Post-war American visions

In 1975 the *North American Review* observed that the Big Sur Coast was ‘so full of far-out people that some residents think the license plates should read, “California – the Altered States”’. One of the intellectual centres of this vogue was the Esalen Institute. Located at Big Sur, on the Californian coast, in the area where Henry Miller, Alan Watts, Jaime de Angulo and others had already explored their potential, the institute was the nucleus of the so-called Human Potential Movement. Esalen had ‘so many trips going on in so many directions it would run a constant risk of losing touch with the world altogether if it weren’t so well grounded’. One of the ‘trips’ involved shamanism:

A scholarly, academic anthropologist lectured on shamanism at Esalen Institute a while ago. His explanation of the shaman making rain was expressed in the form, “If you want to make rain here’s what you do ... Everybody stand up, and let’s try it a minute. We won’t really do it, but just get the feel of it.” A visiting psychiatrist from Michigan was later overheard protesting to the program’s director. “I really feel there are moral and ethical objections to teaching people that they can make rain”.

I don’t know how he felt, if he was still there, a few hours later when the learned professor danced and chanted, shaking a rattle, over an upset seminar member, then stooped over her, sucking in through a small tube, and spun away retching as though his mouth were full of deadly poison. I do know, though, that after a twenty-minute session she said she felt much better.¹

Years before, in 1968, *Life* magazine had already observed that Esalen ‘sometimes is like a religious retreat, sometimes a Southern revival meeting, sometimes a Dionysian revel’. Visitors danced, shouted, cried (‘crying is a sort of status symbol’) and worked on other ‘techniques to unlock the human potential’. In short, they threw their ‘inhibitions’ to ‘the Gentle Winds’. *Life* also detected that the Human Potential Movement was ‘not only a mystique but a business, and a thriving one at that’.²

² J. Howard, ‘Inhibitions thrown to the Gentle Winds’. *Life* 65/2 (1968) 48-65. See also idem,
Certainly, notwithstanding its supposedly countercultural focus on individual psychological development, the establishment and success of Esalen were closely related to the major structural transformation of post-war American society. Essential to the new American circumstances were the dramatic improvements in the standard of living. These resulted in a proliferation of distinctive and alternative lifestyles. From the 1950s onwards, the new cultural circumstances brought a ferment of shifting dispositions, also because different interest groups perceived the cultural forms of authorities and/or their parents as straightjackets that restrained them from achieving freedom. Lifestyle choices entailed new leisure activities, new political beliefs, new family relations, a ‘sexual revolution’, new moral, ethical and aesthetic standards, new social networks and new consumption patterns; the world was thick with potential.3

The self-proclaimed countercultural forces that emerged in this changing American environment were momentous for the genealogy of shamanism and the genesis of a field of shamanism. This chapter will single out some of the lineages of countercultural interpretations of shamanism that developed from the 1950s onwards. To be exact, the institutionalisation of countercultural interpretations of shamanism in the fields of psychology, psychedelics and literature will pass the review. The field of anthropology, which led the way in the genesis of a field of shamanism, will feature in the next chapter. I must also stress that these lineages converged, as countercultural poets, psychonauts, psychologists and anthropologists took steps in interconnected fields. Therefore, the categorisation in this chapter is a tool to organise a range of complex and interconnected interpretations of shamanism that were not strictly separate.4

The first part of this chapter focuses on the occurrence and institutionalisation of countercultural revolts in post-war America. The chapter will continue with the development of American psychology and the psychological interpretations of

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4 The periodisation of ‘the sixties’ is a continuing debate. In my approach, the ‘sixties’ developed at different paces within distinct fields. From the 1950s onwards countercultural perspectives were institutionalised within relatively separate fields which, while closely related to wider societal changes, had their own pace and their own momentum. See, for instance, P. Jenkins, Decade of Nightmares. The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America (Oxford, 2006); A. Petigny, The Permissive Society. America, 1941-1965 (Cambridge, 2009).
shamanism, as the institution of countercultural prospects within this field would be vital for the genealogy of shamanism and, moreover, for the interpretation of shamanism in other countercultural fields. Exemplary is the establishment of the Esalen Institute, which was a central location for the Human Potential Movement and the field of esotericism. It would also be crucial for the genesis of a field of shamanism. They are the subject of the third part of this chapter. In the fourth part I focus on the Native American Indian teachers who started to offer 'medicine power', which is important as this category of teachers would later intersect with the genealogy of shamanism. The genealogy of shamanism and the genesis of a field of shamanism would also be structured by the advance of so-called psychedelics, as we will see in part five. I conclude this chapter with an examination of the poets and literary authorities who put the shaman-poet forward as the universal and supreme guide of the tribe.

Countercultural revolts

Not all of the so-called countercultural revolts that occurred in post-war America had a bearing on the genealogy of shamanism. In general, civil rights activists, who struggled for a sociopolitical version of freedom, were not interested in shamanism. On the other side of the hippie-politico spectrum, however, ‘shamanism’ became an important concept. Here, the so-called hippies and their advocates prioritised individual therapeutic quests for healing, authenticity, transcendence, self-actualisation and intimate community. They embodied their struggle for a playful, tolerant, nonviolent, non-hierarchical and anti-materialistic society with conspicuous long hair, loose and colourful clothing and/or nakedness. In contrast to supposed ‘phonies’ who conformed to the conventional codes of behaviour, hippies struggled to live their lives in line with their authentic selves. Some of the hippies started ‘grooving on Jesus’, other parts of the ‘hip subculture’ were, in the words of Alan Watts, using ‘Yoga, Vedanta, Zen and the chemical mysticism of psychedelic drugs’ as an ‘earnest and responsible effort (...) to correct the self-destroying course of industrial civilization, which is alienated from nature’. Gradually, the term shaman would enter the legitimate discourse of this esoteric configuration.

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Countercultural interpretation of a counterculture

In his 1969 classic *The Making of a Counterculture*, which was one the most influential interpretations of the American post-war struggle for individual freedom, the historian Theodore Roszak presented shamanism as a valuable solution for the problems of ‘technocratic society’. Roszak, who had edited a pacifist newspaper before acquired public prominence with his book, was well disposed, to say the least, to what he labelled ‘counterculture’, and approved of Alan Watts and others who ‘were on hand to achieve the “mystic revolution”’. In Roszak’s unusually optimistic and apocalyptic cultivation of the ‘new spiritual freedom’ the shaman was an important figure, as he was an ‘artist, poet, dramatist, dancer, his people’s healer, moral counsellor, diviner, and cosmologer’ who could and should function as a role model for what Roszak supportively identified as the new national consciousness. The shaman could teach ‘the meaning of magic in its pristine form: magic not as a repertory of clever stunts, but as a form of experience, a way of addressing the world’.6

According to Roszak, churches performed ‘bad magic’ and indulged in ‘obscurrantism’, ‘authoritative manipulation’ and ‘privileged control of the sacraments for personal gain’, whereas the shaman performed ‘good magic’. The shaman was an antidote to ‘technocratic society’ as he ‘opens the mysteries to all’. Roszak wrote:

> Indeed, the shaman might properly lay claim to being the culture hero *par excellence*, for through him creative forces that approach the superhuman seem to have been called into play. In the shaman, the first figure to have established himself in human society as individual personality, several great talents were inextricably combined that have since then become specialized professions.7

Essential for Roszak’s interpretation of the ‘shamanistic worldview’ were Eliade’s *Shamanism* and the ‘fascinating treatment of a surviving contemporary shaman at work’ that the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda (1925-1998) had published in 1968 under the title *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*.8 In the same year Roszak interviewed Castaneda for KPFA radio, the radio station that, as we have seen in Chapter 5, also put Alan Watts on air. Roszak introduced Castaneda as a UCLA anthropology student who during fieldwork had become an apprentice of a Yaqui Indian *brujo* or sorcerer named Don Juan. The University of California Press had recently published Castaneda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan* in which Castaneda recounted his experiences with Don Juan. This Indian had intro-

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8  Idem, 243.
duced him to the ‘strange world of shamanic lore and psychedelic experience and adventures in (…) states of non-ordinary reality’.9

Castaneda told Roszak and the listeners that Don Juan might as well be called sorcerer, witch, medicine man, herbalist, curer, or ‘of course, the technical word shaman’. Castaneda explained that the experiences were ‘designed to produce the knowledge that reality of consensus is only a very small segment of the total range of what we could feel as real’. Instead of calling it distortion of reality, or interpret it as hallucination or madness, shamans ‘have learned through usage in a thousand years, perhaps, of practice, they have learned to reclassify the stimuli encoded in a different way.’ Don Juan had taught him that ‘the whole, totality of the universe is just perception’ and that ‘there are no facts, only interpretations.’ No wonder Roszak recommended Castaneda’s ‘fascinating’ book to his audience. Don Juan’s teachings were reminiscent of Roszak’s own ‘visionary’ criticism of scientific forms of knowledge.10

Undeniably, Roszak exaggerated the contrast between the supposedly oppressive culture and the pure intentions of the young people who were the forerunners in this change of consciousness. Psychedelic drug users, for instance, often shared the pursuit of ‘instantness’ with ‘technocratic society’.11 Moreover, Roszak had no eye at all for the relationship between politics, the economic boost and the coinciding institution of countercultural ideas and practices. In fact, the counterculture was primarily structured by the Americans who benefited from the surplus of possibilities that came with the thriving economy. This was already noted in an issue of Life in 1969. A reviewer critically reflected on Roszak’s interpretation:

The counter culture is in fact a subculture of middle-class white youth. In contrast to them, young men and women who are trying hard to get into the System (or to make sure to stay in) don’t have the time or energy for subjectivity, symbiosis and the organic – much less for shamanism. (…) However radical this analysis may be philosophically, it is essential anti-political. Indeed, if I were President Nixon, I would urge my radical opponents to accept Roszak’s view that “objective consciousness” is the core problem, and that a return to shamanism is the way out.12

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9 Idem, 82; The interview can be heard on the online archives of KPFA, see (and listen) at www.archive.org/details/DonJuanTheSorcerer-CarlosCastanedaInterviewedByTheodoreRoszak.
Escape or not, esoteric practices boomed, also because of the new socioeconomic configuration, as the British historian Hugh McLeod convincingly argued in his 2007 *The Religious crisis of the 1960s*. The booming economies and the individual affluence of the long 1960s generated a situation that offered so many choices that it was hard to figure out what was 'the right thing to do'. Many self-liberating people thus strove for 'doing your own thing' or, in Joseph Campbell's famous phrase, to 'follow your bliss'. Experience became one of the ultimate criteria in the search for pleasure, happiness and enjoyment and, as a result, experiential knowledge became highly significant. This process undermined traditional authorities: scholarly, religious and otherwise. At the same time, however, the authority of countercultural experts increased. Roszak and Watts, for instance, were radio hosts and this position enabled them to authorise, legitimise and institutionalise countercultural dispositions. Indeed, as powerful arbiters of taste, they had the symbolic capital to impose their etiquette of consciousness.

*Routinisation and institutionalisation*

Gradually, through the 'routinization' and 'institutionalisation' of countercultural dispositions, to use the terminology of Max Weber (1864–1920), distinct countercultural fields emerged in post-war America, in some prominent cases as subfields of already existing fields. These 'processes of autonomization', as Bourdieu called them, were the results of specific struggles within fields that developed in relation to wider societal changes. For instance, a distinct countercultural economic infrastructure developed, in which personal authenticity in everyday lifestyle choices and truthfulness in product and marketing messages were the main issues. Hippies opened their own stores with food, music, clothing and other goods that suited their own countercultural tastes. The Bodhi Tree Book and Tea Shop, for example, nowadays known as the Bodhi Tree Bookstore, was founded in Los Angeles where, since 1970 onwards, it 'has grown into a flourishing landmark with its roots strongly grounded in the spiritual community'. As we will see later in this

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chapter, the Esalen Institute was exemplary for the institutionalisation of countercultural esotericism.

This internal development should be distinguished from the parallel development that involved the co-optation of countercultural themes by mainstream corporate decision-makers. They welcomed the creative impulses of the counterculture and used images of rebellion, authenticity, individuality and personal choice to tap the gigantic youth market. The countercultural dispositions significantly revitalised the American business and consumer order. Indeed, implanted through the up-and-coming medium television, the new system of possibilities and differences stimulated the social significance of consumption as it became crucial for the forming and expressing of distinct life styles. Youth in particular spends time and money on fashion and automobiles. The triumph of music, interpreted by some commentators as the triumph of vulgarity, also because of its rebellious content, was essential for the breaking of social boundaries and for the genesis of a transnational youth market. The ‘conquest of cool’ that guided ‘hip consumerism’ was a major force in the establishment of the commercial template for our times.17 As we will see later, this template would also structure the field of esotericism.

The institutionalisation and mainstreaming of countercultural dispositions was structured by an intricate combination of circumstances. The process that changed mass markets into more individualised and more personalised consumerism or, in other words, post-Fordism, during the 1970s, for instance, was highly influential. The new circumstances were more centred on the subtle and nuanced meanings underpinning lifestyle choices than on the narrower needs of the mass-market consumer. A new ‘spirit of capitalism’ transpired. Central to the tenet of this new ‘spirit’ were demands for personal authenticity and emancipation. Hierarchy and bureaucracy were rejected in favour of a striving for liberation, competition and permanent change. While the workforce became flatter, leaner and more flexible, individual security diminished. Individuals were increasingly supposed to be flexible and mobile.18 In the new world the fixed highbrow criteria of the old cultural elites gave way to a mobile awareness of personal and individual lifestyle needs and a drive for authenticity on the part of individualised consumers. Gradually, the lifestyle experiments of the counterculture fused into the fabric of everyday life, as something to be relaxed into, lived and experienced in the moment. The

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‘ethic of looseness’ now became the mainstream disposition for the affluent white middle class.\(^\text{19}\)

The routinisation of self-loosening and individualist dispositions was also strengthened by the 1970s economic malaise. Triggered by the economic stagflation, the conservative politics of Richard Nixon, the energy crisis and the Watergate scandal, some countercultural dreams of societal change turned into rude awakenings. The former optimistic faith in professional expertise as a way to solve social problems and as a catalyst for progress vanished, and increasingly Americans relied on the private sphere and concerned themselves with self-expression and self-fulfilment. The same ‘revolt’ also occurred in the medical world, where doubts concerning science, professional expertise and orthodox medicine increased. Many people turned to faith, folk and other remedies instead. This tendency was a continuation of the trends that had already advanced in the countercultural fields that opposed the New Left ‘politicos’ and, instead, had embraced ‘magic politics’.\(^\text{20}\)

As esoteric ideas and practices flourished, an ‘occult establishment’ emerged, making use of forms of capital that were valued in countercultural milieus. It started out as a ‘secret religion of the educated classes’, but at the beginning of the 1970s the ‘occult-metaphysical circle’ was not the ‘ominous underground’ that many people took it to be. ‘Occultism’ was increasingly linked up with ‘mainline culture’, for instance by adding a ‘scientific base’, as Martin Marty observed in 1972. According to his ‘establishmentarian thesis’, the ‘aboveground expression’ or ‘respectable and established public versions of this “sub-culture” positioned itself securely and safely at home in middle America.’\(^\text{21}\) In the same year, the British sociologist Colin Campbell also made some noteworthy observations about what he labelled the ‘cultic milieu’. He described it as including ‘the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure’. These diverse elements were connected by a shared consciousness of their deviant status, an ensuing sense of common cause, an overlapping communication structure of magazines, pamphlets, lectures and informal meetings, and, above all, by a common ideology of ‘seekership’. Another important point of his seminal


article was that he identified the milieu as a point where deviant science meets deviant religion. 22

Indeed, the affinities between the authorities who shaped the ‘occult establishment’ and the scholarly authorities who constituted the Bollingen network was crucial for the recognition of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung and Alan Watts as authorities. Campbell, for instance, seemed to urge people to experience the deeper and essential core of myths instead of listening to religious authorities. 23 When Mircea Eliade explained the ‘craze for the occult’ by ‘the attraction of a personal initiation’ and the ‘hope for renovatio’ in a paper he delivered in 1974, he primarily seemed to echo the principles of the so-called seekers, instead of analysing them. 24 The approaches of Campbell and Eliade not only reflected the countercultural discourse of self-authority, they are also similar to the ‘sociology of spirituality’, as Matthew Wood called the sociological school of thought that emphasises the self-authority of religious seekers. 25

The messages of the Bollingen authorities neatly fitted the outlook of the hippies who institutionalized an ‘anti-institutionalizing ideology’, as they thought that American institutions stunted the full development of human personhood, a theme with a strong affinity with primitivism as they habitually conceptualized themselves as ‘tribes’. They revived communal living by establishing supposedly organic communities without authorities, continuing a cultural lineage of colonies such as those of Mabel Luhan (see Chapter 4). Still, the ‘hippie tribes’ imagined themselves closer to the supposedly timeless qualities of the savage mind than to western history. Whilst primitivism went hand in hand with radical environmentalism, hippies romanticised Native American Indian cultural forms as ‘natural’. They took up Indianness in the hope of accomplishing self-transformation, but they remained aloof from Native American Indian people. And no wonder: visits to Native communities did not bring the sought-after inspiration, as the communities were often unexpected socially restricted. It did not accord well with the hip-

pies’ use of drugs, their sexual dispositions and their flamboyant outrageousness. Yet, as we will see in later in this chapter, various Native American Indians would act up to the image of the white man’s Indian along the lines of Castaneda’s Don Juan, translating Native American knowledge into hippie wisdom. They acquired prominent positions in the field of esotericism.

**American psychology**

In a way, the ‘occult establishment’ structured an esoteric wing of what the futurist Alvin Toffler called the ‘experiential industries’. In his seminal 1970 *Future Shock* he forecasted the emergence of ‘experience makers’:

Under conditions of scarcity, men struggle to meet their immediate material needs. Today under more affluent material conditions, we are reorganizing the economy to deal with a new level of human needs. From a system designed to provide material satisfaction, we are rapidly creating a new economy geared to the provision of psychic gratification.  

The 1970s steadfast institution of individualism, or ‘turn within’, was mockingly interpreted by Tom Wolfe as ‘America’s New Great Awakening’ and as the ‘the Me Decade’. The social critic Christopher Lasch (1932-1994) even diagnosed this trend as a collective mental disorder in his bestselling 1978 *The Culture of Narcissism*. It is not necessary to agree with Lasch’s controversial interpretation to acknowledge the 1970s institutionalisation of individualism. As Matthew Wood noted, social scientists reacted against structural-functionalism and, instead of focusing on publicly observable social contexts and institutions, interpreting their significance in terms of the structuring and functioning of society, concentrated on private, cultural matters in the lives of individuals whether or not they related to in-

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stitutional dimensions of social life. Thomas Luckman’s 1967 The Invisible Religion may count as exemplary for this trend. The process went hand in hand with the institutionalisation and dominance of ‘psychologistic individualism’ or ‘psychologism’. That is to say, from the 1960s onwards, scholarly and other interpretations of social phenomena became increasingly reduced to psychological explanations.

This trend can be related to the expansion of the authority of psychologists. With the new social and economic structures, explicit psychological sensibilities were increasingly encouraged, and even demanded. Federal funding of psychology and the intervention of psychologists in American corporations were critical elements in the process that established the so-called emotional habitus. Psychologists became professionals with an enormous bearing on American culture; they authorised the therapeutic outlook that became a crucial part of the dispositions of a majority of Americans. It would also be of great consequence for the development of American genealogies of shamanism.

Psychoanalysis

As the psychoanalytic movement flourished in post-war America, most psychological interpretations of shamanism primarily focused on the disorders of shamans. For instance, in his classic 1956 article ‘Normal and Abnormal. The Key Problem of Psychiatric Anthropology’ the psychoanalyst and anthropologist George Devereux (1908-1985) wrote:

In brief, there is no reason and no excuse for not considering the shaman as a severe neurotic and even a psychotic. In addition, shamanism is also culture dystonic. This is a point which is amply documented but often systematically overlooked. Thus, the shaman is quite often what we called elsewhere a “trouble unit”. (…) Briefly stated, we hold that the shaman is mentally deranged.

When Devereux wrote this paragraph, the Freudian idiom, formerly reserved for Greenwich Village and other cultural elites, had already become mass jargon.

From the middle of the 1950s onwards, mainstream Americans habitually and freely began to discuss their ‘neurotic anxieties’ and ‘emotional hang-ups’.34 This was also felt within the field of anthropology, where psychoanalytically-informed anthropologists assumed influential positions. Géza Róheim, who we met in Chapter 4, although ignored by most anthropologists, inspired many psychoanalytic scholars.35

Devereux, born to a Jewish family in the Hungarian part of Romania, fled to Paris in his late teens where he was baptized a Catholic in 1932 and changed his name from Dobo to Devereux. In Paris he first studied physics under Marie Curie (1867-1934) before he switched to Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl. They encouraged him to go to Berkeley, where he became a student of Kroeber. He switched to psychoanalysis, partly because he was not being heard in anthropology. In the 1950s and 1960s, he practised psychoanalysis in New York and became one of the main psychoanalytic anthropologists. Afterwards, he returned to Paris, to start a new career, this time as a classicist. With success, as none other than Dodds invited him to All Souls College at Oxford,36 Devereux shared Dodds’s fascination for the ‘turbulent cluster of unexplained facts’ that they called ‘the occult’.37 In line with Dodds’s *Greeks and the Irrational*, Devereux argued in 1970 that

there also existed - at least in Macedonia, and probably in Greece proper as well – a genuine psychotherapy, whose practitioners may well have been shamans and/or pioneers of a kind the hidebound tend to call ‘quacks’.38

In his aforementioned classic 1956 article, Devereux denied that the shaman performed a ‘psychiatric cure’. They merely provided ‘a kind of “corrective emotional experience” (…) which leads to a repatterning of the defences without real curative insight’. The shaman himself was not cured either as he was ‘a severe neurotic

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or psychotic in a state of remission’ and ‘greatly in need of psychiatric help’. Indeed, as Znamenski noted, Devereux was good at capturing the dark side of shamanism. According to Devereux,

the shaman is a fundamentally neurotic person who is fortunate enough to be able to cope with his problems by means of socially sanctioned symptomatic defences, instead of having to improvise his own (socially penalized) symptoms and defences, like the psychotic in our society.

Still, Devereux befriended some ‘psychologically oriented’ Mohave ‘shamans’ and learned ‘much that is psychiatrically useful’ from them. As a matter of fact, in 1969 he wrote that he had nearly created a scandal when he told his students that he thought that ‘some’ primitive shamans and medieval inquisitors understood the unconscious better than did Charcot’s intellectualizing psychiatric predecessors. In contrast, the ‘purely ritually (and/or legalistically) oriented Sedang Moi shaman’ had no psychological sensitivity and comprehension at all. As a therapist, Devereux had, ‘as far back as 1933-34, occasionally borrowed from the shaman’s bag of tricks’. He even did his own ‘shamanizing’ during fieldwork among the Sedang. He was a ‘roaring success’ as a shaman, but it ‘did not persuade (him) that curing rites were more than placebos or cultural bromides.’

Not surprisingly, as the psychoanalytic movement was characterized by institutional splits and controversies, also among anthropologists, Devereux’s interpretations were contested. The psychoanalytic anthropologist L. Bruce Boyer, for instance, disagreed with Devereux and found instead that shamans, even though they ‘possessed more hysterical features, (...) showed a high degree of reality testing potential, keener awareness of peculiarities, more theoretical interest, and the capacity to regress in the ego’s service’. The social psychiatrist and anthropologist Marvin Kaufmann Oppler (1914-1981) presented the Ute shaman as ‘a careful

39  Devereux, ‘Normal and Abnormal’, 31, 41
40  Znamenski, *Beauty of the Primitive*, 104.
41  G. Devereux, ‘Dream Learning and Individual Ritual Differences in Mohave Shamanism’, *American Anthropologist NS* 59 (1957) 1136-45 at 1044.
observer of people in his culture’ and ‘in the best instances an acute analyst of the cultural stresses’. Opler criticised Devereux for being ‘willing to generalize in a sweeping way upon the shaman’s psychological problems’ and made a case for Ute shamans as the pillars of society. Subsumed under their functions in social leadership and ethical-religious thinking, comes their constant functioning in relation to the psychological and social health of their community. Every Ute informant who knew anything about this community could provide the author with an extensive list of actual cures that the shaman had accomplished.

Opler challenged Devereux’s method as ‘one of distorting and misquoting’, and while criticizing him, proposed a more romantic form of primitivism:

> It seems to me that the racial stereotypes of the past have been supplanted for readers like Devereux with a psychiatric stereotyping of whole cultural groups or, as in the present instance, the stereotyping of all shamans as neurotics. My own epidemiological findings have been that the prevalence of neurotic and psychotic behavior is generally greater among “modern” city dwellers than it ever was among functioning primitive cultures.

The psychoanalytic anthropologist Raoul Weston La Barre (1911-1996) stood up for his friend Devereux in his 1970 *The Ghost Dance: The Origins of Religion*, arguing that ‘some of the disputations over the shaman’s mental state comes from diagnostic ineptitude, some from an undiscriminating and monolithic thinking about the shaman. Institutionally, shamanism is merely an identifiable social role. But as individuals, prophets and shamans run the full gamut from self-convinced and sincere psychotics to epileptics and suggestible hysterics, and from calculating psychopaths (more rare than commonly believed) to plodding naifs only following the cultural ropes’. La Barre must be discussed here, as he launched a theory of

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religion and shamanism that rivalled Eliade’s in its scope and comprehensiveness. In *The Ghost Dance* he praised Eliade as the ‘best general source in English’ regarding shamanism. The term ‘shaman’ should be used ‘in the strict sense of Eliade to mean ecstatic possession of a human practitioner by a (supposed) alien spirit or power’. Yet, he criticized the ‘objectivist’ Eliade for his religionism. In fact, most of La Barre’s Freudian interpretations clearly contradict Eliade’s.47

In La Barre’s psychoanalysis of religion, every religion originated as a so-called ‘crisis cult’ that occurred as a reaction to a social crisis. He deemed this also a valid interpretation of the founder’s vision that was the source of Christianity: ‘A god is only a shaman’s dream about his father’, while God was ‘only a biopsychological relationship peculiar to human biology’.48 Indeed, the ‘taproot of religion’ was ‘the child’s fear and awe against his father, symbolized as his maleness, generalized, reified, and projected into the supernatural unknown, but representing a very archaic stage of ego differentiation’.49 The shaman, La Barre argued, is ‘psychologically feminized’ and, moreover:

The shaman is preposterous and magniloquently a fatuous child, for he uses his mother-learned magic, not the secular ego-techniques of mastery that other men use. For the shaman is at base a magician: external powers invade and leave his body with practiced ease, so feeble are his ego boundaries and so false his fantasies of Total Mana anywhere, inside or out. (...) The shaman is the paranoid “father” of his tribesman and protects them from supernatural assault and invasion, but even in this imagery he is not wholly a man – indeed, though relatively rarely, hysteroid women are often shamannesses too. The shaman is a culture hero of the frightened and the infantilized, but psychologically he is a child too.50

Although in the light of the foregoing this may seem curious, La Barre also wrote approvingly of shamans, as ‘culture heroes of all the European arts’. His impressive list of their important meanings included ‘the magic artists of the caves, the shamans behind the dance-drama of the goat-god that grew into Greek tragedy and comedy, the juggler-magicians of secular entertainment, the historian-bards and Homers of epic poetry, the Orpheus-shaman of questing Argonauts - and indeed shamans are the very ancestors of the gods’.51

While Devereux, La Barre and other psychoanalytic anthropologists squabbled about the health of shamans, humanistic psychologists entered the stage. Gradu-

48 Idem, 366.
49 Idem, 107.
ally but definitely, in accord with the development of the permissive society, they
surpassed their psychoanalytically oriented colleagues with positive psychologi-
cal perspectives. Whereas psychoanalysts focused on the past and on pathologies,
humanistic psychologists focused on the future and on potential. In line with the
1960s politics of personal liberation, humanistic interpreters transforming sha-
mans from 'ancestors of the gods', as La Barre would have it, to advanced therapeu-
tic guides.52

**Humanistic psychology**

As humanistic psychologists would structure psychological and therapeutic
thought and practices in the field of shamanism, we must pay attention to the
psychological reasoning and the therapeutic techniques of humanistic psycholo-
gists here. One of the main instigators of humanistic psychology was Abraham
Maslow (1908-1970). In his 1954 *Motivation and Personality*, he briefly referred
to shamanism as one of the ancient forms of psychotherapy 'that support the view
of psychotherapy as need gratification via interpersonal relations'.53 His use of
the term 'shamanism', however, was not important for the genealogy of shaman-
ism. His optimistic psychological outlook, on the other hand, was. That is to say,
instead of focusing on unconscious motives and neurotic mechanisms, Maslow
focused on human potential and on what he called the 'self actualization' of the
'whole person'. According to him, 'Self-actualizing people, those who have come
to a high level of maturation, health, and self-fulfilment, have so much to teach us
that sometimes they seem almost like a different breed of human beings'. Maslow
even argued that the 'person at the peak is godlike' and, anticipating the 1960s
countercultural quest for liberation, he referred to Krishnamurti’s phrase 'choice-
less awareness' and Huxley's 'Perennial Philosophy' to argue that peak experiences
were 'timeless' and 'spaceless'.54

The clinical framework of humanistic psychology that would structure sha-
manc practices as constructed in the field of shamanism was the so-called client-
centred-approach, a distinct anti-authoritarian approach that was provided by
Carl Rogers (1907-1987). In the new method, the therapist should no longer be

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52 D. Moss, 'The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology' in K.J. Schneider, J.F.T.
Bugental, J.F. Pierson (eds.), *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in
Theory, Research, and Practice* (2001) 5-20 at 14; Gifford, 'The Psychoanalytic Movement in

sive Society*.

54 A.H. Maslow, 'Cognition of Being in the Peak-Experiences', *Journal of Genetic Psychology*
94 (1959) 43-66; D. Moss, 'Abraham Maslow and the Emergence of Humanistic Psycholog-
ology', in idem (ed.), *Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology. A Historical and Biographical
engaged with ‘patients’ but with ‘clients’ who, moreover, were responsible for their own change. Clients were supposed to heal themselves in a process that involved self-knowledge and inner exploration, while the therapist facilitated a situation in which they were free to help themselves. Rogers also developed group therapy, wherein an anti-authoritarian facilitator was supposed to create a non-threatening atmosphere, encouraging open and honest sharing among group members who were thought to be able to solve their problems and reach their full potential in this supportive, permissive environment. No longer were therapeutic practices principally aimed at ‘sick patients’. From now on, ‘normal’ people could make use of therapeutic practices to achieve their inherent potential.\textsuperscript{55}

Humanistic psychologists suggested that shamans were highly capable individuals who had healed themselves. A major step towards the acceptance of this idea was the 1967 publication ‘Shamans and Acute Schizophrenia’ by the psychologist Julian Silverman (1933-2001). Using Eliade’s \textit{Shamanism} as a reference, he argued that the significant difference between shamans and schizophrenics was the degree to which their ‘unique resolution of a basic life crisis’ was accepted culturally. In ‘primitive cultures’ it was tolerated, with the result that ‘the abnormal experience (shamanism) is typically beneficial to the individual, cognitively and affectively; he is regarded as one with expanded consciousness’. In ‘our culture’, however, ‘the individual (schizophrenic) typically undergoes an intensification of his suffering over and above his original anxieties’.\textsuperscript{56} In other words, ‘The emotional supports and the modes of collective solutions of the basic problems of existence available to the shaman greatly alleviate the strain of an otherwise excruciatingly painful existence. Such supports are all too often completely unavailable to the schizophrenic in our culture’.\textsuperscript{57}

Silverman’s article was hailed by the anthropologist Don Handelman as ‘the most sophisticated and parsimonious model to date for delineating the psychological crisis that shamans apparently undergo at the onset of their careers’. In an influential article, Handelman lamented the lack of data on ‘the development of shamanic character, of early and later socialization, of personal world view and philosophy, in short of the mind and personal experiences of the shaman’. As Silverman did, Handelman accepted Eliade’s definition of ‘what is meant by a shaman’ and thought that Eliade’s \textit{Shamanism} was ‘often brilliantly conceived and thought-provoking’. Eliade was, however, ‘often suspect in terms of accuracy of


\textsuperscript{57} Silverman, ‘Shamans and Acute Schizophrenia’, 29.
information'. Handelman’s main point was that in general the shaman was treated, incorrectly, either as a relatively strange social being whose role is comprehensible within structural-functional analysis or as the “primitive” neurotic or borderline psychotic, a clinical case-study of psychoanalytic theory. To develop ‘more flexible approaches to encompass the range and variability of shamanic types’, Handelman argued, it would be profitable to adapt to the ideas of Maslow and other humanistic psychologists.58

Handelman contrasted psychoanalytic theory and its preoccupation with mental disorders with his own attempts ‘to explicate how the creative shaman can alter and consolidate his conceptions of the worlds, his techniques, and the social concomitants that can flow from such innovations’. Significantly, Handelman regarded Castaneda’s *The Teachings* as ‘the most impressive body of “actual data” gathered in this manner’, and he recommended the use of hallucinogenic drugs ‘to induce trance and culturally valued visions’. The importance he attached to experiential knowledge inspired Handelman to argue that ‘the investigator may have to do likewise under the tutelage of a shaman or “man of power” in order to know the mind of the shaman’.59

The humanistic optimism regarding shamans was also cultivated by the radical movement that became known as ‘anti-psychiatry’, a term that was established when the South African psychoanalyst David Cooper (1931–1986) published his 1967 *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry*. Cooper questioned the authority of psychiatrists to put medical labels on experiences that should be taken seriously instead of labelled as invalid or mad. He envisioned shamans as positive examples as they experienced a ‘psychotic breakdown or a creative period of spiritual development’. The distinction between ‘breakdown’ or ‘breakthrough’, he wrote, ‘resides mainly in the supervening process of social invalidation’. With correct guidance, psychotic experiences could lead ‘to a more advanced human state’. Unfortunately, however, the experiences could also cause ‘a state of arrest and stultification of the person’. In the case of a successful breakthrough, the tribe could benefit from the experiences of the shaman: ‘Through their vicarious, ‘projective’ participation in this experience, the other members of the tribe would benefit from a *therapeusis*’, which ‘meant renewal of each person through death and rebirth achieved by these miraculous means within one life-span’.56

The trend to view schizophrenics as seers and artists was influential for the genealogy of shamanism. Cooper’s associate, the radical Scottish existential psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (1927–1989) significantly contributed to this drift.61 La-

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61 S.L. Gilman, ‘Constructing Schizophrenia as a Category of Mental Illness’, in E.R. Wallace
ing regarded a psychotic breakdown as an existential crisis that was potentially an attempt to reconstitute the self in a more authentic and integrated way. His 1967 bestseller and campus classic *The Politics of Experience* made a case for the idea that western society was an oppressive structure that estranged humanity from its ‘authentic possibilities’. According to him, ‘Experience may be judged to be invalidly mad or to validly mystical. The distinction is not easy’ and, furthermore, ‘Psychotic experience goes beyond the horizons of our common, that is, our communal sense’.

Although Laing did not offer an interpretation of shamanism, his views were more significant for the genesis of a field of shamanism than the views of many scholars who dealt explicitly with shamanism. It is telling that the major shamanologist Joan Halifax, about whom we will learn more in the next chapter, invited Laing to participate in her 1984 conference about shamanism entitled ‘Awakening the Dream: The Way of the Warrior’. Her invitation illustrates the remarkable complexity of the genealogy of shamanism.

The Esalen Institute

Crucial for the development of humanistic psychology and the genesis of a field of shamanism was the establishment of the Esalen Institute in 1961. It was founded by Michael Murphy and Richard Price (1930-1985) after Murphy inherited 150 acres of coastal land at Carmel, California, in 1961. Alan Watts, who was their teacher, and Aldous Huxley motivated them to set up a ‘Garden of the Human Potential’. Esalen, as they called it, after the Native American Indian tribe known as the Esselen that had resided in the vicinity, was supposed to probe the boundaries

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63 R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London, 1969) 11, 108-9. For instance, even in 1982 Allan Ginsberg’s ‘so-called psychotic experience’ at the age of 24 was interpreted as a ‘self-induced psychedelic experience that was to change the course of his life’ as he felt that ‘he had been reborn into a new spiritual universe that was more abundant and genuine than anything he had ever known before’, see M. Wasserman, ‘Madness as Religious Experience: The Case of Allen Ginsberg’, *Journal of Religion and Health* 21 (1982) 145-51.

of ‘the human potential’. It would offer a range of different, mostly experimental and experiential seminars and workshops in which a synthesis of ‘esoteric traditions’ and science were explored. The first seminar series, presented in 1962, was based on Huxley’s lecture on ‘Human Potentialities’ at the University of California. The first speaker was Alan Watts.65

Esalen became the focal point of the Human Potential Movement. Significantly, Esalen was also the location where Maslow developed a new psychological movement called transpersonal psychology in 1966. It was directed toward inner exploration, self-transformation and the spiritual aspects of personality. Even though transpersonal psychology was also established as an academic discipline, transpersonal psychologists move between academia and the field of esotericism. For instance, whereas humanistic psychologists did have an academic background, many transpersonalists did not.66 Furthermore, transpersonal psychology did not limit itself to theory and research. It was set up as a discipline to explore practices that lead to ‘transpersonal directions’ or ‘altered states of consciousness’ as these were thought to be positive and healthy.67 It would not take long for shamanism to become a transpersonal practice.

Esalen became the hotbed of a range of transpersonal and other esoteric practices. Transpersonal psychologists and other esoteric authorities offered lectures and seminars on Zen, yoga, drugs, Sufism, mysticism, parapsychology and a variety of forms of meditation and therapy through which visitors could allegedly free themselves from social, emotional and psychological constraints. Gestalt therapy acquired a central position, also because the ‘medical man and bohemian artist-intellectual’ Fritz Perls (1893-1970) held an authoritative position at Esalen. Characteristically, he held individuals responsible for their own development and suggested that through a cathartic display of positive and negative emotions they could become aware of their ‘gestalt’ and take their life into their own hands.68

The phenomenal success of Esalen stimulated the development of numerous other growth centres where so-called spiritual seekers went shopping for personal change. For people who had lost faith in conventional science, medicine

and churches, that is, former hippies and many former political activists who had abandoned struggles for social change in favour of the struggle for personal change, growth centres were places to take one's life and one's health into one's own hands. This process epitomised a shift in countercultural practices: these growth centres differed from the hippie communes whose 'tribal' ethos and full-time communal structures appealed to younger and more radical individuals. Instead, growth centres attracted affluent middle-aged individuals who only wanted to participate part-time in educational, recreational and therapeutic encounter sessions. As growth centres developed into privately operated institutions, they were even antithetical to the communal ethos. They structured a field in which individuals and groups of individuals set out to create and market self-enhancing techniques.69

Fundamental for the structuring of this field was that the authorities taking steps in growth centres emphasised experience, authenticity, self-development, self-responsibility and anti-authoritarianism. Working from the clinical structures that Rogers had proposed, they professed an habitual anti-authoritarian stance, and worked in close collaboration with their clients. As a consequence, specific 'ambiguities of authority' became apparent. The result was the advance of what Matthew Wood called 'nonformative spirituality', a type of spirituality that involves multiple authorities, none of which are formative in shaping their clients' spirituality as they remain unbound and free to choose from other spiritual practices at the same time.70

While it boomed, the field of esotericism was thus structured by a variety of nonformative authorities. Their clients, in line with humanistic prospects, were self-actualising consumers making lifestyle choices according to countercultural dispositions. Consequently, the experts who took steps in this arena could not but continuously and explicitly authorise and emphasise their specific forms of authentic esoteric capital. Their distinct positions depended on it. As the field of esotericism routinised, it became a so-called spiritual marketplace where authorities started to promote their supposedly non-commercial practices. Based on this economy of esoteric goods, to use Bourdieu's terminology, the field became a 'community of choice', to borrow a term from Ulrich Beck.71


71 U. Beck and C. Lau, 'Second Modernity as a Research Agenda: Theoretical and Empiri-
The aforementioned Julian Silverman took significant strategic steps to routinise esoteric practices. He managed a seminar at Esalen entitled ‘Shamanism, Psychedelics, and the Schizophrenias’ in 1967, and he lived there from 1971 until 1981, being Esalen’s director from 1971 until 1978. Under his tutelage, Esalen became, in the words of Tom Wolfe, ‘the Harvard of the me decade’. A contemporary commentator put it like this:

The Esalen experience, it was claimed, was not for those who had trouble controlling their drives and emotions, but rather for those who had been too successfully socialized and who in the process had been left emotionally desiccated. This meant that “normals” whose behaviour was not overtly self-destructive but whose feelings and intellect were chronically out of phase and who badly needed to “get back in touch with themselves”.

Silverman initiated the ‘routinization’ of the ‘charismatic community’ or, in his own words, he transformed Esalen from a democratic gathering of ‘a whole bunch of hippies’ disposed to dysfunctional ‘emotionalism’ into a ‘damn business’ where people ‘set about discovering themselves’. In due time, as shamanism became one of the practices through which clients could enter transpersonal states of consciousness to discover their true selves and acquire perennial knowledge, Esalen became the central location for the genesis of a field of shamanism.

Countercultural Indianness

Esalen and other centres that structured the economy of esoteric goods became stages for a range of different kinds of esoteric expert, amongst whom were Native American Indian teachers. They acquired a distinctive position as their Indianness was accepted as pure and authentic. Yet critics denounced this development as ‘the Rise of the Plastic Medicine Men’, and labelled this distinct form of playing Indian ‘spiritual hucksterism’. In the field of esotericism, playing Indian acquired a new quality as a range of popular publications presented Native Americans as ‘spiritual

73 A.L. Mintz, ‘Encounter Groups and Other Panaceas’, Commentary 56 (1973) 42-9 at 44.
teachers’ to white audiences. The artist and publicist Richard Erdoes (1912-2008), for instance, repeatedly has Lame Deer calling himself a ‘hippy Indian’ in his 1972 *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*. Since authenticity was the central self-styled characteristic of the medicine men, it is not surprising that critics disputed the legitimacy, faithfulness and genuineness of the ‘Tribe Called Wannabee’.76

One of the major concepts of Indianness was the so-called ‘medicine wheel’, which is of importance here as it would later become identified as shamanic. It came to the attention of wider audiences in 1972, when the native American author Hyemeyohsts Storm published his bestselling and controversial *Seven Arrows*. The organising framework for this mixture of traditional and fictional narrative, illustration and history is the medicine wheel, which is also represented as the cardinal structure of Native American religion. The medicine wheel matched remarkably well with the spatial shift from square to round that was part of the development of hippie architectural fascination with domes, ‘bubble houses’, ‘medicine tipis’ and ‘magic circles’. In practice, Storm’s medicine wheel functioned like the Jungian interpretation of the Hindu Mandala. Hyemeyohsts Storm did not present the medicine wheel as a form of shamanism, however.77

The story of *Seven Arrows* is emblematic for the initiation narratives that would inundate the field. Storm claims that he had, from his youth onwards, been ‘the apprentice of the brilliant and powerful Zero Chief, and Holy Woman, Estcheemah. (...) She was one of the wisest and most powerful Medicine Chiefs of her time, and a Carrier and teacher of the Medicine Wheels’. She taught him the ‘histories and sophisticated knowledge of the Zero Chiefs’. Afterwards, he shared ‘with the world, in my writing and teaching – the Knowledge of the Medicine Wheels and the story of my most precious teacher, Estcheemah’.78

Native American critics, however, disapproved of what they considered Storm’s misrepresentation and even desecration of Cheyenne religion. Storm was, indeed, an innovator who had gathered material from all Plain tribes to construct a Pan-Indian philosophical system that was fashioned in accordance with the individu-

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78 See www.hyemeyohstsstorm.com/hstorm/about.htm.
alised and personalised primitivism that was institutionalised during the 1970s. His focus on the so-called vision quest as a way to get self-realisation going is a critical case in point. The publication of *Seven Arrows* was a decisive part of the institutionalisation of Indianness in printed esotericism as it was the first publication in the Native American Publishing Program that Harper & Row initiated in the early 1970s.

Indianness thus became a variant of the supposedly perennial wisdom that could be found the world over. For instance, in his 1974 bestselling *Rolling Thunder*, which was a ‘personal exploration into the secret healing powers of an American Indian medicine man’, Doug Boyd (1935-2006) sensed that ‘Rolling Thunder expressed ideas and concepts that I had heard from spokesmen from India, Japan and Tibet’. According to Boyd, Rolling Thunder talked about the ‘law of karma’ and was able to communicate without words, an ability that he shared with ‘Practitioners of all times and places from witch doctors to shamans to yogis, swamis and sages’ Rolling Thunder, who was one of the first Native Americans to build up a white clientele, delighted his listeners when he declared that hippies were ‘the incarnation of the traditional Indians who have fallen’.

Other Native American Indians also became famous as interpreters of supposedly secret Native American Indian knowledge during the 1970s. The former film actor Sun Bear, a.k.a. Vincent La Duke (1929-1992), for instance, started to preach Native American Indian spirituality to colleges and universities in the early 1970s. After his efforts to set up a network of communes failed, he established the Bear Tribe Medicine Society. It consisted primarily of non-Indian Americans. Sun Bear’s Bear Tribe medicine wheel gatherings were held from the late 1970s onwards. His vision that had beheld a medicine wheel was formative for his practices and publi-

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80 Peyer, *Hyemeyosts Storm’s Seven Arrows*, 10.
81 D. Boyd, *Rolling Thunder* (New York, 1974) 7-8; J. Swan, ‘Rolling Thunder at Work: A Shamanic Healing of Multiple Sclerosis’, in S. Nicholsen (ed.), *Shamanism* (Wheaton, 1987) 145-57; P. Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 156-7, 171; R.F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978). Rolling Thunder is an important figure in the 2002 interpretation of ‘Shamanism and the American psychotherapeutic counter-culture’ of Eugene Taylor and Janet Piedilato. They admitted that shamanism had already pervaded the growing Transpersonal environment, but, according to them, the first introduction of shamanism into the organizational structure of what was to become formally known as Transpersonal psychology occurred during a 1970 conference ‘where the parapsychologist Stanley Krippner introduced all those present at the conference to Shoshone shaman Rolling Thunder’. As we will also see in the next chapter, however, medicine men only came to be seen as shamans after shamanism had become a successful theme in the field of esotericism, see E. Taylor and J. Piedilato, ‘Shamanism and the American Psychotherapeutic Counter-Culture’, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16 (2002) 129-40 at 133.
cations, such as his 1980 bestseller *The Medicine Wheel: Earth Astrology.*

The institutionalisation of Indianness is best exemplified in a 1974 publication by Brad Steiger, a widely read author on ESP, UFOs, reincarnation and other paranormal subjects. In his *Medicine Power* he wrote:

The return of medicine power has fostered New Age Amerindian prophets who are speaking to contemporary youth. Ancient Amerindian metaphysics are influencing everything from our young people’s popular music, their hair styles and manner of dress, to their personal spiritual philosophies. Contemporary Amerindian mystics are demonstrating that the medicine of the Great Spirit can soar beyond science to present modern man with a system of relevant spiritual guidance for anyone who will learn to walk in balance, to live in harmony with Nature and with the Cosmos.

As we can see from Steiger’s examination of medicine power, the perennial wisdom of ‘Amerindian mystics’ was performed in growth centres all over the United States:

Norman Paulson has patterned his Brotherhood of the Sun upon the mystical teachings of the Hopis and the principles of Essenic Christianity. (...) Dean Frey, former Spiritualist minister and well-known Chicago sensitive, has materialized Amerindian spirit entities and is a great friend of the Hopis, who call her “Little Pumpkin” (...) Irene Hughes has become one of the most renowned of the United States contemporary seers. Mrs. Hughes is one quarter Cherokee and attributes much of her sensitivity to the example set by her mother, Easter Bell Finger (...) Nada-Yolanda, channel for the Mark-Age MetaCenter in Miami, has been given impressions which convince her that she is the reincarnation of Lobo-Tan, a princess of the ancient Tanoan tribe. She feels she has verified these impressions on her subsequent trips to the Southwest.

Without doubt, Steiger’s *Medicine Power* offers an inquisitive outlook on the strategies through which Indianness and supposedly native American knowledge in the form of ‘medicine power’ was put into effect for middle class white audiences. It is important to note that during the 1960s and 1970s medicine power was not habitually equated with shamanism. As we will see in the next chapter, medicine power and shamanism only became inextricably intertwined during the 1980s. At

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that point in time, Indianness would become a major form of capital in the field of shamanism.

**Psychedelics**

Indianness also guided many psychedelic authorities who, even before Eliade built up his reputation in Chicago, accepted the idea of shamans as psychedelic experts. This image was permanently implanted in the collective imagination of American audiences when the international banker Gordon Wasson (1898-1986) published his account of his experiences with the Mexican ‘shaman’ Maria Sabina (1888-1985) in ‘Seeking the Sacred Mushroom’ in *Life* magazine in the spring of 1957. Wasson’s books were too exclusive and expensive for large audiences, but *Life* attracted a wide public, with lasting consequences for the reputation of shamans.85 After he had read about them in the ethnobotanic work of Richard Evans Schultes, Wasson had travelled to Mexico to investigate the ‘sacred’ mushrooms. According to his account in *Life*, Wasson and his photographer became, in 1955, the first ‘white men in recorded history to eat the divine mushrooms, which for centuries have been a secret of certain Indian peoples living far from the great world in southern Mexico’.86

During the ‘mushroom rite’ that Maria Sabina arranged, Wasson had visions of ‘the archetypes, the Platonic ideas, that underlie the imperfect images of everyday life. The thought crossed my mind: could the divine mushrooms be the secret that lay behind the ancient Mysteries?’ Maria Sabina chanted about Jesus Christ, the Holy Father and the Virgin during the ‘shamanistic rite’, but Wasson judged that she ‘came forth with a full-bodied canticle, sung like very ancient music. It seemed to me at the time like an introit to the Ancient days’.87 Moreover, while Wasson acknowledged Maria Sabina as the archetypical ‘shaman’, a term that she and other ‘curanderos’ in the area never used, he thought the other healers in the area were inferior, even though Maria Sabina thought highly of them. Basically, Wasson lifted Maria Sabina from her social, cultural and political surroundings. Rather than trying to understand the complexity of the practices of the different ‘curanderos’ on their own terms, Wasson forced his findings to fit his own preoccupations and found what he had been looking for: an archaic loving and devoted Mary-like shaman figure.88

87  Idem.
Reflecting on ‘primitive peoples who worship these mushrooms’, Wasson supposed ‘that they open the gates to another plane of existence, to the past and the future, to Heaven and God, who then answers truly all grave questions put to him’. In a paper he presented to the Mycological Society of America in 1960, Wasson even argued that the use of mushrooms had brought the ancient civilizations poetry, religion and philosophy. The same mysterious rites that were performed by the ancient Greeks were still performed in the mountains of Mexico, where he had attended them himself: ‘At last you know what the ineffable is, and what ecstasy means. Ecstasy! The mind harks back to the origin of that word. For the Greek ekstasis meant the flight of the soul from the body. Can you find a better word than that to describe the bemushroomed state?’

Wasson was a literate, well-educated and somewhat eccentric hobbyist who surrounded himself with scholars who supported him. He believed that he, as an amateur, was ‘free to range far and wide, disregarding the frontiers that ordinarily segregate learned disciplines’. Academic procedures did not hamper him on his search for knowledge, as Znamenski also noted in his depiction of the ‘sacred mushroom seeker’. It is significant that Wasson never submitted his ideas to peer review. In general, scholars did not ‘recognise’ the cultural impact of mushrooms in all the instances that Wasson did, but he became respected as a researcher among botanists, anthropologists, ethnobotanists, mycologists and historians of religion and, in some cases, they combined forces. With Wendy Doniger, who would later succeed Eliade at Chicago, Wasson worked on his 1968 Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality. The book argued that soma, the god and the plant celebrated in the Vedic hymns, was a mushroom, Amanita muscaria, or fly-agaric and that this mushroom was the source for the Vedic hymns. Wasson also regarded it as the root of shamanic practices in Siberia.

Doniger’s review of Wasson’s 1986 Persephone’s Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion, which was his last book, is noteworthy. Persephone’s Quest reflected his ‘religious mission’ and his writing was ‘primarily visionary’, she argued. This book was even ‘the pious meditation of an inspired devotee’ and ‘not an academic book at all, but an original religious document; it is the work of a shaman, not of a scholar (even an amateur scholar, which is what Wasson rightly claimed

92 Doniger, ‘“Somatic” Memories of R. Gordon Wasson’, 55.
to be).’

This may look like a disqualification in the academic field but some of his friends considered Wasson’s non-academic background as an advantage. Guided by the fashionable anti-authoritarian stance, the popular religious scholar and professor of philosophy Huston Smith claimed that ‘it was in Wasson’s favor that he was not an academician’. However, Smith would not go so far as to agree with Wasson’s friend, the poet and writer Robert Graves (1895-1985), who thought that Wasson’s lack of a university education had preserved his genius.

Wasson’s published experiences inspired flocks of psychedelic seekers to go to Mexico in search of ecstatic experiences. They also inspired other psychedelic authorities to publish on shamans and mushrooms. A classic example is the 1959 *The Sacred Mushroom. The Secret Door of Eternity* by the parapsychologist Andrija Puharich (1918-1995), who also reached a wide audience by featuring in a 1961 documentary called *The Sacred Mushroom*. It was the most popular and most notorious episode in the classic television series *Alcoa Presents: One Step Beyond*, a series that took prime-time audiences on a voyage into the shadowy universe of paranormal and psychic phenomena. In his 1962 *Beyond Telepathy*, Puharich extensively quoted Shirokogoroff to confirm ‘the fabulous powers of the Shaman’ and his use of ‘telepathy and communication at a distance’. All in all, Puharich thus convinced large audiences that shamans were superior occultists.

Many years later John Marco Allegro (1923-1988) ruined his academic career by arguing, in his bestselling 1970 *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, that Christian religion was based on a psychedelic cult. Puharich and Allegro were considered ‘farceurs’ by Wasson and his friends but, like Wasson, they reached and stirred wide audiences with bold knowledge claims about the cultural relevance of mushrooms and shamans. Ultimately, Wasson’s interpretation of his experience of the ‘opening’ of ‘gates to another plane of existence’ and Puharich’s *Secret Door of Eternity* struck the same psychedelic chord.

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Psychedelic virtuosi

The psychedelic mantra had commenced with the publication of Aldous Huxley’s 1954 *Doors of Perception*. After moving from Britain to Los Angeles in 1937, Huxley had enrolled in the milieu of ‘British Mystical Expatriates’ who turned the Hollywood Vedanta centre into a success. It included Krishnamurti, Christopher Isherwood, Alan Watts and Gerald Heard (1889-1971), who set up the Trabuco College in the 1940s to create a ‘new race’ of spiritual leaders who could guide the transformation of consciousness. Driven by his quest for ‘perennial wisdom’ Huxley ingested mescaline, which opened his ‘doors of perception’ to the other world. He even considered that ‘psychedelic’ drugs could produce a new religion that would be the answer for ‘a nation of well-fed and metaphysically starving youth reaching out for beatific visions’.100

Especially after the Harvard psychology professor Timothy Leary (1920-1996) became involved, a psychedelic field was established. Inspired by Huxley’s and Wasson’s accounts, Leary went to Mexico to consume hallucinogenic mushrooms in 1962. A year later, his notorious psychedelic experiments with students cost him his prestigious job at Harvard.101 During that year, Leary had already become an authority and leader in his own field, however. The chairman of the Harvard Social Relations Department declared that Leary had started as a good sound scientist, but had become a cultist.102 Alan Watts, who kept in close touch with Leary and his associates at that time, described Leary as a charismatic religious leader for his own circle of friends and students. Leary had converted himself into a ‘storefront messiah with his name in lights, advocating psychedelic experience as a new world-religion’.103 Dropping out of the academic field, Leary fully cultivated his ‘messiah game’.104


Leary told Playboy in 1966 that ‘LSD is Western yoga’ and in his 1970 The Politics of Ecstasy, he described ‘the psychedelic experience’ as ‘the Hindu-Buddha reincarnation theory experimentally confirmed in your own nervous system’. Even in hard times, he wrote, psychedelics were supplied by ‘shaman-alchemists’ who featured as the ultimate countercultural archetypes in his book. Not bound by the conventions that supposedly incarcerated others, the

alchemist-shaman-wizard-medicine man was always a fringe figure. Never part of the conventional social structure. It has to be. In order to listen to the shuttling, whispering, ancient language of energy (long faint sighs across the millennia), you have to shut out the noise of the marketplace. You flip yourself out deliberately. Voluntary holy alienation.\textsuperscript{105}

Watts, Leary and Huxley were only a few of the ideological virtuosi who formed the ‘high church psychedelic’, as Leary called the countercultural charismatic elite that set research off in the direction of ‘consciousness expansion’.\textsuperscript{106} Psychedelic research was supported by a range of authorities. Scholars, amongst whom was Huston Smith, professed their faith in the ‘religious import’ of drugs in a renowned article in 1964.\textsuperscript{107} The award-winning poet, translator and mythologist Mary Barnard (1909-2001) contributed to the trend by publishing ‘The God in the Flowerpot’ in The American Scholar in 1963. She referred to Eliade, Huxley and Wasson in her musings about ‘sacred plants, magic herbs or shrubs, magic carpets on which the spirit of the shaman can travel through time and space’. The experiences caused by the intake of ‘drug plants’ had had ‘an almost explosive effect on the largely dormant minds of men, causing them to think of things they had never thought of before’. Barnard had great faith in what she called ‘theo-botany’ and was even ‘willing to prophecy’ that it would make ‘the current theories concerning the origins of much mythology and theology as out-of-date as pre-Copernican astronomy’.\textsuperscript{108}

Before long, the term ‘shaman’ became part of the legitimate terminology of the psychedelic field. For instance, the Psychedelic Review, established by Leary and Alpert in 1963, regularly brought shamans into view. The first issue contained a reprint of Gordon Wasson’s ‘Hallucinogenic Fungi of Mexico’, an article that also earned its place in The Psychedelic Reader in 1965.\textsuperscript{109} Mary Barnard’s ‘God in the

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\textsuperscript{106} Leary, The Politics of Ecstasy, 105.
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Flowerpot’ appeared in the second issue and the third issue contained Wasson's 'Notes of the Present Status of Ololiuqui and the Other Hallucinogenics of Mexico'. In 1965, a review of Eliade’s *Shamanism* regarded the book as 'magnificent'. Eliade showed care, erudition and a 'sensitive sympathy for the alien cultures he is describing'. Yet the reviewer would have preferred him to deal with shamanic experiences at first hand. The reviewer forgave him, however, 'since one cannot break the conventions and be an authority'.

Unconventional or not, the psychedelic craze produced a variety of authorities, in different fields. LSD and other hallucinogens provided them with vivid impressions of former lives and of ancient Egypt, India or Greece. Moreover, the drugs were supposed to enhance the creative process as the origins of creativity were supposed to lie in the unconscious. The basic idea was that people failed to be creative because their conscious minds were concealed by a layer of dreary conventions. Artists, children, natives, outcasts and the mentally ill were romanticized because they were imagined to live close to the unconscious. Shamans fitted into this category nicely.

**Psychedelic rock music**

Psychedelics also reached the youth market via the field of popular music, and in some cases shamanism was involved. Jimi Hendrix referred to experiences with ‘acid’ in his 1967 classic ‘Are you experienced’, while Jefferson Airplane’s 1967 hit ‘White Rabbit’ was a lyrical homage to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* mixed with drug-induced hallucinations, and John Lennon composed an ode to LSD with ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ in 1967. In some other instances, too, psychedelic rock musicians referred to shamanism. The Human Beinz, for instance, recorded ‘The Shaman’ on their 1968 album *Nobody But Me*:

> Feathers, bones, feast of herbs / The ring of smoke rise higher / He's on his knees, he shakes his face / To cast the spell upon you / Glistening bodies, sav-

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110 A. Kohsen, ‘Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy (book review)’, *Psychedelic Review* 7 (1965) 117-23. Significantly, the reviewer illustrated the finesse of Eliade's writing by comparing it with the writing of Joseph Campbell, who was, evidently, better known to the readers.


age mind / Entranced by tongue of fire / With serpent eyes he screams and
cries / To curse you with his voodoo, ahhh.

The spell that he is crying it is driving me insane / My mind recalls an age
where i shove the earth to run / I see the gods within the trees / The moon, the
sun, the rain / I joined the savage in his trance / The gods and I are one, ahhh.

The poet and rock icon Jim Morrison (1943-1971), who had named his band the
Doors after Huxley’s book, took the association with shamans a step further. In-
stead of joining ‘the savage in his trance’, he adopted the role of shaman during his
performances, guiding his audiences. The Doors’ keyboard player Ray Manzarek
characterised Morrison as ‘the electric shaman’ and the Doors as ‘the electric sha-
man’s band, pounding away behind him’. For their 1969 album The Soft Parade
the Doors recorded the song ‘Shaman’s Blues’. A year before, famous rock critic
Richard Goldstein had portrayed Morrison as ‘The Shaman as Superstar’ in New
York Magazine. Morrison told him:

The shaman... he was a man who would intoxicate himself. See, he was prob-
ably already an... uh... unusual individual. And, he would put himself into a
trance by dancing, whirling around, drinking, taking drugs – however. Then,
he would go on a mental travel and... uh... describe his journey to the rest of
the tribe.113

Poetry

Morrison was not the first American poet to identify with shamans, as we have
seen in Chapter 3. Some poets had already started to identify with shamans during
the first half of the twentieth century. The trend peaked during the second half of
the century, especially in the field of ‘ethnopoetics’. This was a subfield of anthro-
pology and linguistics which was established by the poet and translator Jerome
Rothenberg. His pioneering 1968 anthology Technicians of the Sacred prominently
featured shamans, for instance his adaptation of fragments of Eliade’s Shamanism.
For Rothenberg, the shaman was the archetype of the visionary poet.114 From 1970

Walters, ‘Electric Shaman’, in idem, Lifestyle Theory: Past, Present, and Future (New York,

114 J. Rothenberg (ed.), Technicians of the Sacred. A range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia
& Oceania (New York, 1968) 54, 429-30. See E. Mottram, ‘Where the Real Song Begins: The
Poetry of Jerome Rothenberg’, Dialectical Anthropology 11 (1986) 225-38; C.A. Meilicke,
“Abulafia’s Circles”: Shamans, Tricksters, and Transgressors’, in idem, Jerome Rothenberg’s
Experimental Poetry and Jewish Tradition (Lehigh, 2005) 81-91. Others also ‘discovered’
until 1980 he edited *Alcheringa*, which was the ‘first magazine of the world’s tribal poeties’, in collaboration with the anthropologist Dennis Tedlock. *Alcheringa* was intended to be ‘a place where tribal poetry can appear in English translation & can act (in the oldest & newest of poetic traditions) to change men’s mind & lives. (...) it will be aiming at the startling and revelatory presentation that has been common to our avant gardes.’

Concerning the 1975 *First International Symposium on Ethnopoetics*, Rothenberg referred to ‘our friend’ Robert Duncan (see Chapter 4) and told the audience:

> Increasingly, the model, the prototype, of the poet has become the “shaman”: the solitary, inspired religious functionary of the late Paleolithic. (...) among us the poet has come to play a performance role that resembles that of the shaman. (...) The poet like the shaman typically withdraws to solitude to find his poem or vision, then returns to sound it, give it life. (...) He is also like the shaman in being at once an outsider, yet a person needed for the validation of a certain kind of experience important to the group. (...) Again like the shaman, he will not only be allowed to act mad in public, but he will often be expected to do so. The act of the shaman - & his poetry - is like a public act of madness. (...) From the first shaman – that solitary person – it flows out to whole companies of shamans, to whole societies of human beings: it heals the sickness of the body but more than that: the sickness of the soul.”

One of the shaman-poets whom Rothenberg must have had in mind was the poet and journalist Lawrence Lipton (1898-1975), who referred to the so-called ‘hipsters’ of the ‘beat generation’ as ‘The Holy Barbarians’ in his 1959 book of the same name. Lipton regarded himself as ‘the Shaman of the tribe’, the shaman being ‘the custodian of the tribal drug lore’. Jazz and drugs were central elements in his concept of the shaman, as these formed ‘one of those best-kept secrets that everyone knows and nobody talks about. Except the beat generation, especially the youngsters, to whom the jazz musician is the shaman of the cult’. Still: ‘It is the element of shamanistic control that is lacking among users of marijuana or the

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hallucinogenic drugs among the holy barbarians.' Allen Ginsberg's legendary 1956 performance of Howl, which was celebrated as the opening act of the 'beat movement', was also hailed as a 'shamanic performance' at the end of the Sixties. Roszak contributed to this idea by claiming that Ginsberg's ‘conception of poetry as an oracular outpouring can claim an imposing genealogy that reaches back to the rhapsodic prophets of Israel (and beyond them perhaps to the shamanism of the Stone Age)’. Ginsberg's 1967 visit to Eliade is noteworthy. During the visit, as Eliade recalled in his journal, Ginsberg recited verses of Prajnaparamita 'while singing and striking two little bronze bells'.

Significantly, beats were immortalised as 'Dharma Bums' as they were engaged in what they thought was a 'spiritual quest' and in what the eminent African American poet and essayist Ishmael Reed mockingly called 'a Buddhist take-over'. Gradually, as the figure of the shaman-poet advanced in this supposed Eastern invasion, beat poets became vital for what a native American critic disparagingly called 'the rise of the white shamans'. Regarded by some critics as 'a new version of cultural imperialism', the beat poets who used the term 'shaman' aimed at timeless and universal knowledge, recognising the archetypical poet in shamans. Moreover, as they often 'discovered' the shaman in themselves they typically misrecognised their stance as timeless and not bound by conventions while, in fact, the idea of the shaman-poet was a typical convention of beat poets. The Bay Area poet Gene Fowler wrote, for instance, 'My ancestors were shamans. / But i am not my ancestors. / I am shaman / to a tribe recently come', in his 1967 Shaman Songs.

117 L. Lipton, The Holy Barbarians (New York, 1959) 77, 177-9. In the 'Glossary', Lipton describes 'Hip' as follows: 'To know, in the sense of having experienced something. A hip cat has experiential knowledge. A hip square has merely heard or read about it.'


119 Roszak, Making of a Counterculture, 128.


The literati of the beat generation were part of the loose network surrounding Timothy Leary and Alan Watts and, hence, also involved in the psychedelic field. Ginsberg, for instance, closely cooperated with Leary and took part in his psychedelic experiments. Most beat poets used LSD, peyote, marihuana and other drugs to create ‘spontaneous prose’. Their associate William Burroughs (1914-1997), the ‘dignified, sage, complex genius-shaman-poet-guide from a different, but sympathetic tribe’, as Leary described him in 1968, was an icon of underground drug culture even before Leary was. In general, although the beat stance was more anti-intellectual than Watts’ and Leary’s, the dispositions that guided their actions were akin. The beats were idealizing ‘spontaneity’ and were constantly On the Road to escape mainstream mass culture that they perceived as increasingly totalitarian and de-individualizing and that, they thought, required ‘conformity’ at all places and all times.

Yet while they presented themselves as ‘rebels’ and cultivated their authenticity and their outsider art by claiming disinterestedness, for instance by celebrating ‘dedicated poverty’, the beats were not as opposed to mainstream culture as they and their critics imagined them to be. They build up their ‘subterranean’ image and developed their position in the literary field successfully precisely because they worked strategically within the wider literary field. Like their psychedelic

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associates, beat poets made use of ‘primitive’ and eastern images in their struggle to create authentic and spontaneous poetry. Beat iconography contained stereotypical images of the ‘soulful civilization’ of Mexico, where, they supposed, individuals were not numbed, alienated and encumbered by standardisation, mechanisation and bureaucratisation. Here, they could ‘hang out’ in a timeless natural state. Not surprisingly, Jaime de Angulo was an inspirational figure in their circle as well as the shaman-poet Robert Duncan.

As they acquired new authoritative positions in the literary field, the beat poets could impose the idea of the shaman-poet more forcefully. William Everson (1912-1994), for instance, used the concept shaman in an ideological struggle about ‘American destiny’, from his distinguished position as poet-in-residence at the University of California in 1971:

O Poets! Shamans of the word! When will you recover the trance-like rhythms, the subliminal imagery, the haunting sense of possession, the powerful inflection and enunciation to effect the vision? Throw off this malaise, this evasion, this attitudinizing and sickness of urbanity. Penetrate to the discord in yourself, the rootlessness, and induce the trance that will heal the rift within. Shamanize! Shamanize! The American destiny is in your hands.

One of the leaders of the beat consecration of shaman-poets was Anne Waldman. She was inspired by Wasson’s accounts of Maria Sabina, but above all by the poetic performances of Robert Duncan. When she saw him reading his poetry at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference with his arms dancing above him as he read, she realised that she ‘could really see the poet as a tribal shaman, speaking and moving and being embarrassing not just for himself but for you, the audience’. In her 1975 Fast Speaking Woman she described her younger self as a ‘downtown-white-New York-young-sophisticate college-graduate-bohemian (…) dabbling in psychotropic drugs, magics, beginning an apprenticeship in tantric Buddhism, attracted to shamanic energies and pulses of all kinds’, describing not merely herself, but also an exemplary religious seeker affluent in cultural capital.
Initially, Waldman worked from a marginal position, but she could empower the idea of the poet-shaman from an authoritative position later on in her career. For instance, while on tour with Bob Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue as ‘poet-in-residence’ in 1976, she wrote a poem called ‘Shaman Hisses You Slide Back into the Night’. Two years before, Waldman had institutionalised the idea of the shaman-poet as founding co-director and teacher, with Allen Ginsburg, of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Tibetan Buddhist Naropa University at Boulder, Colorado, where she started to teach on poets as shamans, from 1974 onwards.129

An even more notable beat shaman-poet was Gary Snyder. He was a friend and student of Alan Watts, who would later, in his 1973 autobiography, describe Snyder as ‘a mixture of Oregon woodsman, seaman, Amerindian shaman, Oriental scholar, San Francisco hippie, and swinging monk’.130 When Snyder went to Japan to study ‘Zen’, in 1956, he perceived the chanting of a ‘Zen monk’ as ‘the steady single-beat of oldest American-Asian shamanism’. Snyder also took a position in the literary milieu of Duncan and De Angelo, whom he praised as ‘a now-legendary departed Spanish shaman and anthropologist’. Snyder identified poets with shamans as they both ‘articulate the semi-known to the tribe’ and eventually, Snyder started to see himself as a shaman, singing songs ‘going back to the Pleistocene and before’. He also related shamanism to the ‘counterculture’ in which he took part as a shaman-poet himself, interpreting the 1967 San Francisco ‘Gathering of the Tribes for the first Be-In’ as a ‘surfacing (in a specifically “American” incarnation) of the Great Subculture which goes back as far as perhaps as the late Palaeolithic’.131


129 Idem. For the revealing school-day memoirs of an ex-student and a disheartening portrait of the beats in their middle-age, see S. Kashner, When I Was Cool (New York, 2004). As can be expected, at the time that the term ‘shaman’ had become virtually unavoidable, one critic called Bob Dylan ‘a rock’n’roll shaman with a direct line to higher (and more painful) states of consciousness’, see D. Buckley, ‘Popular Music’, in K. McGowan (ed.), The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory 6 (Oxford, 1999) 153-74 at 156.


In a 1979 interview, Snyder responded to accusations of cultural imperialism by arguing that a shaman was not ‘a cultural artefact’ and not an ‘Indian thing’. Instead, shamanism was related ‘to the most archaic of human religious practices. All our ancestors – white, black, mongoloid, Veddah, or !Kung – were doing it for most of their prehistory’. The ‘subculture of illuminati’ had been a ‘powerful undercurrent in all higher civilizations’, Snyder wrote:

Buddhist Tantrism, or Vajrayana as it’s also known, is probably the finest shamanistic-yogic-gnostic-socioeconomic view: that mankind’s mother is Nature and Nature should be tenderly respected; that man’s life and destiny is growth and enlightenment in self-disciplined freedom; that the divine has been made flesh and that flesh is divine; that we do not only should but do love one another. This view has been harshly suppressed in the past as threatening to both Church and State. Today, on the contrary, these values seem almost biologically essential to the survival of humanity.

Ultimately, Snyder legitimised the idea of the universal poet-shaman from an authoritative position on the literary field. Although his 1960 *Myths and Texts* already contained ‘shaman songs’, his perspectives gained cultural weight when he became one of the prominent regular contributors to *Alcheringa* and when Rothenberg included his ‘shaman songs’ in his *Sacred Texts*. Most important, however, was the Pulitzer Prize that he won for his 1974 *Turtle Island*. The literary prize earned his blend of ‘ecological consciousness’, ‘Zen’ and ‘shamanism’ enormous prestige.

**Conclusion**

The institutionalisation of countercultural dispositions in different fields from the 1950s onwards was crucial for the development of American genealogies of shamanisms. The particular significance of shamans was perceived differently in the four overlapping fields under consideration in this chapter (psychology, esotericism, psychedelics and poetry), but in general, the shaman came to represent an

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133 Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, 105.

individual who was not restricted by social structures and who was, therefore, in
touch with nature, with the deepest layers of the mind and with perennial knowl-
edge. Instead of recognising shamans as social actors, countercultural opinion-
makers identified them as the ultimate charismatic and unconventional leaders of
their ‘tribes’.

Individualism was a vital inspiration for the scholars and artists who structured
the dominant American genealogy of shamanism. Paradoxically, this individual-
ism dovetailed well with the communalism of the hippies, who combined a long-
ing for individual freedom with a longing for communal life in tribes. Humanistic
and transpersonal psychologists were crucial for the genealogy of shamanism, as
they constructed an image of shamans as individuals with distinct self-actualising
qualities. As wounded healers, shamans had experienced a valuable mystical
breakthrough through which they had attained a more authentic and integrated,
and less inhibited state of mind. As humanistic and transpersonal psychologists
occupied prominent positions in the field of esotericism, their perspectives on
shamanism also became legitimate here. Their image of the shaman was easy to
identify with and, moreover, their therapeutic practices became the format for the
nonformative practices that structured the field.

As the American field of esotericism and the Bollingen network overlapped, it
is no wonder that countercultural conceptualisations of shamanism resembled the
conceptualisations of shamanism that were produced in the Bollingen network. In
fact, Alan Watts and Joseph Campbell were Bollingen authorities who also held
dominant positions in the American field of esotericism. As in the Bollingen net-
work, the elitism and primitivism of countercultural constructions of shamanism
stands out. There were, however, some crucial differences between the Bollingen
network and the American field of esotericism. On the whole, the Bollingen net-
work was structured by scholars who supposed that they were able to grasp the
truth intellectually. Their authority had a charismatic twist, as they unearthed per-
ennial truths behind the observable facts, but their knowledge remained scholarly.
In the field of esotericism, on the other hand, the ultimate key to truly authentic
knowledge about shamanism was experience.

Psychedelics were important in this process as they allowed anyone to become
experienced. Drugs made it easy to taste a secret and archaic perennial knowl-
edge that, in some cases, was perceived as shamanic. Shamanism remained an
elitist concept, however, and it was primarily popular amongst the individuals and
groups who considered themselves the vanguard of a new cultural consciousness.
The elitism was most strongly propounded in the literary field, where the idea
of the poet-shaman was structured by a literary cultural aristocracy. As self-pro-
claimed shaman-poets, they legitimised their position as leaders of their ‘tribe’,
guiding others by introducing them to the poetry and performances that con-
cerned their awe-inspiring experiences. For them, the shaman was the ultimate
representation of deep, untamed, liberated, uninhibited and perennial expertise.