, behind an exotic surface which characterizes the Western references to foreign cultures, one can find familiar patterns of thought. Concerning ideological and spiritual concepts of animism, connectedness, and nature worship, one can understand shamanism as one of the various elements of “esotericism” in European religious history. On the other hand, one can say that the figure of the shaman fits

⁷⁰ Hans Peter Duerr, "Wir wollen staunen". Der Ethnologe Hans Peter Duerr über Geister und Schamanen, Nixen, Nymphen und die Sehnsucht nach einer verzauberten Welt," *Der Spiegel*, 1996, 222-225.

⁷¹ Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁷² As the occultist Frater U.D. says: "... we might come to the conclusion that our shaman's explanation may perhaps not be scientifically more satisfying in Western terms, but it is surely more in accord with the way our unconscious tends to perceive reality. In that sense it is not only more 'natural' but, one suspects, even downright healthier for psychic hygiene. It is, so to speak, more "ecological and holistic" in terms of psychic structure." [Frater U.D., *Egregore. Notes on the Role of the historical Egregore in modern Magic.* <http://www.chaosmatrix.org/library/chaos/texts/egregore.html> (accessed May 14, 2008)].

⁷³ See Shirley Nicholson (Ed.), *Shamanism. An Expanded View of Reality*, (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1987), 211-63.

⁷⁴ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism. A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005).

exceptionally well into contemporary structures of needs and motivations in different cultural areas which beyond the religious-spiritual field. The variety of elements contributing to the fascination makes it a suitable *cipher* for many different contexts: for the healer, the actor, the artist, the DJ, the rock singer—and even for a person like Adolf Hitler who made the American psychiatrist Jan Ehrenwald pose the question: “Shaman, schizophrenic, medium?”⁷⁵ Passion, charisma, and crowd effectiveness and/or crowd suggestion are for Thomas Nöske, characteristics of the “Pop-Schamane” [*pop shaman*].⁷⁶ In *Pop Schamanismus* he introduces twelve celebrities as examples of this type of persona, for example the German rock singer Nina Hagen as the “punk, UFO, feminist and Buddhist shaman”, and the German actress Hildegard Knef as “shaman of the specifically human factor”.⁷⁷ Thus the pop star has become shaman, and the traditional shaman has become pop star. Both of them fill festival halls and provide projection surfaces for individual wishes and ideals.⁷⁸ The mythic charging of the shaman completely changes that alien figure into one of our own making it an idol, a modern myth.

It is important to consider that the purpose of the article is not to examine shamanism as a religious phenomenon or as a set of techniques which have to be investigated to understand alien cultures or new religious movements, but rather the shaman as a singular person who has got a cultural existence detached from shamanism, and who has become a powerful cipher. At this point it may be productive to refer to some philosophical concepts of the German philosopher Karl Jaspers. Jaspers attached much importance to ‘limit situations’ (‘Grenzsituationen’), moments “in which the human mind confronts the restrictions and pathological narrowness of its existing forms, and allows itself to abandon the securities of its limitedness, and so to enter new realm of self-consciousness”.⁷⁹ For Jaspers, experiencing limit situations means to ‘exist’ in terms of ‘to be Existenz’.⁸⁰ Jaspers differentiates between “existence” and “Existenz”. While existence signifies “man regarded as a being among other beings in the world”, Existenz is “man as non-objectifiable self”.⁸¹ Limit situations and (being) Existenz are the ‘doorways’ to

⁷⁵ Jan Ehrenwald, "Hitler: Shaman, Schizophrenic, Medium?", *Parapsychology Review* 6 (1975): 3-9.

⁷⁶ Thomas Nöske and HEL, *Pop-Schamanismus*, edition Minotaurus (Friedland: Klaus Bielefeld Verlag, 1999).

⁷⁷ [Translations G.M.] The book is out of print and only hard to find. A few parts of the book can be found in the internet: <http://www.gebrauchtemusik.de/magazin/hagen.html> and <http://www.gebrauchtemusik.de/magazin/knef.html> (accessed May 14, 2008).

⁷⁸ Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 353, and particularly note 64 on the pages 413-414.

⁷⁹ Chris Thornhill, “Karl Jaspers,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jaspers/> (accessed May 14, 2008).

⁸⁰ “To experience limit situations and to be Existenz are one and the same” (Karl Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1994: 62 – [Translation by the editors]. See also 62-73).

⁸¹ For a better understanding I refer to a longer passage of Jaspers’ text: “As existences we can evade limit situations only by closing our eyes to them. In the world, we want to preserve our existence by expanding it; we relate to it unquestioningly, either mastering or enjoying it or suffering under it and succumbing to it; but in the end there remains nothing for us but to surrender to it. Thus we react meaningfully to limit situations not by planning and calculation in order to overcome them, but by an entirely different sort of activity: namely, *by becoming the Existenz possible within us*. We become we ourselves by entering into the limit situations with open eyes. Only superficially discernible by knowledge, they can be sensed as reality solely by Existenz. To experience limit situations and to be Existenz are one and the same. Out of the helplessness of existence, Being soars upward within me; this is Existenz. While questioning about Being in limit situations is alien to existence, within such situations self-being can become aware of Being by means of a *leap*: the consciousness that usually merely knows about limit situations is all at once fulfilled in a unique, historic, and irreplaceable manner. The limit then enters upon

transcendence: “Transcendence shows itself only to Existenz”.⁸² According to Jaspers, transcendence is one of the two modes of reality – the other being “World” as the immanent mode – which is not accessible to the human consciousness. It “is the absolute other”.⁸³ Jaspers specifies three “languages of transcendence”. The first is the “immediate language” which “is present only to the absolute consciousness of Existenz”.⁸⁴ The second is “the language that becomes universal in the process of communicating”,⁸⁵ while the third is “speculative language”. The understanding of these – indefinite – languages is possible by means of reading the “cipher-script of transcendence”.⁸⁶ Ciphers are the medium with which transcendence may be experienced, and have to be seen in an intermediate position between Existenz and transcendence. Jaspers characterizes ciphers as follows:

A cipher is the particular unity of a world-being and transcendence. It ceases to be when it is thought of as signifying some other: In cipher-script it is impossible to separate the symbol from what is being symbolized. Cipher-script brings transcendence into the present but it cannot be interpreted. If I were to interpret I would have to separate again what only is in togetherness: I would compare cipher-script with transcendence which, after all, only appears to me in it but is not cipher-script. Interpretation would constitute a lapse from the reading of the cipher-script to a comprehension of purely immanent symbolic relationships.⁸⁷

Everything can become a cipher insofar as everything can be experienced as an expression of transcendence. It cannot be equated with metaphors, models, comparisons, representations, or signs because it is not possible to interpret ciphers without losing their contact with transcendence. Every attempt to incorporate a cipher into the body of objectivized knowledge changes it into a sign or symbol with a representational character. Ciphers can always be read in different ways. They are not definite or universal, but have a multiplicity of meaning which is not arbitrary.

However, if a cipher gains an aspect of universality whereby it encounters us in a communicable manner, moreover in a manner in which those culminations may subsequently address us, then a multiplicity of meanings prevails that is the result of the possibility of existential assimilation and actualization.⁸⁸

its real function: to remain immanent and yet to point toward transcendence” (Karl Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 97).

⁸² Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 175.

⁸³ Ibid., 173. O’Connor explains: “The ultimate cause for our Being is an encompassing by the ‘entirely’ different: Transcendence. Like World, this mode cannot appear within the domain of consciousness. It always recedes behind the movement of consciousness as consciousness reaches for the absolute. (...) It is truly transcendent in that it is not immanent to the world nor to the self in the various domains of human consciousness. Transcendence is the wholly other”. Bernard F. O’Connor, *A Dialogue Between Philosophy and Religion*, (Lanham, University Press of America, 1988): 15.

⁸⁴ Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 312.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 314.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 311. The conceptualization of the “ciphers of transcendence” by Jaspers is complex and only a few aspects can be outlined within the scope of this paper. For more details see, for example, Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, and O’Connor, *A Dialogue Between Philosophy and Religion*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 317-318.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 321. Jaspers continues: “Hence, for the metaphysical stance of questioning there is nothing final in cipher-script. It is found wherever, in it, freedom brings transcendence into the present. The cipher can always be read differently. From it one can never draw a conclusion regarding transcendence

To come back to the subject of my paper: I have designated the shaman as a powerful cipher suitable for many different contexts. The word cipher in Jaspers' sense has, as mentioned above, a slightly different and more definite meaning. It is fruitful to examine the figure of the shaman from this perspective. In doing so, the "second language of transcendence" becomes relevant for my argument. In this second language, ciphers are experienced through a context of communication formed e.g. by mythic or aesthetic expression. Rich configurations of symbols, such as myths or works of art, are—in Jaspers' view—the results of the attempts to convey experiences of transcendence. Myths—as well as works of art—"cannot be exhausted by interpretation (...) The meaning of the myths, however, reveals itself only to the person who still believes in the truth that assumed in them its particular and as such evanescent configuration".⁸⁹ The figure of the shaman with its openness to interpretations, with its different mystifications listed above in the ten elements, and with its iridescent and diffuse character can be understood as part of the language of transcendence. The shaman actively and voluntarily exposes himself to limit situations, searches for immediate experiences of transcendence by inducing altered states of consciousness, and serves as a mediator between the realms of existence and transcendence. This latter fact makes him a *symbol of a cipher* in Jaspers' sense. He becomes *a cipher himself* as a manifestation of an augmented existence by living ecstatically, by evoking transcendent forces, and by intensifying life's experiences (e.g. nature, existential situations such as birth and death etc.). As ciphers provide immediate experience of transcendence, they have to seen in a critical relationship to traditional Western religion where such is often absent or impeded.⁹⁰ On this account the shaman fits well into a cultural situation where many people are longing for spirituality away from the offers made by established churches, for direct experiences of the divine without doctrines.

Jesus Christ is—by Christian incarnation—both man and God, "the God-man, who by his uniqueness suspends history, fastens one to a dogma", and can be seen as "the antithesis of cipher".⁹¹ This is because ciphers only emerge in historical actuality: "Truth must assume this historic form because the truth of transcendence, for Existenz in existence, is not there as the atemporal enduring truth to be grasped in the same way as the insights of the intellect".⁹² As opposed to the Christian God-man's ahistoricity, pop stars such as Mick Jagger, Patti Smith, or other celebrities possess personality profiles, make concrete appearances, and have individual biographies. They are charismatic figures, popular idols, and projection surfaces, and can also become ciphers of transcendence like the shamans—at least for some individuals. But unlike pop stars (who are associated with specific personalities), the figure of the shaman is effective in that it does not rely on a specific name or personality. Rather the shaman is able to function effectively because of the characteristics attributed to him whilst living in, and being related to, the social community. These characteristics make him such a powerful cipher.

that would be inferred on its basis. Seen from my own standpoint it retains a permanent multiplicity of meaning. But from the standpoint of transcendence we can say: it can communicate in yet other ways. Cipher-script could never become valid in any final sense within temporal existence for then there would be no possibility; univocal completion would take its place".

⁸⁹ Ibid., 314.

⁹⁰ See O'Connor, *A Dialogue Between Philosophy and Religion*, 125-133, and Paul Ricoeur, "The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion" in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1957), 611-642.

⁹¹ Ricoeur, "Relation", 624. Ricoeur puts it this way: "One must chose between the 'encipherment' (*Chifferwerden*) of all things, and the Christian incarnation" (ibid., 624). Jaspers himself sees the God-man as a cipher of man's urge for the embodiment ("Leibhaftigkeit") of God, and with this as a cipher "for that, that the absolute truth will be killed if it wants to prevail in the world" (Karl Jaspers, *Chiffren der Transzendenz*, München: Piper, 1970, 70. Translation by G.M.). [...der die Chiffer "dafür ist, daß die vollkommene Wahrheit, wenn sie sich in der Welt durchsetzen möchte, totgeschlagen wird"].

⁹² Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 305.

The figure of the shaman in its popularized and modern interpretation is not bound to religion but represents a cipher of an individualistic and experience-oriented access to transcendence, with its manifold ways of manifestation in different realms of modern society.

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